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Thursday 25 November 2004

Jeudi 25 novembre 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 25 novembre 2004

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I move that, in the opinion of the House, the government of Ontario should:

1. Take action to develop a comprehensive strategy in order to reform our first-past-the-post electoral system, including consideration of proportional representation, preferential ballots, a form of mixed systems or others, in the election of Ontario's parliamentarians;

2. Fully engage the citizens of Ontario in the decision-making on a preferred method of electing Ontario's parliamentarians; and

3. Establish a citizens' assembly, the purpose of which would be to provide advice on public policy issues on a continuing basis.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Arthurs has moved ballot item number 41. Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr Arthurs, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr Arthurs: I'm particularly pleased this morning to be able to present to this assembly during private members' time a resolution on democratic renewal. I look forward to hearing during the next hour from other members on what I believe to be an important matter for this House and the people of Ontario.

The resolution does come in three parts, and I will be speaking to each one during the course of the next 10 minutes very briefly.

But first, Mr Speaker, if I could, let me pose to you and the Legislature the following propositions: (1) that in forming a government, it should be the objective of the electorate to create such a government with the support of less than 50% of those eligible to vote and cast ballots; and (2) that a majority of the members elected to the Legislature should be elected with less than a majority of the votes cast, that is, less than 50% of the votes cast. If our electoral system were other than it is and such propositions were made, I would hasten to suggest that they would meet with some scepticism. But we know that is exactly the current situation.

In forming a government, the last earned majority, the government that had more than 50% of the popular vote, was in 1937, some 67 years ago. On the election of members to this House in the most recent election in 2003, 60 seats, a majority, were won with less than a majority of the votes cast, thus to say that a majority of the members of this Legislature had the electoral support of less than 50% of the votes cast in their ridings. I can include myself among that group.

It's for those types of reasons that I believe it's important for us to explore and engage the citizens of Ontario in debate on democratic renewal. It may well be at the end of the day that our first-past-the-post system best serves the province, but I believe we have a responsibility and an obligation to put matters of democratic renewal before the citizens of this province, all of them, from our First Nations to our most recent immigrants, those of all ages, whether they're wealthy or destitute, whether they come from rural or urban communities.

More specifically to the resolution at hand—and I'm just going to repeat a part of it—it speaks to what the government should undertake, some direction: first, to develop a comprehensive strategy to consider reform of a variety of sorts, everything from proportional representation, preferential ballots, some mixed form, or others that may not be included in that rather limited list; second, to encourage the full engagement of the citizens of the province on a preferred method of electing those of us in this assembly; and third, the establishment of a citizens' assembly to provide advice on public policy on a continuing basis that goes beyond the date of an election.

With regard to the first part of the resolution, the most recent process launched by the government must be comprehensive. It must provide for the exploration, examination and consideration of various models, including the current first-past-the-post system. In the last generation alone, the pace of change has accelerated socially, economically, technologically and demographically. We're a different province. Our political traditions, though, are firmly planted in the past and need to be wrested from their slumber. We have an obligation to question a system—our system—which is failing to respond to the changes in Ontario.

In 1865, Ernest Naville, a Swiss political scientist and philosopher, wrote: "In a democratic government, the right of decision belongs to the majority, but the right of representation belongs to all." I think it's a poignant quote in speaking of what democratic governments are about, both in decision-making and in representation, and

I would suggest that in many cases not only aren't the majority in the decision-making, but certainly all of Ontarians are not effectively and adequately represented.

The second part of the resolution speaks to the involvement of Ontarians in this process, to "fully engage the citizens of Ontario." This is intended to ensure not only the broadest range of consultation and public input, dialogue, debate, but also inclusion in the decision-making process. It's intended, as Minister Phillips often refers to, to challenge ourselves to maximize public involvement.

1010

With an ever-declining turnout at the polls, those of us who have served municipally, provincially and those who serve federally are more than aware that the need is self-evident. The percentage turnout continues to decline, election after election. Full participation is healthy. A transparent, constructive democracy allows for open and honest debate. We need to maximize opportunities for all Ontarians to learn about all systems that might be available. We need to draw on the public for their ideas, their suggestions and their participation.

Broadening citizen engagement in these processes and revitalizing the democracy will also resonate with the young people in our communities. By utilizing the new media, on-line dialogues and enhancement of e-government, we'll modernize a democracy we all share in, but more importantly, encourage and involve the young people in our community who are far more conversant with those technologies than I. I've said on more than one occasion, I believe, that I am part of the last generation of Luddites.

Part three of the resolution speaks to public policy issues. Its intention is to engage the public through a citizens' assembly on an ongoing, continuing basis, not a short-term basis, to provide advice on public policy.

It's my view that too often we are encumbered by the partisanship, the partisan nature, of our democratic system. We need to find better ways to seek the advice of the citizens of Ontario. We need to find better ways in which the development of public policy and advice on public policy are more broadly ranged and have the opportunity to be less partisan, particularly in that time frame between elections.

There are key portfolios that are of concern to all Ontarians and some portfolios that are of greater concern to fewer Ontarians with more specific interests. But in areas such as health, education and public safety, I would pose to you that an ongoing process of advice in a less partisan nature, but broadly representative and not just consultative on issue-specific matters, will well serve this Legislature and the people of Ontario.

There will be those who might want to ask why at this time, in light of the government's actions a few weeks ago, this matter would be before the Legislature in the form of a resolution. Well, those of us who are here and have been here will fully understand the process by which private members' hours are balloted well in advance and the necessity and requirement that the members provide to the Clerk of the Assembly and the

table their intentions specifically in regard to private members' bills, resolutions or matters of private business. In doing that, private members are not necessarily aware of the actions being proposed by government or its ministers. In as much as this, I believe, is consistent with the actions currently being taken by the government, they were prepared in the absence of that activity, but I think with an understanding that there is a need for democratic renewal. Having served in elected office for some 20-odd years now, I'm a strong proponent.

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): We have a great number of citizens in our camp with respect to this particular motion. We're being given 15 minutes, our caucus of 24 members, to debate an issue that may change the history of Ontario politics for the next 100 years. Our old system has been in place for 137 years, yet we see the government members bring forward motions to try to restrict the opposition's ability to debate this particular matter.

A member of the opposition could have brought forward an alternate motion. We agree to changing the structure of this particular part of our legislative process all the time. We have eight members who are going to speak on this for less than two minutes each, because all of them want to have their say. We cannot condone this motion in front of this Legislature under this particular part of our legislative process.

We have 15 minutes for our party, 15 minutes for the New Democratic Party and 10 minutes for the backbenchers of the governing party. We cannot consider this kind of issue and this motion and come to a conclusion in this short period of time.

I have called on the government to set up a select committee with equal representation of all parties to sit down and figure out what this process should be. We should have the elected representatives of Ontario, as we now have, decide on how this process should take place so that when the results come out, they will have credibility.

As it now stands, the government refuses to do this. They want to set the framework for this committee. They want to tell the committee how to report. They want to select the committee.

We cannot stand this. We must not give sanction to this resolution, because of the lack of time for members to participate. This is a most undemocratic process, when the government is talking about doing something of a renewal for our democratic process here in Ontario.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): It's my pleasure as well to speak to the motion this morning. I was listening to the honourable member from the other side who proposed the motion and I certainly have some questions that I don't think we'll be able to ask or answer in the time given to us.

However, I noticed he talked about proportional representation, and I certainly have some grave concerns about our moving in that direction. He talked about the last time there was a majority of the popular vote in this province, in 1937. We didn't hear concerns about

whether people were being represented for a long time. It's only in the last maybe three or four terms of government that we've started to hear this being talked about. I think it goes more to what has happened after people are elected than the process by which they are elected. I think where we need some real reform is in what goes on in this House and how we do our job once we're elected.

As for the right of representation, I can tell you that when I was elected as the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, I became the representative of every citizen of that riding, not just of those who voted for me. I represent the rights and aspirations of every citizen in my riding and I will speak on their behalf in this House.

It seems to me that some people are thinking this idea of proportional representation is the panacea to all that ails this system. Well, it goes a lot deeper than that. It's about what happens in the House and elsewhere after we're elected.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I too want to just very quickly speak to the motion that's before us. Obviously, the government has been talking about introducing this type of thing for some time. I find it rather strange that we would have a motion like this to be debated here with really no information or help to help me make the decision.

One of the things I find very curious is, this is called democratic renewal. I heard the member who introduced the motion suggest that we're getting less and less participation in our democracy to elect us to this place. I think what's causing that is not the way we're voted for but the fact that they don't have confidence that when they have elected someone, that individual will come and do what they said they were going to do.

I think there's no greater example in Ontario's history than what we have with the present government. They made all kinds of promises to get elected, and the people who voted for the members representing that government thought they would come here and implement those things. Now we find that that's not what happens at all. I think if we were going to do some democratic renewal, we would take a stand on that.

A number of weeks ago, I introduced a motion in this House on opposition day. It was the type of motion to give rural Ontario and the farmers of Ontario some support that the government, before the election, had promised, and after the election had taken away. Members from the government side had stood and told their people, "We disagree with what the government is doing," and yet when they got in here, they voted against putting those programs back.

Rather than putting a new program in place or putting a process in place to make changes, I think we need to make some changes in how we operate in this place on behalf of our citizens. That's why I will not be supporting this motion. I think much more work needs to be done on each member individually, rather than trying to tell us all how the people should elect differently.

1020

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I intend to support this motion because I think it's important in the evolution of the democratic system in the province of Ontario.

I look at this from a bit of a historical context. When you go back to the 19th century in Ontario, we think of William Lyon Mackenzie challenging the Family Compact of the day and meeting with his colleagues in Montgomery's Tavern to think about a reform process in Upper Canada to make sure that the people were indeed represented, so their ideas and concepts could be brought forward in an assembly to have a dialogue, to have a debate on the issues of the day.

We think of George Brown, if he were around today as the owner and the editor of the *Globe and Mail*, who epitomized at that time what it meant to be a reformer. I can see what he would say today in his editorials in the *Globe and Mail*, clearly supporting a group of citizens coming together to examine the electoral process in the province of Ontario.

We think of Lord Baldwin, who designed the structure of municipal government with the Baldwin Act in 1843, which is essentially still in effect in Ontario today in the 21st century.

You look at former people who were in this Legislature. We think of Donald C. MacDonald of the NDP, and Stephen Lewis, who, if they were in this chamber today, would no doubt support this motion to look at electoral reform and other important public policy issues in Ontario.

I look across the aisle and I think of when Tom Wells and Bette Stephenson were here, two reform-minded people, whom I can see being very involved to present some ideas into this process. I think of the people who were on our side of the House at one time: Robert Fletcher Nixon, the man who was described in an article at one time as "the best Premier that Ontario never had." We think of Sean Conway, who was an institution in this place from 1975 to 2003. We think of those individuals, and if they were here today, collectively, they would want to share in this debate about looking at ways to make the electoral system in Ontario responsive to Ontario in the 21st century.

There are a number of articles that have been put together lately by a number of scholars who have reviewed this area, and I would just like to get on the record an article that was written by Kent Weaver called "A Hybrid Electoral System for Canada." Even though he refers in this article to our federal system, I believe it does have some bearing on what we might be looking at here in Ontario.

"Given the trade-off between single-party majority government and representational equity for political parties—and the political sensitivity of the former for politicians in power—the most practical objective for electoral reform is to lessen inequitable treatment of voters and parties rather than eliminating them entirely. A hybrid electoral system specifically tailored to Canadian—or Ontario's—"conditions can successfully marry

the Westminster-style parliamentary system's concern for stable single-party majority government with the representational concerns of more proportional systems. Specifically, the federal government could institute a reform that:

“(1) increases the number of seats in the House of Commons”—or the Ontario Legislature, you could insert there—“by 10%, with those seats distributed among the” ridings “according to population”—each riding “receiving roughly 10% more seats than it does now;

“(2) gives priority in awarding compensation seats within each”—they’re referring federally—“province to the party that finishes first in a nationwide vote until giving that party another compensation seat would take its provincial seat share over that of its provincial vote share, at which point it passes to the second party in national vote share, then the third largest etc;

“(3) fills compensation seats from party lists established before the election. Candidates on these party lists may, but need not, also be candidates in individual constituencies.”

That is an example of Mr Weaver looking at a hybrid electoral system for Canada. But as I said, it could equally be applied in the province of Ontario, and it's something that the citizens' jury or the citizens' assembly, as has been suggested by my colleague from Ajax-Pickering-Uxbridge, could indeed look at.

There's no question in my mind, when I chat with people in the riding of Peterborough, that there is some concern that in today's Ontario Legislature there's an underrepresentation of females, there's an underrepresentation of individuals from our First Nations community, and there's an underrepresentation of those other individuals who make up the wonderful cultural mosaic that is Ontario today.

There are pros and cons. This is an article that I picked up the other day from Herbert Grubel. Mr Grubel is a former Reform MP for the riding of Capilano-Howe Sound from 1993 to 1997. In his article, he flags that indeed there may be some pitfalls with proportional representation, but he does highlight the fact that through his experience as an MP from British Columbia and then subsequently on the citizens' jury in British Columbia, there is a need. It's helpful for democracy to look at its mechanism, along with a series of other options, to in fact—what we'd all like to see is increased voter participation in Ontario.

For the life of me, from my way of thinking—I think we all should be concerned about this: The turnout for provincial elections in Ontario should be in excess of 90%; people should be fully engaged in the democratic process in the province of Ontario. Obviously, there's something that's restraining these individuals from participating fully in our democratic process in Ontario.

If you look at the municipal level, it's considered now, in many jurisdictions in Ontario that a high turnout is something in the neighbourhood of 43% to 45%. That indicates to me that more than half of the citizens in any given municipality in Ontario now are no longer

participating in the process. I think it's a real opportunity, through the proposal that was put forward by my colleague, to look at a number of options.

This is part of a legacy. When we look down the road, during the time that you and I, Mr Speaker, will get to spend in this great place, what legacy do we want to leave for the next generation of Ontarians? Our legacy, I think, should be that we want to look at ways that we can re-engage people in the democratic process in the province of Ontario by embarking on a citizens' jury or a citizens' assembly to look at a number of issues. I think it's vitally important for us in the 21st century in Ontario.

1030

It's not just electoral reform that we want to look at. I know my friend from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge wants to look at election financing in Ontario and how we finance our campaigns: perhaps just in time, reporting on individuals who contribute to political parties to make it much more transparent to the people of Ontario; perhaps looking at people who give to candidates during leadership campaigns—that's not transparent now and it's not reported—to eliminate that veil of secrecy that has shrouded the whole activity with regard to leadership campaigns in Ontario.

We have a real opportunity to look at all aspects of how we operate our democratic mechanisms here in Ontario. I think it's what people are looking for. We're looking for leadership, and I think this motion will add to that as we look forward.

I'll be sharing my time with my colleague from Etobicoke Centre.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford):

I'm very pleased to be a part of the debate here today. I think as Mr Sterling, our critic on democratic renewal, said, this is certainly premature in terms of what's going on. The government has already announced through the Premier that they're going to conduct an exercise with respect to what's before us in this motion. Why would we be dealing with this today, when in fact the process has been announced by the democratic renewal minister, the Attorney General, and we have no idea what's going to come out of that process?

What the member is asking today is for the Legislature to adopt the process that is now under consultation with respect to democratic renewal, which is a part of their agenda. I think it's correct to say that it doesn't matter what system we have if the Legislature isn't working the way it should work.

An example was yesterday in the government agencies committee, where I put forth a motion to open up the process with respect to appointments, not only reviewing Premiers' appointments but also ministerial letters, which make up 33% of the process. It was voted down by the Liberal-backed majority of that government agencies committee, and they broke their promise to make government agencies more transparent and accountable to the public.

The process, in terms of how we work in this Legislature, is just as important. I think our leader, John Tory,

has put forth a platform that should be adhered to by the members in this Legislature: to bring greater democratic renewal today. So I won't be supporting this.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): It's quite interesting to listen to this debate so far, and the different positions being taken. I think it's an important resolution, or motion, before us today. It doesn't give a lot of detail, as the government's announcement last week, which I attended, didn't give a lot of detail, therefore I'm jumping into the void that's been left in terms of making some suggestions about process.

I want to say very clearly to the Conservative members, indeed to all the members here—I've been in this place since 1990. I've been in government, I've been a backbencher for a while in government, I was a cabinet minister and I've sat in opposition. I now sit as the deputy leader of the New Democratic Party. I say to those who think that fiddling with the existing system is going to make the changes we need to update democracy in this province, it is not going to work.

They've been in government as well; you're in government now; we've been in government. We all see, when a majority of any party gets into government, that when rule changes are made, they are actually made to enhance the power of the government and to decrease the accessibility and the power of the opposition. I think it's just human nature. I'm not slamming any particular party here. It's happened under all our parties, and I believe it will continue to happen as long as we keep this system, which worked for its time.

Let's keep in mind that this system, which has been in place for, what, 137 years, was brought in before women had the vote, let alone the lack of women we have as representatives still. I think it's something like 21% now in 2004. The lack of our aboriginal people and other visible minorities is a disgrace, really, when you think of it. We have to change the system. The idea of trying to fiddle around the edges is just not going to work.

What I said—and it's true; I don't have a lot of time, but I'm sure we'll have more opportunities to talk about this—is that part of the strategy we're talking about here today must ensure that the citizens' assembly is independent and accountable, and that a set of principles and terms of reference and mandate are absolutely key, because what is set out in that set of principles will determine how the citizens' assembly looks at the problem and will focus their recommendations.

What happened in BC, in my humble view, from looking at what happened there—I don't believe the mandate and the terms of reference allowed that broader discussion. It was very clear. You couldn't increase members in the assembly, for instance. That, right away, limits some of the directions the committee might have recommended. It also didn't look at, as one of its principles, getting more women elected.

I see here today that there are all kinds of girls and boys from different schools up in our galleries. This may sound like a little bit of a boring debate to them about democracy, but I'm really glad you're here for this today.

I say to the girls who might want to run some day that right now in this place only 21% of the people sitting here are women, and we want to change that. That's one of the things that proportional representation can change.

I'm sure each party leader received a letter from Rosemary Spiers, the chair of Equal Voice. She's talking about that same issue and says that, right now, as I pointed out, "...only 21% of the seats in the Legislature are held by women. At the present rate of change"—to the girls here today, it's going to take a long time if we don't change the system, because Equal Voice has calculated—"it will take four more generations before our half of the population can hope to achieve equal representation in the Ontario House."

That letter goes on to point out that they have a preference. They've looked at all of the different kinds of proportional representation and they saw that "the mixed member proportional voting system" which they have in Scotland, Germany and New Zealand "has substantially increased the number of elected women."

In the NDP, as you know, we have an affirmative action process, unlike the other parties, and we do better overall proportionately, but still not good enough. What Equal Voice is saying is, we need both: We need to change the system to a kind of proportional representation that includes that in it, but also that parties have an affirmative action program. When you put the two together, you will increase the number of women much more quickly, which in my view is absolutely critical.

I've talked to the Attorney General—I'm the democratic renewal critic for my party—about our involvement in this process. In order for the integrity of this government process that has been put in place to be kept, it absolutely has to be transparent and agreed to by all parties in this Legislature. That is absolutely critical. Whether or not the Conservatives believe in proportional representation, we do, although not every person in our party does, but overall our party does support proportional representation. I know I do.

I believe, for instance, that it is absolutely critical that, if there's a citizens' assembly, we look at what worked in BC and what didn't work: that it is absolutely transparent, that it's agreed upon by all of the members, and that it reports back to the Legislative Assembly, not the Attorney General's office, which was, I think, what the Gibson report in BC had recommended. I think they had their assembly report back to the AG's office there. We shouldn't do that; we should make sure it reports back to the Legislative Assembly here. We also want to make sure that the budget and all of the other components, if a citizens' assembly is put together, goes through a real legislative process, not through the Attorney General's office.

1040

Some of the things I'd like to see happen immediately include real-time disclosure. The minister mentioned that election finance reforms etc will be dealt with by something called a citizens' jury. I believe that's the kind of thing the Liberals promised they'd deal with, that they'd

do. I've been on my feet in the House saying, "Do that now." There are certain things within the system that we need to fix. That was a promise that shouldn't wait to be part of this.

I've got to ask the question, if you cherry-pick a fixed date for elections, which the Liberals have done, to do now but, at the same time, put aside something like the importance of real-time disclosure as part of this whole committee makeup, why do that? I would say, put the fixed election date in the whole mix, because once you start fiddling with the system and talking about changing the system, that should become part of the discussion or, at the very least, pick out some of these other components like real-time disclosure, which is not a problem. You'll recall that I brought a fax machine into the House one day and said, "This is a real-time machine." It's not hard to disclose the donations that the Liberals, or any of the parties, are getting when they have these high-priced dinners. So I think the government should take a look at some of those smaller issues, things like that, which can be reformed now and dealt with as the Liberals promised.

Overall, changing the system, as has been recommended by this resolution today, is going to involve the citizens of this province. I would say to the government that one of the issues you brought forward was enumeration. We all know from our ridings in the past several elections that those lists are a mess. If people are going to be chosen to be on that citizens' assembly from the voters' list, then I would say we've got a problem. A whole bunch of people will be left off because they're not on the voters' list. So when the government talks about targeted enumeration, let's make the target all of Ontario; let's start a proper enumeration process again.

I want to leave a little time for our former democratic renewal critic, Gilles Bisson, but those are just a few of my thoughts about the process that I, of course, plan and hope to be very much involved in. We will be suggesting a number of principles and ideas for terms of reference for this process to proceed.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm pleased to join in the debate on what I think is a very important issue, and that is the re-engagement of citizens across this province in their democracy. I think it involves something that is somewhat difficult for politicians—some more than others—and that is to listen rather than talk. If we can encapsulate what we believe and what this private member's resolution that my colleague Mr Arthurs has brought forward is all about, it is really about listening to the citizens in this province about why they do or do not feel engaged in our current democratic process.

Over the last number of months, I've had a lot of opportunity to do some of that listening, and I want to share with the members of the Legislature some of what I have heard. I recently had an opportunity to listen to a group of youth in this province, who advanced a report called Just Listen to Me, again building on the idea that "We need to be listened to; our voices need to be heard." These youth were reflective of a variety of backgrounds.

Some of the young people had been wards of the state, some of them had had issues with the CAS, some of them had lived on the street, and others had had lives that would maybe reflect a little bit more the lives that we're familiar with. But at the end of the day, one of the key things that they asked the government was, "Please listen to us. Listen to our perspective, listen to what we have to say and please acknowledge that we do need to be engaged."

What this resolution is about is, in part two, to "fully engage the citizens of Ontario." That is something that we are currently undertaking, and I think the stars are becoming aligned. We are hearing a lot more about why citizens want to see their faces reflected in this Legislature. I agree with my colleague from across the House who talked about this place needing to be more reflective. It needs to be more reflective of the variety of faces across Ontario.

With respect to women, we have reached a cap, somewhat, in this country, of 20%, 21%. We used to talk a little bit more about, "Let time pass. We will see more women." Well, why are we not seeing more women and why are we not seeing more representation in the Legislature?

Those are questions that those of us who believe in democracy—and certainly, if we're here and we put our name on a ballot and we wanted to participate in this process, we need to see that reflective nature here, because, as I stated at the beginning, there are many, many voices that are not being heard in this Legislature.

In this private member's bill, to talk about going out and listening—and I want to also share a little bit more about, yes, the government has started on some of these initiatives, because we all agree that it's very important and we do need to have more engagement.

I had an opportunity to participate in the Democracy Challenge that was launched on November 19 by the minister responsible for democratic renewal. The tag line of the Democracy Challenge was very interesting. We really wanted in that Democracy Challenge to inform, inspire, engage.

When I had an opportunity to sit and listen to the young people who were collected in that room, I heard from them the very same message that I heard from high school students in my own riding when I'd gone and participated at a leadership forum at Father Redmond, from the students and the young people who launched the Just Listen to Me report who were working with the child advocate in the province, and that was, "Our voices need to be heard. We want to be inspired. We want to see our ideas reflected in the work that takes place in this Legislature."

But in order to figure out what we need to do and what needs to be changed, we first have to figure out what will engage and how we can bring those voices forward. By starting with the voices of those who are engaged in projects like Kids Voting and the other great projects that are taking place across the country, we are going to be able to inspire others to participate. The youth who were

at the Democracy Challenge talked a lot about how to get those youth who do not see their face reflected in anything that we do in this Legislature, who do not see the importance of it, to participate. We need to build that snowball. We need to get everyone interested and willing to participate in our democratic process. That responsibility lies with us, and it starts by stopping talking and starting listening.

The Deputy Speaker: One second. Speaking of that, the chatter has been a little loud in here this morning, making it difficult to hear. So if the members would just keep that in mind while there are speakers on the floor.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition): It's regrettable that time in private members' hour is being utilized for this purpose. We know the government made an announcement, and the opposition, in terms of this substantive motion, has the total of 15 minutes to participate in this kind of debate. So it's something of an unfortunate joke, but I think it's indicative of the way the members of the Liberal Party treat this place.

They made the announcement with respect to their own initiative in this regard, outside of the assembly. We see it on a day-to-day basis by the ministers in the Liberal government refusing to answer direct questions from opposition members, who represent a majority of the population in this province, and we're still not getting substantive and meaningful answers to questions posed.

I think the first step in any initiative like this should be to determine the root causes of disillusionment among the non-voters in the province. There should be a select committee of this Legislature to try and determine why people are not participating, why they're not voting.

I think you might find out one of the significant reasons is when you have the leader of a political party, Mr McGuinty, basing an election campaign, significant television advertising on standing in front of the people of Ontario and promising, "I will not increase your taxes. If there's one thing you can count on, I will not increase your taxes if I'm the Premier of Ontario," and within two months, what did he do? He brought in the largest tax increase in the history of the province of Ontario. Does that have an impact on people being disillusioned? They went out and voted for this man based on a very significant promise, and within two months he broke it. Does that not have an impact on voters? Does that not disillusion the people of the province of Ontario? It certainly does. It's a sham. This motion is a sham. It's wasting the time of private members and we will vote against it.

1050

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I first of all want to put on the record my personal view and also the view of the party, which is that we believe this current system, first past the post, has to be modernized. The reality is that when one of the few British parliamentary systems that still operates on a system where a government that gets elected with 35% or 45% of the popular vote could end up with 60%, 70%, 80% of the seats in the House, it seems to us, and I think to many people, it

doesn't make a lot of sense. We need to have a system in this province that says once the election is over, if a particular party got 48% of the vote, they should have 48% of the seats. The litmus test is that if you can't—

Mr Yakabuski: Disaster.

Mr Bisson: I listen to the Tories next door say, "Disaster." It's a big disaster in Germany, where they've operated with first past the post since after the Second World War, along with most other countries in Europe, and their economies are outperforming the economy of North America. They're politically more stable than a whole bunch of other places. So the argument that proportional representation is a disaster is a stretch beyond the imagination. It certainly is not.

The other issue—

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: No, they are a mixed system.

Mr Sterling: There's 9% unemployment.

Mr Bisson: Now the Tories are saying the economic union isn't working and that the economy of Europe isn't working. Look at the Eurodollar as compared to the Canadian and American dollars, and you'll find that the European economy is doing quite well. Anyway, I'm not debating you; I'm debating the House.

I would just make this other point. We believe that if the government goes ahead with this process they've put forward and actually does the right thing as far as the process of trying to figure out how to move forward with democratic renewal, it could be a good thing.

The basic problem we have in this Legislature is that it has evolved into a system where the Premier and a few unelected advisers who are around him or her, normally him, basically make all the decisions. The members become more and more irrelevant as time goes by. Was it the Liberals who created this issue? No. Was it the Tories? No. Was it us? It started with all of us. At one point or another, there's been an evolution over the last 20 years in this place, as in other Parliaments across Canada and at the federal level. The Premier and a few unelected people make decisions in the Premier's office. They come into caucus and say, "Boys and girls, this is what you're going to do," and all the trained seals have to follow in behind. That doesn't make a lot of sense. We have to say yes, a government has to have the right to have its legislation, but it has to have that right based on what the actual representation of the vote should have been, and that's why I believe that a PR system of some form would be better.

I particularly like a mixed system that says you have two votes, one where you vote for the party of your choice to be the government, the other one for the local member. At the end of the day, you make the adjustments. That's what Germany and a whole bunch of other places do.

In Ontario, we have a tradition of constituencies and you can't do away with that. I don't think anybody in Ontario would stand for a PR system that would say the parties will put a list and the list people are the ones who get elected. That would never fly. You have to have a

constituency-based system, but you have to have a mixed proportional system, in my view.

On another issue, in regard to fixed-date elections, this is an initiative the government has put forward that I support. I think it makes sense. But there are some dangers with this. One is, the current bill as it stands will put us in virtual election, as the Americans are. You have to have that bill amended so that there is a real, fixed period of elections where parties, candidates and third parties—in other words, people who support candidates—can't spend money until 27 or 30 days before the actual election. If we don't put that kind of proviso in your current legislation, it will mean you're going to have all kinds of third-party advertising and the parties themselves going out and campaigning virtually for a year or a year and a half before the next provincial election. That won't serve anybody well. Members need to understand that the current bill, as it stands, is flawed.

Do I support a fixed-date election? Certainly; not a problem. But we need to make sure that the election is set in such a way that nobody can campaign until 27 days before the election, nobody can spend money until 27 days before an election and there can be no third-party advertising.

As well, we have to take a look at campaign limits. That's why I favour what the federal government has done, which is to get rid of union and corporate donations. Not a bad idea. The question is, how do you come up with a formula that's fair for all parties? How do you allow, for example, the Green Party, which has something to say in this province, to run candidates, and how do you make sure the existing parties can fare well enough to be able to run a full slate of candidates in those elections? If we are to deal with that as well, I think we're on our way to making some pretty good reforms when it comes to democracy in Ontario.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): It's my pleasure to join in private members' business debate this morning. Unfortunately, I don't think this is the spot where we should be discussing this important motion when we, as individual members in the opposition, have all of a minute and a half to talk about this issue. I would mention that the member for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge said that he introduced this before the government made their recent announcement. I would have gladly traded my private member's bill, I think it's number 70 on the ballot list, the deposit return system. We could have been talking about something that's very important and maybe looked at solving the trash problems in this province.

I do have concerns about rushing into changing our whole system. We have a system that has worked well for 137 years. We've had stable government for 137 years. I think we should take our time and look at other systems. The member for Timmins-James Bay raised some valid concerns with our existing system, but I think what our system needs is a tune-up. It doesn't need a major overhaul; it needs a tune-up to get more involvement with the members to make it work a little bit better. But we should be very careful about rushing into a new

system that may, from a distance, from a high level, look good but does have many problems, especially when our system has worked very well.

So that, in the limited time I have, is what I would like to add to this discussion. We should look at ways of making the current system work better before making radical changes.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): This morning's motion—and it's merely a motion in private members' hour—raises a question in my mind: This is it? This is all there is to this, a private members' motion? I really raise the question, is this it? Where is the government bill? Where is the legislation? All we have here is a motion indicating that we should consider proportional representation. Where is the government legislation for us to debate? To the Liberals across the way, this was your election platform.

I know in my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant, it was raised in every single all-candidates debate, raised by local Liberals. Granted, the Liberals dropped by 3,000 votes in my riding in the last election. But local Liberals, regardless, still presented this as one of their most important new initiatives.

As the member for Leeds-Grenville has indicated, what we have this morning is a sham. I'd put an "e" on the end of that word. It's a shame; it's a sham and a shame. And I ask, where's the government? Do we not get to debate a government bill? What are they afraid of? Is this going to be, perhaps down the road, slid in underneath the back door?

As with my colleagues, I just have a couple of minutes to address this issue today, to speak on the often touted, certainly during the last election, concept of proportional representation. It's a Liberal move that, as the member for Lanark-Carleton pointed out, will change the history of this province and representation in Ontario over the next hundred years. As the member indicated, 24 members of Her Majesty's loyal opposition get a total of 15 minutes to raise their constituents' concerns about what I consider this morning as an affront to democracy, this suffocation of debate, the muzzling of any detailed opposition comment this morning.

Last week, the Premier of Ontario bypassed duly elected representatives in the Legislature, making an announcement about electoral reform at a location somewhere outside of the assembly. We as opposition members were not consulted, there was no legislation presented for debate, and what we have this morning is an afterthought, shamelessly trying to cleanse this initiative of its partisan stench by holding a very brief debate in private members'—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

1100

Mr Barrett: Obviously, I've run out of the very short time I was allocated.

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

Mr Arthurs: I would like to list all the members who spoke in this rather limited debate of an hour—and with

that I can agree. But I'm pleased that on a Thursday morning we had some dozen members of this Legislature engaged in this particular debate.

I do agree with some of the comments made by members opposite, but let's recall that this is private members' time; this is not government time. I agree that the time available in this modest bid, an hour, is not enough to engage us all fully in the debate on democratic renewal. What I don't agree on is that the issue of getting elected is not an issue; that's one of the issues.

I agree particularly with the member from Toronto-Danforth, who made reference to the need to have terms of reference and processes well defined and structure done upfront to provide legitimacy to the process. I am in concurrence and have commented on that in other places. This particular motion is intended to set the stage, to create a process; it's not intended to establish an outcome.

It really is three parts. The first one is about how this assembly gets elected, and there's obviously a need for consideration of whether or not what we do now is the most effective means of doing that. Second, it talks about public engagement. It talks about public engagement in the context of how we get elected, but, beyond that, it creates the opportunity of a template in regard to how we engage the public on public policy issues. If we do it well on this issue, then we'll have set a template on how we're going to engage the public generally. The third part speaks about public policy and seeking advice on public policy on an ongoing basis. I think this Legislature and province would be well served by doing that.

I'm very pleased with the debate this morning and am pleased that I had the opportunity to bring this resolution forward.

HOME FIRE SPRINKLER ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LES EXTINCTEURS AUTOMATIQUES DOMICILIAIRES

Mrs Jeffrey moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 141, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 respecting home fire sprinklers / Projet de loi 141, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment en ce qui a trait aux extincteurs automatiques domiciliaires.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mrs Jeffrey, pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I rise in the House today in order to present Bill 141, the Home Fire Sprinkler Act, 2004, for second reading.

This week marks Home Fire Safety Week. It is a time when Canadians are asked to reflect on how best to protect their homes from fire. The purpose of the bill is to prevent the devastating loss of life and property that is caused by fire every year. This bill will require the installation of fire sprinklers in new detached, semi-detached and row houses.

Between 1999 and 2003 in Ontario, fire took the lives of 533 people and was responsible for almost \$1.6 billion in property damage. Last year alone, fire claimed the lives of 110 people and destroyed an estimated \$457 million in property. However, none of these figures adequately represents the human cost endured by families and friends whose loved ones are lost or injured due the fire.

This bill is the culmination of over a decade of work by a dedicated firefighter. His mission: to bring proven technology of residential fire sprinklers to the Canadian public. Brian Maltby is the fire prevention division chief in Brampton, and he's the first Canadian ever to be elected to the board of directors of the fire and life safety section of the International Association Of Fire Chiefs.

There is compelling statistical evidence of the need and effectiveness of residential fire sprinklers. Residential sprinklers add fire suppression and complement the early warning capability of smoke alarms. When a fire starts, a heat-sensitive element, called a fusible link, detects the heat. Each sprinkler head responds independently, resulting in fires rarely spreading beyond the room of origin. In roughly 95% of all documented sprinkler activations, one sprinkler has been sufficient to control the fire.

At first I didn't understand why Brian was so driven, until he told me the reason why the issue of residential sprinklers had become so personal. In 1993, Brian Maltby had the unenviable task of having to tell a young mother that her two children had perished in a fire. In vain, he tried to comfort the distraught young woman. For months after that tragedy, Brian would lie awake at night thinking about that young mother and her loss and about how those two young lives were prematurely lost.

The construction of a new monument for the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association just south of the Legislature will be completed next month. It's a beautiful structure and recognizes the ultimate contribution of many brave firefighters. However, I believe that the best way to honour those fallen heroes is by ensuring that we minimize the risk for current and future firefighters.

In September 2000, Brampton firefighters responded to a residential fire. Upon arrival, the crew found the house fully engulfed. Fortunately, all of the residents were out. Larry Brooks, a 19-year career firefighter, stretched an attack hose line around the east side of the house, when suddenly the roof, east wall and block chimney collapsed, trapping Larry in the rubble.

The crew worked feverishly to pull Larry out from underneath the debris, and for a while, it was uncertain whether Firefighter Brooks would survive his injuries.

This summer, after four years of trying to save Larry's left arm, the doctors finally had to amputate it.

Today, dozens of firefighters and others affected by fire have come from all over the province to express their support for the installation of residential fire sprinklers in new homes.

In the members' gallery, we have a tireless advocate for residential fire sprinklers, Firefighter Brian Maltby.

We have Al Speed, the former fire chief of the city of Toronto, and William Stewart, the current fire chief of the city of Toronto. We have Deputy Fire Chief Terry Boyko of the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, Deputy Fire Marshal Doug Crawford, and Firefighter Chris Arthey, whose home was destroyed in a fire and who installed home fire sprinklers when rebuilding his home.

Sometimes it's easy to become desensitized to the weekly reports about the number of fire deaths or injuries or the extraordinary damage that occurs in this province every year. But it's impossible to ignore the stories of people who have been affected by fires, individuals like Mr Gyamfi.

In 1999, Mr Gyamfi lost his daughter in an arson house fire in Brampton. Despite the fact that his loss is still relatively recent, he has chosen to come here today in order to show his support for residential fire sprinklers. Mr Gyamfi joins us in the members' gallery.

Applause.

Mrs Jeffrey: Thank you.

The question before us today is: How much value do we attribute to the lives of our firefighters, the lives of Ontarians and the lives of our families? I believe that we, as legislators, have a responsibility to ensure that we take a leadership role to protect Ontarians.

Fire sprinklers in new homes are affordable. On average, home fire sprinklers add only 1% to 1.5% to the total building cost in new construction. We need to encourage the same consumers who demand air bags in their cars and who spend several thousand dollars to protect their homes with electronic alarm systems to demand homes with sprinklers. The cost is insignificant when compared to the possibility of losing a loved one in a fire.

Just over two weeks ago, Ontario endured one of this year's most tragic fire incidents, in West Lincoln, Ontario. On November 8, 2004, a 39-year-old expectant mother named Monika Woerlen died from smoke inhalation with her 7 children. By the time a fire truck was able to arrive on the scene, their home was already engulfed in flames.

I'm sure I express the sentiments of this Legislature when I offer our sincere condolences to Mr Woerlen, his family and the constituents of the member for Erie-Lincoln.

Some would propose that homes in rural areas do not need fire sprinklers. However, homes that are located in remote or isolated areas are less likely to have a quick response time from emergency services, and they're the ones who most need fire sprinklers.

1110

It's important to understand that in most fires it's the smoke that kills, not the fire. As well, most residential fires occur when people feel the safest, asleep in their beds, usually between the hours of midnight and 6 am.

The vast majority of all residential fires today are due to behavioural causes: careless smoking, unattended cooking or children playing with fire. While we cannot prevent these behaviours, we can design sprinkler systems to control the outcome.

By the time an individual realizes their home is on fire, it's often too late to find a safe exit from the home. The smoke is blinding, you're choking and you're disoriented. Imagine the terror that faces you: the prospect of blindly trying to find a safe exit out of your home and ensuring that everyone else you love is safe.

There is now a significant body of evidence in California, Georgia, Maryland, Arizona, Washington and Vancouver. There has never been a single fire fatality in a residence with a sprinkler system where the occupants have not been in direct contact with the fire. It is time for Ontario to take a leadership role and become the first province in Canada to mandate fire sprinklers.

When I first came to Queen's Park, I remember something Premier McGuinty said to members when speaking about private members' legislation. He asked us to be courageous and to bring legislation to the table that was meaningful. I took his words to heart. I cannot think of anything more important than showing our commitment to civilian and firefighter safety.

In conclusion, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my friend Firefighter Brian Maltby. I know Brian has a dream of a day when firefighters will respond to a house fire by running into a house, turning off the water, mopping up the floor and returning safe and sound.

A wise man once said that the best time to plant a tree was 25 years ago; the second-best time is today. The best time to include residential sprinklers in the building code would have been 25 years ago. The second-best time to install residential sprinklers is today. Please join me in supporting this bill.

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to respond. I know my colleagues from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford and maybe some others will speak to this bill as well.

First, we welcome the opportunity to debate this bill, and congratulate the member for bringing it forward for debate. The member for Brampton Centre obviously has the best of intentions with her legislation. We welcome our guests, the fire chiefs and the distinguished men and women in the gallery here today, as part of our debate.

My third introductory comment is that I sincerely appreciate the kind words from the member on behalf of the Woerlen family and the people of Erie-Lincoln. I am proud to be a resident of West Lincoln, where the firefighters bravely tried to assist the family as best as possible, as well as the firefighters from neighbouring Pelham, who have an agreement to protect that part of West Lincoln as well.

This legislation has good intentions. We support the notion of doing whatever we can—obviously an admirable goal—to eliminate any fatalities or injuries caused by residential or business fires and, in addition to that, whatever we can do to protect our brave men and women firefighters. We had a gathering here yesterday of firefighters from across the province; the association of the chiefs are here today.

I think the question for the assembly is, if you're making an investment in protecting home safety, if

you're making an investment in terms of assisting and protecting our firefighters, what is the best way to do so? Certainly, the firefighters who visited with me yesterday—from Welland, St Catharines and Niagara Falls—talked about 1710 and 1720, two initiatives to increase the number of firefighters who can make a call on time, protect themselves and get to the property as quickly as possible. The chiefs, in their release, and the firefighters I spoke with yesterday as well, talked about the importance of smoke detectors and the fact that, sadly, some 30% of the smoke detectors aren't functioning or aren't maintained on a regular basis. Definitely an initiative in that respect would be an admirable one as well.

Similarly I do believe—and I know the member is but one of her caucus—if they were to move forward with this initiative, as part of their building code reform or by passing this particular bill through third reading—obviously we feel the government should put its money where its mouth is as well. Hopefully members opposite would support either some sort of tax credit or some sort of benefit, if this legislation passes, to assist with that cost. While a 1% to 1.5% increase in costs may not seem like a lot, I think to a good number of homeowners it could be up to \$3,500 per home, as estimated by the Canadian Home Builders' Association in a study a few years ago. For a lot of middle-class families, working families or young couples buying their first home, an additional \$3,500 could be quite expensive. I wonder if that \$3,500—if society is paying that cost—should be best invested in sprinklers, a better job of smoke detectors or a better job of hiring and training our firefighters to maintain the high quality of our service and getting more firefighters to the scene on time.

I'll stress that again: \$3,500, to a family, if that is the accurate number, can be quite expensive. The government, therefore, should support that, if this initiative does move forward, with the requisite tax break, a grant or some assistance in that regard.

Often a challenge too in these instances is when a private member's bill comes forward and there's also a government initiative underway. I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is currently reviewing the building code and undergoing consultations. We believe that this bill should be part of those consultations, so that they look at the entire change and updating the building code in one fell swoop.

I hope, in the rest of the debate this morning, that I will hear a bit more about potential costs. If you're going to invest that sum of money across the province, is that the best way to support our firefighters and prevent fire damage, fatalities and injuries? Hopefully, there has been some cost-benefit analysis work done in terms of the dollars invested versus benefits, as opposed to investing those dollars in more firefighters, more training and a better education program with smoke detectors.

Those are my remarks. I look forward to my colleagues in the assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? Oh, the member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): How can you miss me?

The Deputy Speaker: Good question. I don't know.

Mr Bisson: I just want to say to the member across the way, I have no problem supporting this particular initiative. However, I think there'll probably be some—not so much in the construction industry but in the realty industry, who will probably have some concerns. They'll argue, I'm sure, that this is going to push up the average cost of houses in Ontario and make housing unaffordable. To them, I say, God, have you looked at the price of housing lately? I don't think a fire suppression system is going to make all that much difference.

We were talking to a number of firefighters last night at the reception about the prices of housing in, I think it was, the Stratford area. I couldn't get over what a single-family house, a three-bedroom bungalow, is going for in that community. I thought that housing was reasonable in that area. The price of houses is quite high.

I don't have a problem supporting this. I understand why the member is doing it. It's certainly a good safety initiative. I just clarified with her—I wanted to make sure, and she said yes, that in fact this would only apply to new construction. You wouldn't be talking about trying to retrofit existing housing because obviously that would be a great difficulty. You'd have to start ripping ceilings apart, which probably would not be very practical, considering that most of us don't want to take the drywall down once it's up. So it's obviously not a problem.

I do want to take this time, and I've got a bit of time, to talk about fire services generally, and I want to talk about it from the perspective of First Nations—a perspective we don't hear very often in this House.

We have a situation right now in the community of Attawapiskat where there is a primary school, J.R. Nakogee, that deals with all the education needs of all those kids from JK all the way up to grade 8. It's currently closed. It has been closed for four years. Why? Because there has been a diesel spill.

A big, long story: The federal government used to operate the power plant in that community because most of those communities were not on the hydro grid. They had to generate electricity by way of diesel generators. They had a huge spill. Diesel fuel ended up in the ground and migrated to the ground underneath the school. The federal government kept on studying it and wouldn't do anything. Those kids kept on getting sicker and sicker and, finally, the families of those children had to take the conditions into their own hands. It's pretty sad when the federal government won't respond to something as serious as that. The community had to make a decision to shut the school down. Now the situation is, for four years we've had the J.R. Nakogee Elementary School in the community of Attawapiskat shut down. Why? Because it is contaminated with diesel fuel and it is unsafe for human habitation.

1120

Here's an interesting point—it's all going to relate, Speaker. I promise you it's going to come back to fire

suppression systems, because that completes this story. The interesting thing is that when the federal government finally got around to taking a look at what was dangerous in the community when it came to the diesel spill, they decided to rip down the three teachers' houses that were owned by the federal government because the contamination levels were such that it put human habitation at risk. Interestingly, the level of contamination in the school was higher, and is higher, than it was inside those teachers' houses. It's interesting that the federal government saw fit to tear down the three houses occupied by teachers because it was unsafe for human habitation but was unwilling to rip down the school and remedy the current situation at the school where the pollution levels were even higher. So that sets up the first part of the story.

Now the second part of the story: They have a high school, it's called Vezina Secondary School. It houses around 300 to 400 secondary students in that community. Guess what? The fire suppression system malfunctioned and the entire school basically was destroyed because the fire suppression system, as firemen would know, has to be operated dry. You don't keep water in those things, especially in northern Ontario where it's up in the unheated attic. You pressurize the system in good weather, make sure there are no leaks, turn the system off, drain the system out and leave the water out of the system.

As a result, what happened for some reason, the system malfunctioned when they tested it last spring. We got the first frost this winter and guess what happened? The water system froze up in the attic, the pipes burst, the entire fire suppression system went off in the attic above the drywall—could you imagine? Firefighters, you know what I'm talking about. The water built up in the insulation, built up over the joists and the entire ceiling of the school started to leak in every conceivable spot. If you could think of putting a pail in that school, water was coming through the roof. As a result, they had to evacuate the school and the school has been basically demolished.

So now we've got JR Nakogee school in Attawapiskat, a community of 3,000 people, where they've got no primary school and a federal government that's done nothing and has been missing in action. I am fed up with the situation, I'll tell you, beyond means. We now have the secondary school that's been destroyed because of a fire suppression system that malfunctioned, and that school is now shut down. So the response is, "Let's find other places in the community to put the students while we study what to do."

A few members in this House have been to Attawapiskat and would know that, like most northern reserves, you've only got 15 to 20 people per house. Can you imagine having your children in your house? How many children do you have? Two, three?

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: OK, so you and your husband have three kids. So you have your daily lives going on as you live in your house. All of a sudden in your community, because

there isn't enough housing, your sister doesn't have a place to live, so she's got to move in with her boyfriend or husband and their kids. And by the way, your parents don't have anywhere to live either because there's no housing in that community, so they have to move in with you as well. It is that bad.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: It's damn serious and that's not to be laughed at.

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I'm not laughing.

Mr Bisson: How we accept that kind of situation today is unbelievable, that in the country of Canada we put citizens in that situation. I won't have people in this House thinking it's funny. I invite you to Attawapiskat, sir, I invite you to Fort Albany, and I invite you to all communities across the north to go see for yourself.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Bisson: Don't come in here and start laughing—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay, please direct your remarks through the Chair. At some point you should be speaking to the bill, as well. I understand, but you should be speaking to bill.

Mr Bisson: I am speaking to the bill because it's related to the fire suppression system in that school. My point is—and I'm saying to the member across the way, I know there's a certain sympathy within the government because we've had a number of your members come up to that community and look at it.

So imagine, now you have you, your three kids, your sister-in-law, her husband, their two kids, your mum and dad and, by the way, your oldest son just got married and he's moving in with his wife. How do your children study in that environment? How does a child find the quietness they need to study and compete with other kids in this country when it comes to education when you've got that kind of activity going on in the home? That happens each and every day in those communities, and our federal government does nothing.

I've been reading the papers lately—it's related to the fire suppression system. I want to get back to the Vezina Secondary School and the fire suppression system. I've been reading in the paper lately, in the Star and other places, there have been editorials about the Auditor General, or whatever they call Sheila whatever her name is in Ottawa—

Interjection: Fraser.

Mr Bisson: Fraser—that they're not doing a very good job managing money at Indian Affairs, INAC, when it comes to servicing those communities and that we're somehow spending more money than we should in the education system and not getting any results.

We're not getting results because these kids have nowhere to study. They can't go to their houses. Why? Because the houses are overcrowded. They have to live with extended families. There's dysfunctionality in those communities because of the residential school syndrome and everything else that has gone on. It's quite complicated. The communities will admit it. There's a high

level of abuse when it comes to alcohol, drugs and gas sniffing.

I have a resident in the community of Attawapiskat. He and his wife moved out to live in a tent all winter with their two younger children. Why? Because they don't feel secure living in the house with their older children, who are now sniffing gas. It's pretty serious stuff.

Coming back to how this relates to the Vezina school, we now have the only secondary school in the community, where those kids had some hope of trying to break the cycle and study, shut down because the fire suppression system was faulty and it has basically destroyed the school. So now we have kids in the entire community who don't have a school. They're now working out of portables on shift work, and the federal government is still studying the situation.

I want to make one call in this House. If the federal government can't do the job, they should just get the hell out of the way. It's clear that they've abandoned the First Nations in this province. They are not doing their job. I look at any other child in Ontario. You have a school that is properly built according to building codes, that has fire suppression systems that are well maintained so you don't have the kind of situation that has happened with our school up in Attawapiskat, and you have a system that says we need to make sure all children have an equal opportunity for education. At the end of the day, the only chance those kids have to break the cycle is to compete, along with every other child in this province and this country.

These people don't want welfare. They don't want to be given a handout; they want to be given a hand up, as Mike Harris used to say, to a certain extent. I'm not advocating for everything Mike Harris said, but the saying is right. Those kids want to be given an opportunity to compete with every other child out there, but we can't do that because we don't have some of the basic infrastructure.

As we stand in this Legislature today and talk about your private member's bill, which I think is really important—it's a great idea and I'll support it. Putting fire suppression systems in individual homes, new construction and semi-detached homes makes a lot of sense. I want people to remember that there is a whole segment of our society—God, they'd just be happy to have a house; they'd be happy to have an apartment. They have none.

I see my good friend the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal is here. He's had the opportunity to meet, along with myself, with a few of the chiefs from up north. We talked about the need to find some way to provide housing dollars for those communities because it's clear the federal government is not doing it.

Am I saying we should let the federal government off the hook? Certainly not. They have a fiduciary responsibility to First Nations and, as such, have to make sure they go through with their responsibility to those communities. But we need to figure out as a province how to make those First Nations people in the northern and other

parts of our province real citizens, active citizens, equal citizens.

Now I want to get to fire services. I want to tell the firefighters who are here, imagine that you work in a fire department up in Fort Albany, Attawapiskat, Peawanuk, wherever it might be. You haven't got a fire truck—no such thing. You probably don't even have a uniform. You have a fire. All you have is the goodwill of a lot of volunteers trying to do the right thing. In some communities there may be a water distribution system that allows you to have a fire hydrant. There may not be a maintenance department within the community because they don't have the budget to make sure the fire hydrants are working properly.

You know, in your communities, that you have public works people who go out and check to make sure the fire hydrants are functional so that if there is a fire, they can actually plug your pumper truck into it and use the water to put out the fire. In most of those communities, (a) you don't have a fire truck; (b) if you have a fire truck, you don't have the fire hall to put it in—can you imagine that? You'll go and get your fire truck, it's 40 below zero outside and it's full of snow, and you're going to go out and fight a fire. And (c), in most cases the basic infrastructure doesn't work.

When First Nations fire departments try to get money to train their firefighters—you know that for professional and volunteer firefighters, firefighting is a very serious business. It's very technical. It's not a job where somebody can walk in and say, "I'm a fireman. Give me a hat, give me my hose and I'll go out and fight a fire." It's a very scientific, very technical thing and people need to know what they're doing. We don't even have the basic dollars to train the firefighters to do their jobs. I'm not saying that all First Nations firefighters are no good. They're very well intentioned, and some communities are more organized than others. I look at Moose Factory, a very different situation than, let's say, Kashechewan or Big Trout Lake.

1130

The point is, again, a federal government asleep on the job, not paying attention to their responsibility to First Nations, and we have a fire marshal's office in Ontario that has no jurisdiction. I say again, if the federal government doesn't want to do the job, get the heck out of the way. Those communities are in Ontario. Put them under the fire marshal's act so that we have some real standards that we can then enforce in those communities and make sure their fire services are functioning.

Imagine that you're a police officer: same story. I was in one community and brought our critic, Peter Kormos, one day. I've forgotten where it was. It might have been Ogoki or Martin Falls or wherever; I don't remember. He says that as a critic for justice he goes to the NAPS people; that's Nishnawbe-Aski policing. Those are the police officers in those communities. He asked, "When you have an emergency where somebody has, let's say, drowned or is in danger and you've got to go out and get them, what do you have for emergency services?" Do

you know what they had? They had a boat—no motor—and it didn't even have paddles; they had a boat. Now tell me: As a firefighter, how do you save somebody who's drowning in a river because they fell through the ice, or try to get some child off the ice in the fall or spring, when all you've got is a boat that doesn't have a motor, that doesn't even have oars? And why? Because they didn't have enough money. The only thing they got shipped to them was a boat.

I'm just saying that if the feds don't want to do it, give us, as the province, the money, get the heck out of the way, and we will make sure we make First Nations real partners when it comes to what we signed their treaties for in Ontario.

Am I upset? I apologize if I got mad at you. Maybe I didn't hear everything you said, but I take this really seriously. I am sick and tired, fed up, with what the federal government is not doing for aboriginal people. Any opportunities that I have to stand up in this House and tell people just how shocking conditions are in our communities, yes, I am going to take them and I make absolutely no apologies.

I do apologize to the member for one thing. I wish I could have spoken more on your actual bill, but you know you've got my support. I had to use this opportunity.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm pleased to join the debate with respect to this legislation. I noticed, though, that the legislation is restricted to new detached houses, semi-detached houses or row houses. I'm not really clear on why the member has restricted it to those particular areas, considering that people also reside in newly constructed apartment buildings. There's also the non-profit housing that is going to be constructed. There are also condominiums that people would live in.

She may have the answer. It may be that they are covered by that; I have no idea. I think that's something for her to answer in terms of why she has limited the application of her bill to detached or semi-detached homes or row housing. By row housing, she may mean link housing; I'm not sure. I think that's correct. That's one area.

The other area that is important to look at is enforcement in terms of smoke alarms. I know they do have a mandatory requirement with respect to smoke alarms in our city of Barrie, but on the same point, I don't know how well that's enforced. I don't know how well it's enforced all across the province. You can have as many laws as you want, but if they're not enforced, then it doesn't make any sense to have them. You have to have laws that can be enforced no matter how much merit there is with respect to the law.

I don't know how much consultation she's had with city councils or municipalities. I don't know whether there's any endorsement in terms of whether they have the funding, in terms of the bylaw enforcement officers or the fire marshal's office within the communities, whether they're going to be able to enforce this. It seems,

from the comments I heard from my friend from Erie-Lincoln, picking up on smoke detectors, which are a relatively simple technology to maintain, that a recent release by the fire chief stated that as many as 30% of residential smoke alarms were not working in one region of Ontario.

A home sprinkler system would be more complicated, and the issue of whether it works or whether it malfunctions is serious, because we have to look at it from the point of a resale. What's going to happen on the resale? We know that insurance companies have taken a much tougher line with respect to the technology and the state of the equipment that's in your house, whether they are going to approve providing insurance for certain types of plumbing systems, certain types of wiring systems, and now you add something else on to this in terms of whether the insurance industry is going to be prepared to cover situations where it's not properly maintained. I think that's a fundamental issue.

There are issues with respect to enforcement. There are issues with respect to the insurance industry. There are certainly issues with respect to the limited application of what she's trying to accomplish here. And I'm sure she's got answers. I know this is going to go to committee hearings.

Also, we should be looking at whether she would consider making it a mandatory purchase option, making it an option that builders have to offer their clients so you have consent for this particular type of system that would be put into a new home, for example.

I have to look at this from the point of view of a cost-benefit analysis, with input from new homebuyers and the new home warranty system. A lot of consultation needs to go into this. I'm sure the member is aware of this, and I'm sure that she's going to do that, because she's a former city councillor in Brampton and would understand how this should be done.

Those are all the comments I have on this bill.

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I'll be sharing my time with the members from Oakville and Niagara Falls. I want to thank the member from Brampton Centre for bringing this bill forward.

Since the amalgamation of Toronto seven years ago, our city has seen a total of 139 fire deaths. I had the opportunity to speak to our city of Toronto fire chief, Bill Stewart, and deputy chief, Rick Simpson, yesterday. They told me that most, if not all, of these victims would have been saved had their homes or buildings been equipped with automatic sprinklers. That's just Toronto. Looking across the province, close to 100 people on average die in fires every year.

A number of years ago, I had the opportunity, as chair of the city of Toronto's community services committee, to join Fire Chief Al Speed, who's also here today, in launching our city's war on fire. This was a series of actions, recommendations and fire prevention strategies that helped bring about the turnaround in fire fatalities in Toronto, including a recommendation to the province to consider making fire suppression sprinklers mandatory in

all new buildings. The leadership of Chief Speed, and the continued leadership of Chief Stewart, has made a difference in Toronto, but there's more that we have to do.

For the most part, fire fatalities have been decreasing but, as I said, there is more we can do. Automatic fire sprinkler systems work, plain and simple. There's no denying it. I've seen no data to suggest anything otherwise. Lives are being saved in places like Vancouver, which has led the country by making automatic fire suppression sprinkler systems mandatory. The results there speak for themselves: zero fire deaths in buildings that have had these sprinkler systems installed. In all, 220 jurisdictions across North America are protecting their people and their families from the ravages of fire through the mandatory implementation of sprinkler systems in homes.

Nobody here is suggesting retrofitting current housing. That would be great, it would be desirable, but we know that it would likely be cost-prohibitive. But if we can know that we can save lives by making sprinkler systems mandatory in new homes, surely that's something we should be considering.

This is not a new idea. Let me share with you the long and painful history of recommendations from coroner's inquest to coroner's inquest since 1989: December 1989, the Cann inquest; June 1992, the Deslaurier inquest; January 1994, the McNutt inquest; January 1995, the Florio inquest; May 1996, the Simmonds inquest; March 1995, the Pinkerton inquest; January 1998, the McLeod inquest; June 1997, the Davis inquest; August 1998, the Fedoruk inquest; January 1999, the Benson inquest; April 2001, the Shaw inquest; January 2001, the Patrick inquest; May 2001, the Wilson inquest; and I'm sure there are many more that I wasn't aware of.

Every one of these inquests concluded that the province should consider making sprinkler systems mandatory in homes. It's time to bring an end to this long recession of inquests and deaths. It's time to give serious consideration to making automatic sprinkler systems mandatory.

1140

Is cost a factor? Of course it is. We don't want to impose more costs on the building industry. This is a key industry in our economy. It creates thousands of jobs. A healthy building industry leads to a healthy economy. So we must be sensitive to the concerns of the building industry. That's why we should consider doing something like they've done in Vancouver, where they've been able to remove 30 pages of their building code, saving builders money by reducing building code requirements if sprinkler systems are in place. This has simplified their building code and reduced the impact on the building industry caused by making sprinklers mandatory. It's something I think we should be considering.

Finally, I agree with Toronto Fire Chief Bill Stewart on the need to extend mandatory sprinkler systems not only to low-rise buildings but to high-rise as well. But I recognize that we have to start somewhere, and this bill is

an excellent way to focus that discussion and consideration of this important issue.

At the end of the day, there is no more important responsibility for any government than the safety and security of our people. Today we have a bill before us that, if passed, will certainly save lives. I commend the member for Brampton Centre for bringing this to our attention and for bringing this bill forward, and I'm pleased to support it.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Thank you very much for allowing me to speak to this bill this morning. I do want to commend the member for Brampton Centre for bringing forth this piece of legislation. I don't happen to support it, but I do support her as a member. I know she's very passionate in what she does and she represents her constituency very well.

I also want to welcome the members of the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs here this morning. I understand that they support the member in what she's doing, and we certainly support you in the good work that you and your membership do. However, I have some concerns and reservations about this bill.

Number one, I'm one who believes in a person's freedom to make choices. I've read the briefs that the member provided us with, and we appreciate that. She gave a lot of evidence and statistics about why fire suppression systems would be a positive step. Having read all those and having had some previous knowledge of how the systems work, I could very well, if I were building a new home, make the choice to go ahead and put a fire suppression system in. It would be my decision whether or not to invest that extra \$3,500 or \$4,000 to do so, but that would be my choice based on the evidence as it's presented to me. I think a much better way of doing this would be, if there was a mandatory option offered, that if the association of home builders or contractors in general had to offer this to all new home builders as a possibility or an option in erecting that new home, that would be more positive.

Also, if you have that much confidence in what you're offering, you should be able to sell it to people as a positive choice for them to make; not that it should be legislated on them, but a positive choice for them to make, that they will be doing themselves and their families a service and also preserving the physical home itself, should a fire break out.

Another thing I have a very significant concern about is the insurance aspect of what this might do. We might say that insurance companies are probably going to be offering reductions in insurance premiums to homes that have these systems in place, but you know the old saying: for every action there's an equal reaction. The homes that don't have these systems could end up paying a penalty for not having those systems in place—the existing homes. It'll be a long time before we have more new homes erected than we have homes already in existence.

On the sale of a home, oftentimes the insurance company doesn't kick up a big fuss about it. They've got a current customer in place. However, when that home is

resold, they go through an inspection process. They go through there with a fine-toothed comb, and there are lots of things they can look at in that home. Having been in the real estate business, I know this very well. They go through the home and then they say, "We won't insure this home because of this, this and that." Sometimes they're rectifiable and sometimes it's much more difficult to do just that.

We don't know that, a few years down the road, the insurance company is not going to look at this, because they do some strange things and they are driven by the profit motive—if they give a rebate on one side of the equation, they have to make up for that on another. They may go to home buyers and say, "Oh, I'm sorry, but we can't insure that older home because it doesn't have a fire suppression system, which, as you know, is the law in Ontario now for all new homes." So I have a concern that those people are going to be left with the short end of the stick. I don't know what the cost would be of a retrofit to put this into a home, but it would be astronomical. As you know, whenever you try to do something in an existing building, the costs escalate dramatically.

Those are the concerns I have with this. I think we should be selling this on the basis of its merits. If a suppression system is a good thing, then wise home builders will be marketing that and wise people who are building a home, on an individual basis, will give very strong consideration to whether or not they should put a fire suppression system in their home. If they want to have all the best protection, that may be a choice they make.

I have a concern about young people today. Some of the things that this government has done have made the cost of owning a home go up dramatically. This will add to that. Owning a home in this country and this province is getting tougher and tougher for people starting out in life because of the cost of development charges and all those kinds of things. In rural Ontario, for example—we passed Bill 26 yesterday. It's a disaster. It stops development in rural Ontario and puts a real noose around it, and it's going to add to the cost of building new homes. If we add this to it, it only escalates that further.

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to join this debate today. I think this is one of the better private members' bills I've seen come forward, and I certainly want to compliment the member from Brampton Centre for bringing forward Bill 141, the Home Fire Sprinkler Act.

When you're creating legislation, there comes a time when you'd like to do everything. You'd like to protect every home, in this case, in Ontario. But what I think the member has brought forward is a sensible and practical idea that says that, as we continue to build homes, we should pay attention to the expert advice that has been given to us by inquest after inquest, telling us how we can save lives. The member's bill would accomplish exactly what the inquests have been talking about.

People have said that a retrofit to an existing home, to put a sprinkler system in, could be expensive, and I agree

with that point of view. It could be expensive in a lot of circumstances. But it's a good first step. I think we should at least join a jurisdiction like the city of Vancouver and over 200 other jurisdictions in North America that have decided that it's in the best interests of their citizens and the taxpayers within their jurisdictions that a fire sprinkler system be installed in new housing. I think there can't help but be insurance savings inherent in the installation of a system such as this. I don't have that fact in front of me, but it's something that just makes common sense and I think should be supported.

I think one of the key signs of a civilized society in this modern, urban era that we live in is the emergency services we provide to each other as a society. One major component of that is in our fire protection and in the wonderful men and women who provide that fire protection: the firefighters of our community. I applaud them and I applaud their presence here today.

Sometimes, points get driven home to you pretty hard. In my own community, in 1998, we had a horrible tragedy that I believe, and the inquest that followed that tragedy believed, could have been prevented. It resulted in the deaths of three young people and one mother. It took place on August 15, 1998.

They talk about response times when they go into inquests and when you're planning fire protection and you want to know how quickly, from the time that an emergency call is made, you can have a fire truck or a police car or an ambulance on the scene. In this case, we're talking about a fire truck.

1150

What the inquest found out when it did the investigation was that a woman from the home called the fire department at 4:01 and said, "I have a fire in my house," and then the line went dead. Fire trucks were on scene within four minutes. By 4:05, the fire trucks were on scene. The police officer who attended could hear the people in the house. The fire protection personnel who were there were unable to rescue the people from the house, even though they knew, when they were on the perimeter of the fire on the outside of that house, there were still live people in that house, and they couldn't reach them.

By the time 4:18 came along, they had two bodies on the front lawn. By the time 4:28 came along, they had two more bodies. They were able to perform CPR, they were able to transfer them to some of the local hospitals and they were able to revive them. Within 36 hours, they all died. They didn't die from the fire; they died from the effects of smoke inhalation.

This issue went on to inquest, obviously. I have first-hand knowledge of not only the traumatic experience that the family underwent, that the surviving members of the family underwent, but also of the firefighters who attended at that scene, the firefighters who heard the voices and were unable to reach the people they dedicated their lives to saving.

This clearly is an example of a situation where, had that home had fire sprinklers in it, those four people

would still be alive today and that experience would not be haunting the members of the firefighting profession in my community, who needed some degree of counselling after this event took place.

It simply is something whose time has come. Whether it comes by form of a government bill or whether it comes by form of a private member's bill I don't think really matters any more. But what I'm standing here today to do is to implore you to support this bill and to applaud the member from Brampton Centre, who has had the common sense and the compassion to bring this bill forward for your consideration and support.

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to be part of today's debate. The debate is quite simple: It's about saving lives at no cost to the government. In fact, the government will make money on taxes and save money in health and social expenditures through Bill 141, the Home Fire Sprinkler Act.

As we all have heard today already, fire kills more people in Canada annually than all natural disasters combined. In fact, more than 100 individuals perish in fires each year, and ironically, most fire deaths—75%—occur in the very place where we feel the safest: our homes.

Home fires often happen at night when people are sleeping. In less than four minutes, a room can become engulfed in flames before anyone awakes, as we've just heard. Those most at risk are the very young and the older adults, who have difficulty making a quick escape.

Although smoke detectors are essential in every household, they are designed to detect, not control, a fire. Home fire sprinklers complement a detector's work, providing a way to fight flames immediately. In less time than it would take most fire departments to arrive on the scene, home fire sprinklers can contain and even extinguish a fire. There's less damage, and less chance of deadly smoke and gases reaching your family. Home fire sprinkler systems save lives, reduce property loss and can even help cut homeowners' insurance premiums.

Not only do home fire sprinklers, used in combination with smoke detectors, dramatically reduce the risk of home fire deaths, they also decrease fire damage by as much as two thirds in residences with fire sprinklers when compared to those without them. It's really like having your own firefighter standing by.

Recent sprinkler technology breakthroughs make sprinklers more affordable and easier to install in homes. With a variety of unobtrusive designs today, sprinklers fit inconspicuously into interior design. And sprinkler systems usually operate off domestic water supply.

Home fire sprinkler systems often cost less than cabinet upgrades, new carpeting or other major purchases in new home construction. Estimated costs of home sprinkler systems right now are about 1% to 1.5% of the total cost of home construction.

Fire sprinklers can also be installed in existing homes.

Because the fire sprinkler system reacts so quickly, it can dramatically reduce the heat, flames and smoke produced in a fire. Home fire sprinklers release only 10 to 26 gallons of water per minute and only at the direct

site of the fire. In a home without sprinklers, the fire department often arrives after the fire has grown to dangerous levels, and at that point several hose streams must be applied to the fire at as much as 125 gallons per minute for each hose. The resulting water damage is actually much lower with home fire sprinklers.

In residences with sprinkler systems, 90% of the fires are contained by the operation of just one sprinkler. Sprinklers keep fires small.

It is a significant bill. In my community, I'm proud to say that because of my involvement on city council, I have had the opportunity to work with our full-time fire department and volunteers. I have had the opportunity to discuss, back in my own riding, what their personal opinions of these systems are, and they have assured me without any hesitation that it is the right thing, that it will make homes safer.

It is time we join with the other 200 jurisdictions and make sprinklers mandatory in our new homes, just like we already have in apartments, office buildings and schools. Really, why should we not ensure that one of the places where we spend most of our time, where our children are, where our family are, where are friends and relatives are, is a safe place to be at any time?

I too want to compliment my colleague from Brampton Centre, Linda Jeffery, for bringing forward this bill. It is significant. This is the place where it should be brought forward and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Mrs Jeffrey, you have up to two minutes to reply.

Mrs Jeffrey: I would like to thank the members from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Erie-Lincoln, Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford and Timmins-James Bay for their comments and their passion. I would also like to thank my colleagues from Scarborough Centre, Oakville and Niagara Falls. I'm grateful they took the time to talk so thoughtfully about the legislation.

What I would like to do is focus on three messages that I would like people to think about following this debate.

This bill is designed to protect what we value most. We have a collective responsibility to protect the health and safety of Ontarians.

We know that sprinklers complement the early warning capability of smoke alarms by adding fire suppression.

We need to encourage and educate consumers about residential fires. Our future depends on it. We need to embrace this proven technology to protect all Ontarians.

Last year we lost over 100 people. These were mothers, fathers, children. Over time, we have lost heroes in our communities—firefighters. We need to ensure that the risk for future and current firefighters is minimized.

I want to remind everybody that there has never been a single fire fatality in a residence with a sprinkler system where the occupants have not be in direct contact with the fire.

I want to repeat myself: The best time to include residential sprinklers in the building code would have

been 25 years ago. The second best time for this Legislature to make a decision that would reflect on all of us forever would be to install residential sprinklers today.

I would appreciate your support on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will first deal with ballot item number 41, standing in the name of Mr Arthurs.

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

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

There will be a vote on this, and we will deal with it after the next ballot item.

HOME FIRE SPRINKLER ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LES EXTINCTEURS AUTOMATIQUES DOMICILIAIRES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 42, standing in the name of Mrs Jeffrey. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Pursuant to standing order number 96, this—

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): Mr Speaker, I move that we forward this to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? It will be done. Agreed.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 41. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1205.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Arthurs has moved private members' notice of motion number 30.

All those in favour will please stand and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Gravelle, Michael	Mitchell, Carol
Broten, Laurel C.	Hoy, Pat	Mossop, Jennifer F.
Brownell, Jim	Jeffrey, Linda	Patten, Richard
Caplan, David	Kular, Kuldip	Qaadri, Shafiq
Craitor, Kim	Kwinter, Monte	Ramal, Khalil
Delaney, Bob	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Rinaldi, Lou
Dhillon, Vic	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Di Cocco, Caroline	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Duguid, Brad	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Fonseca, Peter	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	Sterling, Norman W.
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Tascona, Joseph N.
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	
Hudak, Tim	Runciman, Robert W.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 33; the nays are 13.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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

The House recessed from 1207 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm very pleased to be here today and to have an opportunity to do a statement on a children's treatment centre for York region and the county of Simcoe.

We had a rally last Monday at my office and 70 or 80 people showed up with signs in a very non-spirited manner. They were basically there to rally support behind all the MPPs who sit for the county of Simcoe and the region of York.

I want to emphasize again—and we've done this over and over again with petitions—that this is the only area of the province that does not have a children's treatment centre. The coalition has been formed up there and has done an extremely good job of working with all of the stakeholders to put a very good proposal before, originally, the Ministry of Health; now, of course, that's been shifted to the minister responsible for children's services, Minister Bountrogianni.

With the growth in our area, I can't emphasize enough to the folks who sit in cabinet and all the MPPs how very, very important this is for our young people. There are 23,000 children, as I said, who may require treatment; 6,000 of them are specialized. We have a number of careers at stake as well, with some of our pediatricians and other health care stakeholders.

So I urge the minister responsible, Minister Bountrogianni, but primarily Minister Sorbara, who is handling the finances—he is an MPP in York region, and they are counting on him to work with the other MPPs to make sure that the young people receive the services they need with a children's treatment centre for York region and the county of Simcoe.

I appreciate the opportunity to put this on the record today.

TRANSIT SERVICES

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): This past Monday, the McGuinty government demonstrated its commitment to reducing gridlock by investing in public transit and investing in our cities. Our government, in conjunction with GO Transit, will dramatically improve GO Transit services by building a new Milliken GO station and parking lot in my riding of Markham.

The new and modern building will be built on Red Lea Avenue and will include close to 700 parking spaces. The new Milliken station will enable more passengers to get on and off the train as a result of the strategic location. This much-needed solution will greatly ease traffic congestion, and it's welcome news for the people of Markham. By demonstrating a strong commitment to public transit, the McGuinty government is making commuting more convenient.

The building of the new Milliken GO station and parking lot is also welcome news for the business community. The GTA is the economic engine for Ontario and Canada. However, all too often traffic gridlock results in lost business, particularly in Markham, where traffic congestion is at an all-time high. The Markham Board of Trade has repeatedly echoed this concern, citing "gridlock as having a negative impact on productivity and economic competitiveness."

Monday's announcement of the new Milliken GO station and parking lot for Markham shows our government is once again creating real, positive change for cities. This is good news for the commuters and business community of Markham.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I hope you might indulge members of the House who are coming in with white and purple ribbons today, both of them representing organizations that are supporting ending violence against women, and that we could have permission to wear them today.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): You're asking for unanimous consent for members to wear the ribbons. Do we have unanimous consent?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Yes, we do, but on the same point of order—

The Speaker: We have unanimous consent.

You had a point of order?

Mr Bisson: Just to be clear, I would want to make sure that those ribbons are available in the opposition lobbies. I didn't see them when I went through.

The Speaker: I'm sure that the minister will make them available.

Members' statements?

PORT DOVER

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): My hometown of Port Dover has been snubbed. It's been dissed by the Liberals—deleted. They've been telling us that we are not memorable; we are not worthy.

You know, that doesn't matter, because 300,000 tourists came to visit us this year, and 300,000 tourists will come to visit us next year, just as millions of visitors over the past century have travelled "over to Dover," by train from Brantford, by ferry from Erie, and down the plank road from Hamilton.

However, this government, through the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership, has classified Dover as non-memorable. We have been erased from government memory, deprogrammed. I think a McGuinty minion has pressed the delete button. Apparently, we don't exist and we never did: no beach, no perch, no foot-longs, no Harleys, no Lighthouse theatre, no dairy bar, no Maple Leaf, no Harbour Museum, no hotels, no Golden Glow, no chips, no fish tugs, no sailboats and no July 1 parade, the longest-running Dominion Day parade in Canada.

In spite of what this government may think, we are memorable. I wish to thank the government for all the Port Dover media attention that this decision has garnered.

Dover won't give up without a fight: Phone 1-800-699-9038 or e-mail tourism@norfolkcounty.on.ca. Thanks for the memories.

SECOND-STAGE HOUSING

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): November is woman abuse awareness month. Today I want to draw particular attention to the fact that the Ontario Liberals have broken a promise to all women and children in this province who find themselves trapped in a nightmare of domestic violence. Before the 2003 election, the Liberals promised to build second-stage housing. It appears to have been a cynical and empty promise.

The lack of second-stage housing is a huge concern in my city of Hamilton, as it is across the province. The McGuinty Liberals, like the Conservatives before them, have not invested in the most important aspect of helping women escape the cycle of violence, and that is housing.

The member from Hamilton Mountain, when in opposition as a women's issues critic, was a staunch advocate of second-stage housing, but her support has fallen like a house of cards. In 2002, the member said, "Under a Dalton McGuinty government, we will reinstate second-stage housing." Here, in 2004, it's just another broken promise.

Funding for second-stage housing in Hamilton is woefully inadequate. Phoenix Place will likely have to close its doors by December 31 of this year. This outstanding service received \$40,000, it's true, to hire staff and write reports. That's all very well and good, but what about the bricks and mortar?

Second Stage Services received nothing from this government. They have, in fact, had to downsize their units, notwithstanding the fact that they had been repeatedly promised an introduction of strong programs of second-stage housing construction.

Last year, shelters in Hamilton turned away thousands of women seeking refuge from violence. I shudder to think how many more will be turned away because this government has failed to keep one of its bedrock commitments to the women and children of Ontario.

DIABETES

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I rise today to speak about diabetes, a very serious illness that affects over 850,000 people in Ontario, approximately 85,000 of whom are insulin-dependent. November is Diabetes Awareness Month.

While people with diabetes only make up approximately 6% of Ontario's population, they happen to account for 32% of heart attacks, 30% of strokes, 51% of new kidney dialysis patients and 70% of amputations.

Friends, these are alarming statistics, but there is good news: Diabetes complications can largely be prevented or significantly delayed with proper management of the disease. I know; I am a diabetic.

As legislators, we can do this by taking steps to alleviate the financial burden of diabetes on individuals and families and by ensuring access to medication, supplies and devices, as well as access to diabetes health care services. We're making progress but we have so much more to do.

This coming Monday, November 29, the diabetes association will be holding a reception and information session here at Queen's Park from 12 to 1:30 in committee room 2. I am pleased to be co-sponsoring this reception with my colleagues Elizabeth Witmer and Shelly Martel.

I encourage all my colleagues to attend so we can find out more about the good work of the diabetes association and how to combat this combatable disease.

1340

ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): Everyone in Ontario knows we have a crisis in our film industry. The industry has been hard hit over the last several years and this government has failed to keep its election promise to increase tax credits to 33%.

But the landscape in the last few months has begun to shift even more dramatically. The vastly increased Canadian dollar is a threat to film production in Toronto. Many of the small businesses that supply the industry may not survive if production declines even further. Ontarians need to know from this Liberal government: What is your strategy to preserve our film industry in the next six to 12 months?

We are talking about real people facing a crisis. I personally know set designers, caterers, hair dressers and a stunt man in my riding who depend on the film industry.

Small businesses all over Ontario could be in trouble. Wayne Ford is the owner of Mar-Lyn Lumber in Ajax, a small business that employs 10 people. Mar-Lyn is one of the largest suppliers of construction materials for movie sets in the Toronto area, working with about 85% of productions. Wayne and his employees do good work, yet Wayne is certain that he is likely to go out of business with the current crisis in the film industry.

With Christmas a month away, I ask this Liberal government, what message should I give to Wayne, his employees and their families about what the government is doing to save jobs in the film industry?

RIDE PROGRAM

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): The holiday season fast approaching marks the beginning of the annual holiday RIDE program, or Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere. In fact, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services was on hand earlier today at Variety Village in Scarborough to launch the holiday RIDE campaign for the GTA.

Every holiday season, the fine men and women who make up Ontario's police forces are out in full force to ensure we all get home safe after celebrating with family and friends. It is no longer acceptable to drink and then drive. The RIDE program has played a major role in deterring this behaviour by taking dangerous people off our roadways and highways, not just during the holiday season but also year-round.

In the past nine years, provincially assisted RIDE programs have provided more than 57,000 police-hours for spot checks in Ontario. The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services provides \$1.2 million in funding annually to supplement the RIDE spot checks.

MADD Canada will also be out spreading their message this holiday season through their red ribbon campaign that asks the public to tie a red ribbon to their car antenna to spread awareness and to remember those who have fallen victim to drunk drivers.

The McGuinty government believes in being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. As such, this government is committed to working with MADD and other road safety partners to combat impaired driving. I would like to salute the officers, as well MADD Canada, for these efforts.

LEARNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): They say that youth are the leaders of tomorrow. Today I will give two examples that challenge that saying. Youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow, they are the leaders of today as well.

Youth like Jocelyn Land-Murphy and Jessica Lax, co-founders of Otesha Project, are spreading their message to schools across the York Region District School Board of how individual actions can create a better world for everyone.

They were part of a forum that was organized by Learning for a Sustainable Future, a national non-profit group that is helping educators and governments link education to action when it comes to the environment. The forum allows students not only to understand the importance of the environment, but gives them a framework to start thinking about the environment as part of their decision-making process.

Education is key to ensuring that our youth know how to protect the environment they live in, and this forum is a great example of that.

1350

As we continue debate on the greenbelt, as we look to renewable energy to keep the lights on, as we push for strong protection of our water resources, and as we invest in public transportation, we understand the importance of being able to make decisions based on a three-fold bottom line: looking at environmental, economic and social factors. Teaching these same decision-making skills to our youth will ensure that not only can our youth make educational decisions in the future but they can make them today. Here is to today and to the future.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): When you are a little kid, days are divided into two categories. You're either having a good day or you're having a bad day. Today is a good day for the youngest learners in this province because this government's commitment to giving our children the best possible start in life starts today.

Earlier today we announced that we are expanding early learning and child care to provide a full day of learning and child care for 4- and 5-year-olds in this province. We are building a system of early learning and child care that will give our children the best chance at future success.

"This government's plan is critical to Ontario's moving ahead as a province." That was said by Dr Jean Clinton of McMaster University. She said, "Evidence shows that quality early learning and care, in combination with positive nurturing by parents, is crucial to healthy child development and has a significant and long-lasting impact."

Margaret McCain, the co-author of the Ontario Early Years report, says, "This program is a fulfillment of everything we envisioned in 1998 with our Early Years Study. This was our vision and hope for Ontario, and indeed Canada."

If Ontario is going to be a leader in science, commerce and culture tomorrow, we need to be a leader in early childhood development today.

We are also moving ahead with programs to give access to child care subsidies for more children, infant

screening programs and hearing, speech and language programs for more young children across the province. We will be moving forward in steps with our federal and municipal partners and dedicated service providers and parents.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (CERTIFICATION), 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL (ACCREDITATION)

Mr Kormos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 151, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to certification of trade unions / *Projet de loi 151, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail en ce qui a trait à l'accréditation des syndicats.*

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

Mr Kormos?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): The bill amends the Labour Relations Act, 1995, to allow the Ontario Labour Relations Board to certify a trade union as the bargaining agent of the employees in a bargaining unit without directing a representation vote if it is satisfied that more than 55% of the employees in the bargaining unit are members of the trade union on the date on which the application is made. Under the present act, a representation vote is required in those circumstances.

Also, the board may hold a hearing when considering an application for certification, whereas under the present act the board is not allowed to hold a hearing in those circumstances.

LABOUR RELATIONS STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT (SUCCESSOR RIGHTS), 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL (SUCCESSION AUX QUALITÉS)

Mr Kormos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 152, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 and the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, 1993 with respect to successor rights / *Projet de loi 152, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail et la Loi de 1993 sur la négociation collective des employés de la Couronne en ce qui concerne la succession aux qualités.*

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

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Under section 69 of the Labour Relations Act, 1995, if an employer who is bound by a collective agreement with respect to

employees sells a business, the person to whom the business is sold is still bound by the collective agreement. The bill amends the act to extend the application of that section to a situation where a contractor who provides services at a premises is replaced by another contractor who provides substantially similar services at the same premises.

The bill amends the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, 1993, to make section 69 of the Labour Relations Act, 1995, applicable to crown employees and employees of agencies of the crown covered by the former act. The bill, when passed, will permit Mr McGuinty to say that he has kept at least one promise he made to working people in Ontario.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on Thursday, November 25, 2004, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Mr Caplan has moved government notice of motion 231. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it. Carried.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I seek unanimous consent to move the following motion:

That the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly and the standing committee on finance and economic affairs be authorized to meet in the morning and following routine proceedings on Wednesday, December 1, 2004.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is there consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Caplan: I thank the House.

I move that the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly and the standing committee on finance and economic affairs be authorized to meet in the morning and following routine proceedings on Wednesday, December 1, 2004.

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

CONSIDERATION OF BILLS

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I seek unanimous consent to move a motion respecting Bills 25 and 73.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is there consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Caplan: I move that the application of standing order 74 to the following two bills be suspended: Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising; and Bill 73, An Act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads.

The Speaker: Mr Caplan seeks unanimous consent to move the following motion:

That the application of standing order 74 to the following two bills be suspended: Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising; and Bill 73, An Act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads.

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

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

WOLF STRATEGY

STRATÉGIE SUR LES LOUPS

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): Before I start today, I'd like to recognize some people who helped work with the ministry on what I'm announcing today. In the east members' gallery are Josh Matlow and Melissa Tkachyk from Earthroots, and in the west members' gallery I see Jean Langlois from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Ottawa Valley chapter, and Rick Smith from Environmental Defence Canada. I know Terry Quinney from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters was with me; I don't see Terry at the moment, but he was with me at the announcement just a few moments ago.

I'm very pleased to rise in the House today to inform the members of this government's intention to enhance the conservation of Ontario's wolves. The McGuinty government is putting forward the strongest measures ever taken in this province to conserve and protect our wolf population. We are living up to our campaign commitment to protect Ontario's wolves. Earlier today, I announced that we are proposing to implement Ontario's first province-wide wolf strategy. We are also recommending the first province-wide regulations to limit wolf hunting in Ontario.

Today's proposals build on the steps already taken to protect the eastern wolf in the Algonquin Provincial Park area. Members may recall that I announced a ban on the hunting and trapping of wolves in and around the park last May. The goal of our actions at that time was to ensure that wolves continue to play an important and valued role in the natural ecosystems wherever they live in the province. Our actions will also help ensure that we have the information and scientific data we need to keep Ontario's wolf populations healthy and sustainable.

During July, August and September of this year, ministry staff met with a number of our stakeholder groups to discuss wolf conservation. We learned a lot from those discussions, and it went into the proposed strategy I'm putting forward today. We very much appreciate the valuable feedback we received from all the participants. The proposed wolf strategy would, number one, develop and implement a research and monitoring program to determine the status of wolf populations in the province. It would also require that wolf and coyote hunters in northern and central Ontario purchase a special game seal in addition to the small game licence, and the number of game seals would be limited to two per hunter per year. We would also require mandatory reporting by hunters about wolf and coyote hunting. We'd also apply a closed hunting and trapping season, from April 1 to September 14, for wolves and coyotes in northern and central Ontario. Today I'm also proposing to set up a committee of representatives from various stakeholder groups to review the results of these proposed changes when new data become available.

The wolf strategy and the proposed regulation changes are being posted today on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry for public review. Over the next 40 days, members of the public are encouraged to submit their comments on these two proposals. We will carefully consider that public input before the strategy is finalized.

I believe we owe it to future generations to act now to conserve and safeguard Ontario's biodiversity, and I'm pleased that my government is moving forward with the protection of Ontario's wolves. The wolf measures I am proposing today will contribute to the protection of our biodiversity and to a healthier natural environment for our province, and they will help ensure that this magnificent animal continues to live and thrive in Ontario's wilderness.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): It's not surprising that the ministry is moving forward when the ministry's own data specifically states that the wolf population is considered healthy. Yet special interest groups have been constantly pushing for this exact move with an international campaign, with communication coming from all around the world on this very issue.

Even the Algonquin wolf study specifically stated that the population was being harvested at a 30% to 40% harvest rate within those areas with no negative impact. The current harvest rates of over 5% are having no impact at all, yet with a 5% or 6% harvest rate, we're getting the changes that are taking place today. The largest impact on wolves is genetic degradation from inbreeding with coyotes, and that's where the wolf population itself will have its major fall.

The minister spoke of meeting with the stakeholders, except that the two groups in the province whose principal concern is wolves were never communicated with. They were never asked, and they need a lot of questions answered with regard to this. For example, tourist outfitters who provide a service in this area had no

knowledge of this coming forward. I spoke with them here this morning.

1400

Other groups have certain concerns related to training seasons. There's no mention of training seasons. What of the agricultural community? How is that going to be impacted in those specific areas? How are they going to protect livestock when dealing with these issues? I would hope, with the committee that's being established by the minister, that these specific groups and organizations will be included with this.

I know that when Lyn McLeod was the Minister of Natural Resources, she tried to move forward in areas with this. I met with the minister at that time, and she gave me assurances that the agricultural and municipal communities would be met with and dealt with, because they had strong concerns on these issues. I hear no mention of those communities being brought forward in this minister's statement at all. I certainly hope that the agricultural impact that's going to take place with this move will be dealt with, because it's going to be quite substantial.

In closing, I would like to say that no one in the province is opposed to protecting Ontario's great resources, such as Ontario's wolves. I just have concerns that the ministry is moving forward in opposition to its own specific data that say that the wolf population is extremely healthy, yet the ministry is bowing to the concerns of special interest groups in the province.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I wish to offer a suggestion to our Minister of Natural Resources. Let's accept the fact that habitats change and populations of various species change. Nature is not static. To protect an ecosystem and ecosystem processes, you must be prepared to accept that natural changes occur, obviously, within a forest and, consequently, natural changes occur with respect to wildlife species and their abundance. For example, we know the Algonquin wolf population has declined since the 1960s. Logging practices were a factor there. Both deer and beaver populations have decreased in response. Wolves are known to take down deer and to eat beaver.

Elsewhere, in the eastern Canadian wolf range, the Algonquin wolf population appears to be healthy, as Jerry Ouellette, the former minister, has mentioned. The population appears to be vigorous and expanding elsewhere. Reproductive success and recruitment are apparently not a problem. Then again, deer and beaver populations are also thriving, outside of Algonquin Park.

The Environmental Commissioner, Gord Miller, cites concerns that this government must be coordinated with respect to its approach to biodiversity, an issue just raised by the minister. I quote Gord Miller. The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario is concerned that "while ministries may be working away at fragments of issues, they often fail to grasp the wider perspective. This failure to see the bigger picture has very practical consequences, since it can result in policies and programs that are inadequate, misdirected or even counterproductive."

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Minister, I guess I've got to stand in this House and say something nice about you for a change. I want you to know there have not been a lot of occasions that I've had the opportunity to do that. But on this particular one, I'm going to say, not a bad move. It's something that, quite frankly, has been worked on for some time by a number of people. I would say it's certainly a step in the right direction, and we give you support in where you are going.

I want to point out a couple of things that I think need to be said. Number one, there's nothing in this particular announcement, when it talks about the issue of co-management of natural resources, or I should say, as far as the forest, with our First Nations. You say in your report that wolf stocks are pretty high in most parts of the province. You will know that's not the case in all regions of the province. In dealing with Nishnawbe-Aski Nation and others, I know that they have been talking to you and with your ministry for some time about how we move to a level of co-management where First Nations are able to work together with the provincial government in setting out whatever the policies are when it comes to dealing with issues such as you announced today.

I have to say, on behalf of First Nations in northern Ontario, that we're still waiting. We're there. We signed treaties 100 years ago, and we're still waiting for the provincial government to come back and honour those treaties and engage in what was supposed to be a co-management exercise when it came to not only natural resources but all the game and wildlife within the forest.

I do want to say, however, because I know this is an issue in my riding and I would think it's an issue in many other ridings, if you have a healthy wolf population, what does it mean to the agricultural industry? We know that there used to be a program at one time that would help to compensate farmers when it came to loss of livestock. We need to make sure that if we have a healthy wolf population, which is not a bad thing, we need to have an offset on the Ministry of Agriculture side in order to assist farmers for the loss of livestock. You'll know in your riding—I used to share part of it in the Val Gagné area—we had a number of areas where we had problems in the past, and we need to make sure that if wolf stocks do come up, and I hope they do, we're able to compensate farmers adequately.

The other thing is that we need to deal with the rabies issue. You need to make sure that within your ministry you have the necessary dollars to deal with an effective rabies program, not only for wolves but for other canine animals within the forest. We've had a couple of incidents over the last couple of years where rabies has actually been quite a huge concern within the fox population, and in some cases within the wolf population, and we need to make sure that's taken care of.

I do want to say, because my friend Marilyn Churley pointed it out to me, that you chose today not to talk about the woodland caribou.

Ms Churley: Woodland caribou.

Mr Bisson: Marilyn Churley said it again, and she asked me to say to you that you promised in the last election that you were going to deal effectively with the protection of the woodland caribou. That is part of not only our platform but, quite frankly, something you said you would do, and we're still sitting here, waiting for you to do something in regard to the woodland caribou.

I want to say, on behalf of all northern communities, you are certainly a wolf in sheep's clothing when it comes to the forestry industry. You chose today not to stand up in the House and take me up on my challenge that I raised again privately with you yesterday, which is—

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): Say something nice.

Mr Bisson: I did say something nice. I used the other two minutes to do something else.

When are you going to withdraw your amendments on Bill 106? You know and I know that at the end of the day there is much pressure and lots of change happening within the forestry industry. Amendments to Bill 106 that would allow forestry companies to decouple the licence of their forest operations to the mills where they ship their trees are going to result in the loss of thousands of jobs in northern Ontario.

You're a northerner. I'm a northerner. We both represent constituencies that have a large forestry industry. I know that you're an honourable member. I know that you care about the people of Kirkland Lake and Cochrane. We need to do the right thing by our constituents. Minister, I ask you in the House again today to withdraw the amendments to Bill 106 so that we can protect jobs in northern Ontario.

Minister, c'est une annonce qui n'est certainement pas dans la bonne direction. On a besoin de s'assurer que les points que j'ai faits faisant affaire avec ce qu'on fait pour les autochtones pour la réalité d'être capable—

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: Hey, when you guys get a chance to speak, you'll get a chance. It's my turn.

Anyway, with all that heckling, I'm done.

DEFERRED VOTES

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LA PUBLICITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising / Projet de loi 25, Loi concernant la publicité gouvernementale.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1408 to 1413.

The Speaker: Mr Phillips has moved second reading of Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising.

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

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kular, Kuldeep	Racco, Mario G.
Brownell, Jim	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Caplan, David	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Cordiano, Joseph	Marsales, Judy	Sergio, Mario
Craitor, Kim	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Watson, Jim
Duncan, Dwight	Oraziotti, David	Wong, Tony C.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise.

Nays

Barrett, Toby	Martel, Shelley	Sterling, Norman W.
Chudleigh, Ted	Miller, Norm	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John
Hudak, Tim	Runciman, Robert W.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 45; the nays are 11.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Mr Speaker, I ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: So ordered.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent for all parties to speak for up to five minutes to recognize International Day to End Violence Against Women and the launch of the White Ribbon Campaign.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is there unanimous consent to the request by the member for Don Valley East? Agreed.

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to ask for permission of the House, perhaps unanimous consent, to show the flowers that were presented to this House this morning at a press conference by a women's organization on behalf of the days that we're honouring.

The Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent to show the flowers? Agreed.

Hon Ms Pupatello: Thank you, Speaker, and we do appreciate the indulgence of this House, for all of the members who were at the press conference this morning that was put together by OAITH, the Ontario Association

of Interval and Transition Houses. They presented a rose for all of the women who have died this year and a pink rose for the child as well who died this year at the hands of domestic violence.

I thought it was important to show the House, because there are many thoughtful people across this province who still remember and who have dedicated their careers to making Ontario a safer place. On behalf of all the members of the House, I'm pleased to present this to the Premier so that all of us will do our part to continue the fight to eradicate domestic abuse.

I rise in the House today to mark the international community's commitment to eradicating violence against women and girls. In 1999, the United Nations declared November 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. It's observed as a day of worldwide action to raise public awareness of the problem of violence against women.

November 25 also marks the beginning of the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign coordinated by the Center for Women's Global Leadership. This campaign links violence against women and human rights, emphasizing that such violence is a violation of human rights. The dates that the Center for Women's Global Leadership chose for the campaign symbolically make this link: November 25 is International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women and December 10 is International Human Rights Day. This 16-day period also includes Canada's national Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6, the 15th anniversary of the Montreal massacre, when 14 young women were murdered at L'École Polytechnique in Montreal, a day that many of us will never forget.

Today is also the beginning of the White Ribbon Campaign, which began here in Canada in 1991 and has been so successful it's now observed in other countries around the world. This campaign, which extends to December 6, urges boys and men to speak out against male violence against women and to wear a white ribbon as a symbol of their opposition to violence against women. I believe we all have to do our part to make a difference in attitudes in our communities.

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I want to tell you today that a couple of hours ago I met a wonderful woman named Minou. She's a woman who came to Canada from Tehran. She is a small but powerful young woman who came to Canada with her husband—both professionals. She came as a pharmacist. When she arrived, she began to suffer from domestic abuse at the hands of her husband. To see this woman today and to hear the way she was able to talk to us about how government-supported agencies are able to reach out to people like her to get the kind of help she needed to leave an abusive relationship is a wonderful story, and one that impacts on all of us.

It motivates us to move forward and do more to work with our community partners to make a real difference in these lives, in our own women and children right here in

Ontario. I was so impressed by her and by the organization, in this case family services of Toronto, because they can make that connection for many women. Many organizations across Ontario—OAITH and the shelters it represents is but one—have reached out to women and have helped to put them and their children back on their feet.

On behalf of the McGuinty government, we applaud the people who work in this field. It is a dedicated group of people who really do make a difference in the lives of these women. We applaud the members of the House who go forward and talk and advocate and motivate all the time.

Tonight I am very pleased to find myself in Kin-cardine at Woman's Place in Carol Mitchell's riding, an organization that goes out every day and helps women and their children piece their lives back together when they've suffered domestic abuse.

Today we saw a number of people come together to continue to push the government to move ahead to help people who are the most vulnerable, and often those are women who have suffered domestic abuse.

I look forward over the course of the next couple of weeks to a tremendous announcement that our Premier will be involved in, which will culminate this year's work to put together our domestic violence action plan, a plan I know we're all going to be proud of that will hurtle us into the next century doing great work for women who have suffered domestic abuse.

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): Today in this House we are joined together to mark International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. November 25 was proclaimed as this day by the United Nations in 1999. It commemorates the brutal assassination in 1961 of the three Mirabal sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic, on the orders of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo.

While the world and our country have made great strides in the last few decades in increasing the equality of women, we still have far to go in eliminating violence against women. November 25 is a day of commemoration but also a day of education. We must work to teach our young people that violence is wrong.

In Ontario each year too many children see or hear violence in their homes, too many see their mothers victimized by violence, too many are victimized themselves. Too many become part of a cycle of violence as boys grow up to become abusers and girls grow up to accept abuse.

We must break this cycle. Our schools, churches, community groups and agencies must teach children that violence is a crime. Children and young people must learn how to recognize the signs of an unhealthy relationship. They need to know that they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

In my riding, I would like to thank such agencies as the York Region Abuse Program and the various family life centres for the work they do in educating and assisting the victims of violence. I know they are rep-

resentative of the work done by similar agencies across the province.

Thanks must also go to all the organizations that perform valuable research in anti-violence strategies. I am also grateful to agencies such as the Ontario SPCA, which has demonstrated that cruelty to animals is often a red flag indicating violence against women and children. We must continue to support women and their families who are victims of violence.

I am very proud of the actions that our government took while in office to fight violence. We provided 54 courts by 2004, enhanced prosecution of abusers by crown attorneys specially trained in domestic violence issues, support for victims, and specialized processing of these cases. We increased shelter funding by \$26 million over four years to add 300 new shelter beds and to refurbish 136 others. Nine million dollars annually was provided in new funding for counselling, telephone crisis service and other shelter supports. We developed a province-wide, toll-free, bilingual support line that offered referrals to victim services, information about the criminal justice system and information about the status and scheduled release of offenders. I'm very proud of this record and I know that I speak for all of our caucus in saying that we will fully support any measures this government takes to enhance the fight against violence against women.

I wanted to end my statement with some words of hope, but after reading the newspaper this morning, I cannot do so. A man in Toronto who lured an 11-year-old girl over the Internet to his apartment and sexually assaulted her has been sentenced to only the 21 months he has already served. The crown attorney asked that he be sentenced to 10 or 12 years. Even worse, this man had been ordered deported four years ago and shouldn't even have been in Canada. Fighting violence against women takes education, prevention and assistance to victims. It also requires that violence against women is recognized as a crime, that perpetrators are criminals and should face stiff sentences for their crimes.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I rise on behalf of New Democrats today to talk about this issue before us. In 1998, Ontario signed a federal-provincial-territorial agreement that stated, "Living free of violence is a right, not a privilege." We all know that some women in Ontario and many women across the world are denied that right in their homes every day. After a series of high-profile coroners' inquests and reports, time after time domestic assault and homicide are still too commonplace, and in Ontario that risk continues to be prevalent.

Last week, I was privileged to be invited to speak at a press conference with Wyann Ruso, who came all too close to being the next "femicide" victim in Ontario. She's still in a lot of pain and recovering from her severe injuries, but she decided to speak publicly about her ordeal in hopes that it would be a catalyst for real change. I think we all want to acknowledge and thank Ms Ruso for her courage and strength in coming forward and

telling her story. We wish her a speedy recovery and wish her well.

I'm not going to go into the details of that case today. I think we all are aware of what happened to Ms Ruso. But the success of the domestic violence strategy that was mentioned today in the press conference I attended with the minister will be measured in part if this number declines, and indeed we have to see this number decline. I have not been at many press conferences where I've seen most of the members of the media, both male and female, either in tears or close to tears themselves because we had the faces of victims representing victims of domestic violence in front of us. It was a very painful thing to behold. I think it should serve to remind all of us why we're here today talking about this issue and why it is urgent to take further action.

Of course, what needs to be reformed has been well-documented already by the many reports prepared by the coroner's office after spousal homicide attacks take place, and by researchers and women's advocacy groups.

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I would say that Ontario women don't need another paper plan. They do not need a plan that may languish on paper because the dedicated funds never really flow to it. There is a plan in place and it just needs to be implemented. These women and their children need places to turn to, to rebuild their lives in safety. But if there is nowhere to go, as was the case with Gillian Hadley—we don't know for sure but she may have been alive today had there been housing for her to go to—and if help is scarce, women are forced to choose between poverty and violence.

The ministerial steering committee struck to devise the government's action plan does not include at the table the front-line groups that are most knowledgeable about what is needed and what does and does not work. I know the minister was there today and heard as well as I did OAITH and others at the press conference ask Queen's Park, the government, to rectify that situation and make sure these women are at the table while this plan is being devised.

Women need to have in place a viable network of safe places for them and their children to go. That has been an urgent recommendation continuously articulated over the years by the coroner's office—after deaths—through the May-Iles inquiry, its tragic successor the Hadley inquiry, and the recent report by the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee.

There is an acute shortage of safe places for women to go. Women's shelters are filled to capacity, and then the second-stage housing and affordable housing women need are in short supply because of cuts made both by the Liberals in Ottawa and the Tories here. We now have to rectify that situation, because as a result, as I said, women have terrible choices to make.

I would say in closing that we talked a lot yesterday about housing. Today we will be talking about child care and some of those other issues that are absolutely critical

to have in place in this province for women who are trying to flee from violence, in order to keep them safe.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO GENERATION CONTRACT

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition):

My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, yesterday you said, and I'm quoting, "There will be a lot of excitement about the prospect that we're increasing Canada's wind supply." We know of one person who is quite excited today, excited to the tune of \$475 million. That's the value of the contract you handed to Erie Shores Wind Farm, which is owned by AIM PowerGen, a private energy firm. The president of AIM PowerGen is one Mike Crawley, former top assistant to Liberal leader Lyn McLeod and current Ontario president for the Liberal Party of Canada. Minister, do you stand by your decision to give a top Liberal a \$475-million contract?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): The winning bid is actually from Erie Shores Wind Farm limited partnership, of which Mr Crawley's firm is one partner. The other partner is somebody named Stephen Probyn, president of Clean Power Income Fund, who ran for the Conservative Party in the 1997 federal election. You may want to add that to your list of partners in that project.

Mr Crawley also indicated that he had the opportunity to meet with Mr O'Toole last week with respect to their proposal, and Mr O'Toole wished his company luck because it was such a good proposal. The final piece that I think members should know is that your House leader, Mr Baird, is scheduled to meet with Mr Crawley next week, and your party appointed Mr Crawley to the energy supply and conservation task force.

Mr Runciman: It just shows you how non-partisan we can be. In the announcement yesterday, you handed the folks at AIM PowerGen an incredibly lucrative contract, made even more lucrative by the fact that you fixed a price for the energy they'll hopefully produce at eight cents per kilowatt hour, roughly 60% higher than the fixed price consumers will now pay.

This is a deliberately inflated price. The trouble is, it's not for one year or five years; it's for 20 years. In AIM PowerGen's case, that's worth \$475 million in return for a modest 99 megawatts of power, a mere drop in the bucket, given that Ontario can now produce 30,000 megawatts.

Your Liberal friends are now cashing in on a decision you made to the tune of a big red-ribbon-wrapped \$475 million. How do you justify this extraordinary cost to a senior Liberal for a relatively small amount of power?

Hon Mr Duncan: I'll remind you again that one of the partners in this venture is Steve Probyn, who was a federal Conservative candidate in 1997.

The eight-cent price is consistent with the price arrived at for renewables in Quebec and Manitoba. Eight cents is not the flat price. There's a range of prices between 7.1 cents and eight cents. The average turned out to be eight cents because of this. The price, at eight cents, came in below what most analysts expected it would be for renewables. The original estimates were between eight cents and 12 cents.

Finally, this government set up a process that was independent of myself, of the government, of even my senior officials. There was a fairness commissioner hired from the outside, and the fairness commissioner signed off on the process that yielded a contract of this nature that went to a partnership headed by a prominent federal Conservative candidate, Steve Probyn.

Mr Runciman: The reality is that we are talking about the principal of this company, who is a senior Liberal operative, one who is highly involved in both the provincial and federal Liberal parties. He has just been handed a contract worth close to half a billion dollars for a 0.3% contribution to power output. Can the minister guarantee that neither Mike Crawley nor AIM PowerGen had any undue influence over this process? Can you guarantee that?

Hon Mr Duncan: The fairness commissioner has already guaranteed that, and the way the process was set up it was guaranteed. I'd remind the member that a prominent Conservative is a partner in that as well. What I can guarantee you is that there will be no more total contracts of \$9 million to backroom players like Paul Rhodes, Tom Long, Leslie Noble, Michael Gourley or Jaime Watt. Those days are gone.

The other thing I'll say to the member opposite is that this government is proud to be the first to bring on meaningful renewable energy in this province: 395 megawatts at a competitive price. To impugn the integrity of a defeated Conservative candidate, who is a partner in one of the successful bids, is really doing a disservice to Mr Probyn, whose company competed fairly in a process that was assessed to be fair by an independent arbiter. They may not want us to, but we believe in cleaner, greener power for this province and indeed for this country.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Runciman: I agree that this is not \$9 million in backrooms; this is \$24 million a year for 20 years to a Liberal crony.

Can the minister explain how it was that Mike Crawley led a policy session of your Liberal Party policy conference just three weeks ago? The subject was renewable energy. We have a copy of the program, the Ontario Liberal Party annual policy development conference in November. Mike Crawley, now recipient of this half-billion-dollar Liberal government contract, was presenting a closed-door session on renewable energy. Only registered Liberals could listen to this one. Minister, \$475 million is a very sweet payback for speaking at a Liberal conference, wouldn't you agree?

Hon Mr Duncan: Mr Crawley is the president of the Canadian Wind Energy Association. Jim Miller, the head

of PC research, attended and paid his registration to attend the conference. Mr Crawley was appointed by the member's government to sit on the task force on energy supply and conservation because he is an expert.

The work that has been done in the renewable energy file to increase Canada's wind capacity by more than 80%—Canada's wind capacity—is only the first step. We will work with anyone, whether they're a New Democrat, a Conservative, as Mr Probyn is, one of the partners in that deal—a defeated Conservative candidate—or a Liberal, if they have expertise and participate in an independent and fair process, which we established, which we set up and which was signed off on by the fairness commissioner.

I was delighted that the director of Conservative research was able to attend our conference, and I should tell you there were members of other political parties there, at what was a fulsome discussion about the importance of renewable energy to the future of this province and country.

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Mr Runciman: The minister has a dramatically different view of the world, now that he's sitting in the government benches, versus what positions he took on this side of the House. The facts are that Mike Crawley is a former top assistant to former Liberal leader Lyn McLeod. He is the current Ontario president of the Liberal Party of Canada. He's an influential Liberal insider, and that's made clear by the fact that he was featured in this session on the need for renewable energy at your own policy conference. Now he's the recipient of a \$24-million-a-year contract for 20 years, and that's a contract for a modest amount of renewable energy.

Minister, I think people deserve a better answer than they're receiving from you here today. Please explain the situation, which on the surface seems to be very difficult for you to deal with.

Hon Mr Duncan: Over 41 bids were received on the RFP. It was set up with an independent outside consultant that was approved some time ago. This partnership, involving Mr Probyn and Mr Crawley, was one of the successful proponents. It was tendered, and it was subject to an independent arbiter for fairness.

I can tell you what wasn't tendered. Paul Rhodes's \$335,000 strategic communications advice to Ontario Hydro was untendered; his \$211,000 strategic advice to LCBO was untendered; \$683,000 in contracts to Tom Long to Hydro One; \$635,000 to Tom Long's company, Egon Zehnder, untendered; an untendered contract for \$195,000 to provide insight and leadership techniques to the Darlington nuclear plant.

The process was fair and independent. It yielded up a bid for 99 megawatts by a company that's partnered by a Liberal and a Conservative. Regardless of political stripe, we welcome their participation in helping Ontario move to a cleaner and greener energy program.

Mr Runciman: That's the standardized response. I didn't hear millions of dollars or billions of dollars talked about in that response, and that's the reality of this con-

tract: \$24 million-plus a year for 20 years, close to half a billion dollars over that term, to a Liberal insider. It has a strong stench of unethical behaviour, especially considering it's for a 0.3% increase in Ontario's power supply.

Given what we believe is an obvious conflict of interest, will you immediately put this contract on hold, pending a review by Ontario's Integrity Commissioner? If you have nothing to hide, let the independent Integrity Commissioner look at this \$475-million deal. Will you do that?

Hon Mr Duncan: No. The fairness has been determined independently. There is a process under the act that the member opposite can submit.

I want to point out again that this process yielded up a number of superb projects, and that will produce energy for 20 years into the future. By the way, one of the interesting things we discovered—and I know members on all sides the House will be interested in this—is that wind power is now becoming competitive with natural gas. That means we can turn more to wind and more to renewables.

So for 20 years at that price, yes; but over time, as fossil fuel prices rise, the price of wind stays the same. As long as the wind continues to blow, we believe we should harvest it. We believe it's in the interests of this province to have cleaner, greener power. I welcome Steve Probyn's involvement in this partnership, and we're thankful that there are people out there—smart, intelligent, creative people—bringing their goodwill, their expertise and their investment dollars to bring on cleaner, greener energy in Ontario.

The Speaker: New question. The leader of the third party.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): This question is for the Acting Premier. Just a few months ago, on June 24, the energy minister stood in the Legislature and boasted that 90 companies had come forward and expressed interest in generating renewable electricity in Ontario and that the total of the offers was 4,400 megawatts. In other words, there were a lot of companies that came forward, a lot of operators came forward offering to generate renewable power. Can you explain how it is that the president of the Liberal Party of Canada, Ontario wing, gets a guaranteed 20-year deal to sell electricity to the hydro system at prices 60% higher than the current wholesale price?

The McGuinty government is giving the president of the Liberal Party a rich private hydro contract. I say that's cronyism. I say it's conflict of interest. Will you immediately terminate this rich contract for your Liberal friend?

Hon Mr Duncan: First of all, if the member opposite had read further on what I said that day, that 4,400 megawatts was just the first cut. When we analyzed them, we discovered, for instance, that there were proposals for nuclear reactors in there. Surely the member opposite didn't want us to endorse nuclear reactors. That's number one.

Number two, the member incorrectly stated that this was awarded by the Liberal Party. The member will recall that this government—and he criticized us for doing this—hired outside consultants to take us through the process, including a fairness commissioner who analyzed every aspect of the deal and signed off on it.

The members of the government became aware of the actual successful proponents, I believe, about three days ago. We weren't involved in any aspect of the selection. There was a fair process established. There were indeed hundreds of applicants. We went through a rigorous process where we winnowed them down to the best proposals at the best price. This particular partnership was one of 10 successful bidders. We welcome the addition of new renewable energy to this province.

Mr Hampton: The minister is already changing his story. On June 24 he boasted, "We've received expressions of interest" that would total "approximately 4,400 megawatts of ... renewable supply" including "wind, solar, water, biomass and landfill gas." It seems to me there were a lot of offers in there.

I want to just talk about Mr Crawley's expertise. Just go to the Liberal Web site. There's Paul Martin. There's Mr Crawley. Here's his expertise: Mike Crawley, president. Mike Crawley has extensive party experience. He has served the party in a number of capacities, including on riding executives, campaign teams, young Liberal executives and staff positions with federal MPs, the party office and the office of the Leader of the Opposition in Ontario.

This guy is a Liberal hack. He's a Liberal hack, and you're handing him a \$475-million contract. Where I come from, we call this wrong. Where I come from, we call this cronyism. Where I come from, we call this conflict of interest.

The Speaker: Question.

Mr Hampton: Will you terminate the contract?

Hon Mr Duncan: What the member failed to indicate was that Mr Crawley is also the president of the Canadian Wind Energy Association. Mr Crawley was also appointed by the Conservative government to sit on the energy supply and conservation task force.

The member failed to mention that this government set up an independent process, away from government, that involved outside consultants who made the decisions based on a number of criteria, including the quality of the proposal and the price of the energy. This proposal was one of 10 successful proponents. I'd remind the member opposite that the other company that's partnered in this is headed by a member of another political party. There was no political involvement in this process whatsoever.

We believe this is a good project going forward into the future of this province. It does so in a competitive way and makes sure that instead of doing what previous governments did on the renewable file, and that is nothing, we have new clean, green energy going forward into the future.

Mr Hampton: I even go to his own CV, and he says he's held senior management positions in the public and

private sectors. He's held a number of sales management positions with the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. This guy had no involvement with wind energy until the Conservative government appointed him to a task force, and you have continued to put him in positions like that since becoming government.

Here is what really stinks: He goes to the Liberal policy conference three weeks ago and tells you what your hydro policy should be, and then three weeks later, he gets a \$475-million contract. Where I come from, this stinks. This stinks. Will you do the responsible thing and will you terminate this blatant conflict of interest, this blatant payoff to your Liberal friend?

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Hon Mr Duncan: The only thing that stinks is the mischaracterization that member has made of a successful proponent that involved a number of successful companies in this province trying to help us bring on more clean, green power.

Again, I emphasize, last winter this government set up an independent process, with outside consultants, overseen by a fairness commissioner. The bids were not known to the government. The government had no involvement in the selection of the successful bidders. We've announced 10 successful proponents who will bring on 395 megawatts of power that is clean and green into this province, at a price that is comparable to similar power in other jurisdictions and that over time will prove to be a very good deal when one factors in all the aspects associated with having cleaner, greener electricity in Ontario.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Hampton: To the Minister of Energy, you might remember this: Dalton McGuinty promised change. He said, "Choose change." He said that he would put the public good ahead of private interests and political cronies. Where is the change?

Well, Leslie Noble is gone, Michael Gourley is gone, Paul Rhodes is gone. But now we have Michael Crawley at the trough, the president of the Liberal Party at the trough, to the tune of \$475 million.

Someone said, it's "sickening." "The people of Ontario can be assured that this kind of nonsense is not going to happen again." Do you know who that was? That was Dwight Duncan who said that. Dwight Duncan. Why is Conservative cronyism sickening but \$475 million of McGuinty cronyism for the president of the Liberal Party is OK?

Hon Mr Duncan: What was sickening and remains so is that all that was done untendered. There was no freedom of information applied to Hydro or OPG.

There has been change. Five years of NDP government: In five years, how much wind power did they bring on? Six tenths of one megawatt of wind power in five years. This government has brought on 355 megawatts. So there has been a big change. Under the Conservative government, eight years in power, 14 megawatts of wind energy. This government announced yesterday 355

megawatts of wind and another 40 megawatts of other renewable sources.

There was an independent process that was publicly tendered—he may have wanted to go to the Web site to follow the progress of that—with an outside fairness commissioner overseeing every aspect of it. So there has been real change on renewable energy, real change in how we do business. This is a good deal for the people of Ontario.

Mr Hampton: I want to quote Dwight Duncan again: "The people of Ontario voted for change—real change. We're giving them real change in the energy sector.... one thing I know for certain: There will be no more abuse of the public trough by Tories, like went on under that government for almost eight pitiful years."

Instead, we have the president of the Liberal Party of Canada, Ontario wing, and even his own CV says that he was in sales management for the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and before that he was a political hack. You are going to give him a \$475-million contract at 60% higher than the current price of electricity. Meanwhile, for low- and modest-income families, who have been hit by an over-20% increase in their hydro prices, you are only going to give them a dollar for every extra \$20 that you take out of their pockets. Maybe you can tell me, is this the McGuinty government's definition of "change"—you whack ordinary Ontarians with double-digit hydro price increases and you give the president of the Liberal Party a guaranteed \$475-million contract?

Hon Mr Duncan: Publicly advertised requests for proposal that were advertised in every major daily in the province, that have been subject to oversight by independent outsiders, is hardly a backroom deal.

We have brought about change. We did everything in a fair and open process that was there for everyone to see. You impugn the integrity not just of Mr Crawley but of a number of partners in that organization who are taking the risk of building this, who are providing us—and I know the member is opposed to renewable energy, I know that he doesn't want to move forward, but I would suggest that this process was fair, it was open, it was subject to public scrutiny and it is subject to freedom of information. That's what has changed. That is altogether different from what went on here before we became the government last year.

Mr Hampton: Do you know what? Ninety companies came forward, and somehow the president of the Liberal Party, who has virtually no experience in this field, comes out on top.

According to the McGuinty government, you could have a bank robbery and you could have the bank robber walking off with the money and as long as you had an independent consultant who said, "It's all fair," that would be fine with the McGuinty government.

Here is what is happening out there. It's a very cold day today; in many places, it's snowing. Across Ontario people who have to use electric heat are using a lot of electricity. They are being whacked with double-digit hydro rate increases. Many of them can barely afford it,

yet the McGuinty government definition of “change” is that those people should be whacked; they should have money taken out of their pockets so that the president of the Liberal Party can walk away with a \$475-million guaranteed contract. I ask you again, is this the McGuinty government—

The Speaker: Minister of Energy.

Hon Mr Duncan: There is no doubt that the question of low-income consumers of electricity is a significant issue. To link these two issues is absolutely phony. This process was open, fair, accountable, subject to FOI and it yielded 10 proponents, of which this partnership was one of the successful proponents. It represents a dramatic change in how government does business. We are moving forward to bring on these 395 megawatts of power, using a process that was fair, open, transparent and subject to enormous scrutiny. We're satisfied that this process has yielded the best, most favourable results for the people of Ontario.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Education. He seems not to be here.

Interjection.

Mr Klees: While the minister takes his seat—Minister, today our clippings were full of articles that talked about school daycares being planned. Theresa Boyle of the Toronto Star, Margaret Philp in the Globe and others reported on announcements that would be made today that there would be child care implemented throughout schools in Ontario. Interestingly enough, you were not at the announcement, and even more interestingly, the announcement never did happen.

Is it true, Minister, that you heard from directors of education from across this province and from school board trustees that such an announcement is absolutely impractical, impossible to implement? Is that why that announcement was withdrawn today?

1500

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I think the member opposite is somewhat confused. There was an announcement today about a terrific program for young children, one that should have happened—ought to have happened—under the previous government. In fact, it reflected a report they commissioned from Dr Fraser Mustard and Margaret McCain a number of years ago—five years ago—that said what they should do. This government is doing it. Unfortunately, the kids in this province have been made to wait.

What was in the announcement—I can't speak to any speculation ahead of it—was a very substantial connection with the work we're already doing in schools.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I'm not quite sure if the Minister of Community and Social Services is answering the question or you are answering the question. Could you just wrap up in 10 seconds?

Hon Mr Kennedy: To wrap up, I'm surprised the member opposite is not applauding the tremendous announcement made by the Premier and by the Minister of Children and Youth Services, but he should. And he should understand that it will complement very well what we're doing in our schools: improving education for young children.

Mr Klees: Neither of the ministers answered the question. The reality is that they made an announcement, or at least sucked the media in, letting them think they were making an announcement about child care facilities in schools, which would have been wrong in the first place.

I'm glad they withdrew. I'm glad that school board trustees and directors of education got to them. Here is what the director of education for York region appealed to the minister to do: Put in place in York region a centre for child care that deals with serious issues; that is, child care centres that deal with special needs for children. He says that 14,000 children with disabilities living in York region are without the support of a children's treatment centre.

This minister has his priorities all wrong. What I want to know from the minister is, will he get the priorities right and encourage the minister responsible for children's services to put in place children's treatment centres where they are needed, rather than play games with child care centres that are not needed?

Hon Mr Kennedy: I think what parents of this province, and probably even educators and principals and others, would have liked from the member opposite was his saying something in favour of strengthening public education in this province, instead of some idle speculation about what might have been better in terms of a child care announcement.

What's very good about this announcement is that it has been endorsed by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, by representatives from the Atkinson centre and by Margaret McCain, who wrote the Early Years report that your government let sit on the shelf and collect dust for month after month while children grew up without the advantages they're finally going to have. That's what happened.

I want to speak, if I can, in my capacity as Minister of Education, to the critic for education. The education community welcomes this announcement today. They welcome the wraparound. I say to parents out there, in case you're wondering how the critic opposite entirely missed your concerns that this is—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Klees: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'm going to ask for a late show, because this minister did not answer my question relating to the children's treatment centre that is identified—

The Speaker: I understand. Thank you. As you know, you must put forward the necessary papers for the late show.

New question.

CHILD CARE

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Acting Premier. I am shocked at your government's conduct today. You raised hopes again and again and then dashed them by failing to come through with any real action. You hype and put out all these brave and bold new plans, and then you don't deliver. All you deliver are re-announcements and pilot projects. You did it with housing, you did it with health care and now you're doing it with child care.

You said your Best Start program would help 330,000 children under six, but today's announcement doesn't even come close. You announced a three-community pilot project, and that's it. This is not a best start; this is hardly a baby step. Acting Premier, when will you stop dashing people's hopes and start delivering on your promises?

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The program does deliver on people's hopes, and the public should listen to this. This is a comprehensive plan. There is substantial money for helping young babies deal with health problems. There's substantial money for helping young babies deal with hearing and other disabilities. There is—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member from Nickel Belt, will you come to order, please. Acting Premier?

Hon Gerry Phillips: There's a plan for full-day learning for young people, and I think the public should understand. Here's what independent people who know this issue say: "This is the best thing that has happened since McCain and Mustard issued their Ontario Early Years Study, 1999. Finally, the key recommendations of their report are on the road to being implemented." That's a professor from OISE.

This is what Margaret McCain said: "This program"—

The Speaker: Maybe you can give that in a supplementary, Acting Premier. Supplementary?

Ms Horwath: In fact, I think Dr Mustard comes from a university in the community I'm from, and I know his work very well. But if this were a major commitment, we'd see the minister here. It would be announced right here in this Legislature along with all the other government business. But instead, you took your announcement out of this building, where it wouldn't get the scrutiny that it deserves.

The Minister of Children and Youth Services has said over and over, of course—and it's true—that the early years are important. They're definitely the most important. Aren't those early years crucial enough to warrant more than just a study that's gaining dust on a shelf, a tiny pilot project in just three communities in this province?

Where's the beef, Acting Premier? Where's the beef? When is your government going to come through with the provincial dollars, the \$300 million that you promised? When is that genuine province-wide program

going to be coming forward for the children of all of Ontario?

Hon Gerry Phillips: Again, I say to the public, the plan is there. And here's what experts say about it—the opposition, which may look for any particular little problem. Here's what the experts say: "At last we have a government that understands that how children start out has a huge impact on where they end up." That's the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "This government's plan is critical to Ontario's moving ahead as a province." That's a child psychologist from McMaster.

Again, I quote the author of a major report, Margaret McCain: "This program is a fulfillment of everything we envisioned in 1998 with our Early Years Study. This was our vision and hope for Ontario, and indeed Canada."

So I think the public understands when people who understand this issue, experts who have studied it, have looked at our Best Start plan. Those are their comments, not the opposition's, dare I say, ranting against a plan that I think will do an enormous amount of good for our young people.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'm just waiting for some members to settle.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The member from Trinity-Spadina seems not to have settled yet.

New question.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr David Oraziotti (Sault Ste Marie): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, there's no doubt that we're facing serious challenges in the energy sector and have been for years because of a lack of planning on the part of the past two governments. I'm pleased we're moving forward in the energy sector and on several reform initiatives that are proposed in Bill 100.

Constituents in my riding have been following the challenges we face and have been advocating for more clean, renewable power. Yesterday it was exciting to learn that Great Lakes Power, Superior Wind Energy and Harmony Wind Energy put forward a successful proposal for a 100-megawatt wind park near Sault Ste Marie. Minister, what are some of the environmental and economic benefits of these new clean power projects?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): The outcome of our RFP for renewable energy has yielded 395 megawatts of renewable power. We believe it's great news for the people of Ontario. Communities like Sault Ste Marie, which are in close proximity to this, will benefit directly.

Again, this announcement yesterday represents an 80% increase in the amount of wind power available in Canada. I should also say that there will be more opportunities in the future to bring on still more wind and other forms of renewable electricity, to help us deal with the supply crunch we have. We believe that these projects, when fully implemented and running by the end of 2007,

will make an important difference in how we provide energy to our homes, businesses and schools, and we're excited by the prospects of their success.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary? The member from Guelph-Wellington.

1510

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): Minister, my constituents are excited about this announcement because, as you say, it will help clean up our air and benefit our economy.

My constituents in Guelph-Wellington are particularly excited because one of the successful low bidders is Guelph Hydro, which is owned by the citizens of Guelph. In fact, the Eastview landfill was recently closed, and we will be collecting the methane gas from the landfill and using it to generate electricity—a very exciting project. We certainly need this diverse supply mix: wind, solar, biomass, landfill gas. I'm pleased to see that we've done that.

Minister, when might consumers see the first power as a result of this announcement and, since this RFP you issued last June was so successful, will the government be bringing on further supply from renewable energy?

Hon Mr Duncan: I thank the member for the question. All projects have to be producing power by December 31, 2007. We believe that a number of them will actually be up and running by 2006. I also want to note that the successful proponents were, in fact, the lowest-cost producers of this electricity, as judged by the process we had established.

The public RFP that we launched earlier this year was the first of many future opportunities for Ontario's renewable generators, both large and small. One area we're looking forward to expanding on is the so-called really small projects—the single windmills that are more prevalent in Europe—where we still haven't made enough progress.

All these projects have to be on line before December 31, 2007; otherwise, there are financial penalties to the successful proponents. Some will be on as early as 2006, and we're looking forward to more opportunities for development of renewable power as we move forward into the future.

HIGHWAY 60

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. I've raised this issue with you on a number of occasions by way of statement, by way of direct contact, by way of letter, and we're raising it by way of question in the House today. It's the issue of Highway 60 in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

The condition of this highway continues to deteriorate, yet I have no answer from you. Will you make a commitment today to this House and to the people of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke that the two most critical sections of that highway—between Eganville and Douglas and between Barry's Bay and the Nipissing boundary—will

be reconstructed next year, 2005? Minister, will you make that commitment today? Lives are depending on it; the condition of this highway is getting worse.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): We are always very concerned about the condition of the highways, and we want to make sure that we have adequate support for our drivers and the people of Ontario. So I am prepared, and have instructed my staff, to go and look at those highways. We will make sure that whatever needs to be done gets done.

Mr Yakabuski: I offered to even drive you around there myself, but we don't want you looking at it any longer, because your press secretary, in an interview with the Barry's Bay This Week newspaper, committed that those two stretches of highway would, in fact, be reconstructed next year, in 2005.

Does your press secretary speak for you, and will you back up that press secretary now and commit to reconstructing those two sections next year?

Hon Mr Takhar: Let me answer the first part. He offered to have me go with him; there's no question about that. I said to the member that if he authorized me to check his driving licence record, then I would be more than pleased to do it. But he never agreed to do that, so I couldn't do it.

I have suggested that I ask my officials to go and look at the highways, and then we'll see what condition they are in and what action is to be taken.

SECOND-STAGE HOUSING

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the minister responsible for women's issues. Minister, I have a copy of a letter written to you by the Second Stage Housing Alliance. They want you to keep the promise the Premier made prior to the election on reinstating funds to second-stage housing.

I'm quoting from the letter now: "It is a great disappointment to have been promised reinstatement of core program funding for so long from this government, only to hear that new programs will be developed with the money previously promised."

Minister, they're saying that because of your decision, programs are on the verge of closure. That's just like under the Tories—something you railed against when you were in opposition. Will you keep your promise and reinstate funding for all 27 existing second-stage housing programs, as promised?

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I'm very happy to receive this type of question, considering that today is the day we're marking an international day for eradicating violence against women. It's important to note that several weeks ago we made a tremendous announcement. We brought second-stage housing agencies back into the fold of the provincial government. We announced a \$3.5-million support to our agencies in the women's sector that work with transitional housing supports. We've not just gone back to

some of our second-stage housing providers, but we've also enhanced the current program, which is funding transitional support workers to help women who are in-community, because we recognize that 80% of women who face abuse don't, in fact, go through shelters or second-stage. We realize that we have to help as many women as possible, and I know that this member from Danforth supports the efforts that we've made to reach out to women who've suffered domestic abuse.

Ms Churley: Minister, you can put all the spin you want on this. The reality is that your government, in opposition and after winning government, said that you were going to reinstate all of the core funding to existing second-stage programs. You didn't do that. You have used that money, that \$3.5 million, to create new programs. You're pitting people against each other in the sector. You promised the second-stage housing money, and you did not deliver. You said in the past that you believed it was critical, and you know that, without such housing programs, many women are left to choose between poverty, homelessness or returning to the abusive home they tried to leave in the first place.

Nobody's objecting to your new transitional programs that you brought in, Minister; they're important. But you have not kept your promise. You are not putting the funding back into those existing programs. It's badly needed. Will you stand on your feet today and say that you will keep the promise you made—and they believed you—on second-stage housing in this province?

Hon Ms Pupatello: I can tell you that the day we made our announcement to get back into the business of providing support to women who are in housing and need support was a great day for Ontario. In 1996, the previous government indeed removed funding to second-stage housing units. What has happened since then is that the women's sector agencies that work with these women who have been battered, whether they're in the shelters, whether they're in other units, whether they're in social housing—wherever they are in the community, they need our help, including in second-stage housing being provided by those agencies. What we have done is bring these agencies back into the fold.

What this member opposite knows is that within the next couple of weeks, we are laying out our domestic violence action plan, where these women's sector agencies will be stronger and they will be in a better position than ever to put these broken women back on their feet and back into their community. We are proud of that.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Minister, I understand that yesterday the Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress released its third annual report, *Realizing Our Prosperity Potential*. The report has come back with some recommendations on ways to make Ontario more prosperous, understanding that there is more work to be done to close

the prosperity gap. Minister, what steps have been taken to address these recommendations and keep Ontarians prosperous?

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I'd like to thank the member for the question. Let me first of all congratulate the Roger Martin task force on competitiveness and productivity for continuing their groundbreaking work. It's very important work for Ontario's economy. The good news coming out of the report is that Ontario's economy is closing the gap with its US peer states. The gap has gone from \$5,900 in 2002 down to \$3,000 in 2004—a major step forward.

1520

The good news doesn't stop there. In fact, our government is taking additional steps that will help to close the prosperity gap. We have lowered the small business income limit. We are, in addition, eliminating the capital tax. Thanks to the finance minister's budget, we're making additional investments in skills development by including an initiative with respect to an apprenticeship training tax credit, helping foreign-trained people access trades and professions, and creating an additional 7,000 apprenticeship positions.

I'd also like to quote from the task force. It stated, "Our people are highly skilled and have the attitude to win; we have an excellent mix of industries; our industries are competitive..." As well, "our governments have"—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr McNeely: One of the recommendations from this report is to ensure that we make investments into research and development and innovation. I know you've been active on this issue and it is of tremendous importance to people of my riding, Ottawa-Orléans, and the city of Ottawa. Not only do we have great research at our universities—Carleton and Ottawa—but we are also home to a strong high-tech sector and many innovative, cutting-edge companies.

One of the goals of Team Ottawa-Orléans, a new socio-economic development council in my riding, is to attract these exciting companies and R&D firms to our riding.

Minister, please inform this House of your effort to make research and innovation a priority in Ontario.

Hon Mr Cordiano: I'm happy to report that research and innovation are at the top of this government's priority list. I'm proud of the fact that we've made a four-year commitment to research and we are actually going to be investing \$1.8 million over the next four years toward research and commercialization.

The good news is that we're also revamping Ontario's research programming. We're creating a new Ontario research fund, which will do three things: It'll make us more accountable and transparent, make certain that there is a made-in-Ontario set of policies toward research and commercialization, and place a greater emphasis on commercialization as well.

In addition to this, we have a commercialization strategy which will take good ideas out of our labs and ensure that they get to the marketplace with some degree of success. This McGuinty government wants to make sure we are creating high-paying, high-value-added jobs, creating more prosperity for all of Ontario. That's what this government is doing.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The Minister of Energy earlier today referred to the fairness commissioner. We've discovered that the commissioner is a significant donor to the Liberal Party of Ontario. So much for fairness.

The Speaker: That is not a point of order.

GAMBLING

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is for the Minister or Economic Development and Trade, the minister responsible for gaming.

It has long been my view that too many Ontario families have been negatively impacted by gambling addictions. This problem has been highlighted in a great number of media reports in recent weeks, including a continuing investigative series by Dave Seglins of CBC Radio. Much of the initial coverage focused on a report conducted by the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre. That report estimated that Ontario residents lose more than \$4 billion a year on provincially run gambling. The alarming fact is that 35% of that massive sum is coming from the 5% of Ontario's adult population who have a gambling problem.

Almost six months ago I introduced Bill 95, which would prevent the government from establishing any new gaming premises, or expanding any existing ones, until it appoints a commission under the Public Inquiries Act to study the negative social impacts of excessive gambling. My question to the minister is very simple: Will the government express support for my bill?

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): With respect to the whole question of gaming and what we're going to do, I've made certain that we're going to take stock of where we are in this province. We are conducting a major assessment of the gaming industry in this province. It has seen a rapid increase in its size over the past 10 years, since the day that the NDP government of Bob Rae introduced gaming. It was further expanded by the Conservative governments under Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, and we've had a tremendous increase in the expansion of this industry.

We are doing this overall, comprehensive review because it's a very important industry. It accounts for many thousands of jobs, as you know, throughout various communities in the province. As a result, we are not making any decisions with respect to expansion until this assessment is complete.

Mr Arnott: The minister outlined and gave information to the House about an operational review he has

undertaken on this issue. I'm concerned that the government is going to use this as a pretext for a massive expansion of gambling in this province. The minister is aware, certainly, that the review he has undertaken on problem gambling is being led by the former chair of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp—does this mean he is impartial when it comes to the question of gambling expansion?—and the review appears to be limited by the fact that it's being done behind closed doors without any of the public participation that Bill 95 would provide.

The Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre has outlined a five-point plan to deal with problem gambling. It includes public education for adults; effective school-based prevention for children and youth; prevention for gamblers; aggressive, innovative treatment for early-stage problem gamblers; and prevention of foreseeable harm at gambling venues such as casinos. My question is: Will the government display a social conscience and implement this five-point plan to help people with gambling addictions and take a socially responsible approach to protecting them?

Hon Mr Cordiano: I know this member cares deeply about this question, so let me say that we are taking this matter seriously with respect to problem gaming. I have asked Dr Stanley Sadinsky to review the whole problem gaming area to ensure that we are looking at best practices from other jurisdictions, and that we are in fact reaching the people who need the kind of help you're referring to with problem gaming.

There is \$36 million allocated toward problem gaming in general, and there are 47 agencies that are dealing with problem gaming, reaching out to those people who need help. I would say to the honourable member that it was your party, when you were in power, that expanded gaming throughout the province. I don't recall your ever bringing this bill forward at that time, although I do say, with all due respect, that I appreciate the sincerity with which you've brought this forward. I just want to point out that all three parties have been supportive of gaming in this province.

Mr Arnott: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to institute a three-year moratorium on the expansion of gambling—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That's not a point of order. New question.

EATING DISORDERS

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Health. Your budget squeeze on Ontario hospitals is forcing the closure of two outpatient programs at Toronto General Hospital. These programs serve adults who are very ill, suffering from bulimia, anorexia and other eating disorders. The hospital says they have to cut educational and group therapy services currently serving 200 patients and reduce their day-patient care program, because your ministry has told them to balance the budget and these are not core services.

The hospital also says these services are available in the community, but both FADE—Family and Friends Against Disordered Eating—and Sheena's Place, a charitable organization in Toronto supporting people with eating disorders, have told us there are no publicly funded organizations in Toronto to pick up what is being cut. What are you going to do to ensure that 200 patients now receiving services and 33 people on a wait list for these services are going to get the help they need?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like to thank the honourable member for the question. I've had the opportunity to meet with the group FADE during my time as Minister of Health. I think we would all agree that the challenges for people in our province struggling with eating disorders require proper assistance from our health care system.

The circumstances the honourable member brings to the House's attention today, I'll take under advisement. I'll need to take a look at it, and work to ensure that the quality of services available to the community, given our recent \$100 million investment in community-based mental health services, meets the needs of this very particular group of Ontarians.

Ms Martel: If I might reinforce the problem, the Toronto General Hospital's eating disorders program is one of the largest and most innovative of its kind. It serves as a model for clinicians and researchers right around the world. But as a result of the budget squeeze you've placed on hospitals, they have very publicly said they are going to be cutting these services to people who suffer from bulimia and anorexia in order to balance their budget.

There are 200 people who have been currently served in the educational and group therapy sessions, there are 33 more are on a waiting list and there are other patients who are going to suffer because the day-patient care program is also being reduced.

1530

I say again that both FADE and Sheena's Place have told us, as of today, there are no community-based organizations that are publicly funded that can pick up what is being lost. So I ask you again, what are you going to do to ensure that people who suffer from eating disorders are going to get the help they desperately need?

Hon Mr Smitherman: Further to the information that I provided to the honourable member in my earlier answer, I think it's important to remind members what I've had the opportunity to say many times in the House with respect to the issue of hospital funding. We've established a process with hospitals that requires them first to look at those areas that are non-clinical, that don't have patient impact, including administration and the like. We're at the earliest phases of that, and I think it's important to make sure we work through these matters with Ontario's hospitals on a case-by-case basis.

With respect to the programs the honourable member mentions, I agree that these are important programs that require support from the Ontario health care system, and

I intend to take the matter up with a view toward ensuring that Ontarians can access them.

GREENHOUSE INDUSTRY

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Minister, the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance, a group consisting of Ontario's vegetable, flower and pepper growers and making up the second largest agricultural industry in Ontario, is at Queen's Park today. In the ridings of Essex and Chatham-Kent Essex, greenhouse growers make a significant contribution to our economy and our rural communities. As this sector grows, so do other industries in our ridings, like trucking, packaging and warehousing. This industry is vital to the strength of our communities in my riding and across the province.

This week you made an important announcement regarding transitional assistance to farmers. Ontario agriculture is currently enduring many challenges and can use the support of the government. Minister, please tell the House and members of this important sector of agriculture how they might benefit from the support you announced Monday.

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): The announcement we made this week will allow these farmers to be eligible for the self-directed risk management program. They'll be eligible for the general top-up through the CAIS program. As well, there's been \$20 million allocated for research, and they'll be able to put applications in for those research projects.

Mr Crozier: Thank you, Minister. I'm confident that, despite any challenges the Ontario agriculture industry may face, the greenhouse industry will continue to grow and be successful and contribute to the strength of our rural communities.

The \$20 million in funding for research and development for the horticultural industry will benefit everyone in the province because of the huge impact that horticulture makes on our agriculture industry and our rural economy. We all know, however, that time is of the essence and the need for assistance is as soon as possible. Please tell the House when horticultural farmers will receive this support.

Hon Mr Peters: I thank the honourable member for the question. Farmers who are in the CAIS program and are triggering CAIS benefits for 2003 will start to receive their general top-up cheques before Christmas. As well, the self-directed risk management program is application-based, and information regarding that program will flow early in the new year.

I want to thank the member, as well, for spotlighting this important part of agriculture in the province. This is certainly one area where you can go into a grocery store and you can really help support Ontario farmers. Ontario greenhouse tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers and the flowers that come from the greenhouse industry are available to you year-round. When you're buying poinsettias for the holiday season, make sure you look to see

where that poinsettia was grown. Make sure you're buying an Ontario product.

VISITORS

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I know that you would want me to introduce two important visitors to the Ontario Legislature in the members' gallery on the east side. Sharon Gleason, who is a community activist in the city of St Catharines on the mayor's advisory committee on people with disabilities, and Regional Councillor Mike Collins are both here. I know they'd like to stand up and be recognized.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That's not a point of order, but they're welcome.

PETITIONS

OPTOMETRISTS

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): "Whereas the last funding agreement between the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Association of Optometrists (OAO) expired March 31, 2000; and

"Whereas the optometric fees for OHIP-insured services remain unchanged since 1989; and

"Whereas the lack of any fee increase for 15 years has created a crisis situation for optometrists; and

"Whereas fees for OHIP services do not provide for fair or reasonable compensation for the professional services of optometrists, in that they no longer cover the costs of providing eye examinations; and

"Whereas it is in the best interests of patients and the government to have a new funding agreement for insured services that will ensure that the most vulnerable members of society are able to receive the eye care they need;

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

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care resume negotiations immediately with the OAO and appoint a mediator to help with the negotiation process in order to ensure that optometrists can continue to provide quality eye care services to patients in Ontario."

I affix my signature to this, as I am in complete agreement.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition sent to me by people who live in Thunder Bay. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Whereas those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—

will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Whereas the elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save \$93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over \$200 million in other health care costs; and

"Whereas there was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

I agree with the petitioners, and I have affixed my signature.

WEARING OF HELMETS

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas each year thousands of individuals fall while cycling, in-line skating, skateboarding or rollerblading;

"Whereas at least 20% of these cycling, in-line skating, rollerblading accidents involve an injury to the head;

"Whereas the cost of treating an individual with a severe head injury can be \$4 million to \$9 million over the course of their lifetime;

"Whereas wearing a certified helmet can prevent 85% of head injuries;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to swiftly pass Bill 129 and make it mandatory for all individuals to wear a certified helmet when cycling, in-line skating, skateboarding or using any other type of muscular-powered vehicle in the province of Ontario."

EYE EXAMINATIONS

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the 2004 provincial budget was not clear on whether adult optometry patients who have or who are at risk for medical conditions, such as diabetes, glaucoma, macular degeneration and clinically significant cataracts would continue to be covered through the Ontario health insurance plan; and

"Whereas Ontario's optometrists strongly feel that Ontario seniors, those under 20 and those with chronic sight-threatening diseases must continue to receive primary eye care services directly from Ontario's optometrists; and

"Whereas forcing patients to be referred to optometrists through their family physicians ignores the years of specialized training optometrists undertake to detect, diagnose and treat eye conditions; and

"Whereas almost 140 communities across the province have already been designated as underserved for family

practitioners and the government's approach will only exacerbate the problem unnecessarily;

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

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care immediately clarify that the eye examination services they provide to patients at risk for medical conditions will continue to be covered by OHIP and the coverage for these services is not dependent on a patient being referred to an optometrist by a family physician."

I will give it to my friend here, the page from Peterborough.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I present this petition delivered to me by Dr Dean Wright, Dr Axel Fritz, Dr Kelly Ramsay and Dr Sharon Hull. It reads as follows:

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save \$93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over \$200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

I'm pleased to affix my signature as well and hand these signatures over to page Curtis.

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HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that has been signed by thousands of people, which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas all hospitals since the inception of public medicare in Canada have been non-profit;

"Whereas 'public-private partnership' (P3) hospitals turn over democratic community control to international investors, making a public service into a commodity sold for profit;

"Whereas worldwide evidence is that private (P3) hospitals lead to doctor, nurse, staff and bed cuts in hospitals in order to make room for profit taking, consultant fees, higher borrowing costs and outrageous executive salaries;

"Whereas private (P3) hospitals hide information about the use of tax dollars by claiming 'commercial secrecy' when they privatize public institutions;

"Whereas the higher costs, user fees, two-tier services and culture of private (P3) hospitals risk the future sustainability of our public medicare system;

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

"We call on the government of Ontario to stop all current and future 'public-private partnership' (P3) hospital deals and return full ownership, operation, management and delivery of hospital services to non-profit hands, and develop a plan to fund new hospitals through public finance, clearly excluding the privatization of hospital services."

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): "To: Legislative Assembly of Ontario..."

"Whereas,

"Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

"Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

"Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save \$93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over \$200 million in other health care costs; and

"There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

"We, the undersigned"—all 200—"petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province."

I sign that petition.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): These petitions have been sent to me by people from Kingston and Thunder Bay. They read as follows:

"Whereas elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need; and

"Whereas those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments; and

"Whereas elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save \$93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over \$200 million in other health care costs; and

“Whereas there was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province.”

I agree with the petitioners, and I've affixed my signature to this.

TUITION

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): We have a petition to increase public funding for post-secondary education, reduce tuition fees and reinstate an upfront system of grants for Ontario students. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario Liberal government took an historic step forward by funding a tuition fee freeze for two years; and

“Whereas a majority of Ontarians support increased public funding for colleges and universities as well as reduced tuition fees; and

“Whereas increasing student debt through income-contingent loan repayment schemes or raising loan limits only increases the cost of post-secondary education for students from modest means; and

“Whereas per student investment in Ontario still lags gravely behind the vast majority of jurisdictions in North America;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, supporting the Canadian Federation of Students' call to increase funding for colleges and universities and reduce tuition fees for all Ontario students, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to (1) reduce tuition fees for all students in Ontario, (2) increase public funding for post-secondary education to at least the national average, and (3) implement an upfront, needs-based grant system for Ontario full-time and part-time students.”

I'll give it to my friend, page Adam.

GO TRANSIT SERVICE

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly that I'm reading on behalf of Liz Hill on Cedar Hedge Rise in Mississauga. It pertains to a new GO train station to serve the northwest corridor. My staff have pointed out to me that I have only read the petition 19 times, so this will make it an even 20.

“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.”

I am one of those residents. I'm pleased to sign the petition and to ask Emma to carry it for me.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have petitions addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. They read as follows:

“Whereas the elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

“Whereas those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

“Whereas the elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save \$93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over \$200 million in other health care costs; and

“Whereas there was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province.”

I agree with the petition and have affixed my signature to this.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas,

“Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

“Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

“Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save \$93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over \$200 million in other health care costs; and

“There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province.”

It’s signed by thousands, and signed by myself as well. Page Savannah is going to take this to the Clerks’ table.

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 Minister of Education concerning children’s treatment centres and boards of education. The matter will be debated today at 6 pm.

1550

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I rise, pursuant to standing order 55, to give the Legislature notice of the business of the House for next week.

On Monday, November 29: Bill 149.

On Tuesday, November 30: Bill 149.

On Wednesday, December 1: Bill 17.

On Thursday, December 2: Bill 25 and Bill 73.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): What’s going on?

Hon Mr Caplan: Democracy in action.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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 Caplan, on behalf of Mr Watson, moved third 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): Mr Caplan?

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): It’s quite all right, sir.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I’m going to be doing the leadoff, and it’s a good thing Mr Caplan was here to move third reading of this bill. It’s a good thing he was scripted, because he was tempted, I’m sure, to move it into committee of the whole—once burned, twice shy. Hopefully we won’t see that any more from Mr Caplan, at least not until after some significant hiatus. The record should clearly illustrate that Minister Watson has a chance to read it, that his colleague Minister Caplan did not screw up this afternoon and, indeed, did not send the bill to committee of the whole as many of his colleagues were sitting here. They were sitting here in anticipation. I could see people mouthing over to him, “Not committee of the whole. Don’t send it to committee of the whole.” They were doing that; they were just trying to be helpful.

I’ve got a one-hour lead on Bill 70, and then Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East is going to be speaking to it. Then other New Democrats are going to be speaking to it as well, should we have the opportunity, of course; should we be able to seize the moment. I quite frankly tell you that New Democrats may have to carry the debate on this bill this afternoon. But that’s OK. There are only eight of us, but the fact is that we are a formidable caucus. The eight of us can do things that 80 couldn’t do in other caucuses.

The acting government House leader made reference to the matters that the Legislature may address next week. I’m looking forward to getting home, back down to Niagara Centre, tomorrow morning, which is when I’ll be going because, of course, the House is sitting this evening. As a matter of fact, I’m going to be here this evening, talking to the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

We’re debating Bill 70 now; of course we are, Speaker. I want to let you know in advance that I always relish, I look forward to your gentle hand guiding me through these one-hour leadoffs. I want you to know, Speaker, that I value that guidance, that instruction, that mentoring, if you will, that you’ve been so generous with with me and with other members of the assembly. So your directing me in your oh-so-subtle way to Bill 70 is truly appreciated, because if I were not to mention Bill 70 from time to time I would be remiss.

In the context of Bill 70, I want to mention I’m getting back down to my riding, and other folks are headed to their ridings too. I’m going to be joining an SEIU, Service Employees International Union, information picket line outside the Welland County General Hospital. There are going to be similar picket lines in other communities in Niagara tomorrow. Members of the SEIU held press conferences today announcing those information pickets tomorrow. It’s not the first time this month that I’ve been with the good women and men, members of the Service Employees International Union. I was with them back on Wednesday, November 10. I was outside Extencicare in St Catharines. That’s a private, for-profit long-term-care

facility. The health professionals, members of the SEIU, who work at Extencare in St Catharines were, in the most noble tradition of their profession of health professionals, raising their concerns about the adequacy of the care being administered to our folks and our grandfolks in long-term-care facilities—in nursing homes, as they are colloquially known.

One of the revelations during the course of that meeting of SEIU members, their supporters and friends—I was fortunate to be asked to join them—was that at Extencare the residents who are incontinent, of course, wear incontinence supplies; if I may—I know it's offensive—adult diapers. The diapers are from a supplier that has treated them such that they turn blue when they're 60% soaked with urine. So they have to be 60% soaked with urine before they turn blue. The purpose of their turning blue of course is that staff are not allowed to change a diaper until it turns blue. That's a shocking revelation. It means that our folks who suffer incontinence as a result of their senior years are sitting in their own urine in long-term-care facilities. Feces do not affect the diaper, so if there's a bowel movement without any urine or not enough urine to constitute a 60% soaking, a resident is forced to sit in that in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

I hope members don't find any delight in that observation. I found that a shocking revelation, a disturbing one. Bill 70, to the extent that it purports to protect consumers in this province, certainly does nothing to protect our seniors—our folks and our grandfolks—in long-term-care facilities. They are forced to sit, in the instance of Extencare, in their own bodily waste for hours at a time, and nursing staff and other care staff are forbidden to assist that particular resident of a long-term-care facility. The staff find this objectionable, odious, repugnant, but without clear direction from this government about proper standards, fair standards, just standards, humane standards in long-term-care facilities, the staff are helpless.

You see, those same seniors, even though they were promised three baths a week when the Liberals were campaigning for government, instead of the one bath a week they were allowed, promised three—promise broken. Those same residents are—oh my goodness, the largesse of this government—permitted two baths a week. The Liberals promised to restore the 2.25 hours of care per resident per day, even though that figure in and of itself is grossly inadequate, and haven't kept that promise either.

Surely we in this chamber can have sufficient concern about the welfare and the well-being of senior citizens in this province, of our folks and our grandfolks, to address this in a meaningful way and not after some lengthy consultation and review—because the facts are clear—but promptly.

1600

I was proud of SEIU members who blew the whistle on this government's inaction with respect to long-term care back on November 10, proud to be with those SEIU

members, proud to be with those health professionals who work in very demanding jobs, grossly understaffed, in long-term-care facilities, including for-profit long-term-care facilities, for extended care.

Look, the reason they have these diapers that turn blue when they're 60% soaked with urine is so that they don't have to waste money on one or two extra diapers for an incontinent adult. I know there are folks watching who are going to write me an e-mail or a letter saying that we shouldn't call these diapers, because they're adults who wear them; they're incontinence pads. There's a technical name for them that I, for the life of me, can't think of right now, so please forgive me for being so crude as to speak of them bluntly as adult diapers.

That is troubling stuff, that the government is funding long-term care just like extended care: They put profits before people.

The same SEIU members, the sisters and brothers of the ones who work in long-term-care facilities, are going to be outside hospitals in Niagara tomorrow. I'm going to be proud to join my sisters and brothers from the SEIU at the Welland County General Hospital. Let me tell you, Speaker, Bill 70 doesn't provide them much solace or comfort because, tomorrow in Niagara, Service Employees International Union workers in our hospitals, workers doing some of the most demanding and crucial and critical jobs like cleaning, keeping the hospital clean, and keeping it safe, are going to be taking this government on, this Liberal government, this Dalton McGuinty government, with its agenda of privatization of health care, an agenda that's being pursued through the contracting out of services to the private sector.

The Liberals just don't get it. Never have; seems they never will. Privatization always costs more and ends up delivering less. These health workers who are going to be outside hospitals in Niagara tomorrow know that. They're not the high-priced, high-wage workers in the health industry. They know that. They work and they work hard, and they work harder than they ever have because they're grossly understaffed in their own right. But they have a commitment, a passionate commitment, to public health care. I only wish this government, the Liberal government, the McGuinty government, shared that commitment. I wish you did.

I'm going to be with those SEIU workers outside the Welland County General Hospital tomorrow at 12 noon. I ask folks in Welland, because I know folks in Welland care dearly, just like they do in Pelham and Thorold and Port Colborne and south St Catharines—heck, all of St Catharines—to join those SEIU workers outside the Welland County General Hospital and outside other hospitals and lend their voice to those workers in their struggle because of this government's privatization of health care.

I asked one of the pages to go down to the library and pull the legislative history of Bill 70. Here we have the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations shepherding his bill through the Legislature. Thank goodness he finally shepherded it through to the end of November,

because it's only seven months after it was introduced. What is going on with you guys? You couldn't organize a one-car funeral. Seven months, and you needed the collaboration of the opposition parties to get it to this point. Good grief. It was opposition House leaders who said, "Let's get this thing wrapped up. Let's call it Thursday afternoon." My goodness.

I heard all of the tantrums of the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations—indeed, the threats—the less-than-accurate depictions of Bill 70. The government tried to sell Bill 70 to me back in April. They said, "This is just a housekeeping bill." I said, "Are you sure?" They said, "It's just a housekeeping bill. There's nothing of substance in here. It's just a housekeeping bill."

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): That's it.

Mr Kormos: Khalil Ramal says, "That's it." Hansard should pick up: I said, "just a housekeeping bill," and he said, "That's it," and I responded to him. That's how you get in Hansard with a heckle, Mr Ramal. If I don't respond to you, you're squeezed out of Hansard. Even if I do respond to you and Hansard can't hear you, you're not going to be in Hansard. You've got to speak up if you're going to heckle. Speak up.

So here we've got a minister who, seven months later, whines his way to third reading. I suppose it's not inappropriate that the minister whines, because he's the author and sponsor of the bill to bring your own wine, right? What's the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations' favourite whine? "Why aren't you guys helping me pass my bill?" He doesn't understand, you see. He has a House leader who has to call the bills before they can be debated, and it's only when they're debated that they can get called for a vote. That's how it works.

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Maybe they need a new House leader.

Mr Kormos: There are people over there who would do an excellent job at being House leader. I have no hesitation—I know for a fact that Ted McMeekin would be an extremely capable House leader. He could House leader the pants off the current one, make no mistake about it. Ms Marsales from Hamilton would be a wonderful—

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): Marsales.

Mr Kormos: She says her name is Marsales. That's only because she was in the real estate racket for as long as she was.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: I understand, Ms Marsales. I understand. So I just offended some real estate agents. Put a note on an e-mail tree; get it out there, please. You've been involved in the real estate business.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: OK, I understand, and that's why you wanted me to pronounce it Ms Marsales. We do more sales, right? Are you still in the real estate business?

Ms Marsales: Absolutely.

Mr Kormos: OK. What's the name of the company?

Ms Marsales: Judy Marsales Real Estate.

Mr Kormos: Judy Marsales Real Estate. Telephone number? It's 905—

Ms Marsales: No.

Mr Kormos: Nope, Ms Marsales isn't interested. Ms Marsales doesn't want your business. Ms Marsales has the opportunity. She doesn't want to—how are you going to sell houses if people don't know what your phone number is, Ms Marsales? You can't sell houses with an unlisted number, for Pete's sake.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Be careful, Bob. There was a deal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): I would just ask the member, how does this pertain to Bill 70?

Mr Kormos: I'm going to put it in context. I've got to take this puppy home, but we're going to do it the long way.

So here's the minister, the Honourable Jim Watson. He is a minister who has been very single-minded, I must say, in the course of the last short while. He's had two pieces of legislation: bring your own wine and this housekeeping bill. That's a busy minister. His parliamentary assistant, Ted McMeekin, has carried most of the load, and folks should know that. Quite frankly, if Ted were the minister, I suspect this legislation would have been developed and proceeded with far more effectively.

Watson, the minister, sponsor of Bill 70, is—well, he is who he is. He brought to mind an old Pennsylvania German word that does not have an English translation, but it captures the essence of the minister, and that is, he is an aarschnoddle minister. He is. He's the minister of aarschnoddle. I thought about him in the context of his cabinet. Jim Watson is the aarschnoddle of this cabinet. In fact, he's the überaarschnoddle. Jim Watson is the überaarschnoddle of this Liberal caucus. I'd better get a page—I want Hansard to get the spelling right.

The Acting Speaker: I appreciate the member's comments. I would ask him to speak either French or English in his contribution to the debate this afternoon.

1610

Mr Kormos: I appreciate what you're saying, but there are, from time to time—you know the English language is a creature of neologisms and of importing words from any number of linguistic backgrounds. So let's be careful, let's be cautious about excluding any particular ethnicity from their ability to contribute to the growth of the English language. As you know, there are well-educated people who toss around, oh, the *Götterdämmerung*, the *gestalt*, and things like that, so I'm simply saying—again, I wish there were an English translation—I proclaim, I speak highly of the minister when I say to you that he is the aarschnoddle of this cabinet, the aarschnoddle of this caucus.

I have no qualms. If he wants to put that in a householder, then all the power to him: "Peter Kormos says that Jim Watson is the aarschnoddle of the Liberal cabinet." Let the minister put that in his householder up in Ottawa, the Nepean area, somewhere around there, because this minister whined about Bill 70. You were

here. You heard the whining in the House, you heard the whining outside there, you heard the aarschgnoddle whining of an aarschgnoddle minister who seemed to have no control whatsoever over his House leader, no stature in cabinet and no ability to get his bill moved forward. He's pleading with Ms Horwath, he's pleading for her assistance, and Ms Horwath is saying, "Look, my plate's full."

Ms Horwath is the new member for Hamilton East, and a stellar member she is. I think every member of this Legislature has just revelled in her talent, commitment and incredible ability. We in the New Democratic Party are very grateful to the people of Hamilton East for sending Ms Horwath. There's no value that can be put on our gratitude. Maybe there is, but I, for the life of me, can't think of one at the moment. If there were a value to be put on it, it would be not just in the thousands of dollars, it would be in the millions of dollars—no two ways about it. We're grateful to the folks of Hamilton East.

I was down in Hamilton just last weekend for the NDP convention, a very successful convention. I read the Hamilton Spectator and saw a review of members of the Hamilton caucus, if you will: one Tory, four Liberals, and of course our Ms Andrea Horwath, one New Democrat. And the question put to them—because you see, the Hamilton Spectator has launched and is in the course of doing an incredibly effective bit of investigative reporting—incredible. I wonder, Ms Horwath, could you have somebody get me the name of the brave Hamilton Spectator reporter who was defying the court in terms of not—

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Ken Peters.

Mr Kormos: I wanted to mention Ken Peters. Ken Peters is the Hamilton Spectator reporter, and I don't know the status of the matter right now, who in the course of litigation as a witness—you know him, Mr McMeekin, I'm sure—has been called upon to name a source, at risk of being jailed. Ken Peters has, in the noblest tradition of the fourth estate, declined to do so. I don't know what the court has done with it. I think it's foolish for courts to take people like that and jail them, because you can jail them for a day, for a week, for a month, and he's still not going to inform. I mean, that's such a violation.

It's imperative that if the press, the fourth and fifth estates, are going to do the job they have to do in a democratic society, they be able to have access to information without being compelled to reveal their sources. So I, on behalf of New Democrats, want to applaud and thank Ken Peters for his journalistic integrity, for his courage, and for maintaining the incredibly high standard that members of the fourth and fifth estates in democratic countries—and in undemocratic ones, quite frankly. Let's be fair, democracy needs effective journalism and so do totalitarian regimes. Of course, the perils and dangers faced by journalists, workers in the fourth and fifth estates, in undemocratic countries are even worse. An effective press is critical to journalism.

There seemed to be a trio of reporters at the Hamilton Spectator who—have you got their bylines, Ms Hor-

wath?—with the assistance of others, have launched this investigative series into health clubs in the Hamilton area, owned, according to the Spectator, by one John Cardillo, who, we're also told, lives on some multi-million dollar estate. Customers have been getting ripped off, scammed, fleeced. The Spectator has been talking about the fleecing of these victims of the health club and, in the course of doing so, has had occasion to say to the government of Ontario and to the Minister of Consumer and Business Services—thank you, Ms Horwath. Ms Horwath is going to be speaking to this bill in short order.

Of course, Dan Nolan is one the reporters. Dan and I go back a long way. It's true. Dan was a reporter down in Welland when I was beginning my adult working life. Steve Buist, whom I spoke with on a couple of occasions, is one very impressive young journalist who I hope is taking this down now—one very impressive, young, skilled and courageous journalist. Natalie Alcoba is one of that trio. I'm sure other journalists at the Spectator have been involved. Investigative journalism of this level has become rarer and rarer and scarcer and scarcer, even with Toronto papers. You know that, don't you, Ms Alcoba? Right?

I remember Christie Blatchford, as a matter of fact, when she started working for the Globe and Mail, and she was doing front-page investigative stuff, very leading-edge stuff. I'm a fan of Christie Blatchford. I even read her when she wrote for the Post. I tried not to buy it, but I confess that when Christie was writing for the Post, I would read the Post, because I'm a fan of Christie Blatchford.

It has become harder and harder for well-trained, bright, talented journalists to engage in investigative journalism. Because you've got the ilk of rip-off scam artists like fat Conrad "Tubby" Black stealing money hand over fist from organizations like Hollinger and laying off editorial staff, because you've got crooks, criminals, like Conrad Black, who have brought journalism and news reporting and the newspaper business to its lowest level conceivable, you've seen huge erosions in the numbers of—am I wrong? If I'm wrong, shake your head. It has become tougher and tougher. The number of editorial staff on newspapers has been reduced significantly. That means that editorial writers are hard-pressed just to keep up with the day-to-day stuff, the court reports, and what's happening in the community, as compared to doing hard-hitting investigative journalism.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Say that outside.

Mr Kormos: You want me to slander Conrad Black outside? Are you kidding? I do it at every speech I can. I do it at every opportunity I can. The guy's a crook, OK? I've said it outside; I've said it inside.

Mr McMeekin: Who's a crook?

Mr Kormos: Conrad Black and Barbara Amiel—who happens to come from down my way, from my part of the province, St Catharines. Barbara Amiel is the driver of the getaway car at least, if not—she's no Patti Hearst.

She can't argue the Stockholm Syndrome. There's a lot of Gucci and Louis Vuitton that has passed through Babs Amiel's fat little fingers, paid for by the workers and the shareholders of Hollinger. That's who gets ripped off: the workers and the shareholders.

Look, Tubby Black has stolen more money from more people than any outlaw biker gang ever has. And I'm looking forward—

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: No, think about this. Who's the guy from Nortel? John Roth?

Interjection: Roth.

Mr Kormos: I'm looking forward to John Roth and Conrad Black sharing the same cell. I'm looking forward to Babs Amiel getting to know Martha Stewart on a first-name basis. If Conrad Black happens to get jailed in Canada, in a place like Millhaven—I don't know if any of you people have ever been to Millhaven. When you're shipped in, you go through the reception area, and you've got to exchange your street clothes for your prison clothes. I'm looking forward to a trusty, like some biker with a bushy beard, big biceps and piercings all over working as a trusty, and Conrad Black is up there with John Roth from Nortel right behind him and looking at the biggest, meanest, toughest biker saying, "Hey, you're my cellmate tonight, pal." I'm looking forward to that.

1620

That would be too kind to Conrad Black, to be in but Millhaven. So Conrad Black's a crook; he's a dishonest crook; he's a lying crook.

Ms Marsales: Mr Speaker, I think we need to get back to the bill.

Mr Kormos: Be careful, Ms Marsales, because I've got the first hour and then we've got seven other New Democrats to speak to the bill. We can either wrap 'er up today or we can wrap 'er up tomorrow.

Ms Marsales: Are you threatening me?

Mr Kormos: No, I'm just cautioning. Your House leader's assistant is doing what he's got to do.

So Conrad Black's a crook, Barbara Amiel, a crook, and Nortel's John Roth, another crook. Who goes to jail? Poor people end up going to jail. You want to ban pit bulls. Why don't you ban Conrad Black and Barbara Amiel? That would be a far more productive exercise. You want to euthanize a bunch of Staffordshire terrier puppies, well, take that to the next logical conclusion.

We've got Bill 70. You've got the minister, this aarschnoddle Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations—

Ms Horwath: Überaarschnoddle.

Mr Kormos: —überaarschnoddle minister—saying, "But I can't do anything about the rip-offs." He's whining. This is Mr Bring Your Own Whine: "I can't do anything about the rip-offs until I have Bill 70." Oh, for Pete's sake, what hogwash, what rubbish, what balderdash, what bunkum, what garbage. You know what I'm getting to now, don't you?

The Acting Speaker: I don't want to know.

Mr Kormos: You don't want to know, Speaker.

What foolish talk. Has the guy not read his bill? It's his staff who were trying to market this bill to me back in April saying, "Oh, Pete, don't worry about the bill; it's only housekeeping. There's nothing really substantive in there." And now we've got Watson—

Mr McMeekin: He's trying to solve the problem.

Mr Kormos: Now we've got aarschnoddle Watson saying, "But I can't do anything about these people getting ripped off." Hundreds of them, aren't there? Hundreds. Some senior citizens too, aren't there? Senior citizens who are trying to keep fit in these health clubs, right?

You've got to understand. You know that the health club industry—I remember Vic Tanny's. Do you remember Vic Tanny's? You don't, because you're too young. Do you remember Vic Tanny's? The tip-off was this: They were selling lifetime memberships for \$1,000, but then the next week, lifetime membership is \$750. They were down to \$600, \$550; lifetime memberships, \$299. People should have known, because of course the week after that, boom, Vic Tanny's is long gone, right? It's one of the problems in that industry.

Does Bill 70 have anything in it to protect people from these kind of rip-offs? Well, I read it. Ms Horwath read it. Unfortunately, aarschnoddle minister didn't, because it's the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, passed by the Conservatives back in, I suspect, 2003—passed—but never proclaimed by this government. It's got the sections in it that deal with service providers like health clubs. What is going on here? Does Minister aarschnoddle Watson not have staff to explain to him that you can go to e-laws on your Web site? Just click "e-laws," go under C, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002. Oh, go to part IV—part I, part II—part IV and there are the tools that you need to get cracking on—what is it, Premier health club?

Ms Horwath: Premier Fitness.

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): Premier of fitness.

Mr Kormos: Premier Fitness, among others.

Does Mr Watson, the aarschnoddle minister, call upon his Premier's office or House leader—call anybody? If he had called me—look, Jim, call me. My phone number's listed. I'll tell you what you've got to do. You've got to call the secretary of cabinet or somebody in the Premier's office to proclaim the bill. Right? Don't come into the Legislature and whine while people are getting ripped off. Don't tell Ms Horwath that she's blocking Bill 70 when you haven't been able to get it called for debate. And don't try to pretend that Bill 70 has anything with your ability to protect victims of Premier Fitness rip-offs.

You know that parliamentary convention prohibits me from using language that accurately expresses what I believe Mr Watson to have been doing to the press, members of this chamber and the public.

Mr McMeekin: Give him some credit.

Mr Kormos: When people in this province elected the Liberals, they voted for change and all they've ended up getting is spare change. They've ended up with a

Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations who has little capacity to even understand the legislation coming from his own ministry, but rather who would spin—well, let me put it this way: Were the minister sitting here—and his parliamentary assistant is, so I'm not being critical of the minister for not sitting here, because it's convention that they can either have the minister here or the parliamentary assistant. I commend Ted McMeekin for carrying the ball for this minister.

But were the minister sitting here and were Diogenes to come into this room with his lamp and were Diogenes to go person by person to where the minister is, let me tell you, he'd keep on walking. Old Diogenes would keep on trucking past that minister if he happened to be in this room right now. Do you understand what I'm saying, members of the fourth estate? Remember Diogenes with the lamp? He was on a search. He was alookin' and Jim Watson wouldn't be the answer. Jim Watson wouldn't be the prize, not after the things he said about Bill 70, he wouldn't; not after the things he said about members of this Legislature, he wouldn't.

But the sad thing is, he conned—I'm sorry, that's not fair. I withdraw "conned." He persuaded his Hamilton colleagues to mouth the spin.

Again, pages, I apologize to you now, because you're too young. But these parliamentary backbenchers from Hamilton, the Liberal ones, were like Charlie McCarthy on Edgar Bergen's lap. It doesn't connect with you either, Speaker? You're not that young, Speaker; you're my age. I know it. You might even be a couple of years older. Charlie McCarthy on Edgar Bergen's lap.

You've got these four Liberal backbenchers with Edgar Bergen, aka aarschnoddle Minister Watson. They're sitting on his lap and he's in there with the hand in the back of the head and they've got to say, "Yes, Bill 70 must pass before we can protect people from rip-offs by Premier Fitness."

For Pete's sake, backbenchers, you don't get paid enough to be used that way, to be exploited that way by a minister who's too darned ineffective and lazy to get his legislation passed or to even proclaim legislation that had already been worked on by the Conservatives. Who was it, Tim Hudak, who did the Consumer Protection Act? Bill Murdoch may not be a fan of Tim Hudak, I understand that. The record is clear. Tim Hudak may not have sat down at the word processor and written that bill all by himself. I understand that even he wouldn't say that. But all you have got to do is proclaim whatever bill number it was—Consumer Protection Act, 2002.

1630

Bill 70 isn't just about the Consumer Protection Act. Bill 70 is about the Athletics Control Act—oops, nothing to do with Premier Health and Fitness Club and rip-offs of people in Hamilton. Bill 70 has to do with the Bailiffs Act—oops, nothing to do with protecting consumers from rip-offs by Premier Fitness or by Conrad Black or by Barbara Amiel or by John Roth at Nortel. Business Corporations Act—nope, oops. Business Names Act—

nope, oops. Cemeteries Act—nope, oops. Collection Agencies Act—nope, oops.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Yeah, there's a lot of oops from Mr aarschnoddle whiner Minister Watson.

Consumer Reporting Act, Corporations Act, Corporations Information Act, Land Titles Act, Licence Appeal Tribunal Act—maybe that's what the minister needed passed, the Licence Appeal Tribunal Act, or maybe the Motor Vehicle Dealers Act. Maybe Watson, aarschnoddle Minister Watson, needed the Motor Vehicle Dealers Act amended before he could go after people getting ripped off at health clubs. I don't know—Motor Vehicle Dealers Act?

Maybe he needed, Ms Marsales, the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act amended before he could catch bad people ripping off fitness club consumers, or maybe the Paperback and Periodicals Distributors Act. Yeah, that could be. That's a maybe; that's a big maybe. I got it. Watson needs the Paperback and Periodicals Distributors Act amended before he can send investigators out to protect consumers being ripped off in Hamilton.

Maybe the Travel Industry Act—no, I don't think so. Maybe the Repair and Storage Liens Act—no, I don't think so. Maybe the Theatres Act? Could be, if he's planning on making a movie about it afterwards.

This is Bill 70. It amends all this legislation: Theatres Act, Real Estate Brokers Act, Motor Vehicle Dealers Act. It amends all these bills.

Here we are: the Consumer Protection Act. But exactly what amendments are there to the Consumer Protection Act here? Are there any amendments that substantively change the impact of the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, which hasn't been proclaimed yet? Read 'em and weep, partner; read 'em and weep: not one; none.

This whole exercise has been rather silly and pathetic, all this whining, all this moaning, all this complaining. The problem isn't with anybody else in the chamber; it's with the minister himself. Victims of fraud need protection from Premier Fitness and similar scam artists in Hamilton. Who is going to protect those health club members from Premier Fitness? Well, Lord have mercy, who is going to protect us from Minister Jim Watson?

I am hard-pressed to understand why Jim Watson says he has to have Bill 70 before he can move. You know what the problem is? I'll tell you what the problem is. Again, you're not going to like this too much. Over the course of the last eight or nine years, since 1995, the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations has been gutted. It has been. Come on, be fair. You know that as well as I do. I used to spend some time over there in years gone by. There used to be whole floors of investigators and investigative teams. There used to be real people, live people answering the phone, not cardboard cut-outs, but real people answering the phone.

If you call the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, you're lucky to get through, and if you do get through, you're lucky to get a voice mail. You sure as God made little apples ain't going to get live people

answering the phone. Try it one day. Try one of these consumer hotlines. You get a fuzzy little taped message that's rather staticky—stop buying your stuff at the bargain discount barn and dollar stores; go to Radio Shack and pick up some decent telephone answering equipment. But there are no investigators. There's nobody there to do the investigation. That's the sad thing.

So you've got a minister who is a minister in name but who is, for all intents and purposes, a court eunuch because he has no capacity, no power. He has no tools. He has the law, because he has the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, but he just doesn't have the staff; nor, it appears, does he really have the will because oh, Minister Watson, a former Conservative—you know that, don't you, Conservative members? Of course you know; you're the ones who told me. Did you say, "Good riddance," to him? He becomes a Liberal when he sees the Tory star fading and the Liberal moon rising.

Mrs Munro: It's choosing change.

Mr Kormos: He chose change; yes, that's right. I call it opportunism. What do you call it where you come from? Down where I come from we call that crass opportunism.

I expect that Bill 70, because this is what we proposed to the House leader of the government after all this whining and complaining and moaning and groaning, will go to a vote tonight at five minutes to 6, give or take. Then the minister, aarschnoddle Minister Watson, is in a pickle because he goes, "Oh, no. What do I do now?" Because now he has his Bill 70. Is the sheriff going to put on his big 10-gallon hat and hike up those cowboy boots, put the big spurs on and ride into Hamilton on his old hobby horse and start taking on John Cardillo and Premier Fitness? Do you know what? No. The whole charade is going to be exposed. The old emperor has got no clothes. The emperor is buck naked. That's the problem: no clothes. It was all gab, all yack, all spin.

The worst thing that could happen to the minister today is for this bill to get third reading—it will get third reading unless something extraordinary happens—because then people like Natalie Alcoba, ace journalist, tough questioner, takes-no-prisoners newspaper person, is going to be on the phone to the Honourable Jim Watson, saying, "Well, Minister, what now?" It's going to be the old, "How now, brown cow? What are you going to do now? Are you going to deliver? You've got your Bill 70. What are you going to deliver? Let's see. Where's this posse of yours, riding into Hamilton, rounding up these bad-guy, rip-off artists?" Sorry; there ain't no posse, ain't no sheriff, no boots, no spurs, no horse, no hat, no six-guns—just the yapping, just talk.

The minister knows, because he demonstrates it every time he rises, that talk is cheap. "Oh, I can't get my bill through. That's why I can't protect consumers in Hamilton." Well, nobody stopped you from proclaiming the Consumer Protection Act, 2002. The bill has already been passed. The really hard work has already been done. Are you lazy or just incompetent? Or are you just here for a good time and not a long time, Minister? Are you

sort of just happy to be here? You know—Jim Watson: "Make me minister. Make me minister of anything, just as long as you make me minister." Well, you got the car, you got the driver, you got the bucks, you got the salary; you're a six-digit income earner here. I tell you: time to deliver. Like the guy said in the movie, "Show me the money."

1640

Well, the remarkable thing is, I bet you that the spinmeisters, that the backroom folks, that the high-priced consultants, the Liberal hacks who are on their \$1,000-a-day consulting jobs, are busy right now writing the new spin lines, the next excuse for why this minister does squat about health club rip-offs, fitness club rip-offs, private gym rip-offs of what, according to the Hamilton Spectator, is hundreds of people. It is an industry that has, from time to time, been plagued by this problem.

Far be it from me to tell Ms Alcoba what to write, and I wouldn't think of it, but it seems, from what I read in the Hamilton Spectator, it's a little like a pyramid scheme. Premier Fitness—am I right?—is constantly taking from Peter to pay Paul, dare I say it. Your property taxes not paid here. You are bringing in membership fees, you're stalling refunding people money, because you're using that money to pay property taxes or salaries and because, presumably, it is a private corporation.

Look, I've got no qualms about people making money. I'm one of those left-wingers who thinks there is nothing good enough for the working class and every worker should be paid real good, fair wages, because the more money people make, quite frankly, the more they can afford to pay taxes and keep building public things like public health care and public education.

The young pages here—before I came here, I was a lawyer. I made a lot of money then; it was the 1980s.

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): You had a Corvette?

Mr Kormos: Well, I got the Corvette after I traded in the Porsche, because I didn't want to appear ostentatious. I want you guys to make twice as much money as I ever made in my good years as a lawyer. Do you know why? Because I am one of those baby boomers, that big, huge blip in our population who are now rapidly approaching or are in middle age. We are going to need you making lots of money so you can pay taxes to keep me in a long-term-care facility when I'm 80 years old, should I live that long.

Think about it. Think about how I started this talk today. I started it by talking about SEIU members, Service Employees International Union members, who are workers at Extendicare, the private, long-term-care facility down in St Catharines, where we learned about the abuses being heaped on our folks and our grandfolks in those long-term-care facilities in the interest of the profit. I praised those workers, those health workers in long-term-care facilities for their professionalism, for their commitment, for their hard work, for their passion

to make sure those folks are treated better in long-term-care facilities.

I tried to tear a strip off this government—I think I did—because this government has broken every promise it made to seniors in this province and, as I say, however disgusting the observation is, has left folks to sit in their own waste. Our grandfolks are sitting in their own waste for hours at a time in seniors' homes because there are rigid budgets and controls on when their incontinence supplies can be changed, their adult diapers, if I may. Bathing, with this government, is restricted to two baths per week. Mr Bring Your Own Wine, the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, chooses to blame everybody but himself for this government's inaction on the consumer protection file.

Well, the crying and whining and moaning and groaning and complaining and carrying-on and feet-stomping and temper tantrums and the finger pointing and the blame-everybody-but-don't-accept-responsibility-yourself Mr Watson, minister aarschnoddle, the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, the ball is now in your court. Yes, Minister, it is. Don't hide. Don't slink away. The ball is in your court. Now what is your excuse going to be? The dog died? The donkey ate your homework? What's your excuse going to be? The whining is over.

Oh, wait, here's Mr Klees. Mr Klees says, "Yeah, that's right. He's going to blame it on a pit bull," or maybe a Staffordshire terrier or maybe a puppy that looks like a pit bull or a Staffordshire terrier.

This government has been obsessed with—look at its agenda. I keep trying to tell this government, you pass legislation by calling it, debating it and then putting it to a vote. That's how legislation passes. Any kid in grade 5 civics—and all of you go to those grade 5 classes, right? You talk to young people in grade 5, and we talk to grade 10 as well. You know this. You know it. You're darned right you know it. The young page over here—come here for a minute, please. Evan knows it. Thank you, Evan. Would you take that back to Ms Horwath, please? Thank you. Evan the page knows it. He has done grade 5 civics. He knows that you pass legislation by calling the bill for first reading, no debate on first reading—first reading's a freebie—call it for second reading, debate it and, when the debate's over, you vote on it. If you've got a majority government—by the way, guys, you've got a majority government. It wasn't my choice, it wasn't my druthers, but you got it.

A majority government means there's nothing opposition can do to stop you. It's like you're driving one of those great big asphalt-eating machines that goes down the QEW and just churns up—have you ever seen those? It peels off the surface layer. It's like the Queen Mary, the transatlantic cruiser. It's huge. That thing could bulldoze over anything. But I've got to tell you, your organizational skills are lacking. Maybe some of those self-help books would be instructive. It would be like, How to Get a Bill Passed. Maybe the Dummies series can write a book for the government: Passing Bills for Dummies,

Calling Legislation to be Debated for Dummies. You've got to call the bills to get them passed.

You can't have first reading of Bill 70 in April and then not call it again until November and say, "Why didn't the bill pass?" I sent a page down to the library to get me the history of the bill in the House. "Have the library print out this page for me." Did you go down there for me? Yeah, you went there for me. No, no, I don't need you now. You went there for me. I appreciate it.

The page brought back the history of the bill. First reading, voted on April 29—catch this, Ms Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East, a brilliant legislator, a wonderful addition to this NDP team here at Queen's Park: It was called for first reading and voted upon April 29; second reading isn't called until November 2 of the same year. Now, let's go through this: April, May, June, July, August, September—five months—October. You waited over six months. You sat on the bill. It was gathering dust. It was lingering in some damp, dank, dark storage room.

I've got to say to you, Minister, if you don't have clout with your House leader, I can't help you, because, quite frankly, your House leader is no fan of mine. We just don't get along that well. I'm not sure I have very much clout with your House leader, although I did get him to call the bill today, finally, for third reading, because, quite frankly, we would very dearly love to see you hoisted on your own petard, Mr Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, Mr aarschnoddle minister. That phrase—there's no exact translation, but it's to distinguish oneself amongst a group.

And here you are. I've got a feeling the bill is going to pass. If the bill doesn't pass tonight when it goes to a vote, it's going to be a mockery. A majority government—whoops, what is going on here?

Mr McMeekin: I'll bet it's going to pass.

Mr Kormos: McMeekin's a betting man. He's going to bet it's going to pass. I'm not going to take that bet because I don't want to give you my money today. I don't have any, Mr McMeekin. The problem is, though, when the bill passes, what's the minister's excuse going to be then? Jeez, what's the problem going to be, what's the hurdle going to be, what's the brick wall going to be?

1650

Thank God we have the Hamilton police. Thank God we have the cops down there—right, Ms Horwath?—doing criminal investigations. Because if those folks getting ripped off had to depend upon this government, they'd be waiting till the cows came home. It would be an awful cold day in hell before any of them get their money back. You can bet your boots on that.

So at 6 o'clock tonight, what's the excuse going to be? The problem is, this gang—one of the Tories referred to them as the gang that couldn't shoot straight. I talked about them yesterday as the group that couldn't organize a drunk-up in a brewery on a good day. That's how disorganized they are. They just simply can't get their act together, notwithstanding they have their hand in the

provincial revenues cookie jar up to the armpit. You understand that; right? They have unlimited access to money, spending money hand over fist on glossy brochures that they distribute, promoting themselves in a very partisan way, notwithstanding what they promised during the election. But they won't staff up the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, no sir, no ma'am, no way.

The next question to ask the minister is, how many investigators do you have working there and what's the difference between the investigators there in the year 2004 and in the year 1994, 10 years ago? That would be a most revealing question. Make sure you get told the truth, though. You wouldn't want a member of the press to be misled. That means fact checking. With these guys, you have to fact check, fact check, fact check. With these Liberals, it's all about fact checking. If you don't fact check, you're going to be done like dinner.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Horwath: It's interesting that I'm the only one who has any comments on the speech of my friend and colleague from Niagara Centre, Peter Kormos. People will know that Mr Kormos is very well-read and very well informed with regard to the history of the bill and what it contains and what it doesn't contain. He spent his leadoff hour quite appropriately outlining not only what the bill has in it, but also what it doesn't have in it. Quite frankly, that's what the Liberals promised it had in it and, in fact, it doesn't. He was going through the bill again and reaffirming that in fact it doesn't have in it any of the things the minister claimed it does. That's a very disturbing thing.

I look forward to taking the opportunity in my 20-minute speech tonight to outline some of the concerns that I have in regard to what this bill lacks.

I have to tell you, as a big omnibus housekeeping bill, it does a few things here and a few things there. It's not an offensive bill. It's a so-so bill. I think the member for Niagara Centre actually indicated quite clearly the number of acts this bill does a few little, minor changes to, and that was the point of the bill. As far as it goes, is it a horrendous bill? No. Is it a bill that we have to rail against? No. But does it do the things the minister so opportunistically pretended it did at the time when this story broke in the Hamilton Spectator by these excellent reporters and through the research and the charges that were being investigated by our local Hamilton police officers? No, it doesn't do those things either.

I'm very pleased to take the opportunity to thank the critic for our party in this area, and I look forward to my 20-minute speech on the issue.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): This is like the NDP unplugged today. I wanted to make sure I got this straight.

I want to just put a couple of things on the record. First, our critic, Mr Kormos, has raised a number of points of interest on this particular bill. Is this bill fairly difficult to support? No. I think there are a number of

things in here that are OK. I want to echo the comments made by the member for Hamilton Centre—

Ms Horwath: East.

Mr Bisson: I always get the easts and the wests and the centres mixed up—and that is, the really unfortunate comments made by the minister vis-à-vis our member here in regard to this bill. He tried to make it look as if this bill was being held up and that somehow or other the member for Hamilton East was going to do something that was going to be negative toward a particular issue. As it turns out, that issue wasn't even contained in this bill. I say, Lord, a minister should at least know what bill he is talking to when it comes to making those kinds of accusations.

I just want to say: interesting. I know the member from Hamilton East appreciated the attention the minister got for her vis-à-vis this particular issue in her home constituency. In fact, there were a number of pretty good articles, as I remember, reading the Hamilton Spectator and others, who saw through that and said, "Listen, the minister was blowing a bit of smoke and didn't need to be doing what he was doing." I wanted to say that.

The other thing is that this particular bill doesn't amend something that I think needs to be amended, and that is a number of issues that we need to deal with when it comes to the building code that I know are issues that have been raised in this House before. It's rather unfortunate—

Mr Kormos: Does it have anything to do with fitness club frauds?

Mr Bisson: We can go into that later. But there are a number of opportunities we get like this where a government brings in a bill that makes various changes to legislation. It's sort of an omnibus bill. I would just hope, when we do, that the government involves the critics a bit more so that we're able to look at some of the other things that we could contain within the bill itself.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Niagara Centre in response.

Mr Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. First, to the deputy government House leader, Mr Caplan, who heckled both Ms Horwath and my colleague Mr Bisson, I just say this: Look, you've got it wrong. You're the heckler. You're supposed to be making them look stupid. Please, be more measured in how you approach that. The job of a heckler is to make the people being heckled look stupid, not the contrary.

Thank goodness Andrea Horwath raised this matter in the House. She's the one who brought it to the Legislature, the concerns around fitness club rip-offs down in Hamilton and the Hamilton area. She's the one who was at the head of the pack. She's the one who was calling upon the minister to get off his aarschnoddled duff and get this thing rolling. She's the one who was persistent in raising it. She's the one who has been rattling the cage. She's the one who had the courage to take on Premier and Cardillo and their scams.

I say that folks in Hamilton can rest assured that Andrea Horwath, the member from Hamilton East, is

going to keep doing that. As far as I'm concerned, she'll be doing it for a long time. I'll be, I trust, an old man watching this on the legislative channel down in Welland when Andrea Horwath is still here taking on the bad guys, making our province more than a little bit safer, making things more than a little bit more just, making things more than a little better and more than a little more prosperous for hard-working folks, for parents and their kids.

New Democrats are proud of our record on exposing this government's shortcomings, this government's broken promises, this government's inability to manage any agenda, never mind its own, and this government's abandonment of the hard-working people, the women and men of the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Hamilton East.

Ms Horwath: It's my pleasure to rise and debate Bill 70 tonight. The most important thing that everyone, I think, around here would agree—in fact, I'm sure would agree—is the fact that everybody in this chamber right now wants to do the right thing by consumers. That's the bottom line. When we look at what we need to be attacking, we need to be attacking those businesses, those industries, those shady providers of service that are fraudulent in their activities. They're the ones that have been treating consumers and members of our communities unfairly. Everybody would agree that consumers in the province of Ontario deserve a fair shake, good value for money, respect from providers of service and respect from the businesses that they support.

Today we're debating this Liberal bill. It's a bill that purports to tighten up consumer protection. Unfortunately, it misses the mark wholeheartedly; it misses the mark completely. It's an OK bill, as I mentioned before in my questions and comments opportunity, when I was speaking to the excellent comments by Mr Kormos, the member for Niagara Centre. But the problem is, it's not a great bill. It is an OK bill but not a great bill. There are some things that it's going to do, but there are a heck of a lot of things that it's not going to do. Quite frankly, it's the things that it's not going to do that concern me; it's the things it's not going to do that were claimed by the minister it was going to do that are really a big concern.

1700

First of all you will know, after having looked at this bill for some time now, that it is massive bill; in fact, it's something we call an omnibus bill, similar to the Conservatives' bill, or many bills that the Conservatives brought forward in their time in government, that the Liberals constantly railed against. They constantly opposed the presentation of omnibus bills by the Conservatives in eight years in opposition. Back then, Liberals actually believed in debating bills and improving them through debate. Liberals did.

It's funny how things change when you're the government. I went back in the records and tried to look at some of the quotations that various members of the current government brought forward when they were in the

opposition benches. Here is one: "This is a very comprehensive bill. It's been alluded to a couple of times tonight that there's little question that we should support it. Certainly to the extent that it goes to protect consumers, I'm quite ready, willing and able to do that. What I do want, though, is for us to have the opportunity to debate the bill, to point out some of the shortfalls that may be in the bill and to discuss those issues that may not be in the bill that we feel should be. Our support of the bill will of course be dependent on the democratic process that is left in this Legislature." That was a quote by Bruce Crozier, Liberal MPP.

Here is a second one: "I think it is an important piece of legislation that deserves a lot of scrutiny. I'm glad we have an opportunity to raise some issues in regard to"—the bill in particular at that time was Bill 180. "Maybe the government will be able to make a better bill by our comments." Again, laudable suggestions, a laudable perspective of the then opposition Liberals. That was Mike Colle, Liberal MPP.

As is characteristic of the Liberals, as we've seen time and time again, their position has changed now that they're in government. Now they castigate us, as the opposition, for trying to debate the bills that they're bringing forward. Where they were defending the right to do so when they were in opposition, somehow we don't have the same right to do that when we are in opposition. Interesting. It's hard to say what's most striking: the dramatic changes in their positions or the dramatic number of broken promises they have had.

Now that they are the government, they want to rush through legislation and they want to pass this omnibus bill without our having the opportunity to debate it. If the minister is in such a hurry to have the omnibus legislation approved—and as I said, this bill is a so-so bill at best—maybe what he should do—maybe he is there now. He could be doing that now, and it would be a great thing if that's what he is doing right now. He could be in his office, signing off on the Consumer Protection Act, 2002. That's what he should be doing. In essence, it's the same bill. The only difference is that the earlier bill was queued up and ready to be proclaimed into law. It was ready to go. All that was required, all that is currently required, was the signature of two cabinet ministers. But this minister instead chose to delay. He chose to delay, he chose to grandstand, he chose to hold off improving consumer protection in Ontario for a full 14 months and played partisan politics instead. He has let a virtually identical bill sit in limbo since October 2003. Shame on the minister for that.

If the matter is so urgent to the minister all of the sudden, why didn't he do anything sooner? Why wasn't this done a year ago? He has done nothing but blame others for his failure to move quickly on this bill. He made people wait for consumer protection, and that's not even as good as the law that's sitting in his office right now. He actually has a bill here that makes some minor changes to numerous bills. But the bottom line is that it could have been done very quickly; it could have been

done some time ago; it could have been done, in fact, immediately after taking government back in 2003. We have waited all this time. When you look at Bill 70 and read through it, when you look at the section that deals with the Consumer Protection Statute Law Amendment Act, 2002, you'll see that in fact this bill was waited for for nothing. We waited about 14 months for nothing in terms of consumer protection changes. One of the things that is very frustrating is that when it comes to the protection of consumers, I don't think we should be settling for second-best; I don't think we should be settling for waiting around for the minister to find something he can get busy with, as opposed to doing the right thing.

They wanted us to wait; we've waited. And the bottom line is, the bill does nothing but minor housekeeping changes. They'll spin it any way they want, but everybody who has the opportunity can go on-line and find it themselves once it becomes legislation. You'll see very clearly that there's very little that this bill actually does.

It's not the time for these kinds of half measures right now in Ontario. As you can see from the problems we've been having in Hamilton with Premier Fitness Club particularly and its record of consumer rip-offs, the bottom line is that right now is when we need a fulsome set of consumer protection initiatives, and they're not here. Consumers deserve the best and the strongest protection and the bottom line is, the Liberals have chosen to ignore the improvements that need to be made in this bill in favour of their own watered-down version of things.

The problem I see is this: The minister did nothing to move that bill along. He put this bill forward instead of just signing off on the one that was sitting there. We've been dealing with this omnibus piece of legislation. It was sitting on a back burner because there are so many bills there that it hasn't received the priority of the government. But finally, thanks to the help of the Hamilton Spectator—and I have to say that I think Mr Kormos mentioned three reporters in his debate earlier today, but in fact the initial story had the byline of five reporters. I know that some of them were doing a lot of research in the background on this story—certainly Natalie Alcoba, who's here with us tonight; Steve Arnold as well; Steve Buist, who was also mentioned by Mr Kormos; Tara Perkins; Joan Walters; and, of course, Dan Nolan, who was also mentioned. These are all of the reporters on the Spectator staff who have been working on this story.

One of the things that's really of concern is that people need to know that Bill 70 really doesn't do anything in terms of improving their rights and their powers when it comes to consumer protection. It doesn't do a darn thing. So even though there's all this bluster and all this complaining—and I think my friend called the minister the bring-your-own-whine minister because of all the complaining and whining that has been going on in the last little while in regard to this issue. When you look at it, it's all for naught because there's really nothing in here that makes one iota of change to protect consumers.

Quite frankly, it's really just a bill about housekeeping. It's minor wording changes. I can actually open the bill and read the sections that are appropriate, if you think that would be helpful; I really don't, because that legislative language is actually a little bit tough to get through and it chews up time, so there's really no point in doing that.

But the bottom line is, housekeeping is one thing; real consumer protection is another. But you know what? I'm not saying that housekeeping isn't important because, to some extent, everybody knows that housekeeping is important. So it's not a matter of whether this particular bill, as it sits, is a good bill or a bad bill; the issue is that the minister inappropriately called this bill a new consumer protection bill, and that is not what it is. This bill has been put out there as the panacea, as the answer, as the response, to the great work that was done in my community by my police force and by my local newspaper. As a response to that, it has been held up as the big answer, as the big solution to this very frustrating and, quite frankly, ongoing problem.

The reason the Conservatives brought the bill forward back in 2002 was because this problem has been going on for over a decade in Ontario. The Conservative government got it on their agenda, they drafted the legislation, it went through all of the process that goes on in this particular place, and where does it sit? It sits on a shelf somewhere because somebody didn't bother to pull it off, dust it off and sign on the bottom line to get it enacted. Quite frankly, that's unacceptable.

There are far more important consumer issues that need to be addressed by the ministry. The action is far overdue. We all know that not only Premier Fitness but a number of other unscrupulous companies exist. They're abusing pre-authorized chequing, they're abusing pre-authorized payment plans, they're raiding customers' credit cards. It's all here. I've got all of the clippings from the Hamilton Spectator articles, and you can read through them. A little bit later on, I'm going to give you some of the examples of what real people have been dealing with on this issue in community after community across this province.

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The problem is that Bill 70 doesn't curtail chronic offenders, fly-by-night businesses and corporate con artists; it just doesn't do it. It doesn't make that scenario any different for the vulnerable consumer, the vulnerable person looking to get involved with a fitness club or other types of businesses. There's no effective escape clauses from bad contracts and bogus claims. They're just not in there; they aren't. It doesn't protect airline ticket buyers if an airline goes out of business, which is one of the other claims that the minister has made. The bottom line is that what the consumers of Ontario really deserve is the very best we can offer in terms of consumer protection.

Again, in Hamilton, thanks to the diligent reporting of the Hamilton Spectator, one particular unscrupulous fitness club is being exposed. I suspect many others are

watching their Ps and Qs to make sure that they're not going to be the next ones that are in the public limelight in regard to these unscrupulous practices. In that five-part series, as you know, there was revelation of extremely despicable tactics that were employed by Premier Fitness, problems that were extremely serious, inappropriate and fraudulent were taking place, and they were exposed by that investigation and by those reporters.

Imagine if that happened to you: if you opened your credit card statement and found that there were monthly deductions coming off when you had cancelled your subscription to the club; and, further to that, when you called the bank, the bank didn't bother to let you know that all of a sudden these new charges started appearing again, or in fact the charges had changed. There were people who were getting charges at a certain amount, and then without authorization, without any kind of notification, all of a sudden different amounts were being taken out. In fact, the one article shows an actual statement and circles the areas where people were getting inappropriate amounts taken out of their accounts. That's just unacceptable. It's really also unacceptable that Bill 70 itself doesn't provide an opportunity to put really high-impact fines on these corporate scoundrels. It's not in there, and it needs to be in there.

The bottom line is that I've taken the opportunity to give you a few examples of who these people are. It takes a lot of effort, a lot of courage to come out publicly and to have your particular story in the newspaper. Reporters will tell you—and I've talked to many of them who are my friends—they'll say, "We often really do like to get a human face on some of these stories, so if you can find somebody that we could talk to, we'd really appreciate doing that." Oftentimes it's difficult to do because in scams like this people feel a little bit embarrassed. They have nothing to be embarrassed about. It's not their fault that they're getting—I can't say that word—unscrupulous deliverers of service causing them to have financial difficulties with their bank statements and credit cards. They're being stolen from, they're being robbed blind by these unscrupulous providers of service. It's not the individual consumer's fault, but they do feel a little bit averse to having their stories out in a newspaper.

But I've got to tell you, I've got to give it to people like Vicky McFarlane. Vicky McFarlane couldn't figure out who the heck was taking money out of her bank account—\$35.31 was appearing on her bank statements month after month after month. It was later found out, after she went to small claims court in Hamilton and won, that Premier Fitness was supposed to be cancelling those withdrawals. In fact, the fitness club had to pay her back the sum of \$282.48. It took over a year, and small claims court, and she wasn't alone. There are all kinds of examples of people in different scenarios. Vicky McFarlane was in fact from Cayuga.

There's a woman, Anna Hocevar. Anna now refuses to even have a credit card. She was so frustrated by her inability to solve the mystery, to solve the problem, and to get the credit card company to stop taking the deduc-

tions off. Again, small claims court is what solved that problem after a significant amount of time. The bottom line is, Premier Fitness had to pay \$1,096.17 in November 2001. Three years later, she still hasn't received her money, even though the judge found in her favour and she was supposed to be paid over a thousand dollars, almost \$1,100.

That is a frustrating thing for people. It's an extremely frustrating thing for people. And a lot of people just can't afford that kind of money. They can't afford to have that kind of money missing from their accounts, charged to their credit cards.

But the bottom line is, notwithstanding all these things, it is really regrettable that Bill 70 doesn't address, in any major way, in any substantive way, these problems and concerns.

I could go on and I could talk to you about the number of other people: Mary Wilkinson, Dianne Moore, Len Dezoete, Carol DaSilva, Jason Chagnon. All of these people have been unscrupulously dealt with by these fly-by-night—not even fly-by-night, by these leeches of companies that think they can just get away with whatever they want and not have any repercussions whatsoever.

The difficulty is that Bill 70—again, not a horrible bill, but it doesn't do what it purports to do in regard to consumer protection, and that has certainly been the big frustration from my perspective. When I first learned about these issues and started doing some of my own research and investigation into what was happening, I tried to figure out why these things can go unattended, only to discover that a bill has been sitting on the shelf, that legislation has been sitting on the shelf gathering dust since 2002. It could have been passed over a year ago. It hasn't been passed yet and is still sitting there. It's a pretty frustrating thing.

For weeks, I have been calling on the minister to start posting those names on Web sites, get those names up there, let wary consumers have a place where they can go to see who these unscrupulous companies are, to see where charges and convictions have taken place so that they can at least beware. You know, like, *caveat emptor*, *buyer beware*. Well, there is a role that the minister could have been playing to make those people have the opportunity to be aware of what was happening in the marketplace. But no, that hasn't happened either.

So not only is the legislation not off the shelf, not signed off, the Web site is not up. Between 1999 and 2003, the ministry received 700 complaints about Premier Fitness alone; another 1,200 complained about health clubs in 2003, an increase of 50%.

There was no shortage of examples in the *Spectator*. I have named maybe half a dozen or so. Others who didn't tell their stories number in the thousands.

The real bottom line here is that this legislation will likely pass because it's, as I said, a so-so piece of omnibus legislation. It amends, with minor language changes and a few changes in regulatory abilities, I don't know, a dozen or so different provincial acts.

But the unfortunate thing—in fact, the unacceptable thing—is that it doesn't do what the minister has been claiming for weeks that it's going to do. Quite frankly, it doesn't do anything to protect the consumers of Ontario. It doesn't do anything to close down those unscrupulous, bad-apple corporations that have been ripping people off left, right and centre across the province for decades.

Mr Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to raise this sham. I appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for questions and comments.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Isn't anybody else speaking to this important bill before us today? What's the matter with everybody? That's why we're here: to debate.

Hon Mr Caplan: Your House leader asked us not to, so we agreed not to.

Ms Churley: Oh, OK. They've reached an agreement here.

Hon Mr Caplan: There is an agreement.

Ms Churley: All right. Well, let me put my two cents' worth in here. I will be speaking to the bill in a few minutes.

I want to congratulate the member for Hamilton East for her work and thank her for her work on this issue. She certainly knows far more about it than I do.

I am the former consumer and commercial relations minister—that's what it was called then—from the days when we were in government. We did bring in a lot of very important legislation when we were in government, and I recall that these kinds of consumer issues often get left behind in any government's legislative agenda. So I'm very pleased whenever a minister from any government brings forward legislation that improves things for the consumer.

As the member for Hamilton East pointed out, there were some false claims about what this bill would actually do. When the member for Hamilton East raised the issue around the Premier Fitness club and the people who were being ripped off in her community, the claim from the Liberals was, "Well, if you hurry up and pass this bill, it'll solve all the problems." First of all, we weren't holding the bill up. We can't. There are only eight of us here. There's only so long we want if we think it's an important bill to talk about, and I think talking about consumer protection is extremely important, particularly what happened and the false information that was put out in Hamilton around the member for Hamilton East's question, that this bill in fact is not going to do anything about this situation—false information.

I want to congratulate her, and I want to congratulate the Hamilton Spectator for the fine, fine series they did on consumer problems, not only in Hamilton, but I would say they are reflected right across Ontario.

1720

Mr Bisson: I know that my good friend Marilyn Churley for Toronto-Danforth will be up next, and she has a number of things to say about this as a former minister of consumer and corporate relations, or, as we

used to call her, the elevator lady. There used to be a time that the ministers of consumer and corporate relations had their names in elevators in any community across the province. For some reason we don't do that any more, which we'll talk about some other time. I just—

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: I thought it was pretty good, I've got to admit. It comes with practice. Not a problem.

The other thing—and I'm going to get a bit of time later and I'm going to talk about this more at length—is the whole debacle in regard to the Electrical Safety Authority. I know the director. I've had these chats with her before and I know she's trying to do a fine job. But the reality is that prior to the government's privatizing electrical inspection, if you were an electrician and wanted to get a permit for inspection, you called Ontario Hydro, got your electrical permit, Ontario Hydro would send the inspector to inspect the job, and once the job was completed and the final inspection was given, you were given a signoff on the permit and away you went; that was the end of that. Rates were pretty reasonable. Ontario Hydro had good inspectors. They were available in most communities, at least with the Ontario Hydro side, and with the local PUCs on the other side.

The former Tory government privatized it. They created the ESA, the Electrical Safety Authority. Now you pay rates that are far in excess of what you ever paid before. And try to get a Hydro inspector if you're somewhere on Highway 11 and you need to get a job done. For example, a person I was talking to in Opasatika had an electrical problem. Basically, the electrical service had to be changed: 40 below outside and the furnace—nothing would work. What happened was that they couldn't get an inspector because the inspector had to be dispatched out of North Bay and they had to wait three days without electricity. Talk about a sad state of affairs.

Mr Kormos: It's sad, it's regrettable, that the rules permit Ms Horwath only 20 minutes. You see, this is the whole point. The rules are very rigid about how long you can speak to any given piece of legislation, and that's it. The lead-off gets an hour and then it's 20 minutes, 20 minutes, and eventually down to 10. So for anybody, for the whiny minister to somehow talk about Ms Horwath blocking it—what, with a 20-minute speech? I know that with her thorough familiarity with the issue, Ms Horwath could have kept going. But 20 minutes is the maximum, end of story. Like the guy on the cooking channel says, "It ain't rocket science." You do the math. Eight New Democrats can't block a majority government's bills.

What does slow down the progress of bills with a majority government is their own incompetence, their own lack of organizational skills, their own infighting. What you've got is ministers competing with each other to get their bills passed because ministers consider them a feather in their cap. So you've got ministers piling all over each other. It's like a football scrum. You've got ministers climbing all over each other's backs. They've got footprints on their backs to prove it, getting ahead of each other to get their bills presented.

I suppose I should say I'm sorry that the minister of consumer and commercial relations, Mr Watson, lost the fight in cabinet to get his bills advanced. His bill was introduced for first reading on April 29, and then the government never called it until November 2. That's five or six months. That shows the level of priority the government had for the bill. New Democrats don't control that; it's the government that controls the passage of bills. Why don't they come clean and be straight about that?

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Hamilton East in response.

Ms Horwath: I appreciate the comments from my colleagues Marilyn Churley from Toronto-Danforth and Peter Kormos from Niagara Centre.

It's quite interesting, as someone relatively new to this chamber, to watch how these various efforts take place. The bottom line is, what doesn't need to be watched is legislation sitting on a shelf, gathering dust for the reasons of political opportunism. That's what happened to the Consumer Protection Act, 2002. It's still sitting there, waiting for signatures. It could be enacted at any time. It's very disconcerting and difficult when everybody in this chamber knows that it's sitting there, when everyone knows that this legislation that's been held out as somehow a panacea for consumer protection contains nothing that's going to make a difference, while the real deal is sitting on a shelf somewhere, gathering dust. It's not something the minister should be proud of. It's not something that is doing any good for the consumers of Ontario when the protection they need is sitting on a shelf, gathering dust. It can be enacted. It should have been enacted. Because the Hamilton Spectator in my community decided to do an investigative report, a five-part series on a particular fitness club, all of a sudden the steam is on for a bill that does nothing.

The subterfuge begins, and the consumers are left out in the cold are; the very people whose lives and whose stories are being told in the pages of the Spectator are left out without consumer protection. It's unacceptable, it's inappropriate and we really need to get on with the business of protecting consumers in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Toronto-Danforth.

Ms Churley: I'm glad I have an opportunity to talk to this bill today. As I mentioned in my little two-minute statement a few minutes ago, I'm a former Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations. That's what it was called then. The ministry is a mere ghost now compared to what it used to be when I was the minister. It's a shell. It hardly can do the work that's still within its mandate. That is the stuff that was still left, that wasn't privatized, gotten rid of or downloaded by the previous Tory government, with so many staff laid off.

That's one of the issues here. I'll get into the more substantive parts of the bill in a minute. But one of the issues—and I keep raising this time and time again within the environmental area—is that you can bring in good laws, you can bring in perfect laws, but they aren't

worth the paper they're written on if you do not have the front-line staff to enforce those new laws. That is one of the critical problems we have before us, that the ministry is not staffed adequately to do what it's already mandated to do.

Coming back to this bill before us today, it's been raised, and it's very important to have this raised to try to understand what in heaven's name is going on here. There was all this confusion for a while when my colleague and friend from Hamilton East raised a very serious issue to the consumer minister in this House about people being ripped off at the Premier Fitness club in her riding. Then all the Liberal members were getting up in the House in answer to most of our questions, and were out and about in Hamilton everywhere, trying to blame Andrea Horwath and our caucus for holding up a piece of legislation. Talk about laying blame—just ridiculous. What's a word I can use? "Disingenuous" will do. I have other words in mind, but I think we're allowed to use "disingenuous" in this House.

Interjection.

Ms Churley: Yes, because I haven't said the words, and "disingenuous" is parliamentary. But everybody knows what I mean by that.

Hon Mr Caplan: What do you mean by that?

Ms Churley: Do you really want me to say what I mean by that?

The Acting Speaker: Mr Caplan, will you take your seat now? I want the debate to continue.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Mr Caplan is taking his seat so we can continue the debate. Do you want to continue, please.

1730

Ms Churley: OK. Sit down. There, he's sitting down now.

Anyway, I don't need to use the L word or any of those words. Everybody knows what I mean by being disingenuous. The reality is that this bill was introduced before the House on April 29, and then it just sat there after first reading and wasn't brought back into the House until November 2. Then the government came forward and said, "We want to snap our fingers and have the opposition say, 'OK, we're just going to pass it, we don't need debate,'" and then they used the situation in Hamilton to try to lay the blame on the New Democrats in particular for not allowing a piece of legislation to go through that would not have done a thing for that particular situation in Hamilton anyway.

Interjection: It's not true.

Ms Churley: It is true. That's why we were so angry and so upset over here, because on both counts it was disingenuous. First of all, we weren't holding up anything. They were holding up their own bill. Second of all, even if we had said, "OK, sure. We don't need to debate this. We trust you. We're just going to let it go through," it turns out it wouldn't have done a darn thing anyway. Talk about not being fair. That was really an unfair situation to put the member for Hamilton East in. I think

she rallied and made it perfectly clear in a hurry—she’s pretty good, we’re all discovering here. You may try to put one over on her but she demonstrated that it’s not going to work. It’s very clear this act would do nothing if passed. In fact, this is, compared to what we really need, pretty piddly stuff.

I have to confess here, as the former minister, that I worked on the Consumer Protection Act. Peter Kormos, I believe, was working on it when he was minister, and I’m sure ministers before that and then ministers after that. I’m going to hand it to the Tories here. I don’t do this very much, so you’d better listen up over there. I’m going to compliment you. The Conservatives actually carried through with a new Consumer Protection Act.

Mr Chudleigh: What a great government that was.

Ms Churley: It was a great day. We were able to get up and say, “Hey, we agree with something from the Tories.” I did slam them, Mr Speaker, you were there, for not putting the money into it because, as I just said, if you cut a ministry the way the Tories—it didn’t last long, did it; I’m getting negative—cut that ministry, the act would have been pretty difficult to enforce because the resources weren’t there.

But nonetheless, they actually got a new Consumer Protection Act passed. It’s ready to be proclaimed, yet the new Liberal government—I actually don’t understand what’s going on here. The Consumer Protection Act, which I worked on and many of us worked on, and they built on the work that had been done, and actually to their credit completed it, and as you know, the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, whatever it’s called now, is a pretty complex ministry.

When I was minister, I think we had about 58 different statutes that we were in charge of, all the way from this kind of consumer protection to funerals and cemeteries to certain components of nuclear power, elevators, real estate. We even had an obscure one called the bread act. Do you remember the bread act? It was still on the books. I don’t know if it’s—

Mr Kormos: What about the tag on the upholstery?

Ms Churley: And the tag on the upholstery; there was that too; do not remove those tags for fear of going to jail forever kind of thing.

There was actually one on the books that said—

Interjection.

Ms Churley: Yes, one of those. Jim Bradley, who was then a critic in the Liberal Party, used to always threaten that he was going to ask me a question on whether or not I was going to get rid of this bread act. It was a statute that was brought in, I believe, in maybe the 1930s, 1940s, whenever. There was an actual law, if I remember correctly, about the length of a loaf of bread that could legally be sold to people. It must have come from bakeries. I assume at one time they would try to bake the bread a little bit smaller and rip off consumers. That’s exactly why this act was brought into being, so people were not getting ripped off on the size of the bread they bought.

Anyway, the Tories did come through with the act, and it’s sitting there. It would do so much more than

these piddly little amendments to the act are doing. Why do that? You’re bringing in a bill that is not going to address most of the concerns raised by my colleague from Hamilton East about the fitness clubs and people being ripped off there. It’s not going to do a darn thing for them. Why don’t you go back to the drawing board and take it out, blow the dust off or wipe the dust off and proclaim it? We would support it. If you put the resources in, it would actually be able to do something about the situation in Hamilton and some of those other situations that the Spectator did a spectacular five-part investigative series on.

We need to see this more often. As I said earlier, consumers are being ripped off in so many areas and are often the forgotten victims. If they can’t afford to go to Small Claims Court, which most people can’t, to be honest, they end up not getting any satisfaction whatsoever.

I just thought of this. I wish I had it with me. I’ve got to tell a brief little story. This is not exactly a consumer rip-off, but it’s the 407. Mike Colle was on the Goldhawk show last night. I got home from my meeting and I switched on, and there he was. There were people calling in. This is a good story, actually.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): Marilyn, tell your story.

Ms Churley: I will. There were people calling in with their horror stories of how they had been ripped off by the 407. I felt like calling in but I thought, no. I wasn’t exactly ripped off.

I wish I had it here, but I’ll tell you the story. I got a bill from 407 and I was a little late paying it. It was \$6.75 or something; it wasn’t for very much. I was a little late paying. I finally sent a cheque in. I sent the cheque to cover the total amount, the \$6.75. A couple of weeks later, I get a letter in the mail from 407. I’m thinking, “What’s this?” I open it up and it tells me that I still owe 11 cents. How much would a stamp on that envelope cost? I don’t know, 40 cents in bulk or whatever. So I think, “I will pay them their 11 cents or they will send it to collection agency.” No doubt—for 11 cents. But I thought, “I’m not writing a check for 11 cents.” So I went to my purse. I didn’t have any pennies, so I Scotch Taped a nickel and a dime on to the bill and sent it to them. I felt relieved. “It’s over. I will not hear from them again.”

A couple of weeks later, there’s another letter from the 407. I think, “Oh, what’s this?” I open it up and there’s a very polite little letter with a lot of paper telling me that I had a credit of three cents. They did. They spent all that money, first, to tell me I owed 11 cents. I sent them 15 cents. They sent me a letter telling me I had a credit of three cents. I might have got my numbers—

Interjection: It should have been four cents.

Ms Churley: Four cents. So there you go.

Interjection.

Ms Churley: No, instead of 11 cents, I must have sent them 12 cents, because I remember the three cents. It stuck in my mind.

Talk about efficiency. That's the private sector for you that we hear so much about. That's not a knock on all of the private sector, but that's a good example that I will be bringing up time and time again when people talk about the efficiency of the private sector compared to government.

That was a little bit off, although it is relevant to talk about the 407 vis-à-vis this bill and vis-à-vis consumer protection. The horror stories that are out there. People are being sent off to collection agencies and, in many cases, they don't owe anything. They can't get off, and it's affecting their credit rating.

This is a bill that's not going to deal—you remember that, Mr Cordiano? Weren't you the minister there once, of consumer and commercial relations?

Interjection.

Ms Churley: No, you never were. I thought you were, for some reason. You were my critic for a while.

1740

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I was probably your critic on many occasions.

Ms Churley: On many occasions, yes, that's true. I know that you and I used to talk about it, so I think you were the consumer critic for a while. You know, from being the critic for this ministry, the incredible number of consumer problems there are and the rip-offs that go on out there that need urgent attention, so, why? I understand there is an agreement, but I would love somebody to stand up from the government side and tell me why they are not proclaiming the Consumer Protection Act that was brought forward under the Tories. Why, when it would resolve this problem?

I also think, to be honest, that the minister owes an apology, if he hasn't already, to the member for Hamilton East, because I actually think what he did to her was pretty dirty. I think it was pretty down and dirty to be that disingenuous and give the impression that that member was holding up a bill that would have prevented the very problem she was talking about, when it wasn't true. Maybe, the first time he said it—I'm going to give him this—he thought that. Maybe he thought that should the bill be passed, it would have corrected the problem. But he must have very quickly found out afterwards that that wasn't the case, and he should have apologized at that point, not continued to go out there along with some of the Hamilton members, as I understand it, and whip this up and continue that myth—again, I'm choosing my words carefully—that Ms Horwath actually was holding up a bill that would resolve the very problem she was trying to fix.

That is really not fair politics. This is a very partisan place and sometimes things do get a little dirty and a little rough around here, but I don't think that's fair game. I really think he owes the member an apology for that.

I think the member wants very much to see legislation brought forward that will fix the problem, and New Democrats will support such legislation. In fact, if the government decides to proclaim the Consumer Protection

Act, the only thing you will hear from us is that we will be asking you to put the resources there so that you can actually fulfill all the new pieces in that bill. So there you are.

Here we are today debating this bill, which as I said, and other of my colleagues pointed out and others will later, is basically an omnibus housekeeping bill in a number of consumer and business service areas. More specifically, it attempts to remedy public safety and business harmonization concerns in a number of areas, including—just so people who may be watching this with rapt attention, I'm sure, know what this piddly little bill is about—none of the things I've been talking about that are needed to protect consumers, but things like electrical contracting, film classification and travel agent liability.

We understand, and my colleagues raised it and I will again briefly, because it is important, that there are significant public safety concerns in the electrical sector. I know this has been a problem for some time, created by the gaps and inefficiency in the current licensing system of electrical contractors and master electricians, and in the certification of electricians in the compulsory electrical trades. It is really important for us as a Legislature to deal with those safety concerns, and it is important that this bill go through to deal with things like that.

I understand with respect to the electrical sector, from what I know, that these proposed amendments seem to be supported by the industry and labour stakeholders. I also understand that they are consistent with the recommendations from the 2003 auditor's report. I also understand that the travel agents and film distributors are onside with the changes relevant to their industries as well.

From what I understand, there are not a whole lot of problems with this bill. As far as it goes, after we have spoken and outlined our concerns over what happened around this bill over the past couple of weeks, the legislation should go forward.

I understand there is an issue that we need to be talking about, and that is the more general protection of airline ticket buyers. While the travel compensation fund wasn't designed to compensate for end-user failure, there may be other mechanisms that could be used. I don't know. But this, as you know, is a big issue, especially what's been happening with Air Canada lately and the concerns about what happens to consumers when there are end-user failures. You bought your ticket, the airline goes out of business or whatever, and you are stuck. It's really important that protection be there for those consumers, and we don't believe what's here is adequate enough to deal with that.

I say again, as strongly as I can to the Liberal members here today, that we have eight members in the New Democratic Party. We have recently allowed, to the extent that we can allow—there's only eight of us. We're all very strong members. We have strong opinions on many of the issues that come here, and, frankly, we can and do give the government good advice. It's seldom taken, but I believe it's important. That is what opposition is here to do, to make sure that we not only scru-

tinize carefully—remember the Tories and that municipal tax bill they brought in? It had to be amended eight times. Because of closure, they rushed it through so quickly—

Mr Bisson: It wasn't a tax bill; it was an amendment to the Municipal Act.

Ms Churley: An amendment to the Municipal Act. It had to be amended eight different times in this House because they messed it up so much and didn't give us enough time to really scrutinize it.

That is one of the reasons why this is important. These are new laws that are going to impact and influence people's lives for a very long time. We are making laws in this place. It may seem that they are innocuous sometimes and why not pass them just like that, but usually you look at almost any bill, however motherhood it might be, and you can find glitches and problems with it. That's one of the roles.

I was on a TV show with a Liberal member last night, a nice guy, I really like him, David Zimmer, but he was saying, "Why does the NDP hold things up? We're going to win the vote at the end of the day anyway." Like, why debate? I mean, what an attitude.

I'm speaking out on this bill because I had some important things to say about it.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Are there any other honourable members who wish to participate in the debate? The Chair recognizes the member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Bisson: I am just going to take about five to seven minutes and we'll let this get to a vote.

I wanted to put on the record a part of this bill because it is a concern to people in the electrical industry. One of the things I did prior to coming to Parliament—I'm an electrician by trade, so I speak about this with some knowledge. The government is making some amendments in this particular act to the Electrical Safety Authority. I know my friends in the Conservative caucus aren't going to like this, but I've got to tell this story anyway. I spoke about it very briefly earlier.

There was a time in the province of Ontario, when you wanted to, let's say, build a house and you had to get electrical service installed and get your house wired up, you needed a permit to have that done and it had to be conducted by a qualified person. The way it used to work was that the electrician would go to the Ontario Hydro office and apply for the permit, the permit would be issued, the inspector would come on-site at particular points during the construction stage and eventually certify that the work that had been done by the journeyman electrician was done in a manner prescribed by the law and regulations that deal with the electrical industry. That worked rather well, and I'll tell you why it worked well.

One reason is that the inspectors were qualified people. Normally, they were journeymen electricians who had been in the trade for some time, who, after a while, said, "Listen, I don't want to carry tools any more. I'd be interested in being an inspector." They basically went and applied, and then they were trained by Ontario Hydro

to understand the Ontario electrical safety code. I've got to tell you, as an electrician, that learning the electrical trade is one thing, but it's quite another thing to get into the whole issue of understanding the Ontario electrical safety code and the Canadian electrical safety code, what size conduits for particular situations, what size wires etc. There's quite a bit to it. That's why it was always good, in the old system, that you had qualified personnel who were your inspectors who understood the realities of the trade.

1750

I have to say that the record of the Ontario Hydro inspectors was very good. I don't remember very many instances, if any, where an inspector had inspected a particular building and the building, it turned out, was not properly wired or something was not done according to code. But for whatever reason, the Conservative government decided, I believe in their first term, that they wanted to get rid of the Ontario electrical inspectors. They saw this as a way of cutting red tape. They created what they called the Electrical Safety Authority. The ESA had the effect of doing a quasi-privatization of the electrical inspectors. The mantra of the day was, "This is a way of cutting red tape. It's going to be more efficient and a better way to get electrical inspections done, and it'll be a better way to organize the inspections of electrical work in Ontario." As it turns out, it had quite the opposite effect. The fees and permits that have to be paid to get a permit in the province have gone up dramatically.

The people who work there are all good people. They try hard; they work hard. This is not their fault. They didn't create this; they have to work within what was created by this Legislature. But I have to say, it is far more expensive today to get an electrical permit than it ever was in the past. I will also argue that it is far more difficult sometimes to even get an inspector to come to do an inspection.

I was telling this story in the House a little bit earlier. A constituent of mine in Opatatika had an electrical problem. The electrical service on the outside wall blew up. It was an old 60-amp service that was too loaded down and should have been changed a long time ago. Anyway, the long and the short of the story is, the thing blew up on the outside meter; the electrical system was shut down.

She called an electrician, I believe from Kapuskasing, who went in to take a look at it and said, "Ma'am, we have to change your electrical service. I would suggest that you go to a 200-amp service." Not a problem. He does the work of getting the permit because he was a certified ESA electrician, so that means that some of this stuff he was able to do himself as far as the permit. So he went ahead and did the work that had to be done to rip down the old electrical service, because you have to call the Hydro people to come in and do the disconnect, do the work and, after that, get them to come back and do the reconnect. By the time the inspector was dispatched to come back to Opatatika to inspect the electrical service prior to Hydro coming back to do the reconnection,

it was a matter of three days. Why? Because at that point we no longer had electrical inspectors in the area from Hearst to Kapuskasing. I believe the inspector in this case came from North Bay, if my memory serves correctly. It might have been a little bit closer, but it seems to me it was North Bay.

What they do is, they put the inspector on the road, and the inspector, he or she, on a schedule, shows up in various towns to do the inspections of the electrical work before giving Ontario Hydro the go-ahead to hook up the power and put it back on to the service.

Here is this woman in Opatatika, northern Ontario, in the middle of February, I believe two years ago, in 30- to 40-below-zero weather, and the house is without any electrical service for a period of three or three and a half days by the time the inspector was able to come back and do the inspection to put the service back on.

So I would say, when you look at the exercise of quasi-privatization, certainly we're paying more and we're getting far less than we ever did before under the ESA.

The other thing I just want to say very quickly is a story that most members may laugh at, but it actually happened. I had a situation where a constituent of mine—I wish we could have dealt with it in this bill, but we didn't, and that has to do with regulations under the Cemeteries Act. I had a constituent call me two summers ago. He said to me, "I went over to find out where they buried my brother." It turned out, they didn't bury the brother where he was supposed to be buried in a particular community. So here was the brother, who wanted to come back and visit where his brother was buried—he went to the cemetery, he went to the spot he was supposed to find his brother, and found another name. He figured, "I must be wrong," looked around the cemetery and never was able to find him. It turned out they had buried the guy in the wrong place in the cemetery and had not marked the grave.

Obviously some regulations are needed to make sure we have proper regulation when it comes to the issue of being able to register gravesites so that if a family member wants to come back and find a deceased member of the family some years later, there is actually good record-keeping. In most cases that happens, but we still have in this province certain private cemeteries, and that's what happened in this particular case. I really find it too bad that the minister didn't get a chance to do that.

I know we've talked at length about what happened to my good friend Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East, where the minister said, "Oh, we need this bill, and if we don't get this bill passed, all these companies out there are basically ripping off consumers when it comes to fitness clubs," like I belong to and go to every day.

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: I've turned over a new leaf, you've got to know.

Basically it was, "They can't get their money back until the bill is passed," but it turns out that's not even in the bill. But we've talked about that at length. I wanted to

put those fine comments on the record. I know, Speaker, you wanted to hear them, along with everybody else in this House.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other honourable members who wish to participate in the debate? Reply from the parliamentary assistant? No.

The minister has moved third reading of Bill 70. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): The member from Oak Ridges has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Education. 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): At the outset, I want to say how disappointed I am that I've had to call this special debate on this issue. I am also disappointed that the minister appears not to have the courage to deal with this debate himself and has chosen to send his parliamentary assistant.

I want to put in context the reason for this debate. Earlier, in question period today, I put a question to the Minister of Education that dealt with an announcement that was going to be made that this government was launching a major program of putting in place in elementary schools in our province daycare centres that would accommodate children in junior kindergarten. That entire proposal, of course, is fraught with impossibilities. The reality is that school boards cannot afford to do this. We have heard from many across the province who understand that this announcement would have been impossible to implement.

The question I put to the minister was, why is this government so concerned about issues such as daycare within our elementary schools when there are priorities that have been brought to the attention of the minister that he and his government should be addressing? I specifically referred to the issue of children's treatment centres in, for example, York region.

On record is the director of education for York region. He wrote a letter. In that letter he said, "By 2006, using the conservative estimate of the 1991 HALS study, there will be almost 14,000 children with disabilities living in York region without the support of a children's treatment centre. According to the CTC role review estimates, we believe there are now over 3,800 children and youth with multiple special needs, over 200 of them medically fragile, living in York region."

Speaker, I know that you too have addressed this because this relates not only to York region, but to Simcoe as well. There is a desperate need within York region and Simcoe for a children's treatment center for very desperately needy children. This government has taken it upon itself to continue to make frivolous announcements—bumper-sticker politics is what it amounts to—for new programs. First of all, the government cannot afford these new programs. There are existing programs within our province that this government should be focusing on and should be funding. Instead, they continue to make these announcements.

1800

That is the question I put to the Minister of Education: Will you, as minister, understand the importance, the desperation that parents and children are in now and put aside this initiative on the part of this government to put in place daycare centres? No one is saying that daycare centres are not important, but it is a matter of priority, and the priority is for the identified needs of the children in York region and other regions within this province.

Mark my words: When we hear from the parliamentary assistant, I venture to say that she will not answer this question either. The people who will be reading Hansard, who are watching us tonight, the parents and the children, the director of education for York region and others in Simcoe will be looking to see whether this parliamentary assistant is finally going to make the commitment to fund the children's treatment centre for York region as a priority, to ensure these children's needs are looked after.

That is the issue I wanted to address this evening: not whether daycare centres are important, but that this government understand the importance of children's treatment centres to the welfare of these young children within the region of York and other school districts in this province. That is the issue, and until this government understands that priority, they do not have the right to consider themselves leaders in education.

The Acting Speaker: In response, the member from Don Valley West, parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education.

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): Mr Klees, the member for Oak Ridges, has included a number of questions in his speech. He talked specifically about a treatment centre, which actually is another issue. It's an issue beside the point of the announcement that was made this morning.

I want to address the issue—

Interjection.

Ms Wynne: Treatment centres are another issue. We understand how important treatment centres are, which is why we increased their funding by 3%, an increase that hasn't been made for a number of years. The point we have to address here is that this member fundamentally believes in private education. I think we need to remember that the private school tax credit is part of his belief system, so we are dealing with a different philosophy.

Mr Klees: Just answer the question.

Ms Wynne: The answer to his question, which was whether we will abandon this plan, is no.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Don Valley West, take your seat, please. The member from Oak Ridges, I am having difficulty hearing the speaker.

The Chair recognizes the member from Don Valley West.

Ms Wynne: I apologize, Mr Speaker. I didn't see that you had stood up.

I heard Mr Klees ask a question about whether our government would abandon this plan that was announced today, a plan that will put child care in our communities, that will help all families and all children when they are young to get a head start, to get a better start on education, that will prepare kids for grade one, and that will provide families with the security they need that their children are being looked after. Will we abandon that plan? No; absolutely not.

That plan puts in place security for the largest number of families in this province. We will not abandon it; in fact, we are going to champion it. What this Best Start vision does is outline a 10-to 15-year approach that will create excellent hubs of early childhood care and education in our communities. They won't look the same in every community, and again, this complexity is something that the previous government really could not grasp. It couldn't grasp that each community—I actually grew up in York region. I know quite a bit about York region.

Mr Klees: Well, then you should know better.

Ms Wynne: I know that York region is dealing with issues that downtown Toronto doesn't necessarily deal with, that Rainy River doesn't deal with, that Kapuskasing doesn't deal with. What we know is that the Best Start plan has to be customized to approaches that work in every community. If children are going to get the speech therapy they need, if they are going to get the early screening they need, we're going to have to figure out in each community how to deliver that. But that's what the plan is about.

What happens when you don't have a plan? When you don't have a plan, you make ad hoc decisions—

Mr Klees: That's exactly what you're doing.

Ms Wynne: No, absolutely not. This is a plan. What we are not doing is putting in ad hoc systems that don't work. We are laying out what we see as critical. In fact, the report that was commissioned by the previous government, by Margaret McCain and Fraser Mustard, was never implemented. That is a travesty. What Margaret McCain has said about Best Start is, "This program is a fulfillment of everything we envisioned in 1998 with our Early Years Study. This was our vision and hope for Ontario and indeed for Canada."

Interjection.

Ms Wynne: The member for Oak Ridges really doesn't want to let me speak—

Mr Klees: Because you're not answering the question.

Ms Wynne: —because he recognizes in fact that what we are doing is the right thing.

I was a public school trustee. I know there will be challenges to introducing child care into every school in the province or in every community. I know there will be challenges. But we're going to work with municipalities, we're going to work co-operatively with them, because there is no choice in this country. There is a consensus among families, in communities, that we must have a child care plan, that we must have an Early Years plan, that we must deal with the problems, the concerns that young families have with their children. That's why we

put this plan in place and we're going to make it work. It is the right thing to do.

I am sorry that the previous government and the member for Oak Ridges will not be at our side, working with us and working for the families of York region. We will work for the families of York region. We will make sure they have the services they need. That's what Best Start is about.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

This House stands adjourned until 6:45 pm.

The House adjourned at 1807.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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