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Jeudi 8 décembre 2005

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L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 8 December 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 8 décembre 2005

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

GENDER-BASED
PRICE DISCRIMINATION
PROHIBITION ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005
INTERDISANT LA DISCRIMINATION
DES PRIX FONDÉE SUR LE SEXE

Mr. Berardinetti moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 9, An Act to prohibit price discrimination on the basis of gender / Projet de loi 9, Loi interdisant la discrimination des prix fondée sur le sexe.

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

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I want to start off by indicating that I will be sharing my time later on this morning with the members from Peterborough, Thornhill and Stoney Creek. I just wanted to indicate that at the outset.

As you know, this is the second time this bill has come before the assembly here. We dealt with this on Thursday, 14 April, when it received second reading and was sent off to committee. The exact same bill as before is being brought forward and being debated once again here today.

I wanted to start off by introducing my wife, who is present here today, Michelle Berardinetti. She joins me once again. She is actually the inspiration and the author behind this bill in many ways. Around the time we got married, a lot of the issues that are in this bill that I will be speaking about in the next few minutes came about, due to our many conversations and our many discussions over this. I wanted to thank her for being here today. Michelle, thank you for being here.

Bill 9, An Act to prohibit price discrimination on the basis of gender, deals with a basic human right. Many things have happened since the bill was first introduced and first debated on April 14, the biggest thing probably being that a lot of media picked up on this issue and allowed me an opportunity to talk to many of them.

What this basically comes down to is one thing: human rights versus economics. Some will argue, "Let

the marketplace decide what the price should be for a haircut, what the price should be for men's or women's dry cleaning," or "Let's raise the price of men's haircuts so they match women's haircuts," or "Let's charge everyone \$6.95 to dry clean a shirt," or "Let's charge everyone for alterations, not just men," and that prices will be driven up.

That argument has no basis, and I'll tell you why: If you look back in history, and perhaps the most recent example is about 130 years ago in the 1860s, in the United States, a huge debate and a huge discussion took place involving individual rights versus economics. There were people living in towns like Atlanta and other cities in the south, like Richmond and Georgia, who argued that they had the right to own people, they had the right to have slaves, they had the right to have plantations and to have people work on those plantations, and that the people who worked on those plantations were their property. This was an economic argument. They were willing to die for this, they believed so strongly in it. In fact, over 600,000 Americans—and about half of them came from the south—died fighting wars over this issue. In the end, the north part of the United States succeeded in winning the war, and Abraham Lincoln introduced the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, which indicated and made clear individual rights and that all people were free, regardless of economic conditions. Many in the south, for many years afterward, continued to claim and to argue that their economic condition had been ruined. What was more important—the economy of the south or the rights of individuals to be free?

Perhaps it's a bit of a drastic example to use, but the same thing applies here today in Ontario in the year 2005. Is it right that a woman should pay more for a haircut, three or four times as much, if she spends the same amount of time in the chair as a man does? This bill makes it clear that what I'm speaking of, and what this bill speaks of, is equal time. If someone does work more on a woman's haircut than a man's haircut, yes, they should be entitled to charge more for the service and the person should pay more; but if myself and my wife were to sit in a barber's chair or a hairdresser's chair for 20 minutes at the same time, to get roughly the same amount of hair cut off, why should she pay \$80 and I pay \$15 for that same service? If she's wearing a cotton dress shirt similar to mine, which she's wearing today, and we were both to go to the dry cleaner, why should she pay \$6.95 and I pay \$1.45? If she were to go and buy herself a piece of clothing, or a suit or a jacket similar to the one I'm wearing, a pair of pants like the ones I'm wearing here

today in the Legislature, why should she pay substantially more than I do and, on top of that, have to pay for alterations—over \$100 for alterations—while I should not?

Some would say this is up to the economy. Again, if you want to argue that position, you might as well go back to the 1860s; you might as well go back to the United States and north versus south. This example has played itself out many other times throughout our lifetime. The bottom line again, as I've said before, is human rights. The United Nations makes it clear in its charter—and I have a copy of it here in front of me—that every individual is entitled to be free of discrimination. Our Canadian Charter, section 15, speaks of the right to be free and to be treated equally under the law, regardless of sex, origin or nationality, and other grounds as well. Our Ontario Human Rights Code—I made reference to this last April—makes similar provisions that no one should be discriminated against on the basis of their gender, sex, age, and so on and so forth.

We have this on the international level, the national level and the provincial level. Yet, in 2005, we still have discrimination. We still have cases where people, based simply on their gender, are treated differently. The question that I put forward to everyone in the Legislature today is one I've put forward before, and that is: Why should a dollar in the hands of a man be different than a dollar in the hands of a woman? In both cases, that dollar should be able to buy the same amount of goods or the same amount of services. The unfortunate truth in 2005 is that that is not the case. There are differences in the way women are treated as opposed to the way men are treated.

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I also wanted to indicate the importance of allowing this discussion to go forward to committee. I'm going to move at the end of this debate, when the time comes, I think around noon today, that this be sent to a standing committee of the Legislature. I hope it doesn't just sit there. I know it's up to the House leaders, but ultimately it's up to all members of this House to have this matter debated at committee because there is a lot of interest in this issue. A lot of people are interested in this issue, and there have been articles that came out on the Internet that I was able to find and that my wife pointed out to me that had been printed in places like Bombay, India, New Zealand, we have an article from the Taipei Times, all discussing this issue, saying, "How can it be that men and women can be charged different prices for basically the same goods or services?" So this discussion needs to take place, and the sooner the better. Some may say that it's not a discussion for us here as legislators. I would disagree. Let's take it to committee. Let's let the people deal with this matter at one of the standing committees and bring it forward and vote on it. If people feel strongly against it, so be it, but I think that the day has come to make the changes to bring about the necessary good for all concerned here in Ontario and elsewhere.

Today is December 8. I think back to 25 years ago on this day and I remember it. I was a young university

student, sitting in my house, when I heard the news that someone had been shot. His name was John Lennon. He was shot 25 years ago today. When one stops to reflect on his life, one remembers that in many ways he tried to fight for a lot of things that are important to us and that have resonated with us and throughout the world ever since. His songs *Imagine*, for example, and *Give Peace a Chance* are played constantly in various parts of the world. I've been reading many articles paying tribute to him over the past few days. In his song *Imagine*, he says the words:

You may say I'm a dreamer,
But I'm not the only one,
I hope someday you'll join us,
And the world will live as one.

In many ways this stands for many different causes, whether it be peace, equality, elimination of discrimination, or justice for all. In this case I simply ask today, on December 8, that we honour that commitment to bring about equality and human rights equality for all in Ontario. I ask this House to pass second reading of this bill and that it be sent to committee for further debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I'm certainly pleased to participate in this debate this morning on Bill 9, the Gender-Based Price Discrimination Prohibition Act, 2005, introduced by the member for Scarborough Southwest. I want to commend the member for once again bringing this issue forward. I guess we should also congratulate his wife for having raised his awareness of an issue that most of us have experienced throughout our lifetime as females, seeing that when it comes to some of the services and products that we purchase, there does seem to be a price differential. We're not quite sure why that happens.

It was interesting that when this was brought forward last time, there was quite a bit of media interest. It was certainly something that newspapers around the world did pick up and take note of. However, I would have to say that I've not received a lot of letters or faxes in my office. I brought a few that I did receive that my staff have passed along to me. We got some faxes and e-mails. One is a message from Joe, on April 20. Joe is from Petersburg, Ontario. He says:

"Hi, Elizabeth.

"I just have a comment with regards to the bill that would ensure men and women pay equal prices for things. Although I agree to this in principle, I think in most cases there are legitimate reasons for the price differences, supply and demand being one of them. Women's haircuts are typically more labour-intensive and their clothes are oftentimes more intricate.

"One question I have, though: Does the bill include auto insurance premiums? In theory it should, as this is one example of blatant gender discrimination."

Then I got another one from Patricia in Burlington. "Retail gender discrimination: Elizabeth mentioned that she has paid more for her dry cleaning and alternations but it is not based on gender. Then what is it based on? I

specifically do not get a pedicure/manicure in the GTA area because the female pedicure/manicure is twice that of a man. Last year I asked a salon that I would like a man's manicure, since I don't wear nail polish at all, and they refused. Why should they refuse when I don't want any nail polish, but a 'simple clean,' just like the men's? It is gender discrimination.

"I am fine with hair salons charging more for long hair than short hair. That makes sense. But for the same service, charging different prices is ludicrous. The excuse at the dry cleaner's is that men's shirts are a standard size. Standard size? How can that be when 30% of Canadians are overweight, especially men. So what standard sizes are they talking about?

"It's about time someone pays attention to same-service gender services."

I got one other short e-mail from Brendan, who lives in Kitchener: "My question is about the new law being tabled about the gender-bias pricing. I am wondering if that would include car insurance specifically for young males."

The last time the issue was brought to the attention of this House, it certainly did encourage people to think thoughtfully about all of this. I think it's important that this issue, which obviously does have interest for the people in the province and elsewhere, be discussed, be debated.

I can support the principle behind this bill: that it is intended to prohibit discrimination. I strongly support any initiative on which we would take action against any form of discrimination. In this case, the bill specifically says that we need to prohibit price discrimination on the basis of gender. I guess: What do we mean by price discrimination? What do we mean by price discrimination based on gender? That's a very important question and it needs to be answered. How are you going to determine if indeed the discrimination is based on gender? Who is going to have the authority to make that determination? What criteria are going to be established in order to determine that there is gender discrimination? I see in the bill that the Ontario Human Rights Commission would have the authority to listen to the complaints that might be filed, as well as the Superior Court of Justice.

The bill speaks to the fact that if we're going to deal with this issue of gender discrimination, we would have to establish some sort of infrastructure and determine who is going to be eligible to file complaints, what the process is going to be to handle these complaints, what additional financial and human resources are going to be required, and who is going to do the investigation. I think we need to recognize that there is more than just acknowledging and saying in the House today, "We support this." When you move forward, there are certainly other questions that will need to be answered.

But again, we are talking about discrimination. I do oppose any form of discrimination. I think we can see, though, when you take a look at this issue, that there are some consequences, some additional costs that are going

to be incurred. What is the impact going to be on the people in Ontario?

When the bill last came up for discussion, somebody suggested—I think I read this in a newspaper article—that perhaps it might mean that everybody's price goes up. Maybe the male paying for his shirt will be forced to pay the same as a woman paying for her blouse. That would not be a good consequence of this.

We know that there is some legislation similar to this in California. Taking a look at that, I also understand that, regrettably, the legislation is routinely violated because of a lack of public awareness. Again, that leads us to ask the question, if this legislation were passed, how would we enforce it, and what additional financial and human resources would be required to do so?

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I think the importance of this bill is the fact that the member has brought it forward, and he has pointed out that there is discrimination, that there is a difference in prices for products and services that are provided to women, and they usually, in some cases, are higher than those provided to males. I hope just raising this bill in the House might lead some of those who are involved in offering services, those who are involved in the production of goods, to seriously take a look at the issue of maybe making sure that in future there is more fairness. I hope it raises the awareness of those individuals, and I hope companies might reconsider why they would price some products for women higher than for men. I hope it will encourage those who offer a service to take a second look and seriously consider if indeed there is price discrimination, and if there is a reason for the price differential, if there are valid reasons, I think we need to know that as well.

I want to congratulate the member. I know he is very passionate about this issue, and I commend him for bringing it forward. I think it deserves some further examination as to what would be the consequences, is the discrimination real, and it needs more study before we would obviously give final approval to this recommendation.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It is a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of my colleague's bill, Bill 9, An Act to prohibit price discrimination on the basis of gender.

There was a situation that occurred a number of years ago. I believe it was brought to light by the late Shaughnessy Cohen, who was a very distinguished member of Parliament from the Windsor area—I know, Mr. Speaker, you knew her quite well—an outstanding individual who died far too young in terms of her contribution to public life. But I recall one of the things that she raised on this particular issue. She was a lawyer in the Windsor area, and often talked about and brought to light the fact that when she was getting her legal robes dry cleaned—before going to the Windsor courthouse to make representation on behalf of her clients—the cost of dry cleaning her shirts, which were quite similar to the shirts worn by her male colleagues as part of their legal

robes, was much more expensive than for her male colleagues. She would always ask the question about why that happened when she was looking at her male colleagues wearing exactly the same kind of shirts.

I want to acknowledge the leadership of my colleague from Scarborough Southwest on this particular issue, along with his colleague from Scarborough Centre and my new colleague from Scarborough-Rouge River—a great new trinity of representation from Scarborough. They've all had distinguished careers in municipal politics, and now they're making their mark here in the Ontario Legislature.

I just want to quote from a couple of articles here. One of them was written in the Wall Street Journal in May 1994 by Joan Rigdon. She talks about similar legislation that was brought forward in California. There are just a couple of quotes here that I think are interesting and highlight the challenges of why we need to get rid of the gender bias. She says:

“Michelle Fadelli, an executive for a regional government agency in California, cites her own personal experience. One day last year, she bought five suits for herself and four for her husband at an R. H. Macy & Co. department store in Sacramento. When she ordered similar alterations for each suit, her charges came to \$142,”—for the alterations—“but his alterations were free.”

“‘It was incredibly unfair,’ says Ms. Fadelli. When she complained to a store manager, the charges were waived. But ‘I got the impression it was a grand favour,’ she says. Macy’s associate general counsel, Carol Katz, couldn’t comment on Ms. Fadelli’s case but says it is against company policy to charge different prices for the same alterations.”

Continuing in the article:

“Barbara Sobel, an aide to Supervisor Shelley”—in the government of Sacramento—“has her own story. She says her regular dry cleaner charges \$2.50 to press and launder each of her button-down cotton shirts when she brings them in. But, she says, the same dry cleaner charged half that price when her boyfriend took her shirts in last month.”

This is an interesting trail here, and something I believe this member sees as very important. In fact, this bill, Bill 9, should get out to committee for further study to take a very serious look at this situation.

My friend from Kitchener I think made a good point this morning. When Teddy Roosevelt was President of the United States, he used to say his office was important as a bully pulpit to change behaviours in communities. I think this is one of the essential pieces of this bill, that as we highlight the problems that exist, this legislation, if passed into law, will make us much more aware of the situation and in fact influence behaviours in various segments of our community.

It’s an important piece of legislation and I’m pleased the member has seen fit to bring it back. I certainly wholeheartedly support it and I think it’s appropriate that we move forward at this particular time.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I’m pleased to join in the House today on the subject of this bill, proposed by the member from Scarborough Southwest. Bill 9, the Gender-Based Price Discrimination Prohibition Act, intends to end the differences in price for the same goods and services that exist between men and women. I don’t doubt for a minute that the member is reintroducing his bill with a genuine concern and a genuine wish for equality in the consumer market of Ontario. I know when he introduced the bill in our last session, he got an incredible amount of media, not just in Canada but internationally.

The intentions are good, and I’ve certainly spoken in the House many times in support of policies and programs that can assist our continuing struggle toward equality throughout Ontario. I’m just concerned that if this bill is enacted and is passed into legislation, it opens up an entire new can of worms that we could not control.

I know there’s current legislation similar to what’s being proposed throughout some of the United States, and the American laws, especially California’s 1995 Gender Tax Repeal Act, have been used to model the current bill. The legislation that currently exists in the states of Florida, New York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts is as well-intentioned as the bill proposed by the member from Scarborough Southwest. However, these states already had in place an infrastructure to address some of the consumer grievances. To expect that the Ontario Human Rights Commission has both the resources and staff to examine and administer the thousands of files that will represent each and every single complaint from Ontario consumers, not to mention the eventual hearings and fines—it’s quite large.

If, under the legislation, businesses could be fined up to \$5,000 for violations, that’s a costly contingency plan, for example, for small salon owners, dry cleaners and retailers to have to put into place to prepare for a possible lawsuit or fine, and I’ve got some e-mails to that effect. It’s kind of unfair that we’re discouraging small businesses from setting their own prices, using their own discretion and, to put it simply, doing their job. If there is a constant threat of lawsuits, fines and investigations hanging over the heads of Ontario business owners, if the government puts into place elaborate plans of new enforcement officers and officials who police businesses and investigate complaints, businesses will, in the short-term, comply with the arbitrary pricing rules set by the provincial government, but in the long-term, these businesses have to set up personal insurance savings plans. Small businesses will have to set aside savings, keep money saved in case they face a hearing or a fine, and then they will pass on the increased overhead costs of running their businesses to the average Ontario customer with increased retail prices. The bill appears to assist consumers and lower the average prices of services and goods, but it will cost us all much more money every time we purchase goods and services.

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With many more important issues facing the residents of my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock—issues

which include accessing health care, wait times, unemployment due to plant closures, increased heating and energy costs—it's hard to look at this bill and ask small businesses to take on these extra costs and discourage entrepreneurs in my riding. My riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock has the third-highest percentage of self-employed people in the province. I know the member beside me from Parry Sound–Muskoka has the highest percentage of self-employed people in the province. I think all the residents of my riding are pretty savvy in their daily shopping decisions, not worried about gender-based price comparisons. How can the Human Rights Commission judge if a business is unfairly using a gender bias or if the business is simply taking more time and using greater skill for a specific item or service? If a salon employs a junior stylist to cut men's hair and a more experienced staff member for women, are they required to charge the same amount to men and women, despite the difference in the two staff members' qualifications?

It should be up to the consumers, I believe, to compare prices among different businesses and decide whether they wish to pay more for an experienced staff member or for a lengthy and detailed dry cleaning. I would expect that if anyone feels like they are being subject to an unfair price because of gender, race, religion or age—everybody can vote with their feet and refrain from patronizing the business that does not treat all of their potential customers equally. I would also expect that Ontarians have far more important issues that they wish to see brought forth in legislation here by provincial agencies and by the Human Rights Commission than directing the already overstretched resources of our province to the glorified Better Business Bureau.

As a female member of the House and frequent shopper in my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, I cannot support the Gender-Based Price Discrimination Prohibition Act. I find it unfair. Legislation that would give the Ontario government the power to enforce prices set by businesses in an attempt to protect half the population—you can be assured that if women of Ontario are unhappy with the prices set by a business, they will stop patronizing the business altogether, and they will not hesitate to pass on their dissatisfaction to many friends and families. The women of Ontario don't need any guaranteed protection from the pricing decisions made by businesses. They can judge that on their own. I commend the intention of the member for bringing the bill forward, but I just don't think it's going to be fair legislation. We'll listen to further debate in the Legislature this morning on the bill, and hopefully we'll see discussions.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's my pleasure to be here this morning to talk about this bill on gender-based pricing, and I congratulate the member for bringing it forward. I congratulate his spouse for educating him on the issue. The issue of gender-based pricing is only one of many, many women's issues that are important for us to address and deal with in this House. I have to say that this is an important one, and I

will be speaking to it specifically. We can never let down our guard, we can never become lax in the recognition and the acknowledgment that women face many challenges in our society, many challenges in our communities day after day. Whether that's the fact that women, particularly senior women, are overrepresented in the realm of people living in poverty, or women with young children are the largest proportion of single parents living in poverty, we have to recall that this is an issue that we need to address. When we're dealing with the challenges facing women, the poverty of women is a significant challenge that we need to deal with.

Another important women's issue, of course, one this week, highlighted on December 6, the anniversary of the Montreal massacre at the École Polytechnique in Montreal, is the fact that women still face violence every day. Women are being killed every day. Women are being beaten every day. Woman abuse is a huge problem in our society, and it's one that we need to address and take seriously.

So what else? Sexual assault. Women are being sexually assaulted—young women. The amount of sexual assault that takes place on university campuses is apparently at a rate that is going through the roof, and that's something that is unacceptable.

All of these issues are women's issues. All of these are serious issues that need to be addressed by this House.

In fact, earlier this week, I reintroduced a bill that Marilyn Churley had introduced previously, to deal with sexual harassment or any kind of harassment, frankly, in the workplace, trying to make sure that the Occupational Health and Safety Act is a piece of legislation currently that purports to protect workers from dangers in the workplace, and what this bill does is add harassment to those dangerous things, and that means sexual harassment and racially motivated harassment. Quite simply, any kind of harassment in the workplace should be addressed under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, because it's a piece of legislation that deals with the workplace environment and making sure that it is a safe place for workers. Of course, a place where you're going every day to earn your living and put a roof over your head and feed your family needs to be a place of safety. When people are harassed at work, that is not a safe place. Harassment creates a poisoned work environment, and therefore, any kind of harassment in the workplace should be recognized as something that is not acceptable and something that should have redress under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Those are some of the issues that I see as important women's issues, but let's talk about the issue of discrimination, which is where this member decided to take some action, and again, I congratulate him for that. Discrimination is still, in this day and age, a huge issue for women. Women are still being discriminated against in their wage structure. It's surprising. It's amazing. I mean, it has been decades and decades now that women have been struggling for equity in wage structures at work. It simply has not been addressed. Women are still making

80 cents to the dollar that men are making—that's unacceptable—for the same job. I'm not talking about different jobs.

Similarly, the member's not talking about different hair styles or different degrees of effort that it might take for a hairdresser to do a certain type of style, as opposed to another type of style. Everybody recognizes that the amount of money that you charge for one or the other is determined by the amount of effort that's put in. What I'm talking about is women who are in the workplace doing the exact same jobs as men and not getting paid the same amount, or who are doing jobs that are similar in effort, similar in time, similar in the required skills and the required knowledge and are still being paid less than men. That's unacceptable in this day and age. It's unacceptable that women are still making 80 cents to the dollar, as compared to men in terms of their earning capacity.

Women still face a glass ceiling in many workplaces. Again, women are underrepresented in the top echelons of many companies and workplaces. That's unacceptable. In fact, there was quite a scandal not too long ago when a high-ranking member of a media corporation indicated that women should just go home and suckle their children, that they had no place in the workplace at the highest-ranking levels. It's scary that people actually still have those opinions and can still bring forward that type of discrimination, that type of really deep-down ignorance when it comes to the value that women bring to any workplace, and this workplace as well, I would say to my women colleagues who are here.

So I think that the issue of discrimination is extremely important, but what I think happens, unfortunately, is that with issues like the one that the member from Scarborough Southwest brings forward today, there's a tendency for people to trivialize this kind of an issue. There's a tendency for people to say: "Well, you know, it's not a big deal. Women are just complaining. It's just not that important." There's a tendency to just kind of brush it aside as something that's not of value to have a discussion about. I disagree with that. In fact, I believe that a lot of the systemic discrimination that exists in our society is as a result of that kind of attitude: "We can't be bothered. It's not a big deal. So let's just put it aside, put it on a shelf, because it really doesn't cause much harm."

1040

But you know what? It does cause much harm, not only financially. In this case, in this particular bill, the indication from the member and from the research he's done and the reason he's bringing it forward, is that economically it causes harm. But it also allows us to continue the systemic pieces of discrimination to be maintained and to thrive in our society, and we can't allow that to happen. We have to work diligently to make sure that discrimination is something we acknowledge and recognize, and then work to reduce it or eliminate it completely, which is the best alternative.

I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the services that have been discussed in regard to this bill. When I go

back to Hamilton and spend my time there, I go to many different places where there is no discrimination whatsoever. For example, I'll go to my favourite restaurants downtown, like the My-Thai; or Phulkari, which is closer to the Stoney Creek riding, on Highway 20—it's a great Indian restaurant—the Gate of India in downtown Hamilton; the Wild Orchid, which is my favourite Portuguese restaurant. In fact, I was at a really great new restaurant in Hamilton called Brownies where I met with my good friend Mary Pocius and her son Tim, and happened to run into our former regional chair Terry Cooke there not too long ago. In these places, of course there's no discrimination. What I had for lunch were the same dishes as Tim Pocius had for lunch, and guess what? We paid the same price. Again, when I go to buy art, if I go to the "you me gallery" on James Street or the Gallery on the Bay or the Transit Gallery on Lock Street, or if I go to the Transit Gallery and then run over to the West Town for some wings, in none of those places will I pay differently than my spouse, if he's accompanying me, or whoever I happen to be either having dinner with or shopping with, in that kind of vein.

That's not the issue this bill is trying to address. The issue this bill is trying to address is that there are services that are similar or the same that are being charged differently to women. The one that jumps out at me almost immediately is the issue of toiletries. I find that's one where there is considerable discrimination. I've noticed this now that my son is 13 and I have to buy his toiletries as well as mine and my husband's, and sometimes theirs together are the same as what mine cost. That's an issue that I think indicates and reflects or shows what the problem is when it comes to price discrimination. We talk about hairdressers and those issues, and I think one of the other members was talking about the idea of a pedicure. I've got to tell you, anybody who is willing to give my husband a pedicure, I'd pay them a fortune, because I wouldn't go near those feet if I was paid a million dollars.

I go to a salon on James Street South called Mercedes Salon and Spa. Javier and Mercedes are wonderful people and they do great work. In fact, often in the last couple of years and certainly this year as well, their salon has been chosen as one of the top salons by the Hamilton Spectator—a readers' choice type of competition, and they're right up there at the top. They are up there at the top because they provide a good service, although I have to say it's a different service when they're cutting a man's hair than a woman's hair. But if a woman and a man are both getting highlights, it would be a similar service and a similar cost.

During the time this bill was first introduced, there was a woman from the east end of Hamilton who had been written up in one of the Hamilton Spectator articles indicating that when she was doing those types of services that were the same for a man and a woman, she would be charging the same. Where there was a woman's hairstyle that took a wash, a cut, a blow dry, a set, a style, all of those things each incrementally took a little bit

more time, a little bit more effort and maybe a little bit more skill. It's not the same with a man's haircut, which perhaps was a wash and a cut, and that's the end of the story, especially in the summertime: no need for a blow dryer or anything of that nature, therefore the price would be less. I have to say, though, that when it comes to the idea of hair particularly, it seems to me that's where a lot of the controversy came up.

Dry cleaning was another one of the areas where a lot of the controversy arose, suggesting that women's clothing is different than men's clothing in terms of the effort. I think what this member has indicated is that when this bill gets to the committee stage, that's when some of those issues will be further defined.

When I take in a suit of my own, there is a place on the invoice that indicates "ladies' suit" and the price is charged accordingly; when I take in my husband's suit: "men's suit," priced accordingly. What does "priced accordingly" mean? It shouldn't mean anything. The price should be the same when it's the same type of product.

If I take in the silk shirt that I have on now, I expect to pay a little bit more. If I bring in a silk shirt of my husband's, I expect to pay a little bit more because it's a delicate fabric that takes a little different service to make that fabric not only clean, but pressed in a way that's appropriate.

I don't think it's a matter of splitting hairs, but I do think there is legitimate price discrimination that occurs right now in the market. I guess that's the wrong way to say it. Where there is price discrimination that cannot be legitimized based on extra service, extra effort or extra product to be used to deal with that service or product, then there should not be any price discrimination. Where there is a difference, however, that can be identified—extra effort, extra product or whatever the case may be—then I think we would all agree that that kind of pricing is appropriate to the product.

Having said that, it's interesting: I happen to have had a lot of hairdresser types in my life. My partner is a sixth-generation barber. He and his father had a barbershop in the Lister Block, which is a famous crumbling building in Hamilton's downtown. Interestingly enough, after barbering, he went into women's hair and was doing hair colouring, so I actually don't ever have to pay for my colour. My hubby does it himself, so I don't have to worry too much about that.

My grandmother was also a hair stylist. I remember going to her salon when I was young and growing up. She would have other workers there who would be doing men's hair, and she did women's hair. She also got into a contract for a while where she was actually doing the hair of cadavers in the funeral parlour. When I started thinking about this bill, I wondered if she charged a different price for a male cadaver and a female cadaver with regard to doing their hair, getting them ready for viewing at the funeral parlour.

I don't know whether she did or not. I wouldn't think so, though. I would think it would be a straight cost based

on the fact that these are similar kinds of jobs that have to be done. I could probably ask my grandma that, and maybe I will some day, but that was an issue that I wondered about.

Nonetheless, I think it's really clear that when we have a product or service that is equal/equitable for men and women, it should be priced at the same amount. Where there are differences, certainly there's no problem there, but let's not gouge women. Women have enough barriers and challenges that they are trying to address on a daily basis. We don't need gender-based pricing. We need to get rid of it.

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): It is a pleasure to join in this discussion on the bill brought forward by the member from Scarborough Southwest.

Private members' time is actually my favourite time. You really get a fascinating array of issues that come in to be discussed and have the light shone on them that might not otherwise happen. A lot of bills that come in during private members' time have great sentiment and great intent behind them, and you shine light on issues that might not normally get the light of day or get any media coverage. I can tell our member that for earned media, you get an award, because you did get some tremendous media coverage on this issue.

It's one of those things that in our very busy lives we might run into and be annoyed by. We go in to pick up our dry cleaning or we put it in and we see, as the member from Hamilton East was saying, the little box that's ticked off on the sheet that says "ladies' suit," and you can see "men's suit" underneath and wonder what the price difference is, but you're in a hurry. The dogs are in the car, the kid is squalling and you've got to get going. You have that moment of annoyance and then you move on and head out and don't actually do anything about it.

1050

The member from Scarborough Southwest is actually doing something about this. He is addressing it in a responsible way, I believe. He has had some good publicity around this, and as a result of that publicity there has been tremendous discussion. We've heard letters from around the province. We've heard stories, anecdotes and discussion. He has brought to light something that requires some attention. In addition to that, he has put a backstop in place to say, "Do you know what? It's not enough to just discuss it. We need to do something about it."

I think he has done it in a realistic way. Right in Bill 9, he mentions under "definition":

"1. In this act,

"gender-based pricing" means the practice of charging a different price for the same goods or services on the basis of gender."

Below that, it says,

"Limitation

"(2) Nothing in subsection (1) prevents price differences that are based upon the cost, difficulty or effort of providing the goods or services."

He's not just saying, "Man or woman, you're treated the same." If there is more complication to a woman's haircut than a man's, then so be it, and perhaps there should be a higher price. But I can tell you that on the whole, when you go to a hairdresser, you'll see that women's cuts and styles are more expensive than men's.

I have to tell you a little story around that. Because I have long hair, right away the assumption is that my haircut is going to be more expensive than my husband's. Oftentimes my husband's hair is longer than mine. Right now I've got an edge on him because I haven't had a haircut for a while.

Some of you in the room know that my husband was a member of a former rock group called Honeymoon Suite back in the 1980s, when hair was really important in rock groups. He had a very complicated hair thing happening there. There was dyeing involved, there was a lot of mousse involved, and he ended up with this quite elaborate hairdo, something that I have never had in my life. Clearly he was getting a lot more work and he should have been charged a tremendous amount more.

These days he has a gentler, more natural hairdo that suits his life as a stay-at-home dad. He has wonderful natural chestnut hair. I'm glad to see the dyed red gone. He, interestingly enough, goes to get his hair cut by a former member of the group Platinum Blonde. So there you go; true story. Platinum Blonde has moved on to be actually a hairdresser in his life. He does get charged less than I do to get my hair cut, not by the former member of Platinum Blonde but when I do get my hair cut; it costs me more.

The member from Kitchener-Waterloo mentioned manicures. There is an assumption that if you're a woman, you want a more complicated hairdo. You want your hair curled or, if you're having a manicure, you want nail polish put on. Quite frankly, no curl will ever stay in my hair anyway, so I never want that, and I never want nail polish. I didn't know they did a men's manicure and that there were different prices, but I think the next time I get one, if I ever have time, I will see if that's possible.

I want to congratulate the member from Scarborough Southwest for bringing forth an issue in our society that goes unnoticed that is representative of discrimination and is really a matter of gouging, in some cases, and for doing it in a responsible way, with this bill. I thank him for that. It has been a very interesting conversation. I look forward to its moving forward through committee, where we can deal with some of the issues the member for Kitchener-Waterloo mentioned, and other members, where we have some concerns about the way this should be implemented: the infrastructure, the penalties and all that. That can be done in committee. At this point, it's just great to see it here and great to be able to discuss it openly.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'll speak.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

Mr. Tascona: I'm very pleased to join in the debate with respect to Bill 9, which deals with, I believe, the member from Scarborough Southwest—

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry; it's a mistake by the Chair. The official opposition's time is up. I was willing to let you speak but the rules won't allow it.

Is there any further debate from those whose time isn't up?

Mr. Tascona: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Could I have unanimous consent to let me speak? There's time on the clock and no one else is speaking.

The Deputy Speaker: Unanimous consent has been requested for the time that was left on the clock. Agreed?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Now I'm told there was a no.

Life could be made simpler, Mr. Berardinetti, if you would use the time, because you're allowed to.

Mr. Berardinetti: I'll give Mr. Tascona a minute if he wants it, Mr. Speaker, but I just wanted to read into the record a couple of letters. Some of the other individuals who spoke earlier—and I want to thank them, especially the members from Hamilton East and Kitchener-Waterloo, as well as the government members who spoke. They spoke very well about this bill and covered a lot of the issues. We could go on for hours about it. I simply wanted to add a couple of things into the record.

An 81-year-old lady wrote me a letter and said that she was charged \$22 for a haircut and a man who got a haircut similar to hers got \$30. She asked, "Why should he pay \$8 more?" She wrote, "My only hope is that I will live long enough to see it go through." I'm simply asking, on her behalf and on behalf of the others who have written to me as well, that we see this bill go through.

I noticed that there are three minutes left and I have two minutes to wrap up. So what I'm going to do, Mr. Speaker, is allow the member to speak for a couple of minutes and then I will wrap up in the final two minutes, with the House's consent.

The Deputy Speaker: No, it isn't quite that easy. I have to have unanimous consent to allow the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford to speak, and we heard a no the last time.

I'll ask once again. Do we have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

Mr. Berardinetti, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Berardinetti: It wasn't me who said the no there. I know that Mr. Tascona wanted to speak to this bill, and I do feel bad about it. I hope the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford will speak to it when we send it to committee. Hopefully, it will be sent there.

In closing, I wanted to again thank all members for speaking in favour of this bill. I have so many other things that I wish I could say on it. I'm glad that some of the other members who spoke today were able to cover some of those areas.

What's important now is that the debate move beyond this stage and go into the phase of public committee

hearings. There are a lot of people in the public who do want to speak to this. I never expected the explosion of media interviews to occur, but when that did happen, people came and said to me, "Where is it going to go from here?" I said, "To committee." I know there are those who want to speak to it. Not everyone is going to support this bill. There are those who are going to speak against it for various reasons, and that's fine. Nothing is ever 100% on one side. There is always someone who is going to oppose something, but I think we should allow this to go forward and let it be debated at committee. That's the key to this bill. I really want to see it debated and discussed at committee.

When the time comes today, I will move that this go to committee. I would really ask that those who are listening, who are not able to be here today—the House leaders and the others—allow this to at least go to committee. If it dies on the floor of committee, so be it. But there is a lot of public interest in this issue. If it goes to committee, it will have an opportunity for an airing out and a greater discussion at the committee level. I strongly support that.

I want to thank all those involved, even those in the media who brought this important issue to light.

1100

CONSUMER REPORTING
AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR
LES RENSEIGNEMENTS CONCERNANT
LE CONSOMMATEUR

Mr. Ruprecht moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 38, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act / Projet de loi 38, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements concernant le consommateur.

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

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): This June, I discovered some very scary statistics. In Canada, personal disposable income is up to \$760 billion, yet the total household debt is up to \$875 billion. Canadian consumers spend \$115 billion more than we make. The Canadian consumer is running on empty. At best, we are riding on fumes. Every year, we're borrowing more.

It's fair to say that most Canadians cannot survive without credit. Imagine this: The Canadian Bankers Association Web site shows that the number of Visa and MasterCard credit cards alone in circulation in Canada in 2004 was 53 million, well exceeding our total population. Since we're now living in a credit-producing world, we need to help our citizens understand its dangers and pitfalls.

Let's take a good look at the credit reporting system as it is provided by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre. They say that credit reporting agencies are private

companies that collect information about a consumer's credit history and transactions and then sell this information in the form of a consumer report. Since we've become an increasingly credit-dependent society, the credit reporting system can have a major impact on all aspects of our lives. It is one means by which credit granters obtain information that they use as part of the credit decision process to determine our ability to get a bank loan, a bank account even, a mortgage, a credit card and even employment and rental accommodation. Knowledge about the credit reporting system as well as the accuracy and reliability of such reports is therefore of critical importance to consumers.

What is also critical to consumers is to understand that credit reporting agencies have a file, a financial profile, on literally every breathing Canadian. What's in that file is really important, as I pointed out. Yet only 17% of Canadian adults 18 and over have checked their credit rating in the last three years. When they examined their credit file, over 18% found serious, significant inaccuracies, to the point where they would have been denied credit—18% of those who have a credit file. In the United States, it's even higher: 25% of people in the United States report serious problems and serious errors in their credit files. Imagine this mind-boggling statistic: 79% found in their credit files even minor errors, and furthermore, 46%—that's almost every second Canadian—did not know or understand what the various credit scores mean. This is massive ignorance.

It is our job, as the guardians of our political and economic culture, to ensure that Canadians understand this credit-granting system in order for them not to be taken advantage of. Bill 38 therefore provides that if there has been a security breach and personal financial information stolen, the financial institution must inform the consumer. As it stands right now, we have no law that says that if a credit file has been compromised, the agency or the bank must inform the consumer. Literally, we have no existing safeguards against identity theft when it comes to credit files. In Canada, we don't have a system in place that adequately protects our people's identities from theft. Imagine this: Nearly 10 million people in North America last year were victimized by identity theft. What's the cost? The cost was over \$5 billion. It is therefore urgent and important that this bill is looked at and that we ensure that credit-granting companies, or even credit reporting agencies, provide us with information when our file has been stolen or compromised. It's very important information.

Second, this bill also provides for truncating vital information. Imagine this: If you have just a few dollars, you can get our privacy commissioner's private information of who she called, when she called. If we can get all that private information with a few bucks, they can get private information on you and me as well. The consumer has to be protected. How do we do that? By providing in the credit file a unique identifying number which would mask out, truncate, vital information that's not necessary. That would be the first firewall against identity theft. The first firewall would simply be not to

show social insurance numbers in the credit file. What easier way to do it than to provide a unique identifying number? Our major financial writers, whether from the Star, the Sun or the Financial Post, are calling for this as well. Tyler Hamilton, James Daw and Linda Leatherdale are all calling for this kind of truncated information, masking out important items on your credit file. The idea is simple, because it protects us. The consumer has to be protected, and this bill will do it.

The third item says, "Duty to delete unconfirmed information within 30 days." I've just given you some very important statistics. They show that so many Canadians have examined their files—17%. They looked at those and they found many big errors in their credit files. When they go to the credit-granting agencies and credit reporting agencies and say, "Look, I had an error in my file. Can you please eradicate this error? Can you take it out? Can you do something about it?" what does our law says right now? Our law simply says, "Within a reasonable time we will be granting you the issue and we'll check it out, we'll do something about it." In the United States, it's 30 days. If you find an error in your credit file on a credit card, within 30 days of that disputed item, that company has to eradicate it, has to take it off. We in North America are so tied to the US, we're almost second-class citizens. "Reasonable time" could mean a month, two months, it could even mean a year. For many of our consumers in Canada, this is exactly what takes place.

Number four is, "Duty not to penalize consumers for applying for credit." There are some other items that are important. I hope I have more time later on to discuss those, but this is one of the most important ones. This bill provides that consumer reporting agencies and other persons may not consider as a key factor in determining the credit score of a consumer the fact that a consumer report has been requested. Herein lies the problem: If a landlord requests information on a potential tenant, that is an inquiry. Of course, the consumer reporting agencies will tell you we've got two kinds of inquiries. One is an inquiry that's hard, that has to do directly with if you get credit or if you get a loan; the other one is called a soft inquiry. They're saying to us, "We're separating the soft inquiries from the hard inquiries." We're saying we have so much proof here in these statistics that this is being mixed up. Why should a consumer's score be lowered when a soft inquiry is being made? A soft inquiry does not go to the point where you're getting credit or you're getting a loan; it's a soft inquiry. It's an inquiry by a bank asking about your consumer file. That's a soft inquiry. In some cases that means the numbers are dropping, the index is dropping, and consequently, when the index is dropping from 680 to 640, that means directly that the consumer is being taken advantage of. That means directly you can't get a loan. It's even worse: Now the bank or the consumer credit bureau is saying, "Maybe we can give you a loan through the back door."

We'll discuss that in a few more minutes. In the meantime, I would only hope that this bill will see the light of day, because the consumer has to be protected.

1110

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for York West.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, you were first up, but if you yield, then I'll go this way.

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): No, that's fine. I'll take my five minutes.

First of all, let me say that I am in support of Bill 38. I think it's a good piece of legislation. I have to acclaim the persistence of the member from Davenport, who I think has been a champion in pursuing this bill.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): You just lost my vote.

Mr. Sergio: Absolutely, yes. I'm glad that you support Mr. Ruprecht's bill.

He introduced it before, but of course the events were not in his favour, so I'm pleased to see it again. It is good for our consumers. It would be impossible to deal with all the important aspects of Bill 38 in five minutes, but let me say that everything that Bill 38 contains is with respect to not only improving the reporting agencies' methods but also assisting many consumers out there who are afflicted, unfortunately, by the existing system, both by the reporting agencies and by the way they use that information by disseminating it.

At the moment, there is absolutely no way that a poor consumer who is caught in this particular web can clean up his act, if you will, or his name or his credit. There is no venue that exists so that, in a very easy way, people can go and say, "This is wrong. This is misleading. This should not be on my credit, therefore I want it corrected." Unfortunately, consumer reporting agencies have carte blanche. They have the consumers absolutely at their mercy, and it should not be so. It should not be so.

I believe that when a person requests an inquiry on somebody else's credit, the person affected should be entitled to receive the information, not only from whom the request is being made but what information is being provided. If you say to the consumer reporting agency, "With all due respect, I have no idea what you're talking about. Why is this on my credit? I didn't do this," or "I'm not responsible," or "This is not so," do you know what they tell you? Do you know what they tell the poor consumer out there? "This is not my problem. Somebody has requested the credit information on you, and that's all we are interested in, releasing any information that is on your credit, rightly or wrongly." I believe this is dead wrong, that consumer reporting agencies are abusing the consumers' rights. You know why? Because they get paid to get that particular credit report, and it's unfair.

I believe consumers should be defended, should be protected, should be notified that they are entitled to receive the same information that is being requested by somebody making an inquiry. Only then should consumer reporting agencies give out that information.

One thing that the member and I have alluded to before is with respect to the credit scores—what is this? Do you think that the average consumer out there knows

what this consumer score is all about, how it's being applied, how it affects their credit and stuff like that?

Mr. Ruprecht: Not even MPPs know what their score is.

Mr. Sergio: Probably not. I would say that most of them do.

Let me say that you can go and buy all kinds of things—a house, a car, furniture—and have no problem. But the moment that someone checks your credit and that report is issued, oh boy, you are in trouble because of your credit rating. What's that supposed to mean? Who brought that up, which government, which agency? It's a private agency that is abusing the interests of the citizens. I believe Bill 38 goes a long way to make such a correction, and I applaud Mr. Ruprecht, the member for Davenport, for bringing it to the House today.

Mr. Tascona: I'm very pleased to speak on the bill. I was pre-empted from speaking on Bill 9 by the member from Dovercourt, but I'm going to speak on his bill.

I will say this: I have spoken with the member from Scarborough Southwest about committee hearings on Bill 9, and certainly, it should go to government agencies if we can get it there so we can get some public hearings on that bill. I am certainly in favour of public hearings, but we need to strengthen the bill in terms of the right to go to a civil claim as opposed to the Human Rights Commission, which is fundamentally not working the way it should for ethnic people. Different groups are supposed to be protected by it, and it's not working. So that's my comment on Bill 9.

I want to deal with Mr. Ruprecht's bill, Bill 38, which is actually Joe Cordiano's bill. He was the Minister of Economic Development, as we know now, and I remember him trying to put this forth when he was in opposition. I supported it back then. I thought it was a worthy measure that was put forth by the Minister of Economic Development in terms of consumer reporting. So I'm pleased to see that the member from Dovercourt has seen fit to bring this forth.

Unfortunately, he's bringing this forth as a private member's bill. If the government was really behind this bill, it would be coming through the Minister of Government Services. It's not coming forth as a government bill; it's coming forth as a private member's bill, notwithstanding that the Minister of Economic Development wanted it to go through. Obviously, he hasn't got the clout to get it through the government and put it forth as a government bill. So we have the member from Dovercourt bringing forth a private member's bill on this particular issue.

At best, this may only serve as an education process for what we're going to speak about today in terms of this bill, as opposed to it actually becoming law, because there is merit to this bill. A lot of the public doesn't understand that consumer rating reports are asked for when you're looking for financing. They'll go to a consumer rating agency, and they'll provide a consumer report. You don't necessarily see that report and how it's handled in terms of your financial institution, but the key

issue here is whether the information on that consumer report is accurate or not. That's a big problem. I've been involved in this from a legal sense in dealing with it in terms of people who can phone up to the consumer reporting agency and say, "This is the information that I understand about this particular company or this particular individual," and somehow that information, without being verified, gets into the consumer report.

Quite frankly, it can affect the report in terms of whether you're going to get some financing or provide information that could go into a litigation proceeding where they say that Joe Blow is a shareholder of this particular company, when in fact, how would they know whether that person is a shareholder of the company or whether that person was the president of the company? That information is not verified. You don't even know whether you saw the articles of incorporation if you did a public search with respect to that documentation, yet you find consumer reporting agencies taking that information and putting it into the consumer report, which is not accurate information.

The member is trying to deal with that under section 8, where it puts a duty on the consumer reporting agency, where the individual becomes aware of that, to have them redress this situation. The current legislation provides for a mechanism to get accurate information where you dispute that consumer report. What's wrong and what the problem is going to be with this bill—and I think the member's going to have to look at some serious amendments—is in getting the consumer reporting agency to actually comply with the law, let alone taking them to court.

What I've found in my experience with it, as limited as it is, is that they do not listen to you. They do not change the report. They don't even respond to you in terms of getting that particular information. That has to stop. I know the member is putting that forth, saying if it's inaccurate information and you notify them, they've got to correct it. The fact of the matter is they're not doing anything.

1120

So where do we go to enforce this, let alone taking them to court or putting together an enforcement agency that is user-friendly for the person who wants to make sure they've got accurate information on their consumer report? That is the challenge the member has to deal with, because in his bill he has a lot of good rules and standards in terms of protecting the consumer and ensuring that third parties get accurate information on that consumer, but nowhere in the bill is there a mechanism to make sure the consumer reporting agency does what it's supposed to do.

I put to the member from Davenport that if he doesn't look at that in terms of making sure the bill is going to work—I don't know how he's going to do that. He may have to go through the Ministry of Government Services to make that happen in terms of an enforcement mechanism, in terms of whether they can be used to report on an inaccurate consumer report and make sure it's acted

on. Quite frankly, the procedure is there already. I've tried to use it and I can tell you it's an absolute waste of time, because the fact is that they're not going to listen to you anyway. Other than going to court, you're not going to get yourself an accurate consumer report. We have to look at it from that perspective to make sure it works.

My view is that, from a standards point of view, I agree with the member that consumer credit ratings have to be complete and accurate. Everybody here would agree with that. The problem is, to whom do the consumer reporting agencies go to get that information, and how much work do they do to make sure that information is accurate? At the end of the day, that information can be the deciding factor on whether you'll get any credit in the future or whether you're going to be targeted with bad information on that consumer report forever, because they're not going to bother to change it.

I know that the member says, "If they have that information and they haven't changed it, they have to put a report on it that this information has been challenged." That shouldn't be anything the consumer has to do. These consumer reporting agencies are in the business. They make big money from providing information on consumers. Why does the consumer have to go forth and tell them, "This information's not accurate"? When you say to the bank, "Yes, you can get a consumer report on me, but make sure it's accurate," if they're getting information that's not substantiated and they're not doing their job, whether it's a corporation or an individual consumer, the onus should be on these consumer reporting agencies. Otherwise, they shouldn't be in business.

What we're doing here is trying to put some rules on them to say that they have some statutory guidelines on how to do their business. The problem is, if they don't follow those guidelines, where's the remedy? That's the biggest problem with them. I guess we'll hear, if we get to go to public hearings on this. I hope the member pushes and uses his clout in the caucus, since he's one of the senior members here, in terms of being able to get public hearings, that he'll actually get those. I hope he's going to use his substantial weight in caucus to do that.

He's looking at me. I don't know, is that a yes or a no, or are you thinking about it? We want to get public hearings on this. Isn't that the goal? You're not going to get third and fourth reading here today.

Mr. Ruprecht: Just remember this: This is the second time this bill is up this year.

Mr. Tascona: That's right. I know. This bill was up five years ago too. It was Joe Cordiano's bill.

The way I look at it is that this would be a very interesting exercise in terms of hearing from the consumer reporting agencies and from the financial institutions in terms of what they think about this. I don't think any of them would dispute that when you want to lend money to somebody, you want to make sure you have accurate information on that particular consumer, or on a corporation if that is the consumer, so you'll make the proper decision on whether you want to lend to them or not.

The remedy, in terms of this, if it's false information—we're going on the fact that this may be bona fide false information. If it was a situation where it was a fraudulent misrepresentation of the information, of course the consumer is going to want to know where that source is, to be able to go after it. What you'll find in that consumer report is that there will be entries in terms of when information was offered with respect to that consumer. That's where they get their source, in terms of checking out whether it's accurate information or not. That's the biggest problem for consumers in this particular area.

Quite frankly, when you go through Bill 38, it's a very complex area, in terms of dealing with consumer reporting and what's expected from the different stakeholders in this industry. It's not something that people would readily understand. I think the member was talking about consumer ratings throughout his speech, in terms of how people are ranked and whatever. That's the guts of what we're talking about here: accurate information. I think all the member is asking for is that there's accurate information on the consumer so that consumer can be judged by a third party with respect to a financial rating, in terms of being able to be given credit. Nobody would dispute this.

The problem we've got here is that the industry is not working. So the member is putting forth some new rules and saying, "OK, here's what you're going to have to do." The industry is not working because the fact of the matter is there is no gun that can be put to the heads of the people who are providing this information and who are participants with respect to dealing with consumers. He's going to have to come forth with some kind of remedies that the government can actually enforce. I don't believe it's incumbent on the consumer to go to court to get an accurate report on themselves; I think it's incumbent on the consumer reporting agencies. Probably there should be a mechanism in place where if they do not provide proper information or they do not co-operate in providing that proper information, they can be penalized and treated like any other organization that breaks the law, and be taken and prosecuted through the normal process.

There also needs to be an in-between mechanism so the consumer doesn't have to be the party that has to go directly to that consumer reporting agency, and the consumer reporting agency doesn't listen to them. There may be a responsibility on the consumer to basically go to a government agency, maybe the Ministry of Government Services, and say, "Listen, this is the attempt I've made to get this information accurate. Can you look into it?"—because I know government services is a very active consumer protection ministry—and have them deal with the consumer reporting agency to correct that information. If they don't, then why wouldn't they be subject to prosecution when they're ruining someone's name or ruining someone's credit rating, and there's no other avenue? They're getting paid to provide this information.

The fact of the matter is, the only way a financial institution can get a consumer report is on the consent of the consumer. The financial institution then goes to the consumer reporting agency for that particular information. The standards that we have here really are questionable, in terms of how they go about that information, how they verify it and in fact where they get it, in a day of privacy legislation and other restrictions in terms of getting personal information. So I hope the member has thought that through. I know he's seriously listening to me here this morning in terms of those thoughts.

The other part of the equation is the remedy. He's going to have to think through, because he hasn't put it in his bill, how this is going to be enforced by the consumer to make the government make these groups accountable and for the consumer to be able to get accurate information being presented about themselves.

I remember debating this bill when it was brought forth by the Minister of Economic Development, Joe Cordiano. He was very passionate about this in terms of the need. I was dealing with a very similar situation in terms of a basic non-response from consumer reporting agencies, a brick wall or a stone wall being put in the face of consumers trying to get their information made more accurate. Here we are, later down the road, and the government hasn't acted on this. They've brought it forth as a private member's bill to try to address an industry that can affect people's lives very seriously.

I'm in support, obviously, of this bill, in terms of going forth with public hearings. This bill requires substantive consultation with all the stakeholders in the industry. It probably requires substantive amendments if it's going to go forth, in terms of being meaningful as other than just a code of conduct for the consumer reporting agency. That's essentially what it is right now: a code of conduct. We have to build on the accountability of this industry so that it's fair for consumers and they can get the proper credit rating they need.

1130

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's my pleasure to have a few minutes to talk about Bill 38, which is a consumer protection bill. Of course, nobody at all would be arguing against tightening up protections for consumers. We all know that there are lots of areas where consumers simply get ripped off, where people get ripped off in the market, where people get ripped off by unsavoury people, companies, groups that are out there to be cutthroat, that are out there to prey on unsuspecting consumers, who either don't have a good grip on what their rights are or are not in a position to be able to determine what those rights are in an easy way.

Interestingly enough, the first thing that came to mind when I thought about consumer rip-offs and people getting ripped off in the market are some of the issues that my friend from Niagara Centre, Peter Kormos, has brought to this House: the issue of payday loans and how people are ripped off by those particular companies that prey on people who are desperate and unable to make

ends meet and so go to these payday loan institutions and are charged usurious interest rates just so that they can make ends meet. He has raised that in this House many times, the issue of payday loans.

I think about one of the ones that many consumers rose up against not too many years ago, and that was the issue of negative billing and how people were fed up with the way that companies who were practising negative billing were able to deal with that problem.

There's another one that bothers me, and that's the issue of advance billing. You get your bill for a particular utility or service, you get it this month and you pay in advance for two months ahead. Maybe it's Christmastime or the holiday season, something's going on and you don't pay that bill until a little later. You pay the bill maybe a couple of weeks later than you would have normally and the next thing you know you've got double the bill. You've got to backtrack and say, well, I thought I paid that bill. No, they're billing me now for the two months that I've already had and now two months ahead. So your bill's twice as much. You really have to keep a sharp eye because the next thing you know, you've paid twice for the same period of time. Again, you have to be careful.

I had an experience, speaking of utilities, not too long ago where I have a service that is bundled. I have my Internet, satellite and phone service all bundled into one easy billing option. One of my services goes on the blink. After weeks and weeks of complaining and trying to get some redress from the company, I still didn't receive that service back. Finally, in sheer frustration, after I had been on the telephone and my hubby had been on the telephone trying to get the service reinstated, we just gave up. Just in sheer frustration, I said, "I'm not doing this any more. You've lost a customer."

I had been a customer of at least one of the three bundled companies since ever I even had that service and paid for it as an adult. For many years I was a customer of that service. They lost me as a customer, all three did, because I was fed up. But what ended up happening? I was told that I had to pay \$200 because I breached the contract because I had contracted for certain period of time to be in a bundled service. Well, excuse me, but they breached the contract because they didn't provide the service, and after three weeks, I still couldn't get the service back. They think they're actually going to get the \$200 out of me, and they're not. I know that many people won't bother to fight it because they're afraid that \$200 is going to end up on their credit rating. There's going to be a note on their credit rating that says, "This person bilked our company of \$200," with no details that there is a contractual dispute, but it would only end up on my credit rating that I didn't pay that \$200. You know what? I'm willing to take that risk because, as a consumer, I have the right to fight for the things that I think are necessary to fight for, and if I'm paying for a darned service, I'm getting it. If you're not going to give me the service, I'm not going to pay for it. That's the bottom line. That's just an illustration of how these kinds of

issues can end up with the most unsuspecting person having these notes on their credit rating that indicate that somehow they've done something wrong.

I have to say, there's a lot in the bill that deals with those kinds of issues and I'm going to speak a little bit more fully to them in a little while. There is no doubt that the way society is today, with technology and the concern about people's privacy and the sanctity of their personal and confidential records, those issues are extremely important to people. This bill also deals with some of those issues.

In fact, speaking about privacy and the sanctity of records, even government backbenchers, even the one who sponsored this bill, would recognize that the McGuinty government itself needs to do a better job on the sanctity of people's records and the quality of making sure people's records are kept safe and secure. In fact, it wasn't so long ago that in the city of Hamilton a van was found in a parking lot with people's medical records sitting on the front seat. It had been sitting overnight in some parking lot, and people's medical records were accessible in this van because somebody wasn't taking care of the store when it comes to making sure that those records were going from point A to point B, with no stops in between. Instead, people's very personal test results from a lab were stuck on the front seat of some van overnight in some shopping centre. That's the kind of shoddiness the McGuinty government has to look at in terms of its own obligations around consumers of government services. Again, in the Auditor General's report there's the issue of the driver's licence and the fraud that was going on there. The government has to look at its own shop and make sure that its own obligations are being met to the consumers of government services.

Nonetheless, I wanted to talk a little bit more specifically about what this bill speaks to. There's no doubt that consumers should have, absolutely, security around the safety of their records and the safety of what people have in terms of information about them. The parts of the bill that talk specifically about the duty to truncate vital information is an important piece. I'm going to be supporting this bill because I think it has some important pieces to it, particularly that one. If someone—a store or someplace where you're applying for credit, for example—is asking for your consumer information and there, lo and behold, on the information report is your other credit card number, your driver's licence number, your social insurance number, all kinds of information about yourself that's then just transferred from one organization to another, from one company to another, that's unacceptable. There's no need for that. In this day and age, there is no need for that kind of information to be travelling back and forth without your knowledge. You don't know that when you go to apply for credit, all of your personal information is being transferred from one company to another; you have no idea. What this bill will do if it gets to committee and is passed by this House is that it will help to make sure that the information isn't out there willy-nilly for anybody to have a look at.

The issue of truncation is I think an important one and it's addressed here. In this age of high-speed Internet and technology, with free-flowing information that happens these days over the World Wide Web, this kind of bill is even more timely and this needs to be addressed. As we look through the different pieces of the bill—and I spent some time doing that—there are issues around some things I've already talked about but also, as Mr. Tascona was talking about, issues around credit ratings, what makes up your credit rating, and the obligations that should exist and don't right now that this bill hopes to put in that will explain what a person has that makes up their credit rating. Instead of just some number that indicates your score on a particular measure, it's got to explain specifically where that number came from, where that score came from, what led to your getting that particular score, which companies or organizations or credit agencies indicated that there was a problem with your credit rating, and I think that's extremely important.

1140

The other issue, interestingly enough—and I'll go back to my other thought in a second—is bankruptcy, and the fact that this bill says that once you've been discharged from a bankruptcy, they can't continue to indicate all the issues that led to the bankruptcy. Yes, they can indicate the day that you filed for bankruptcy; they can continue to indicate the day that you were discharged from bankruptcy, but not all of the pieces of your credit history that led you to bankruptcy. Once you're discharged, you're discharged. That means you're discharged from the bankruptcy. That means you're now able to go ahead and try to rebuild your credit rating.

I know people personally who have tried to do that. They've gone through a tough part of their life. Lord knows, in the beginning of the 1990s a lot of people went through a tough part of their life. Lots of people lost small businesses; lots of people went into economic trouble and had to declare bankruptcy. But the problem was that once they got their lives back on track, once they started to rebuild their job or career and they started to move forward again, one of the biggest barriers they faced was that even after having been discharged from bankruptcy, they weren't able to get credit. So they weren't able to rebuild their credit rating and deal with car loans, leases, a basic credit card for emergencies or any other type of credit because every time they attempted to get a credit card or attempted to perhaps lease a car or purchase a car on financing, they couldn't do it. The credit bureau was still providing information that indicated all the outstanding loans from years and years before that were part of the bankruptcy.

I was glad to see that this is in the bill. I think it's extremely important that those times in people's lives when they get into trouble—and people don't like to declare bankruptcy. It's a huge, huge decision for somebody to do that. It's a very serious decision. It's not done in a willy-nilly fashion. However, it is done, and if it's done to try to get the person a second chance to accomplish some of their goals and move forward in a

positive way, then there's no way that once being discharged from that bankruptcy, they should then continue to have that debt bogeyman hanging over their back or hanging on their credit rating. I'm glad that's in the bill.

One thing I was going to say earlier, though, is on the issue of the details as to what's making up your credit rating. People would assume that you can just get that information, but you can't. You can't easily get the information to find out, if you're turned down for credit, why? Why are you turned down for credit? Your bureau: "Your credit rating came back as too high-risk." "Well, what was in it?" "We're not obligated to disclose that." "What do you mean? It's my credit rating. Of course you should be obligated to disclose that." This is an important piece in the bill. That's when you would find out that, lo and behold, they're using your pre-discharge bankruptcy information on your credit rating to prevent you from moving forward in terms of getting credit once you've gotten your life back on track. All of those things I think are extremely important. It think it really makes a huge difference for people to be able to understand not only their consumer information but their credit rating and what they can do to redress errors on their credit information or errors on their consumer report.

I would agree with a previous speaker that one of the problems with this bill is—and I will support it, because I think it deserves to get to committee to be improved and strengthened—where is the onus? Where's the onus for accuracy? Where are the checks and balances? Where are the levers, the pieces of this bill that sanction credit companies or that sanction consumer organizations from doing these kinds of things? How do we sanction them? How do we prevent them from continuing to have erroneous or inappropriate information? Where is the damage to the consumer? Where does that get redressed? I think the important thing that I would like to say to the mover of the bill is that when we get to the stage in committee where we go into the details of this bill—if it gets there; and I hope it does, because I think it's important—we have to make sure there are penalties built in, that there is a system that prevents the abuse of consumers, not just the way it is here but in much stronger terms.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I'd like to start with something from Shakespeare. I might have the wrong play or the wrong role, but I think it was in Macbeth that Laertes's father said to Laertes when he was leaving:

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
"For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
"And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry."

Those were good words for everybody to use, but in 2005 that is not the case for most people.

I've just had an experience with a lending institution that really concerns me. I've had a MasterCard for 20 years. I got it through the Bank of Montreal, which has been my traditional banker; I'm not sure for what reason. I don't recall ever paying interest on the MasterCard for not having paid on time, because I pay it on time. They give you enough time.

Because of my job here at the Legislature—it's a new job, and the flights can really take up the dollars in your account very quickly—three months ago I got a new card from a different lender. I expected it to operate the same. I probably should have gone back and just got a double card from my own bank. In any case, I've now had two months of payments on this card, and I thought I paid them the same way as I pay my MasterCard. I've been charged \$84 interest on one of them. So I think there must be a gimmick on that card. I'm not going to use it any more. I'm going to cut that card up and go back to putting everything on my single card, and then look after getting that in the future. I'm sure there's a gimmick there: Why am I paying interest for two months in a row?

I think we have to look at lending institutions and credit cards, and these groups that lend money. We have to make sure that proper rules are being followed. This is not connected to what we're talking about today, but I think consumers get taken right across the board because they don't have the sophistication, don't have the time, don't look into it and automatically assume this is the way to go.

I'm just looking at section 3 here: "No consumer reporting agency shall consider as a key factor in determining the credit score of a person the fact that there is an inquiry record or that personal or credit information has been obtained." That point was made by the member from Davenport. I think it's extremely important. That's that soft report. Credit organizations can up the interest rate by just using that, getting your credit report down low. That has to be one of the very important parts of this legislation.

Subsection 4(1): It seems to be obvious that, "Every person who refers to a consumer report in connection with any specified transaction or matter in which the person is engaged shall ... inform the consumer that a consumer report respecting him or her has been or is to be referred to"—I think that's very important—"provide the consumer with the name and address of the consumer reporting agency supplying the report; and ... upon the consumer's request, provide the consumer with a copy of the consumer report, by mail or personal delivery, within 30 days of obtaining the report." This would seem almost common sense. This should be automatic, but I guess in today's world it is not.

We have legislation here that I think is very important to protect consumers, to get a level playing field between the very sophisticated lending organizations and the sometimes unsophisticated consumers. I'm very pleased to stand today to support this legislation. I hope that the legislation will pass. It's a private member's bill. I'm anxious to see it get done. It was good to hear that Minister Cordiano had brought this forward before. This is great legislation that can only make it a lot more transparent and a lot fairer for consumers out there.

1150

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Ruprecht: I would like to thank the members from York West, Hamilton East, Ottawa–Orléans and Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford who have provided some very

good points in terms of supporting this legislation. The member from Hamilton East especially indicated that we want to know specifically how consumer credit agencies are determining the credit score of each one of us in our credit files.

Remember, each one of us has a credit file. Every breathing Canadian has a credit file. In this credit world, it is of utmost importance to know what our credit score is. When you ask people—the statistics indicate today, and I read them earlier—only 17% have even requested to know what their score is. In fact, you can get two types of information from the consumer credit bureau: One is your credit score, and the other is the report that indicates whether you are paying your credit back or if you're paying your loan back.

One is free; the credit score is not free. It costs you \$21.95 to get your credit score. But let me suggest to you, try to get your credit score, because it is like an albatross hanging around your neck whenever you need a loan or credit or even some employment. For some of us, this may be the case because we might be looking for a job. Even for that, it's important to know what your score is before the person who wants to do the hiring finds out what the credit score is. It's better that you know ahead of time so you can guard against it. It's better you know what's in your credit file.

We know that today, for instance, 79% of people are saying there are minor errors on their credit files, and of course there are 18% who say that these are so serious that they cannot get a loan or credit even if they wanted to—and those are just errors; this is not the reality.

Let me briefly point out to the member from Hamilton East, in terms of the credit score, that only a small percentage of people know that the actual act of applying for credit—just the application for it, not even getting it—lowers the consumer credit score. Each time a consumer applies for credit, his or her score is lowered by 5% to 7%, just to make the application, not even getting it. “An average consumer who has a score of 640 to 680”—that's the medium range of most people—“is particularly affected, as lowering the score by 20 to 25 points as a result of as few as three or four applications for credit may render such an individual unable to apply for a mortgage or otherwise, disqualifying him or her for favourable rates.”

Of course, you can go to a B lending institution later on if you've been disqualified by a bank. The bank, for that matter—I have information here because I was very careful in checking it out—then gets—no, we don't want to call it a kickback—a commission from sending you somewhere else to get a loan with a higher interest rate. Can you imagine that? Here is a mortgage specialist working for a bank sending you somewhere else to get a loan for your mortgage, and he's getting a payback, he's getting a commission, whatever you want to call it, because he is sending you to a B loaning institution to get you a higher rate on your mortgage. Imagine that.

I hope that this bill will see the light of day, that we'll have discussion and debate and can make amendments in

committee, because that's where the details are going to be worked out.

One point is very important, and that is, in the United Kingdom, guess what? Applications for credit do not affect the composition of credit scores. We have a jurisdiction that does not apply credit scores to the actual loan.

Finally, let me point out something that the member from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford and the member from York West are interested in, and that is, how do we get consumer reporting agencies to stay within the law? We've got a law that says, “Supply correct information on your credit score to consumers.” That's the law, but what's the enforcement mechanism? Do we have an enforcement mechanism that says, “If you don't comply with the law, you credit reporting agencies, there will be a penalty”? There should be a penalty because it's so important in this credit-producing world today. We're all on credit.

It's important to look at that, and the bill addresses itself to some degree to that point. It says here that we provide “that consumers are entitled to a copy of the report obtained by a third party....” So in case someone is asking for your credit, you should be able to get a copy of this report, because you may be turned down for credit by a bank or another institution. If you are turned down, you want to know why. Right now you can't know why because the credit reporting agency pulls your file and consequently you have no access to that information.

In short, there is much in this bill. We have to protect the consumer today. The consumer is crying out for us to do it. I hope you will support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: I could remind the member for Davenport that you have two minutes to reply. You don't have to use it.

Mr. Ruprecht: Oh, no, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I was looking at the watch. I want to be right on time because members are very jealous in terms of watching the clock.

Let me point this out to you—another very important item the member for Hamilton East pointed out in terms of bankruptcy. If you have ever gone bankrupt, as it stands right now, it depends on the credit reporting agency. They put on the amount of money you owe each of the persons you got a loan from. Here you are: The court says, “OK, fine; you've gone bankrupt. We will agree you can start off new,” but at the same time, on your credit report, hanging around your neck is everybody who you aren't going to pay off. So all that detailed information is on there.

I think she is making an excellent point when she says that when the court decides you can start fresh, that should be a fresh start. Of course, there should be an indication saying you've gone bankrupt; we don't disagree with that. The indication should be that you've gone bankrupt, but don't at the same time list every item and every loan and every amount on your credit score. That should not be the case.

Finally, one more item that's most important, and that is, if you should ever take a credit-granting company or a

credit reporting agency to court, as the member from York West pointed out, you have a major problem. Do you know why? Because as soon as you take that step, the credit reporting agency pulls your file. If you are in court for two months, three months, four months or six months, you cannot get credit. You are persona non grata, which simply means you don't exist in terms of your credit file. We are simply saying in this bill that this should not be the case. The consumer should be protected, and the consumer has a right. We are here to protect the consumer.

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

GENDER-BASED
PRICE DISCRIMINATION
PROHIBITION ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005
INTERDISANT LA DISCRIMINATION
DES PRIX FONDÉE SUR LE SEXE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will first deal with ballot item number 13 in the name of Mr. Berardinetti. Mr. Berardinetti has moved second reading of Bill 9. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): Mr. Speaker, I would request that this bill be sent to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Berardinetti has asked that the bill be referred to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs. Agreed? Agreed.

CONSUMER REPORTING
AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES RENSEIGNEMENTS
CONCERNANT LE CONSOMMATEUR

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 14, standing in the name of Mr. Ruprecht. Mr. Ruprecht has moved second reading of Bill 38. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Ruprecht.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I would kindly request that this bill see the light of day in general government.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Ruprecht has asked that the bill be referred to the standing committee on general government. Agreed? Agreed.

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

The House recessed from 1159 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FUNDRAISERS

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to rise today to advise this House of an outstanding fundraising effort for the Credit Valley Hospital, coordinated through the Canada Pakistan Friendship Association.

Mr. Gul Nawaz spearheaded this effort with a dinner on Canada Day that I had the privilege of attending. The event has raised \$271,720 for the new cancer treatment ward at the hospital. Mr. Nawaz put together a remarkable team, and I would like to publicly recognize the contributions of the following individuals: Javid Husain, Mrs. Suraiya Khan, Bashir Khan, Nasir Chatta, Mrs. Mubarakah Ahmed, Mrs. Zari Khan, Mrs. Ishrat Nasim, Shadab Khokhar, Rashid Khan, Zahid Khan, Asif Sherazi, Mrs. Seema Naseer, Khalid Bhatti, Hashim Najmuddin and Barkat Ullah.

Mr. Nawaz is planning another dinner on January 21 next year to raise funds for the victims of the earthquake in Pakistan. The people whose lives will be touched because of these two events will probably never know that it was through the efforts of Gul Nawaz and his dedicated team in the Pakistani community.

We owe them our heartfelt thanks for such a tangible demonstration of their compassion and their belief in giving back to their community.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): The region of Peel is one of the fastest-growing regions in the province. According to a report put together by the Peel Regional Police, in the first seven months of 2005, 373 firearms were seized in Peel. That's a 6.6% increase over the same period in 2004.

I rise today to recognize the initiative of local youth in my riding of Brampton Centre. On November 26, young people in my riding held an all-day youth summit on the issue of youth violence. Rather than giving up on youth in Brampton, they decided to tackle the issues of violence, bullying and gangs head-on. They put together a community forum with politicians, community activists, the police, concerned youth and religious leaders to address the issue of violence within our own community. The youth of Brampton Centre are stepping up to the plate to address issues that are resulting in the loss of lives of young people across this province.

I'm proud that, as a government, we are confronting rising violence by infusing our communities with 1,000 new police officers, 97 of whom will be hired in Peel. These officers will allow the Peel Regional Police to continue concentrating on the reduction and prevention of crime. Maintenance of high visibility and proactive policing policies will help us meet our goal of decreasing levels of criminality and lawless public behaviour.

Since this summit, these young people have embarked on forming a coalition that will combine resources within

the community to combat the issue of escalating violence and ensure that our communities are safe. I congratulate the Ontario Young Liberals for having the courage to take this initiative and start this community dialogue.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): Innumerable people across Ontario are having problems with the MPAC assessment this year. This has been of particular concern to owners of waterfront properties who have seen their assessments skyrocket.

There are many lakes scattered across my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, and it has a large number of waterfront properties. Waterfront property value increases in Haliburton county are among the highest in the province, with an average increase of 35% to 40%. In Ontario, the average increase for waterfront properties is 25%.

The people who own these properties are not always the wealthy cottagers that people first think of. In fact, many of these property owners are people of much more modest means. Some properties are owned by seniors who have made their cottage their permanent home. These seniors live on fixed incomes and can ill afford the massive increases in property taxes that they have seen in recent years. Others have cottage properties that have been in their families for generations, and many of these individuals stand to lose their cottages because they cannot afford to pay the property taxes.

My riding has the second-largest percentage of seniors in Ontario, and, as I have told this House before, many of these people have limited incomes. They are being forced to deal with increased assessment costs, high energy costs and this government's irresponsible health tax. You have almost created a perfect storm, and I do not know how you expect people to be able to remain in their homes with the challenges they are facing.

JEFFREY HAWKINS

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I rise today to celebrate one of the unsung heroes of my community. Today, December 8, at the Hospital for Sick Children, before a gathering of community mental health workers, service providers, psychiatrists, child welfare workers and hospital staff, Mr. Jeffrey Hawkins, the executive director of Algonquin Child and Family Services, received the inaugural Elizabeth Manson award for community service in children's mental health.

Presented this morning by Mary Anne Chambers, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, this award recognizes "an outstanding person in the province of Ontario who has dedicated their career to the continuous improvement of care for children and families challenged by mental health problems."

The award is named after Dr. Elizabeth Manson, a well-respected child psychiatrist who was instrumental in establishing the telepsychiatry hub at the Hospital for

Sick Children, the first provincial telepsychiatry program in Canada. Dr. Manson remains the director of the hospital's telepsychiatry program.

Jeffrey Hawkins is the executive director of the Algonquin Child and Family Services, a multi-service, multidisciplinary organization that responds to the mental health, developmental, autistic and early intervention needs of children, youth and their families in Nipissing, Parry Sound, Muskoka and districts. He has served for over 20 years in the children's mental health field and has served on numerous provincial and regional task forces and best practice working groups. He has worked diligently on the integration of services in our region and has focused on family-centred services, wraparound services, restorative justice and telepsychiatry.

Congratulations to Jeff on this important recognition of the great work that he and all those at Algonquin Child and Family Services are doing for our region and across the province.

KARLA HOMOLKA

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I'm once again raising the mistake-prone conduct of the Attorney General with respect to his conduct of the Criminal Code process to place restrictions on Karla Homolka following her release from prison.

With the exception of some electronic coverage of criticism of the Attorney General by the member for Niagara Centre and myself, Mr. Bryant's screw-ups and failures have largely been ignored by the print media at Queen's Park. Essentially, they're giving his incompetence a free ride for reasons known best to them.

The essentially unreported truth is that the Attorney General botched the original hearing by not countering expert oral evidence provided by Homolka's lawyers, opening the door to a successful appeal. With the cameras not running, he also failed to support the French and Mahaffy families' efforts to seek standing at the appeal and failed to seek standing for his own officials.

This week, with his trademark bluster, he told the media—which dutifully reported—that he would have Homolka arrested if she entered Ontario. He then qualified that, stating that he would seek a warrant for her arrest. Both of those comments were blatantly wrong and not based in law, and indicated either a willingness to direct police or deliberately misinform the public. But he got away with it because of a compliant media.

The member for Niagara Centre and I will continue to point out this minister's failings through outlets such as broadcasts through this legislative channel. We have a responsibility, as a loyal opposition, to make our best efforts, and you can count on us doing just that.

SHARE A CHRISTMAS

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): Today I rise in honour of a local group called Centre 55 in the Beach. Every year at this time, they have a program

called "Share a Christmas." Every year at this time, through the leadership of Bob Murdoch and his staff, the members of the community volunteer to help the needy and all the neighbourhoods in the Beach.

They do this in a variety of ways: by accepting donations to supply fresh food, by identifying those people who are in need, by supporting the teenage angel program, by planning for food drops throughout the area, by arranging transportation, and last but not least and probably most important, through their innovative program called "Adopt a Family."

There will be a fundraiser this year on Tuesday, December 20, at 7 o'clock at St. John the Baptist Norway Church, 470 Woodbine Avenue at Kingston Road, to try to obtain some much-needed funds. But I'm also here today to talk about their great need for volunteers. Even though this has been going for many years, there are always so many people needed, especially in the period between December 18 and 22 when the food is brought in, when it is sorted, and finally on the 22nd when it is delivered to needy families. If you can help, the number is 416-691-1113, extension 24. The families in the Beach will thank you from the bottom of their hearts.

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BÉNÉVOLES VOLUNTEERS

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): Lundi dernier était la journée internationale des bénévoles. Cette journée est reconnue officiellement par les Nations Unies comme une occasion pour rendre hommage aux bénévoles du monde entier pour leur dévouement et leur contribution à la société.

According to Ontario Network—Canada Volunteerism Initiative, Ontario has the second-lowest volunteerism rate in the country.

Voilà pourquoi le gouvernement McGuinty accorde du financement aux conseils scolaires pour mettre les écoles à la disposition des organismes à but non lucratif après les heures de classe.

This weekend I had the pleasure of participating in two events organized by volunteers in my riding. Last Saturday I was at the 25th anniversary of the Club Optimiste de St-Eugène/Ste-Anne, an organization of volunteers dedicated to helping youth in their community. This international organization is represented in every municipality in Glengarry-Prescott-Russell.

Lors de la guignolée de Rockland dimanche dernier, 130 bénévoles se sont divisés les quartiers de la municipalité et ont frappé aux portes des citoyens pour faire la cueillette de 12 000 \$ en argent comptant pour les paniers de Noël et de 15 000 denrées non-périssables pour la banque alimentaire.

I am very proud that volunteering is alive and well in my community, and I thank all the volunteers across Ontario who dedicate themselves to the welfare of others, not only during the holiday season but all year round.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I rise to acknowledge the wonderful work of the Ontario youth apprenticeship program. This program is unique in that it combines college and high school programs so students can earn the basic part one of an apprenticeship and four high school co-op credits at the same time. This is clearly an exciting and effective opportunity for apprentices in the province.

This program is doing great things in my riding of Northumberland. The OYAP cook basic apprenticeship program has partnered with local industry and with Cobourg District Collegiate Institute East to put together a culinary kitchen program for students from grade 9 to grade 12. In fact, this past Monday, December 5, the culinary arts students at CDCI East launched the official opening of a culinary kitchen in Cobourg. This was a truly terrific event, as Paul Macklin, the local MP, Mayor Peter Delanty and Dr. Tony Tilly, the president of Fleming College, can attest.

I would like to note that the Ontario youth apprenticeship program is also in partnership with local industries in my riding, such as LeBlanc enterprises and RONA, in order to create a skilled trade apprenticeship in the construction sector. This program is providing tremendous opportunities for young people in my riding of Northumberland, and I'm proud of everyone involved. I wish the Ontario youth apprenticeship program much success today and in the future. I would like to congratulate the students of CDCI East in Cobourg for their hard work.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): Last night I attended a rally at the Ajax community centre, where 1,300 people, primarily from the ridings of Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge and Whitby-Ajax, came to protest the closure of pediatric and obstetric services at the Ajax-Pickering site of the Rouge Valley Health System. This decision by the hospital was ill advised. I understand the anger of those in attendance and know that a functioning and reliable pediatrics and obstetrics department is part of the vision the community has for its hospital.

The Ajax-Pickering birthing centre has served my family well. In fact, three of my grandchildren were born there, and my youngest daughter certainly hopes her first baby will be delivered there later this month. I support my local hospital in its quest to provide quality health care to one of the fastest-growing communities in Ontario.

On behalf of the community, I express our gratitude to the doctors, nurses, technicians and health care professionals who make the Ajax-Pickering site such a valuable community resource. I'm now in my 24th year of elected office serving Durham communities. I served the hospital as a politician, as a political representative and as a volunteer fundraiser. I want my constituents to know that

I stand with them to ensure that the hospital provides the services we need and that the desperately needed re-development is realized in a timely fashion.

VISITORS

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just want to take this opportunity, although I know you're going to rule me out of order, to welcome Adam Payler, a student from my riding who is shadowing me today, and as well, a group of young ladies who are here promoting the Miss G project. I want to welcome both Adam and the Miss G project ladies here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I think you're clairvoyant: You are out of order. Welcome.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to introduce the concerned women who are here today from the Miss G project for equality in education. We have representatives from the University of Western Ontario, the University of Waterloo, Laurier and the University of Toronto.

The mission of these young women is to get a women's studies course into the Ontario secondary school curriculum. We welcome them here today.

The Speaker: That also is not point of order. Welcome.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on general government.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Todd Decker): Mrs. Jeffrey from the standing committee on general government presents the committee's report as follows and moves its adoption:

Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 206, An Act to revise the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System Act / Projet de loi 206, Loi révisant la Loi sur le régime de retraite des employés municipaux de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Pursuant to standing order 72(b), the bill is therefore ordered for second reading.

MOTIONS

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent for the routine pro-

ceedings "deferred votes" to be called immediately following oral questions today.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has asked for unanimous consent for the routine proceedings "deferred votes" to be called immediately following oral questions today. Agreed? Agreed.

ORAL QUESTIONS

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. On Monday, I asked a question about this Liberal government's approach to ensuring that people who use guns in connection with a crime remain behind bars. At that time, I specifically raised the case of a man who is charged with second-degree murder in the shooting death of a car salesman, and who was already out on bail, facing several other charges in respect of gun crimes.

On Monday, your Attorney General said, "The practice and policy of crowns on all matters involving alleged gun crimes is ... that we try to ensure that people who ought to be detained are detained." In this specific case, I believe the Attorney General's office has stated that the crown did oppose bail. After bail was granted, did the Ministry of the Attorney General's officials ask for a review of the decision to grant bail to this man, and if not, why not?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm pleased to receive the question, but let me just say that I would have thought the leader of the official opposition would want to take the opportunity to comment publicly on his position with respect to the proposed handgun ban put forward by the federal Liberal Party today.

I think a handgun ban is an absolutely essential component of any intelligent, comprehensive plan to address shootings, especially those that are taking place here in the city of Toronto. I think we owe it to our young people in particular to take guns off the streets, and I can't think of anything more powerful in that regard than a handgun ban.

I think that when it comes to crime in Ontario today, what the people of Ontario really want to know is, where does the leader of the official opposition stand with respect to this proposed handgun ban?

Mr. Tory: I think what they really want to know is, what are you doing and what is your government doing to actually keep people who use guns in the commission—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock.

It is Thursday, but the rules are still the same. One member has the floor at a time.

Leader of the Opposition.

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Mr. Tory: As I was saying, what the people of Ontario want to know is what your government is doing with respect to keeping people who are charged with offences involving the use of a gun behind bars pending their trial, so they're not out there turning around and getting charged with something else.

Given your statements both today—actually, you didn't make any statements today, but the statements over the course of the past week—it is very clear there are some “general guidelines” that crown attorneys follow, but no clearly defined, definitive rules for dealing with such accused criminals. Your Attorney General has said that the general practice is to oppose bail, but you've failed to take it to the next logical step, which is to say that always we are automatically and vigorously going to oppose bail and that we're going to seek a review in the event that bail is granted.

Should it not be your policy—and this is my question to you, Premier—that, in cases where the accused is charged with an offence involving the use of a gun and is released on bail, your officials will initiate an automatic review of that decision made in court?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): I'm sure the leader of the official opposition knows very well that in fact the role of the government is to be a part of the drafting and establishing of policies and practices with respect to how crown attorneys exercise their independent discretion. It is a critical part of our justice system that police officers lay charges not based on what government officials tell them to do but rather they do it based upon their independent discretion. When it comes to crown attorneys, the same applies.

I know that the member does not want to try to politicize the exercise of discretion by crown attorneys. I can assure the member opposite that we will continue to have in place principles and policies that are exactly consistent with ensuring that we have safety on our streets and that people who ought to be detained are detained.

Mr. Tory: I think it is entirely consistent with the practice that has been followed for a very long time in terms of the role of the Attorney General and so on that you could indicate that it is your wish—in fact, you've made statements. I've quoted you as saying that the practice and policy of crowns on all matters involving alleged gun crimes is that “we try to ensure that people who ought to be detained are detained.” The “we,” I'm assuming, includes you. That means there is no reason whatsoever why you can't say to these people that they are to vigorously oppose these applications for bail and, furthermore, that you will request them to automatically appeal any bail that is granted in respect of someone charged with a crime involving a gun. Will you instruct them to vigorously oppose—vigorously oppose—these bail applications and to review bail when it is granted in court, as a matter of automatic policy to protect the people?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I answered that already, but I know what people want to know today: Where does the Conservative Party stand on a handgun ban? Are you on the side of the National Rifle Association? Are you in the holster of the gun lobby or on the side of people? Are you on the side of gun safety? Do you believe that there is a constitutional or other right for Ontarians to bear handguns, or do you believe that we ought to have a handgun ban? Are you on the side of prevention, the additional police officers, the additional crown attorneys and the additional judges who have been appointed? Are you on the side of the gun amnesty, the gun tip line, the guns and gangs task force? Are you on the side of the handgun ban, or are you, as ever with the Conservative Party, in the holster of the gun lobby?

COURT BACKLOG

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My new question is for the Premier. According to this year's auditor's report, court backlogs continue to plague our justice system and in fact have gotten worse on your watch. The number of charges waiting eight months or longer to be heard in court increased by 9% in 2005. Two years ago, your Attorney General promised to get the backlog down to zero.

Premier, eight months is exactly how long Lori Dupont, a nurse from Windsor, was told she had to wait to have her day in court to obtain a restraining order against her former boyfriend. Last month, she was murdered while she waited for her day in court.

What specific measures is your government undertaking today with dates and times and places and targets in terms of what's going to be done to get rid of this backlog and, instead of just talking about getting it down to zero, actually getting it down to zero and stopping the trend that has developed on your watch, which is, the backlog is getting worse? What are you doing about it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): I also welcome the auditor's report and thank the auditor and his officials for the work they've done and the many people in the justice sector, not just in the Ministry of the Attorney General but also in our independent judiciary and the private bar, for the work they have done through the justice summits that we set up, in some part as a result of recommendations provided by the auditor.

The goal is zero backlog, but I want to report to members of this House as to where we're at, and it's positive as you'll see from the auditor's report.

The caseload is up over the last five years by some 11%. The backlog, however, I'm happy to report, is down. Caseload up; backlog down. That's as a result of additional investments in our judicial system, as a result of the justice summit that we've undertaken and as a result of a lot of effort by a lot of different partners in our justice system.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

Mr. Tory: In the supplementary, I'll quote from the Provincial Auditor's report, and they can decide whether they want to accept your version or whether they want to accept his version. He says, and I quote from page 295 of his report, "The Ministry [of the Attorney General] could not estimate a timetable for eliminating court backlogs," and then again on page 296 he says that 159,000 criminal charges are waiting longer than eight months to be heard by the Ontario Court of Justice, a 9% increase over last year. That really sounds like backlog down, doesn't it? These statistics are entirely from your watch as Attorney General of this province.

Two weeks ago, the head of the Ontario Crown Attorneys' Association told the media, "Crown attorneys are so overworked, they have little or no time to prepare cases against those charged with serious offences." I've been told this creates huge pressure to do plea bargaining and sentencing deals, which erode confidence in the system of justice.

Specifically, what are you going to do to reverse this trend on your watch and get this backlog and this waiting time down?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: Well, it is down. As I said, caseload is up and, overall, the backlog is down.

I will say that the member can't have it both ways. About a month ago, he was before this House absolutely castigating crown attorneys. He was referring to them as "make-a-deal crown prosecutors." He was accusing them of making let's-make-a-deal arrangements. You can't bash crown attorneys one week and then show up and pretend to be their buddy the next week.

The bottom line is that in fact, Mr. Chaffe, the head of Ontario Crown Attorneys' Association, said of the announcement that we were adding more crown attorneys to the guns and gangs task force—he was very positive—that he was delighted. He said this is an important first step.

We are making the investments. We've been making more investments in our justice system. We'll continue to ensure that we have a justice system that is working better. I can't say it any better than this: The caseload is up, and notwithstanding that, the backlog is down.

Mr. Tory: The reason the crown attorneys are making those deals is because you won't tell them that they're not on, those deals, and because you won't put a plan in place to stop them from being forced to make those deals because of the fact that otherwise these cases are going to get thrown out.

Let's look at the consequences of this backlog and overburdened court system. A shortage of justices of the peace has resulted in the city of Hamilton's court calendar, for the first eight months of this year, showing half- and full-day closures that eliminated 125 days of court time. In the region of Niagara, 58 court days were scheduled for closure between January and August this year. Now, you've appointed only 26 new justices of the peace over the last two years. The crown attorneys' association says 150 are needed to clear the backlog and to really get it moving down, as opposed to your hallucinations.

This is a growing problem on your watch. Where is the plan? Where is any sense of urgency that you're going to get it down, you're going to get these courts open and you're going to give these people the tools so they'll stop making these deals that are eroding confidence in the justice system?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: Let me read from another auditor's report. The member opposite will like this one.

This is from the auditor's 2003 report and it talks about the justice system as per the Conservative government. "The number of backlogged cases," Erik Peters wrote, "in 2002 was at its highest level in 10 years. There is a risk that a situation similar to 1992 may be developing, when long delays resulted in more than 50,000 charges being withdrawn from prosecution." That's the justice system that this government inherited.

1400

So what's the situation in 2004-05? Some 99% of the cases have moved through the system, consistent with the constitutional requirements. Less than 1% were stayed.

If this member wants to, in fact, do something about the JP situation in the various regions that he mentioned, he has to stop being a part of the legislative backlog and agree to move the Access to Justice Act through the Legislature at a timely pace so that I can get those JPs robed up on Monday.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Premier, I continue to have some troubling questions about the degree to which your right-hand political advisers are now all paid lobbyists for nuclear power companies. I'm troubled by the fact that many of the people who you say are independent at the Ontario Power Authority clearly are not independent.

My question today is about protecting consumers from corporate gouging. We know you like the idea of private, profit-driven nuclear power, Premier. Can you tell us who is in charge of overseeing the engineering, the procurement and the construction contract in the refurbishment of the private reactor at Bruce A, and are you confident, Premier, that the public interest will be protected?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I am very confident that the public interest will be protected because the Minister of Energy has put in place the necessary provisions, either through our contractual relationship or otherwise, to ensure that the interests of consumers and the broader interest in safety and security are always and at all times accounted for.

Let me say to the member as well that, again, we are seized with a very important and vital issue that is critical not just to our economy but to our homes and our hospitals and our schools alike, and that is the fact that we find ourselves behind the eight ball when it comes to energy generation in Ontario. We will do whatever we have to to ensure that the people of Ontario have access to a reliable supply of safe, clean, affordable electricity.

Mr. Hampton: My question was, does the Premier know who is in charge of engineering, construction and procurement? I know why the Premier didn't answer—because he'd be embarrassed.

The company in charge of those things at the Bruce private nuclear station is a company called SNC-Lavalin. Where have I heard that name before? Oh yes: SNC-Lavalin is part of that icon of consumer fairness and corporate responsibility, the Highway 407 consortium.

In opposition, Dalton McGuinty called the Highway 407 consortium “a band of highwaymen that rips off consumers with unfair and outrageous toll hikes.”

Premier, can you tell us what it is about the SNC-Lavalin/Highway 407 record, what is it about the 407 privatization disaster, that leads you to have such confidence that they'll protect consumer interests?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP sees electricity ghosts behind every post. He's drawing some tenuous connection between the parties responsible for oversight of Bruce somehow connected with SNC, which is somehow in turn connected with the 407. Apparently, both implicitly and explicitly—if you follow the NDP member's logic; assuming that's possible—that means that the Bruce project is entirely condemned to failure. I just don't see that.

We have taken the necessary steps to ensure that the public interest is protected. The agreement itself was the subject of a fairness report prepared by CIBC. We have ensured that it is comparable with other such agreements in other parts of the world. Again, we will protect the public interest.

Mr. Hampton: Let me draw the connections for the Premier. SNC-Lavalin, to quote your own words, has been ripping off the consumers of Ontario Highway 407, has been taking them to the cleaners, has been abusing people. That is a highway privatization contract. Bruce nuclear is a far more risky nuclear power privatization. And who is at the centre of it? Who is going to be looking after engineering safety? Why, none other than SNC-Lavalin, which is so famous for ripping people off.

I ask you again, Premier: What is it that impresses you about this? Is it the unfair and outrageous toll hikes we've seen? Is it the tendency of SNC-Lavalin to sue government whenever government tries to stand up to protect consumers? Is it just outrageous behaviour? What leads you to believe they will be better behaved in a private nuclear deal than they have behaved in a highway privatization deal?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Assuming that any of us can follow this, let me say there is an important distinction to be drawn between the agreement regarding the 407 and the agreement our government has entered into regarding the refurbishment of a reactor at Bruce. We have acted to protect the public interest. The former Conservative government clearly abdicated its responsibility in that regard. Therein lies the stark contrast. The problem is not with the private sector, although the leader of the NDP would maintain that we can never, at any time, in any place, enter into any kind of arrangement with anybody

in the private sector. I disagree with that strongly. The issue is to ensure that we have in place the necessary protections, in writing, in black and white, for the public. I am confident we have done that. Again, we've had a fairness commissioner review the agreement we have entered into with the folks at Bruce. We've ensured it is in keeping with the utmost protections we can put—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

HYDRO GENERATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Premier again: Here's what is wrong with the Bruce nuclear deal. If the cost of uranium goes up, you're going to subsidize that for the company. If the cost of living goes up, you're going to subsidize that for the company. You're going to give them a \$60-million-a-year break on the lease costs. Over 20 years, that's another \$1.2-billion subsidy. If there are cost overruns in the construction by SNC-Lavalin, the ratepayers of Ontario are going to subsidize that as well. This is important stuff for the economy of Ontario and for jobs in Ontario.

In that regard, Premier, my question is this: How can you possibly consider more expensive and unreliable nuclear power when all of the evidence in Ontario, all of the history, indicates it will only make a difficult electricity situation much worse? It will be expensive; it will be unreliable. How can you consider going down this road even further when you obviously have such a bad partner in SNC-Lavalin?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Just to shed some more light on the deal we have with the restart of Bruce units 1 and 2, we are firmly convinced that Ontario electricity consumers are getting the best deal here. Bruce Power will be paid a fixed price of 6.3 cents per kilowatt hour for Bruce A electricity. This is cheaper than the average price of electricity in Ontario, which was 6.76 cents between January 1 and October 4 of this year. I might say as well that this deal is also significantly less expensive than the NUG—that is the non-utility generation agreement—signed by the NDP government in the early 1990s, which is costing Ontario ratepayers today 8 cents a kilowatt hour—6.3 cents a kilowatt hour for the deal we got versus 8 cents a kilowatt hour for the deal the NDP government got.

Mr. Hampton: The Premier might want to check his history books. Most of those agreements were signed by the David Peterson government. The government I was part of actually shut a lot of them down.

Premier, in the last year—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The government House leader.

Supplementary.

1410

Mr. Hampton: Premier, in the last year, hydro rate hikes have cost us 42,000 good manufacturing jobs. In

fact, as of today, StatsCan says it's now up to 53,000 good manufacturing jobs lost. That's more than just "a little bit of contraction." To people across Ontario, it means 53,000 families without a paycheque, wondering what they're going to do.

Premier, my question is: How can the McGuinty government consider a scheme of more expensive, unreliable nuclear power when it's clear that nuclear power will drive hydro rates even higher? And when you add in all of the hidden subsidies that are in the Bruce deal, what you call inexpensive power becomes very expensive indeed. How can you consider going down the road of more nuclear power and more—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Premier.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Obviously, I disagree with the leader of the NDP's assessment of the state of the economy and job growth. In October, 21,200 net new jobs were created. In November, 1,400 net new jobs were created. This is the fourth straight month of job growth. Since we first earned the privilege of serving Ontarians as their government, this economy has generated 215,700 net new jobs. These stats are all from Stats Canada. It's also important to understand that seven out of eight of the new jobs that have been created are full-time new jobs, which is very significant.

The leader of the NDP says that we should not consider building any more new nuclear in Ontario, and I also draw the inference that we should not refurbish or replace any of the existing nuclear stock. We're not prepared to—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, I can appreciate why you don't want to talk about nuclear power; you're embarrassed because what you promised people was a full and open debate about nuclear power instead of trying to do it through the backroom with your former right-hand political advisers acting as paid lobbyists for nuclear power companies. But what I can't understand is why the Premier refuses to act on a positive plan that I've raised many times, a plan to keep hydro rates from going up even higher. Already, electricity watchers are forecasting a 20% to 30% price hike in the new year. Scrapping the cap on Ontario Power Generation's unregulated revenue will drive up rates even 15 % higher.

Premier, will you announce that your government is going to keep the cap on Ontario Power Generation's unregulated assets so we don't see a 40% increase in hydro rates in the new year?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Let me just recap our plan related to electricity for the benefit of the leader of the NDP and for Ontarians, generally.

As you know, we find ourselves in a difficult position, where there has not been sufficient construction of new generation. That should have happened some eight or 10 years ago, but nonetheless, this is where we find ourselves. So we have proceeded with a very aggressive construction program for new generation. We've brought on close to 3,000 new megawatts of electricity. We have some 9,000 more megawatts of new generation in the

pipeline. We have the most aggressive construction plan in all of North America.

Beyond that, we also have the most aggressive plan for renewables—wind, small hydroelectric and the like. We are also proceeding with a very aggressive conservation plan, because I feel that we all have some responsibility when it comes to ensuring that our electricity needs are met on an ongoing basis.

We have a plan. It's a responsible plan, and it will ensure that we have a reliable supply of safe, clean and affordable electricity.

WOMEN'S STUDIES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is for Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, I wrote you a letter on September 6 and I asked at that time if you would consider a proposal from the Miss G project for equity in education to discuss an optional course in women's studies in Ontario secondary schools. They have asked for this in order to address the issues regarding gender relations and equality. I would ask today, are you prepared to consider the proposal that has been put forward by this group of concerned citizens?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I'm very pleased to report that the Miss G project, a number of members of which are represented in the gallery today, has been working assiduously. I think many members of the House have heard from them. I know that the member for London North Centre had arranged a meeting with our office, as had my parliamentary assistant, the member from Don Valley West. Unfortunately, we were one snowstorm between us in terms of not having that meeting, but we will very much consider this.

We are looking forward to opening up the curriculum. The member opposite may be aware that we're talking about having a curriculum council where decisions can be discussed and debated and made. But we have agreed, because of the energy and the argument being put forward, to give this consideration so that it would be early on the agenda of that kind of curriculum council. I welcome the members here today, and I look forward to having that meeting with them.

Mrs. Witmer: I appreciate the positive response. I would ask the Minister of Education to consider meeting personally with this very enthusiastic group of women at the earliest possible opportunity. They're all here this afternoon. There are about 23 of them here from four different universities: Toronto, Waterloo, Laurier and the University of Western Ontario, and I know they have taken time from their university exams. They feel very strongly about this particular program, and I hope you can make yourself available.

I guess my question to you is, what would be the earliest opportunity you foresee that this type of course could be introduced in our secondary schools?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: What needs to happen, and I won't presuppose the meeting—and I think we probably

can have at least a brief one after question period; I want to thank the member opposite for working effectively in that regard. As I say, the member for London North Centre had arranged that meeting; it was a snowstorm that kept it from happening last week.

The subject is serious: It's to make sure we have gender equity in our curriculum. We still have an absence of the kind of conscious counter-information that's there to make people aware of how this still creeps into our culture and how it hasn't been completely excised. I think it is important that upcoming generations have that complete assurance. In terms of how quickly that can be done—I think it should be infused in all the curriculum and not restricted to a single course. It doesn't mean that such a course couldn't happen, but I think that maybe we have to be even broader in our ambition to fulfill the goal they want.

INJURED WORKERS

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): To the Minister of Labour: WSIB premiums for employers have dropped by over 27% in recent years, and inflation has cut the benefits earned by injured workers by more than 18%. Injured workers have seen their retirement benefits cut and internationally renowned research bodies like the Occupational Disease Panel completely eliminated. Injured workers in this province deserve and need balance and integrity restored to workers' compensation. When are those injured workers in Ontario going to see a new workers' compensation act from your Liberal government?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): We know that tomorrow a number of injured workers' events are going to be taking place around the province. Unfortunately, I won't be there to meet them, but we have a representative who will be meeting with them. I've taken the opportunity, as minister, to meet with injured workers' groups over the past four months, not only here at Queen's Park but travelling around the province, including Thunder Bay.

I find it quite ironic that the question is coming from the NDP, who in 1994, through Bill 165, started those cuts that eroded benefits for injured workers. I find it quite ironic that that has happened.

Certainly, there are serious issues facing injured workers in this province. I take that seriously. We are looking right now at what options we can bring forward to make sure those benefits are there to support injured workers, not only now but into the future.

1420

Mr. Kormos: Minister, hollow words and feeble rhetoric don't put food on the table of these injured workers. You bet your boots they're going to be on the streets tomorrow in London, Thunder Bay, St. Catharines, Toronto and Windsor. You forced them there because they're holding days of action to protest your government's failure to address their plight. Many of them are here in the gallery today, and they're calling on

you to do this: One, restore cuts to the retirement benefits—you can do it; two, provide full cost-of-living protection—you can do that; restore benefits to 90% of net average earnings—you can do that; provide them with real jobs and job security, or full compensation—you can do that; and ensure them full entitlements to CPP disability and workplace benefits. Are you going to do those things or not?

Hon. Mr. Peters: Again, I find it so ironic that here's an individual advocating for injured workers and he voted in favour of Bill 165, which started that downward spiral of support for injured workers.

We moved forward last June to improve benefits in working with the CPP that put more dollars in injured workers' pockets, but we recognize that more needs to be done. I've asked the ministry staff to review our options to look at what we can do, working in conjunction with the WSIB, moving forward.

This is something that has not just happened overnight. It started in 1994 with the NDP. It was accelerated in 1998 with the Conservatives, who took further cuts and benefits away from injured workers. At that time, they continued to hack away at benefits, choosing to take away another 25% of inflation coverage.

I've met with injured workers' groups. We hear the challenges that they're facing. We're going to continue to meet with them, we're going to work with them and we're going to find a way to improve benefits for injured workers.

INDUSTRIAL PARK

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron—Bruce): My question is to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Minister, recently the Ontario Realty Corp. became part of your ministry's responsibilities. As you are aware, last year this government made an announcement that the Huron Industrial Park in my riding of Huron—Bruce was up for sale. My understanding is that the industrial tenants of this park will be given the opportunity to purchase their properties from the province. I know that this can be a very long and drawn-out process. Minister, can you provide me with the current status of the industrial park?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I want to thank the member for the question. I'm very happy to provide some information to the member from Huron—Bruce.

The ORC, the Ontario Realty Corp., has presented the municipality of South Huron with a plan calling for the entire site to be marketed while providing the existing industrial tenants an opportunity to purchase their properties—of course, at market value—if they wish to do so. Several months ago, the ORC conducted a number of information sessions to ensure that the tenants of the industrial park were aware and understood the process that is taking place in the sale of the industrial lands. The discussions on the details, I believe and I was told, were

very useful, and the procedures for severing the various parcels of land and the procedures in purchasing them moved forward. I am very pleased to inform this House—and, of course, the member—that several tenants have now expressed an interest in their properties and are moving forward in the process to purchase. We are very pleased that the employers will be remaining in the industrial park in the community.

Market demand, I should add, for industrial sites in Ontario has been on the rise, and—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mrs. Mitchell: Minister, I can tell you that that sounds very good. The industrial tenants will be very pleased. I'm very pleased to see that this is moving forward and that the tenants within the park have shown such an interest in staying in our community.

Is it possible, Minister, to provide a time frame for this type of purchase? I am aware that these things can take years to complete, but I would appreciate if you could explain the time frame to me.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I certainly want to thank the member for her interest in employment lands in this province. I am, once again, very happy to provide the kind of information that she is looking for on this issue.

In fact, the member is quite correct that it can be a very long process in order to go from sale to transfer. However, the Ontario Realty Corp. is currently in negotiations with the municipality to exercise the government's prerogative to create individual lots, subject to the conditions that the municipality will make. It is my understanding that this will be put to council members in the next couple of weeks. In the government, the Ontario Realty Corp., we are very hopeful of a positive response. The ORC is proceeding to finalize negotiations, market the remaining portions of the property and prepare to deal with the municipal conditions in a manner to enable us to expeditiously conclude this transaction to everyone's satisfaction.

I want to thank the member for her very keen interest in this file and in providing employment lands in the province—

The Speaker: Thank you.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. It's to do with eligibility for the northern health travel grant. As it currently stands, a resident of northern Ontario cannot apply for the northern health travel grant if the referring physician is from southern Ontario. The Ministry of Health staff have been suggesting to applicants that they ask a northern physician to sign the applications. Northern physicians are being advised against this by their professional college, citing that this could be considered a form of fraud. Minister, will you reconsider the eligibility criteria for the northern health travel grant,

so that northern residents can have access to this program as was intended?

Interjections.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): In addition to my colleagues who ask the question of the honourable member, why didn't you fix the eligibility criteria over that eight-and-a-half-year period of time you were the government? I want to say to the honourable—on behalf of my colleagues, I was saying that message.

I acknowledge that there are a variety of pressures on the northern health travel grant. The particular circumstances the honourable member asks me about are ones that warrant some consideration. Accordingly, I'll take the opportunity to do that.

I've had a chance around here on a number of occasions, especially in speaking to northern caucus members from my party, to indicate that we know this is an area northerners depend upon, and it is also an area that would be a prime one for expansion. At this time we're investing about \$25 million a year in support for travel to other locations for necessary services, but I'll certainly take up the issue the honourable member has raised.

Mr. Miller: Thank you very much, Minister, for that answer. I bring it up because I have a specific case, and I'd like to tell you about it. It's a situation with Calvin and Penny Ulrick. They live in Perry township, which is in northern Ontario. Calvin has Marfan syndrome, a disease which affects connective tissue, including the aorta and the eyes. He works as a sawyer at the Tembec sawmill. His wife, Penny, is blind, has glaucoma and multiple sclerosis, and has recently recovered from surgery for a brain aneurysm.

They went to the only doctor in their area who was accepting patients, who was in Huntsville. With the very complicated nature of their medical conditions, they were referred to specialists in southern Ontario. Because they are northern residents, they applied to the northern health travel grant, looking for some relief for travel costs. Mr. Ulrick is facing many more visits to a specialist, including some major surgery in Hamilton coming up, with a one-year recovery time.

The northern health travel grant should be awarded on the basis of the applicant's address, not the physician's address. I ask for your help with this specific situation. Will you reconsider the eligibility criteria for this program and direct your staff to consider only the—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I think, on the face of the information the honourable member provides, it does seem that a more sensible approach is to adhere strictly to the issue of where people live. Accordingly, we'll take a good look at the individual circumstances that are raised and see if there is a necessity for a change in policy. If it is as the honourable member states, like I said, I'll make sure to get back to him so that he can inform those other people as well.

PROJECT LIFESAVER

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): A question to the Minister of Community Safety: Elda Jackson is here with us in the Legislature today. She's from Niagara. She cares for her husband, who has Alzheimer's, at their family home. Her husband, like 60% of other Alzheimer's victims, is one of those people who has a symptom of Alzheimer's: He wanders. He can wander off and that causes great fear for Elda Jackson, as it does for any caregiver for people with Alzheimer's, as it does for institutions that accommodate people with Alzheimer's, autism, Down syndrome, brain injury. Are you aware, Minister, that the cost of a police search for a wanderer with those symptoms is \$1,500 an hour and can oftentimes reach \$100,000 per search?

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I want to thank the member for Niagara Centre for the question. I'm very aware of the issue. I'm sure the member knows there is a program in place, Project Lifesaver, that has been initiated by the OPP in Essex county, in which they provide citizens who have this problem, whether it's autism, Alzheimer's or other mental dysfunctions, with a bracelet that they can track. They've had a 100% success rate. The average recovery time is 22 minutes. It's a wonderful program, and I look forward to your supplementary question on it.

1430

Mr. Kormos: It is a wonderful program. Like you, I've spoken to OPP officers from Essex county. I've also spoken with police officers from police services in other parts of Ontario.

Also present with us today is Doreen Broadbent with Project Lifesaver Ontario. It's this small wristband with a small transmitter and a hand-held receiver that permits but two police officers with this low-tech, easy-to-use, hard-to-damage equipment to locate people, as you know, in usually less than 30 minutes.

Sir, will you meet with Project Lifesaver so that we can begin the process of ensuring that every police service in Ontario has access to this program, this technology and the low-cost training that's necessary? It will save lives and it will reduce the expenditure of scarce police dollars. Will you meet with these folks?

Hon. Mr. Kwinter: I'm pleased to meet with anybody who has an initiative that will help save citizens of Ontario.

I should tell you that under the adequacy standards and regulations of the Police Services Act, all police services in Ontario have to have procedures and policies in place to do search and rescue. This particular program, Project Lifesaver, is a great program and the OPP are happy to do it, but you should understand that their participation is only in the search-and-rescue component of that. Essex county officials have provided, I think, \$10,000 for tracking equipment and \$1,500 for a bracelet. I'd be delighted to meet with them and see what we can do to help them.

The issue of having the police do it is not a problem. There is an issue with the cost and who is picking up that cost, and I'm happy to discuss that with them.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): My question is for the minister responsible for democratic renewal. Minister, as you know, I recently had the honour of serving on the select committee on electoral reform, which has now submitted its report. The select committee was charged with the responsibility to consider and report on options for electoral reform, and I'm very proud of the work we did. In the course of our work, we looked at various electoral systems and we analyzed those systems according to a set of principles, including legitimacy and fair representation. We made recommendations not on a particular system but on the considerations we believe ought to be taken into account going forward.

I know you're working on a proposal to have a citizens' assembly process put in place to look at potential changes to the electoral system in Ontario. How will the report of our select committee affect your plan for a citizens' assembly?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I'd like to thank the member from Don Valley West not only for her question but for her excellent work and the excellent work of her colleagues on the select committee for democratic renewal.

The report is thoughtful, comprehensive and reflects a dedicated effort of members on all sides of the House. The report of the select committee will assist the government in laying out the framework for the citizens' assembly. I think you will be very pleased with the direction we will be taking as the citizens' assembly process unfolds in the following months.

Ms. Wynne: As you've said, our committee worked really hard on the report and we're gratified to hear that the work will be used and has been appreciated.

People in Don Valley West actually ask me about this citizens' assembly process. Just last week, I held a youth forum at which nearly 100 local high school students questioned both the Premier and me on political issues, on politics, and there was a lot of interest in how renewal could happen in our democratic process. We know that one of the issues that we really need to address is youth voter turnout, so I was happy to see that interest.

I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about exactly what the work of the citizens' assembly will be and how our report will complement that work.

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: I would like to congratulate the member for that youth forum, because we need to engage our youth. We have a very low voter turnout amongst the young in Canada and Ontario, and we need to turn that around. We need for them to trust the political system again.

Not only will the citizens' assembly process be guided by the report but it will also be a valuable resource to the assembly itself. We will also have youth engagement as part of it. We will apply a lot of the recommendations of the report.

The assembly did amazing work. The researchers they worked with were amazingly comprehensive. This work will be used every step of the way. I anticipate that with this well-thought-out report, we will have an excellent process in Ontario which may lead in fact to a referendum question in 2007 if the citizens' assembly decides on changing our electoral system.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): My question is to the Premier, about Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls. Over the last decade there have been very few discharges from Rideau Regional Centre. These took place when the parent and the resident agreed they would like to go outside of the residence. Your government has decided to move the 430-plus residents out of Rideau Regional Centre over the next four years. We heard yesterday that there are not adequate resources in the community to take care of these very vulnerable adults. Why don't you continue the policy of the former government and continue to allow these aged and severely handicapped people the option of staying in what they consider their home for as long as they live or as long as their guardians wish?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the minister.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I appreciate the question. As you know, we are continuing a policy that was set out in the mid-1980s. There has been a significant philosophical shift in the sector since the 1970s, which we have continued. At that time, there was a plan to close all institutions. It has been an extremely slow process. Many people have actually been quite critical of governments over the years for not moving more quickly. What we do know is that we have to do this in a careful and balanced manner. In fact, the planning required for each individual is quite individual. There will be no two plans the same, nor have there been. A significant amount of money has been set aside in our budgeting process to be certain that they will have the resources they need in their communities.

Mr. Sterling: There is nothing wrong with slow in this case.

Again to the Premier: The town of Smiths Falls is already losing 100 jobs with the layoffs at Hershey's chocolate and Coiltech. These are private sector jobs. The Rideau Regional Centre jobs, on the other hand, are public sector jobs, and these result directly from a decision by your government. The loss of these jobs will affect not only the 800 employees at Rideau Regional Centre but everybody in Smiths Falls. The payroll of

Rideau Regional Centre is \$36 million. Imagine how much that takes out of a town of 9,000 people.

Minister Gerretsen was kind enough to meet with the mayor of Smiths Falls last week. I want to ask you, Premier, will you support his and my efforts to plan and finance a recovery from this huge economic loss for the town of Smiths Falls?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I was very pleased to see that you mentioned the mayor of Smiths Falls, who has himself been a director of the facility there and has participated in moving hundreds of people into the community. This mayor knows better than most what it means to have people fully included in their communities.

We have addressed at length with each of the three communities what we can do, how we can help, to allow these communities to prepare for the economic development that will be required. I can say, though, that those who worked in institutions, in all of the 13 institutions that the member opposite has had a hand in closing over these many years—I meet them today in the community. They are executive directors of agencies; they are workers who work individually with people in the community; they are individuals who are committed to the sector, to people, because they have a very special talent, a high skill level that we appreciate. In addition, many of those who have left those institutions have come into the government, have accepted positions within our own ministry—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

1440

ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Culture. The McGuinty government promised \$3.8 million in transitional funding for the Royal Botanical Gardens. Our research confirms that that funding never materialized. You promised the \$3.8-million lifeline for the RBG back on April 1—ironically, April Fool's Day. Why have you broken your promise to both the community and the workers at this prized provincial facility?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I want to thank my colleague on the other side for her interest in the Royal Botanical Gardens. The Royal Botanical Gardens is a very important institution for us in Ontario and has been neglected for too long. When I was appointed Minister of Culture, we made sure that there was a review done to ensure that the Royal Botanical Gardens will be there for a long time to come. I'm confident that the new board of directors who has been appointed will make sure that the gardens will be there to be enjoyed by the residents of the area for a long time to come.

Ms. Horwath: If you expect that to be a comfort, it's certainly a cold comfort. The \$3.8 million that you

promised became a bargaining chip in contract negotiations with the RBG workers last spring. During those contract talks, CUPE, Local 5167, was pressured to agree to deep staff cuts. They were told, "No firings, no cash." Now it looks like bad-faith bargaining on your part and that of your government and your parliamentary assistant from Stoney Creek. Why hasn't that \$3.8 million you promised made its way to the RBG like you said it would, and when will you make good on your long-standing promise to our community?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: I'm always impressed by the renewed interest of my colleague from Hamilton East. When she was part of the municipal government, she took a decision or voted for a decision to cut the budget for the Royal Botanical Gardens substantially.

I want to tell you that the Royal Botanical Gardens is a very important institution. They have an independent board of directors that manages the affairs of the board. I'm confident that the board will make the right decision to ensure the future growth of the gardens.

ONTARIO FILM
AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY
INDUSTRIE ONTARIENNE
DU FILM ET DE LA TÉLÉVISION

Mr. Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): My question is for the Minister of Culture, the honourable Madame Meilleur. As you know, the film and television industry is a very significant industry in this province, culturally as well as economically. Over the years it has become a particularly important industry in the greater Toronto area, employing thousands of people and bringing in millions of dollars of revenue.

Due to the SARS crisis, however, as you will appreciate, the film and television industry took a real hit a couple of years ago.

Afin d'aider à la compétitivité dans l'industrie, vous avez annoncé avec le ministre des Finances il y a un an une majoration à l'ordre de 48 \$ millions aux crédits d'impôt pour la production télévisuelle et cinématographique.

Madame la ministre, pourriez-vous nous dire comment se débrouille l'industrie depuis cette majoration?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur (ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones): Je voudrais remercier le député d'Etobicoke-Nord pour sa question et son intérêt dans l'industrie culturelle et de divertissement de l'Ontario. Comme vous savez, cette industrie est très importante pour l'Ontario et les Ontariens. Notre gouvernement prend des mesures sérieuses pour renforcer les six secteurs des industries culturelles et du divertissement en augmentant les crédits d'impôt. En effet, il y a un an, le ministre des Finances et moi-même avons annoncé une augmentation de 48 \$ millions aux crédits d'impôt pour la production télévisuelle et cinématographique en Ontario.

Ontario's cultural and entertainment industries have become world leaders in a broad range of sectors, including television production and children's literature. They employ more than 45,000 people and contribute more than \$7.7 billion per year to Ontario's economy. So they promote our identity as a people and a province and they celebrate—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Qadri: I share with you those sentiments, because the industry does seem to have rebounded from where it was a couple of years ago. Those working in the industry have certainly seen a positive difference in their schedule. Summers are busy again. As well, the streets of Toronto are always showing signs of the film and movie industry.

Apart from these visible signs of improvement, however, could you please share with this House some of the specifics on how these tax credits have directly affected the production of programs that Ontarians love and watch on a daily basis?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: The honourable member is entirely right in saying that Ontario has the vision, talent, expertise and determination required to produce international hits. Take, for example, the Degrassi series of television shows, which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. From The Kids of Degrassi Street to its latest incarnation, Degrassi: The Next Generation, this series has been honoured with two international Emmy awards, 14 Geminis and two Prix Jeunesse, as well as other honours at festivals around the world.

I wanted to take this opportunity to congratulate Linda Schuyler, the producer and co-creator of this series. In recognition of her contribution to Canadian television programming, she was awarded in 1994 the Order of Canada.

LIQUOR LICENSING

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): My question is for the Minister of Government Services. You're conducting hearings with respect to a review of the Liquor Licence Act. As you know, there's a serious problem of date rape drugs being put in the drinks of female customers at bars. Would you consider extending the licensed premises to the washroom area so persons can take their drinks to that area and avoid this problem?

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): Thank you for the question. The member is probably aware—I hope he has what we call the discussion guide on the areas we're reviewing. Indeed, that is one of them.

Part of the consultation is about public safety. One of the things that may be helpful with on public safety is to permit licensed establishments to extend the area so that the washrooms are covered by that so that the person could take her drink into the washroom. Part of the purpose of the consultations is to find out if the advantages of that outweigh some of the possible disadvantages. The

quick answer is yes, that is part of our consultations. My parliamentary assistant, Ted McMeekin, is conducting that, and I'm looking for feedback from the community on that.

Mr. Tascona: In your review documents there is a focus on organized crime and getting behind the veil of who's actually looking for the liquor licence when they're granting those liquor licences. There's been a problem in the city of Barrie with respect to that type of activity and the ability of the police and the city officials to get behind that type of application.

Is it not time now, Minister, to give municipalities the power over liquor licences, since they know what is best for their communities?

Hon. Mr. Phillips: The member is correct, and I'm glad he raised it, that one of the purposes of the consultations is, as I said, public safety. We're looking for advice from our law enforcement community, I might say. Part of the discussion paper is, should we give the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario additional criteria for whether or not they grant a licence, which will allow them to do more broad background checking?

The question of more authority locally is something that we're certainly prepared to look at. But the thrust of the paper is on public safety, looking for advice from the community on how we can enhance public safety, and one of the key areas is looking behind the ownership in licensed establishments to make sure they are the appropriate people who have those licences.

DEFERRED VOTES

ENDING MANDATORY RETIREMENT STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS POUR ÉLIMINER LA RETRAITE OBLIGATOIRE

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 211, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code and certain other Acts to end mandatory retirement / Projet de loi 211, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne et d'autres lois pour éliminer la retraite obligatoire.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1449 to 1454.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Hudak, Tim	Rinaldi, Lou
Balkissoon, Bas	Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.
Bartolucci, Rick	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Bentley, Christopher	Kennedy, Gerard	Sandals, Liz
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldeep	Sergio, Mario
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Smith, Monique
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George

Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Sterling, Norman W.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Matthews, Deborah	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chudleigh, Ted	McGuinty, Dalton	Tascona, Joseph N.
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Tory, John
Cordiano, Joseph	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Miller, Norm	Wilkinson, John
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Wilson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Witmer, Elizabeth
Duguid, Brad	Munro, Julia	Wong, Tony C.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Qaadri, Shafiq	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Hampton, Howard	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Horwath, Andrea	Marchese, Rosario	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 60; the nays are 5.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Earlier today, the Attorney General suggested that the opposition was delaying the Courts of Justice Act. It has never been called by the government. Once again, the Attorney General is providing incorrect—

The Speaker: Petitions.

PETITIONS

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

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

“Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

“Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

“Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

I thank you very much for the opportunity to present this petition on their behalf.

PROPERTY TAXATION

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

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas property assessment now occurs on an annual basis;

“Whereas the Mike Harris government created the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) to deflect criticism of property assessment methodology from the province;

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government promised to create a fair and equitable system of assessment; and

“Whereas property values are not related to the cost of municipal services nor to the ability of taxpayers to pay,

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately create a new system of property assessment that provides property and business owners with fair and equitable assessments that are stable and transparent that a property owner will clearly be able to understand.”

It is signed by many residents of my riding and I am in agreement.

1500

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): This petition is very timely, because we just voted on the mandatory retirement bill. It is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

“Whereas existing legislation enforcing mandatory retirement is discriminatory; and

“Whereas it is the basic human right of Ontario citizens over the age of 65 to earn a living and contribute to society; and

“Whereas the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Yukon and the Northwest Territories have also abolished mandatory retirement in various forms; and

“Whereas ending mandatory retirement is a viable means of boosting the Ontario labour force and accommodating the growing need for skilled workers;

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

“The Ontario government should act by abolishing mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario. This is best achieved by passing Bill 211, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code and certain other Acts to end mandatory retirement.”

I am so delighted on this very day to sign this petition, because it came alive; it became a fact.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

“Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

“Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

I agree with the petition, I've signed it, and I want to thank Jim Lott, executive director of Community Living Meaford, for sending the petitions to me.

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition here, and it's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas gun violence has been on the rise in the province of Ontario over the past year;

“Whereas such violence has had a devastating effect on communities across this province;

“Whereas this propensity toward gun violence is born largely out of neglect and abandonment on the part of previous governments toward youth and the issues and concerns they face;

“Whereas programs supporting youth such as employment and recreation are essential in diverting youth from pursuing and embracing a culture of crime;

“Whereas we applaud Premier Dalton McGuinty for his quick response to this issue by immediately meeting with members of affected community groups and committing the government of Ontario to action;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request that the government of Ontario, as part of its strategy to deal with gun violence, restore and fund more programs that fund initiatives that empower youth like employment and recreation.”

I agree with this petition and sign it, and give it to page Katherine here today.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition that I've received from my riding.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

“Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

“Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

I affix my signature to this petition.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a petition signed by people in my community, among them Andy Rotsma.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

“Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

“Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

I support this and affix my signature.

GAMMA FOUNDRIES

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition addressed to the Parliament of Ontario submitted through the good work of Councillor Arnie Warner in the town of Richmond Hill. It’s from many of his constituents and mine, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas all residents in the town of Richmond Hill have the right to enjoy their homes, property, neighbourhood and to breathe clean air; and

“Whereas Gamma Foundries, a division of Victaulic Co. of Canada Ltd., is clearly the identifiable and documented source of noxious fumes and odours in the Newkirk Road area of Richmond Hill; and

“Whereas Gamma Foundries has persistently failed to respond to the legitimate concerns of the community regarding these odours and emissions; and

“Whereas Gamma Foundries previously refused to initiate engineering solutions to these issues as identified in a report by Earth Tech and as ordered by the Ministry of the Environment; and

“Whereas the Ministry of the Environment has specifically directed Gamma Foundries to initiate engineered controls to address the adverse effects of these pollutants;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of the Environment to take all measures possible to enforce the director’s order and to ensure that residents are afforded the right to enjoy their property and neighbourhood as is their right.”

I will affix my signature to this petition, in support of the residents of this area of Richmond Hill.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have another petition from some Portuguese Canadians. It’s to the Parliament of Ontario, and reads as follows:

“Whereas Portuguese Canadians number” 171,000 “in the Toronto census metropolitan area, many of whom encounter serious barriers (language, culture and location) to accessing community and long-term-care services; and

“There are no long-term-care homes dedicated to the needs of Portuguese Canadian seniors; and

“Camões House for the Aged and Portuguese Community Centre of Toronto is proposing a partnership with a local long-term-care provider to purchase up to 160 existing beds in the Toronto area (for a nominal fee), to develop a Portuguese Canadian long-term-care home in Toronto. This partnership is tentative and is dependent on the approval of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

“We encourage the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, his staff and members of the Legislature to support the Camões proposal, and to make the appropriate administrative and policy changes required to develop a Portuguese Canadian long-term-care home in Toronto.”

Since I’m in agreement with this petition, I’m delighted to sign it.

LESLIE M. FROST CENTRE

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): “Recommendations for the Frost Centre”—Mr. Caplan, are you listening?

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government announced the closure of the Leslie M. Frost Natural Resources Centre in July 2004 with no public consultation; and

“Whereas public outrage over the closure of the Frost Centre caused the government to appoint a working committee of local residents to examine options for the future of the property; and

“Whereas the working committee has completed their consultations and has prepared recommendations for the provincial government that include a procedure to follow during the request for proposals process; and

"Whereas the Frost Centre has been an important educational resource for the community, and continued use of the facility for educational purposes has widespread support;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"The Dalton McGuinty Liberals should retain public ownership of the Frost Centre lands and follow the recommendations of the working committee regarding the request for proposals process."

I know Minister Caplan is listening intently. Thank you.

1510

GO TRANSIT TUNNEL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition that is addressed to various ministries and it reads as follows:

"To the Parliament of Ontario, the minister of infrastructure services and the Minister of Transportation:

"Whereas GO Transit is presently planning to tunnel an area just south of St. Clair Avenue West and west of Old Weston Road, making it easier for GO trains to pass a major rail crossing;

"Whereas TTC is presently planning a TTC right-of-way along all of St. Clair Avenue West, including the bottleneck caused by the dilapidated St. Clair Avenue-Old Weston Road bridge;

"Whereas this bridge (underpass) will be: (1) too narrow for the planned TTC right-of-way, since it will leave only one lane for traffic; (2) it is not safe for pedestrians (it's about 50 metres long). It's dark and slopes on both east and west sides creating high banks for 300 metres; and (3) it creates a divide, a no man's land, between Old Weston Road and Keele Street. (This was acceptable when the area consisted entirely of slaughterhouses, but now the area has 900 new homes);

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that GO Transit extend the tunnel beyond St. Clair Avenue West so that trains will pass under St. Clair Avenue West, thus eliminating this eyesore of a bridge with its high banks and blank walls. Instead it will create a dynamic, revitalized community enhanced by a beautiful continuous cityscape with easy traffic flow."

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to sign it.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): "Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

As I am in agreement, I will be signing this and giving it to Cameron.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding extending this afternoon's session.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Is there unanimous consent to sit beyond 6 p.m.? OK.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I have to read it.

The Acting Speaker: OK, read it.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I move that the House sit beyond 6 p.m. for the purpose of completing consideration of the second reading stage of Bill 18, An Act to implement 2005 Budget measures and amend various Acts, following which the Speaker shall adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m., Monday, December 12, 2005.

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Giving us the business.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Yes, I'm giving you the business.

On Monday, December 12, in the afternoon, second and third reading votes on Bill 37, the Respect for Municipalities Act, and second reading of Bill 206, the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System Act, 2005; in the evening, second reading of Bill 21, the Energy Conservation Responsibility Act, and third reading of Bill 214, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act.

On Tuesday, December 13, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 206, the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System Act; in the evening, third reading of Bill 18, Budget Measures Act, 2005 (No. 2), and concurrence on an interim supply motion.

Wednesday, December 14, in the afternoon, is to be confirmed.

On Thursday, December 15, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 128, the Law Enforcement and Forfeited Property Management Statute Law Amendment Act, and third reading of Bill 159, the Private Security and Investigative Services Act.

OPPOSITION DAY

ECONOMIC POLICY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): I move that the Legislative Assembly call upon the government,

To recognize that there is an immediate need for a comprehensive action plan to deal with local economic crises affecting such communities as Cornwall, Oshawa, Collingwood, Thunder Bay, Windsor, St. Catharines and smaller rural communities around the province of Ontario; and

To recognize that despite some jobs being created in some parts of the province, large layoffs, plant closures and mill shutdowns are having a devastating impact on the earlier-noted communities and many other local economies, related suppliers and local services within Ontario; and

To recognize that economic indicators alone will do very little for specific communities suffering from a large number of job losses and plant shutdowns, as well as the many affected families; and

To recognize that a detailed government initiative is needed now to deal with these communities, families and working men and women who are suffering from these rapid economic changes, and that this plan should come forward immediately.

I believe we also have unanimous consent for the Leader of the Opposition to speak first and for me to rejoin the debate at a later time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Is there unanimous consent? Agreed. The Chair recognizes the leader of the official opposition.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I appreciate very much the indulgence of the members, and in particular the member for Halton, for allowing me to say a few words before others participate in the debate, including him as the mover of this motion.

What prompted us to put this motion forward was a real concern that there are people falling by the wayside here, that there really is not the kind of attention being paid to the plight of what are now, I hate to point out, 52,400 families in Ontario in the manufacturing sector that have been affected by job losses, year over year, from November 2005 back to November 2004. This is a huge number of families that have been affected by it. These are the new Statistics Canada numbers that are out, and they show a problem that is getting worse, not better.

We've had some discussions in here. I've had occasion to get up and ask questions a number of times of the Premier in particular and I sensed, throughout all of

those questions and throughout all the times that we've talked about this in the House, a certain lack of urgency. What I get back when these things are asked about in the House in a very legitimate way—community by community, company by company, family by family—is a recitation of things happening in the province that are of a more positive nature. We say right here in the motion that we recognize the fact that there are jobs being created in the province as well, but that does not take away from the fact that there is huge pain being inflicted on more than 50,000 families, and all of the indirect effects that that has on all of the different communities across this province.

What we're asking for here is really quite simple. I think it starts by saying that we're asking for a bit of empathy, because I really don't think, with respect, I would say, that we have seen that from this government, starting in particular with the Premier, who, when asked these questions, referred to the General Motors layoffs as "a bit of contraction." He has gone on to say, as I put it, "Don't worry; be happy. Everything's really fine." Well, we know for sure that for those 52,000 families, things aren't fine, and in many cases, the communities in which we live—and we only list some of them—Cornwall, Oshawa, Collingwood, Thunder Bay, Windsor, St. Catharines, and many, many other smaller, rural communities and cities of different sizes are affected by this. That's before we even get to the whole question of the spinoff effects.

1520

I saw it in my own riding when it came to the farm crisis, something else that has gone largely ignored by this government. I was walking in the streets of Mount Forest and I went into the ladies' wear store—I think I've said this in the House before—and said, "How's business?" She said, "The worst it's ever been in 20 years." I said, "Why? Is it because of a general economic downturn?" And she said, "No. The farmers aren't spending any money." It was the same story two doors up the street at the car dealership.

These layoffs that are taking place for these 52,000 families are of course going to have devastating impacts on them, but as well they will have an equally significant effect on the shops and the other businesses, the people who supply them, and on it goes in all of these different communities. It will have an impact, as we've seen, on the municipalities themselves in terms of their revenues, because they will lose assessment, and so on it goes.

So when you go through the list—I won't read the list here; I have it, and perhaps one of my colleagues will read it later—it's many communities in the north, in the west, in southern Ontario, in the east, and in northeastern Ontario in particular, where they had economic problems before these layoffs started to take place. Now the devastation is increasing in many of these kinds of communities.

What have we suggested be done here? Well, we said there should be empathy, as I said, but we've also suggested that the economic indicators that the government

ministers, starting in particular with the Premier, are so fond of reading to us are not going to do anything to help those families, and that what we need is a plan to help deal with the plight of those families and communities.

I will say that there seems to be quite a difference. My friend the Minister of Economic Development—and he is my friend—got up in response. I don't think he has ever directly answered any of my questions, because the Premier has, and has basically sort of fobbed me off, just said, "Look, you're a gloom-and-doomster," and "Don't you realize how good all the news is out there?" and "Why are you getting yourself worked up about these layoffs in these communities?"

Now, when asked a question by one of his own colleagues, Mr. Brownell, the member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh—I have trouble with the names—I thought he had a more reasonable answer, frankly. Maybe he would suggest the question was more reasonable. I'll try one of those real softball ones on him one day in the future and see if I get a better answer. But he talked a little bit about training and round tables and so on. I take no issue with that: none. It's precisely the kind of thing that should be done. When the minister does that kind of thing, I commend him for it, and I will commend him for the fact that there was a round table in Cornwall. But then, when we get to the end, and Mr. Brownell asks, quite properly, "Well, OK, what's going to come of all this?" the minister says, and I quote from Hansard, December 6, "We have assigned a deputy minister in my ministry to take a series of additional steps. A steering committee has been established to look at what can be done ... developing a plan" and so forth and so on.

Well, what I want to see, what we want to see, but more importantly, what these communities and these families and these companies and these municipalities want to see, is the plan. We also want to see a date by which the plan will come, and we'd like to know what kind of elements are being considered for inclusion in the plan, because at the end of the day, I think that's what is needed here.

It is not something that's going to pass, you know, if we just wait long enough. Over the years, there probably were some files—you see them in business and your personal life, in politics—where you thought if you put them over to one side of your desk, maybe they'd just go away. This file's not going away: 52,000 families, all kinds of communities, devastated by these job losses. There is no obvious way we can point to it and say, "Well, there's the solution. It's just there. If we wait two months, it's going to come." In fact, the news two months from now could be as bad or worse than what we've seen already.

What we're suggesting in this motion today—and it was worded in such a way that I would hope the government members and the members of the New Democratic Party can support it—is that the time has come for all of us to say together to these families across the province, to each other, to the companies, to the municipalities, "Yes, there's some news that we could take

some encouragement from in different parts of the province; but yes, there is a serious problem as well that is affecting thousands of families, dozens of communities across the province; yes, we need a plan to deal with that; and yes, we're going to state a specific date on which we will bring that plan to this Legislature for discussion and for debate," so that we can say to these families not just that we feel their pain or not that they should take comfort from the numbers they read somewhere else that seem to be affecting some other people, but that we are in their corner, we recognize our responsibility as members of the Legislature and as ministers of the crown, working with the mayors, working with the company executives, working with schools and universities, working with the trade unions, to do something about this and to come forward with a comprehensive, meaningful, funded series of initiatives that will help in these communities.

That is why we've put this motion forward for debate today. We've put it forward in a spirit of hope, that we can give those people some hope. They are not going to take hope from the recitation of good news affecting other people; they're going to take hope from specific measures brought forward to help those families, those companies, those unions and those communities in this province.

I hope it will be a constructive discussion today. The motion was meant to be worded in a constructive manner that all members could support. Then, of course, once the vote is taken, the initiative rests with the government to actually do that. I would say that if they were really proceeding in the kind of spirit we would like to proceed in and that the people would like to see—certainly, when I was canvassing door to door as recently as yesterday, they're saying, "Why can't you people work together, and actually sit down on some of these issues from time to time and do things together, instead of constantly finding you're in this jousting match?" that goes on in here.

I am willing to sit down with the minister. I'm willing to sit with the Premier. I'm willing to sit with these mayors, union heads, community leaders and affected families and so on, to listen and try and find out what the best solutions are and to show support for those solutions when they're brought forward. But I think we've got to get on with naming a date by which we're going to do it, then bring the plan forward and say, "Here's what we're going to do. These are the measures. These are things we're going to do for you because you deserve it, because you are citizens of Ontario as well."

That is what I wanted to say today. That is why, together with the member for Halton, we brought forward this motion to address the concerns being faced by these people, which I think have gone largely unaddressed thus far in terms of specific, tangible help.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I decided that I needed to participate in this debate because of the situation that's happening in Hamilton, my very own community. I notice that the communities that were mentioned by the mover of the motion didn't include the community of Hamilton, but I think we would all recog-

nize that in terms of manufacturing jobs, Hamilton is one of the major centres in Ontario, or at least it once was.

Unfortunately, we in Hamilton have also felt the effects of a shrinking manufacturing sector. We've seen job losses in the manufacturing sector to a significant extent. We've seen job losses at companies like Rheem Canada, Levis, Camco, Tiercon, Ball Packaging—the list goes on and on. In fact, not too long ago I raised the issue in this House that we're even seeing steel manufacturers that are reducing production hours because they simply can't afford the cost of hydro. To be able to maintain a semblance of regular business, they shut down the plant from time to time because they can't afford to fire the furnaces.

From my perspective as a member representing the city of Hamilton, it's extremely important to get on the record the concerns of people in Hamilton in regard to job loss. It's not just these major companies, these major manufacturers, these larger industries that are affected by the shrinking, by the loss of manufacturing jobs. In fact, it spreads far greater than that.

Certainly I'm glad the opposition has brought forward this motion, has brought forward and raised the issue once again of the 52,400 jobs—a full 5% of jobs in Ontario—manufacturing jobs in this province being lost by this government. The fact is, not only does that affect the actual families who are losing these decent paying, usually decent wage with benefits, with pensions types of jobs, but it also means that some of those very families are going to end up in a situation where they can't make ends meet. I wanted to draw the parallel between the effect of this shrinkage of the manufacturing sector and what's happening in other parts of a place like the city of Hamilton.

For example, this past year we had the dubious distinction of tying Toronto in our poverty rates, so Hamilton is now at the top of the province, with Toronto, in terms of having the highest poverty rates. That doesn't happen by accident. That doesn't happen by chance. That happens because we're a large manufacturing centre that is losing good manufacturing jobs, and they're not being replaced with jobs of the same quality. They're being replaced with McJobs, service jobs and jobs that either don't pay a full-time wage or pay a very low wage. In other words, they're not being replaced by equal jobs in the economy, if they're being replaced at all. So there you go.

1530

Guess what? As the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, not only does that mean more pressure on the municipal tax base—and just recently I met with the Hamilton area BIAs. They're concerned about property taxes and what that means for small business, and a number of other concerns that they think this government is not responding to. This is small business, now. These are BIAs—business improvement areas. One of the big concerns they had, of course, in a city like Hamilton, drawing the parallel that when you lose your manufacturing base the pressure is on the municipality to make up

those taxes from other sectors. Where do the taxes have to be made up? Where does the budget have to be pumped up, but through other taxpayers? In this case, with the loss of the industrial base, the pressure on both residential and commercial taxes is enormous.

Of course, this government has refused to deal with the inequity that exists with the funding in the city of Hamilton, and we still have to struggle with the down-loading. My understanding is that our \$19-million problem that this government has refused to deal with over the last couple of years is now growing. It's now up to \$20 million to \$25 million. Guess what? It's because of this very issue, partly, of the erosion of the manufacturing base in the city of Hamilton.

I have to tell you that it's not only the pressure on the budget at the municipal level that then pushes the taxes up in all the other sectors when you're losing your industrial tax base, which of course, many of you will know, is taxed at a higher rate, so therefore brings more money into the coffers, but also, it's the fact that those high-paying jobs being lost means that the number of people who have the dollars to spend—whether it's on cars, on appliances, on restaurant meals from time to time—in the consumer economy, start to exit that economy as well. The effect on the secondary economy in terms of the suppliers to some of these manufacturing jobs and also the tertiary economy in terms of the broader economic effect is significant. It is happening in the city of Hamilton, and it's happening to a great extent.

I also wanted to talk very quickly on the issues that we as New Democrats think this government needs to address as we lose these jobs in the economy. As this motion states, the government refuses to act on that, refuses to come up with a plan, with something that can be implemented to make real change and to turn around that ship.

I wanted to mention that I have spoken to a number of industry leaders in my community, and what they're saying is, "What we see right now, particularly in the forestry sector"—which I'm not going to talk to a great extent about because I know my leader, Howard Hampton, has a lot to say about that, and the effect of the hydro pricing policies of this government on the forestry sector in particular but also on the manufacturing sector. What the leaders of industry in Hamilton have said to me is that the forestry sector is the lead car in a train wreck that's coming down the track at a huge speed. We're watching the forestry jobs go. We're watching the forestry industry fall apart. Next it will be the chemical industry. It's already happening in steel and other manufacturing sector plants and companies. That's just not acceptable. This government has to get its act together and figure out how it's going to put the brakes on that runaway train and make sure that it doesn't go completely off the cliff, because if it does, this province is going to be devastated.

I wanted to make one last point on this issue. I nudged my way into time on this debate because I think the city of Hamilton needs to have someone speaking up for it. I

notice that the other members who are elected in that area are not here to speak on it. Maybe they will be later, and I hope they do, because I think they're going to have to account for this, come the next general election, if it's not turned around. I certainly hope that it is turned around, because there's nobody in this House who would want to see the situation that's occurring now continue, to a place where we do end up with the train going off the cliff. That's in nobody's interest, that's in no community's interest, and that's certainly not in the interests of the people of the province of Ontario.

I have to tell you that the people of the city of Hamilton are getting pretty fed up with the failure of this Liberal government to address many of their issues, whether it's job loss, whether it's budget problems, whether it's the severe downloading that they simply cannot get out from under, whether it's the fact that their poverty rates are going through the roof—I could go on and on, but the bottom line is, the people of Hamilton should also be on that list because we're also losing jobs and have some serious problems with the way this government is managing the economy and losing good manufacturing jobs in Ontario month after month.

Hon. Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I am indeed very happy to engage in this debate. I think it's a very important debate. It is first and foremost a debate that speaks to a number of issues of concern to people in communities across the province that have seen some job losses; there is no doubt about that.

What I want to quickly dispel is the notion that somehow this government is not aware of what's going on in those communities that have felt job losses. In fact, quite the opposite is true. When the opposition suggests that we take action, that we begin an action plan and that they haven't seen one, I want to report that this morning I met with Mayor Poirier of Cornwall and his economic development officer, Paul Fitzpatrick, to talk about the situation in Cornwall. With me at the meeting were the member for Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh and the Minister of Natural Resources. We talked about a number of important things. We talked about putting in place an action plan not only for Cornwall but for that entire region, and how important it is to have an economic development plan that is about the region and looking to attract additional investment and diversifying the economy, and what it means for this region to have such a plan.

Last spring, I visited the community in that region and we talked about such a plan. That work is ongoing, but I have to report that we talked more particularly and in detail about a number of things that were important in addition to the economic development plan that was discussed earlier. We talked about a marketing strategy for the entire region. We talked about highway improvements along the 401 and with respect to the US border. We talked about a waste water facility in Cornwall and about looking at financing options for downtown revitalization. We talked about tourism and how that

could be an important ingredient in the overall economic mix.

So we've looked at a number of options with respect to a real economic development plan that is being considered and is taking shape. I suggested the other day—the Leader of the Opposition is here—that the deputy minister of my department was taking the lead. In addition to that, there's an interministerial taskforce that is charged with looking at options as well. So the resources of the entire government will be brought to bear on the problem that is now being faced not only by Cornwall but, as I say, by that entire region. We are taking steps.

I want to talk about the larger question in other communities. Let's not forget that this government brought forward a new northern Ontario prosperity initiative, which includes grow bonds; a GO North strategy, which our ministry has some carriage for, looking at attracting new investment from abroad, and we are undertaking those initiatives; and looking at a number of other initiatives under the Ontario heritage fund. With respect to further developing the infrastructure of the north—highways and such—there are a number of initiatives that have been announced. The work is ongoing, and steps are being taken.

In addition to that, with respect to the forestry sector, a number of announcements have been made by the Minister of Natural Resources. His plan has been announced: \$680 million in new initiatives that will see the creation of capital projects for energy conservation and cogeneration and, in addition to that, a loan guarantee program to help the forestry sector, to help those northern communities. These are funds that are targeted primarily to the north and to rural communities across this province that are facing these challenges.

1540

In addition to that, this government responded and took the initiative with respect to the auto sector. As a result of our auto sector strategy, we have now seen an additional \$5.5 billion invested in this province. I say to the members opposite, there is no other jurisdiction that has seen that type of investment come to its boundaries in this short a period of time. At a time when there is restructuring taking place around the world in the auto sector, at a time when there are job layoffs around the world, we saw new investment in this province.

Is there a restructuring here? Yes, there is. I say to the members opposite, our strategy is working. Imagine the devastation if we didn't have these new investments. We would have lost the Ford plant and we would have lost additional plants if we did not have these investments made in innovation, in new-generation flex plants across this province. As a result of that, we are going to see an industry emerge on a more competitive footing with the next generation of products competing worldwide. That's as a result of this government's initiatives.

I say to the members, there are additional measures that are taking place to assist those communities.

As a result of this government's historic agreement with the federal government, the labour market develop-

ment agreement, there will be in the future additional monies for adjustment, for retraining older workers. That's as a result of that labour market agreement that was signed by this government, unlike the previous government that couldn't get that job done. So there are a number of initiatives that we are undertaking. I'm attempting to point out that, yes, they are right across the entire province, but they do affect the communities that are facing these challenges.

In addition to that, there are other initiatives that we've taken in agriculture. Through the Canada-Ontario municipal rural infrastructure fund, an additional \$900 million will be made available for smaller communities to improve local roads, bridges, water and waste water systems, and waste management.

In health, additional measures have been taken to ensure that across this province there are going to be capital projects brought forward, something we have not seen in this province for many years. Hospitals were announced under the previous government that never got built. Additional capital projects were announced and never got built. We are now going to see many projects across the province come to life. There are approximately \$5 billion worth of health care projects, including 105 hospital projects, that have been announced or will be announced in the near future.

In education: \$8.3 billion over four years for our publicly funded schools. That's an increase of \$900 per pupil. More than 2,100 new teachers were hired. That will bring the total investment this year in education to \$17.2 billion.

Why am I saying this? Because it affects every part of the province, including those communities that have seen these challenges being confronted.

Let's not forget the historic investment we made in our post-secondary education, where \$6.2 billion will be invested over the next five years.

When it comes to training and apprenticeship, as I said, the labour market agreement will see some additional dollars for transitional retraining for older workers. This is important for those communities that are facing these challenges as well.

When you look at the breadth and scope of what this government has undertaken with respect to these initiatives, do they amount to a specific plan for a specific community? No, but we are undertaking that action with respect to Cornwall. We'll be looking at other communities that are facing some of these challenges and extending a hand. We know how difficult it is for someone to lose their job. We know how difficult it is for a community to see job losses of the magnitude we've seen in some communities. This is a government that cares about people first, that cares about the kind of support and infrastructure that's necessary to ensure that these communities can make the transition from where they are now. It does look bleak in some communities for people, because they may have lost their jobs, but I say to those people in those communities, this is a government that stands behind you. You are not alone.

We will work with you, I say to the Leader of the Opposition. If you have positive suggestions to bring forward, I welcome those. I welcome your input at any meeting we're going to have with any of the community leaders. I welcome any member's suggestions for how we could make this better and how we could face those challenges in those communities. This government is committed to working with people in those communities, with our municipal partners and with our federal partners. It is a collaborative effort. This is a government and a Premier who are reaching out to those communities, saying, "We want to work with you." And we will work with you. We will sit down and work through those challenges together. That's what this process is all about. That's what this government believes in: ensuring that our communities are strong, that they can face the challenges and that we can overcome those challenges. By being there and supporting these communities, supporting individuals, we will get through some of these challenges.

I have to say, despite the fact that we have seen job growth that is pretty substantial, and seven out of eight jobs that have been created in this province are of a full-time nature: 215,000 jobs. These are figures—

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Cordiano: Yes, they are, they are numbers, but they are important numbers. I have to say to members of the Legislature, we do have a positive economic climate and we want to make sure that every part of this province sees the same kind of growth and sees those benefits accrue to those communities right across this province. That's what this government believes in. We want to keep the positive economic climate going and spreading to all those communities.

We've taken additional measures. We've worked with communities. I had a delegation from Niagara region that came to us and said, "We didn't know that the Toyota deal was happening. We didn't know that the plant was about to come to Ontario. Had we known, we would have been better prepared." They said to me, "We want to work with your ministry. We want to work with all levels of government and we've put a plan together to do just that, on a regional basis, because we want to be prepared the next time a large investment comes to Ontario." I say great, because that's exactly what we want to have happen. Across this province, we're reaching out to all the regions and saying, "We want to work with you and we will be there to support you."

I do not disagree with this motion. I think it's a good motion. In fact, I support the efforts and the intent of this motion. I don't see any reason to oppose it.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Chudleigh: It was interesting listening to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade; some encouraging words that he is talking to these communities, and I give him great support for that.

Unfortunately, you said you were talking to Cornwall last spring—that was six or eight months ago—and now you were talking to them again this morning. Hopefully,

something positive occurred in those eight months in between. Otherwise, things are where they were before the conversation began.

What this resolution that we've been talking about today really says is that the people of Ontario want to see the creation of a plan for Ontario's economic future. We have not seen evidence that you have this plan. For example, the recent trade mission to China—there were no results announced. There were no results announced in this Legislature; there were no announcements by way of press releases or other venues. There were no costs as to how much this trade mission cost the people of Ontario. Normally what happens is that when a government comes back from a trade mission, they put out a press release as to what kind of business was done. The only comment you've made on this trade mission was in this House when you accused me of being non-supportive of trade with China. That's a somewhat ridiculous suggestion. For the record, of course I support trade with China. In fact, I support trade with all the great nations of the world. What I don't support is wasting taxpayers' dollars, and there's still not one word from this government on the success of this mission. Knowing that the Liberal government loves to take credit for things—they even take credit for things that perhaps they haven't done—not a word about the success of this trade mission leads one to believe that perhaps there wasn't any success to talk about.

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I would suggest that this trade mission went to China without a plan, and that's no surprise, because evidently we haven't seen a plan for any part of this economy in Ontario. What we have seen is the litany of job losses. Most recently, Budd Canada is laying off 250 people because they were supplying a GM plant that has closed. Manufacturing jobs now lost in Ontario are well over 50,000, as was mentioned earlier, including announced job layoffs. Ford is reporting that in January, and the CAW announced during its negotiations with Ford, that there would be 1,100 job losses. I am told today that that number is in flux. That is a number they're looking at, but Ford is looking at its entire operation across North America. The number-crunching will be done and they'll be making that decision come January. That number could be higher, it could be lower, but I suspect that it will tend to be on the higher side of the 1,100 jobs that were announced.

Many years ago, coal miners in England used to take a canary with them down into the mines. A canary is very sensitive to a lack of oxygen or the presence of methane. When that canary wasn't breathing very well or when it actually fell off its perch, the miners knew that they were in trouble. There was either a lack of oxygen or a buildup of methane. When the canary was in trouble, the miner knew that he was in trouble and he got out of the mine. So the canary saved the lives of these coal miners in England. I would suggest that every plant closing in Ontario is a canary. It's a warning to the government of Ontario that there's something not just quite right.

When we see bankruptcies increasing in the construction industry—there were 260 bankruptcies year-to-date in 2004; there are currently 404 bankruptcies year-to-date in the construction industry. I would suggest to the minister: That's a canary. We should be cognizant of that fact. We should be cognizant that the construction industry is having some difficulty.

In the retail trade, there were 315 year-to-date bankruptcies last year; this year there are 351—a significant increase. I'd suggest to you that in the retail trade, that's another canary. People don't have as much money in their pockets any more because of the effect of this government's policies on retail trade in this province. I don't think you can just sit back and say, well, that's the result of a 68-cent dollar. Yes, the exchange rate is a reality. That's something we have to deal with, but that's been coming for a number of years now. It's been coming for long enough that this government should have been developing a plan; they should have had somewhere to go when they see the dollar continuously increasing. I, for one, don't believe that this exchange rate problem is over. Canada is dealing with petrobucks. We're now in the petroleum business. We have one of the largest reserves of oil in the world in Alberta, and as we move into the future, the Canadian dollar is going to continue to strengthen. I think it is incumbent on the government of the day to have a plan as to how to handle an 85-cent dollar, how to handle a 90-cent dollar, how to handle a dollar at par. Those are the kinds of problems we're going to have to face in the future. Facing them six months from now or two years from now, or waiting until they come to face them, is not good enough for Ontario. Ontario is a strong economic area of manufacturing jobs. To put that aside and to wait for those things to come to pass when we know they're going to be there, is not doing the job for the taxpayers of Ontario. The tough decisions have to be made, and they have to be made soon.

One thing you could do, for instance: As you know, the automotive industry is huge in Ontario: 25% of our gross national product. Most of that trade is with the US. We have to streamline the Windsor border. That's been talked about. I think we have a completion date of 2009-10—someplace way out there. That's not good enough. We've got \$400 million going into the casino in Windsor; all very well, but I tell you, that casino is a non-smoking facility, and it's going to have a great deal of difficulty competing with the smoking casinos across the river. The \$400 million spent on that casino may not have been as wisely spent as it could have been as funding to put together a new streamlined bridge across the Detroit River—or a tunnel; whichever is most economical—to get products from Ontario to the United States and to get products from the United States to Ontario, so that two-way trade can happen in a streamlined facility.

If you travel from Cornwall to Dallas, there are only 16 stoplights, and they're all in Windsor. They're all in Windsor. It's time that those kinds of things were straightened out, with a plan for today. If you started

planning it last week or last month, it's not going to get completed until those dates of 2009-10. That's too late. You have to be ahead of the curve, because the petrobuck that Canada is now dealing with is going to continue to put pressure on the economy of Ontario.

The other thing about this border crossing is that more trade goes across the Windsor–Detroit border than any other border crossing in the world. That's an important fact, that we should have that streamlined new delivery system for that area. This should be pushed on to the very front burner. It should also be pushed on to the election agenda with the federal parties debating this today. I think you should be doing this, in a very real way.

The second thing that you could do, which would have a very positive impact on the automotive industry, deals with the hybrid engine. The hybrid engine is the thing of the future, as we see oil reserves and gasoline becoming more scarce and more expensive. Ontario companies—Ford of Canada, for instance, is a leader in the hybrid engine, whether it be a hydrogen-based hybrid or an electrical-based hybrid. There are obvious benefits to this. The benefits are from the resource, from the environment—there are all kinds of benefits to this—to the greater public of Ontario, the broader population. A PST forgiveness on those kinds of things would be a positive aspect to encourage companies to base their research in Ontario, to base their production in Ontario, and to encourage Ontarians to take advantage of those hybrid engines to help our environment, to help our economy and to help the people of Ontario.

Those are two suggestions for something that we can do before there are more canaries that go on the most-endangered-species list here in Ontario. I look forward to the government's announcements on creating a stronger economy in Ontario, announcements that will be the result of the talks and the conversations that the minister says that he's having with the communities in Ontario. We can only look forward to their success. I wish the minister good luck, and I hope that they're more forthcoming than they have been in the past two years.

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

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I'm pleased to take part in this debate. In case there are people at home who are watching, I want them to know that this debate is about the loss of jobs, the loss of good-paying industrial jobs in Ontario, and the fact that in many parts of Ontario we are seeing an accelerating loss of jobs.

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I listened a while ago to the minister—I guess he's the Minister of Economic Development and Trade now—saying that the McGuinty government wanted to work with communities. I want to ask the people across northern Ontario: Have you seen any evidence of the McGuinty government working with you to sustain jobs in the pulp and paper sector and in the forest sector generally? I know, because I happen to talk to a lot of people, that in fact, no, they haven't seen any sign, any

indication from the McGuinty government that they're doing anything to sustain jobs in the pulp and paper sector, in the forest sector.

This is a sector that is facing some challenges. This is a sector that came here to Queen's Park over a year and a half ago, in the summer of 2004, and said very clearly to the McGuinty government that, first of all, their electricity policy, their policy of driving hydro rates through the roof, was going to kill not tens of thousands of jobs but hundreds of thousands of jobs. We're seeing that unfold now. In addition, they said to the McGuinty government that its general forest policy was going to make matters worse as well. So from the perspective of people who live in northern Ontario and, to a large degree, central Ontario, they don't see the McGuinty government helping. They don't see the McGuinty government doing anything to sustain jobs in the forest sector. They see the McGuinty government making the challenges and the problems worse. They see the McGuinty government killing jobs in community after community across northern and central Ontario.

I want you to note just exactly how unfair this is. To someone living in Kenora, Red Rock, Dryden or Terrace Bay, what they see from their perspective is that, in almost every case, the pulp mills, the paper mills that have been established in those communities are five kilometres, 10 kilometres, maybe 20 kilometres away from a hydroelectric dam. They know those hydroelectric dams produce electricity for about one cent, maybe one-and-a-half cents a kilowatt hour. But you know what? As a result of McGuinty government policy, those paper mills and pulp mills are forced to pay eight cents a kilowatt hour or more for that electricity. They're forced to pay four times what it costs to produce that electricity in their own backyard, for no other reason than that it is the McGuinty government's policy to drive electricity rates through the roof.

Because these are manufacturing plants, because they take wood fibre and completely process it through to a finished product, they utilize a lot of electricity in the manufacturing process. So when they're forced to pay two and three times more for their electricity than a paper mill in, say, Quebec, Manitoba or British Columbia, or Minnesota, Wisconsin or Michigan, and electricity forms 30% or 35% of their overall cost structure, the McGuinty government is putting those mills under. It's killing the jobs of those workers and it's decimating the economies of those communities.

What we've heard, day in, day out, from the Premier and his apologist the Minister of Natural Resources is that they come in here, trot out the figures and say, "Oh, this is happening everywhere." Just some recent examples show that that is not true. For example, just two weeks ago, Domtar announced they were closing down their paper mill in Cornwall—900 jobs erased—and two paper machines at their paper mill in Ottawa—another 200-plus jobs erased. But what they also pointed out when they made that announcement, although the

McGuinty government doesn't want to admit this, is that production was being moved to Quebec.

In fact, the Ottawa paper mill is a very interesting operation. There are two paper machines on the Ontario side of the border and a paper machine on the Quebec side of the border. They're all part of the same mill. Do you know what's happening? Domtar is shutting down the two paper machines on the Ontario side and they're going to speed up the paper machine on the Quebec side. In other words, production that used to be based in Ontario is now moving to Quebec.

Similarly, Cascades announced the closure of their paper mill in Thunder Bay three weeks ago: 525 jobs killed; tens of millions of dollars erased from the local economy. The McGuinty government says, "Oh, this is happening everywhere." In the same announcement, Cascades announced that they were making multi-million-dollar investments in their plant in Saint-Jérôme, Quebec, and that production would be transferred from the Thunder Bay mill to the Saint-Jérôme mill in Quebec. That's what's happening.

The McGuinty government says, "Oh, mills are being shut down in British Columbia." Maybe they don't read the Globe and Mail Report on Business. A pulp mill at Port Alice on Vancouver Island is reopening. The company that was running it, an American company, went bankrupt a year ago, but instead of that mill being shut down it's being reopened. Production is moving from Ontario to British Columbia.

I heard the Minister of Natural Resources say, "Oh, Weyerhaeuser is shutting down their mill in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan." I have news for the Minister of Natural Resources—news that he doesn't want to hear. In fact, the mill in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan is going to continue to operate. If necessary, the Saskatchewan government—an NDP government—is going to organize a worker buyout so that that mill continues to produce. Those jobs will be sustained.

Instead of making the situation worse, provincial governments in other provinces actually have strategies to sustain the forest sector and to sustain the thousands of jobs associated with the forest sector. Do we see any such movement here in Ontario from the McGuinty government? Anything? No. We know, from talking to the Association of Major Power Consumers, that what they're looking at from the McGuinty government in the spring is another 20% to 25% increase in electricity rates, which will kill many more jobs in the pulp and paper sector.

But it doesn't just end in the pulp and paper sector. It doesn't just end there. What we know—and we're already seeing signs of it—River Gold, a gold mine in Wawa, announced just a few weeks ago that they were shutting down production, laying off over 200 workers at their gold mining operation in Wawa. What was the major reason they cited? The cost of electricity in Ontario. Mining, like the forest sector, utilizes a lot of electricity in the mining and in the crushing process. This company simply said that even with the high price of

gold, they cannot continue to sustain their operation, given the high price of electricity in Ontario and the fact that it's McGuinty government policy to drive up those electricity rates even further.

Just a few weeks ago my colleague from Hamilton East read a letter from the chief executive officer of Hamilton Specialty Bar, a small steel company in Hamilton—over 400 workers—who pointed out that the reason many of the workers at that company have taken layoffs this past summer and into the fall, the reason they've had to curtail production, is because of McGuinty government policy, a policy of intentionally, deliberately driving electricity rates through the roof, with no thought of how many thousands of jobs this government destroys, with no thought as to the local economies that are devastated as well as a result of this deliberate and intentional policy.

It doesn't just end, though, with Hamilton Specialty Bar. Dofasco sent a letter to the Premier not long ago, pleading with Dalton McGuinty to adopt a more thoughtful electricity strategy, pointing out that Dofasco—and Dofasco is recognized as the most successful steel company in Canada, if not one of the most successful steel companies in North America. But as Dofasco pointed out, the energy to run much of their operation comes from electricity, and their electricity bill has more than doubled over the last three or four years. Why? As a result of deliberate policy on the part of the McGuinty government.

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None of these communities, these workplaces, these mills, these factories, none of these workers has seen any assistance whatsoever from the McGuinty government—nothing. In fact, it was very interesting to watch the political strategy of the McGuinty government after the forest sector, the mining sector and the steel sector came here to Queen's Park a year and a half ago to say that the McGuinty government policy of driving electricity rates through the roof was going to kill over 150,000 jobs. After they made that statement and provided MPPs with graphs and charts showing exactly how it was going to happen, I asked the Minister of Natural Resources and the Premier, "What's your strategy to deal with this?" They said, "Oh well, we're going to appoint this task force to study the situation in the forest sector." Every month, as more jobs were lost and more mills closed, we would ask the Premier and the minister, "What are you going to do?" The response would be, "Oh, wait till we get this report from the task force. Wait till we have this report from the task force. Then you will see our blueprint."

The task force presented its report last April. Did the McGuinty government come up with a plan then? No. In fact, they sat on the report until June, and then, do you know what the response was to pulp mills and paper mills?

The report was very clear. The task force report said that electricity costs were too high in Ontario, that if Ontario continued to drive up the industrial cost of elec-

tricity to eight and nine cents a kilowatt hour while pulp and paper mills in Quebec were paying three and a half cents a kilowatt hour, while paper mills in Manitoba were paying three cents a kilowatt hour and while pulp and paper mills in British Columbia were paying three and a half cents a kilowatt hour, that if the McGuinty government continued to drive the industrial rate of energy up to eight and nine cents a kilowatt hour, you would see more and more closures. They pleaded with the McGuinty government for an electricity strategy to address this problem.

Did they get any positive response? Do you know what they got this summer from the McGuinty government? Electricity rates were even higher for pulp and paper mills and sawmills. In fact, it's an everyday happening across northern and central Ontario today that pulp and paper mills, as the electricity rates go through the roof, shut down operations and tell workers to go home. Why? As a direct result of McGuinty government policy. What was really galling, though, was that the little bit of help the McGuinty government offered up was, they said to these companies that were already struggling with debt loads, "Borrow more money." One of the things you learn, and actually you learn it fairly early in life, is that when you are in a hole, stop digging. But the McGuinty government's response to an industry that's struggling with debt is, "Take on more debt." This was the McGuinty government's response.

Industry from one end of northern and central Ontario to the other, unions and workers, municipal leaders and local chambers of commerce were embarrassed for the McGuinty government, for this government that had such little appreciation of the problem and of the challenges, and no concept, no idea of what was necessary in terms of public policy and government action to address the challenges.

So more mills closed. Hundreds more workers were put out of work. More communities were devastated. Recognizing that their initial strategy, if you can call it that, their initial so-called strategy, was a complete failure and was seen to be a complete failure, the McGuinty government schedules another news conference in Thunder Bay. Do you know what the sum total of the news conference was? The sum total of the news conference was that even though, as a result of the McGuinty government forest policy, paper mills and pulp mills here are paying the highest prices for delivered wood costs of anywhere in North America, the McGuinty government policy was, "Well, maybe we can knock a dollar a cubic meter off the delivered wood cost," and to announce more loans and to say, "Well, there's some money here for cogeneration."

In fact, that's the other piece of this that sticks out like a sore thumb. In February of last year, after paper mills and pulp mills and steel mills and mining operations and the chemical industry said, "Look, you're driving electricity rates through the roof. You're killing our jobs. You're killing our operations," the McGuinty government announced that they were going to name a

cogeneration facilitator to work with manufacturing industries in this province to facilitate the cogeneration of electricity so that this might facilitate lower-cost electricity. That promise was made in February. March has come and gone. April has come and gone. May has come and gone. June has come and gone. Thousands more jobs have been lost. July has come and gone. August has come and gone. September has come and gone. October has come and gone. November has come and gone. We're now into the middle of December, and do you know what? No cogeneration facilitator. Tens of thousands of more jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector, many as a direct result of the McGuinty policy of driving electricity rates through the roof. They promised a cogeneration facilitator back in February, and here we are in December, the loss of thousands of jobs later, and still no cogeneration facilitator.

Equally in the September announcement from the Minister of Natural Resources, he said to people who were there that the government was going to work aggressively with companies to drive cogeneration. Do you know how many successful cogeneration agreements have been signed since then? Do you know how many successful cogeneration strategies have been put together by the McGuinty government since then, while thousands of jobs have been lost—jobs in Thunder Bay, jobs in Kenora, jobs in Dryden, jobs in Red Rock, jobs in Terrace Bay, jobs in Opasatika, jobs in Kirkland Lake, jobs in Chapleau? Do you know how many cogeneration proposals have been put together by the McGuinty government? Zero, nada, zip, nothing, and this was supposed to be an initiative of the McGuinty government. Nothing has happened.

I welcome this debate. I welcome it because it underlines that while the McGuinty government is oh, so full of photo ops and oh, so full of press releases, when it comes to hardworking people who have spent their life going to work every day, paying their taxes, contributing to their community and developing an economy, in community after community across this province, the McGuinty government has not only abandoned those workers and those communities; the McGuinty government has in fact made the challenges they face even more difficult, even worse. I say to the McGuinty government, stop the photo ops, stop the phony press conferences, stop the repetitive reannouncements and reannouncements that amount to nothing, and get serious. You will not sustain manufacturing jobs in this province so long as your deliberate and intentional policy is to drive electricity rates through the roof.

In fact, the job losses that we've seen so far are just the beginning. First will come pulp and paper, and we're already seeing the needless loss of thousands of jobs as companies move their manufacturing operations out of Ontario, move them to Quebec, move them to Manitoba, move them to British Columbia, move to Wisconsin, to Michigan, to Minnesota, to the US south—completely unnecessary.

But the pulp and paper sector is just the beginning, because next is going to come the steel sector, and after the steel sector will come some of the auto parts sector, particularly the stamping and the casting—just to mention some layoffs at Budd Automotive, where they do stamping, electricity is a big part of their cost. The casting plants: the closure of a casting plant in Brantford. The cost of electricity is a big part of their cost. As the McGuinty government drives electricity rates through the roof, these companies look to move their production to other provinces.

A very interesting presentation by Gerdau Ameristeel: Gerdau Ameristeel is a Brazilian company, but they have steel plants in the United States. They have a steel plant in Whitby. They have a steel plant just outside of Kitchener-Waterloo. Gerdau Ameristeel presented the differing electricity rates for their steel mills in the United States and in Ontario and said, “We will start moving production out of Ontario if you continue to raise electricity rates, if you continue to drive electricity rates higher.” And that’s happening.

So I say to the McGuinty government, cut the phoney press conferences and get rid of the photo ops. Come up with a strategy that sustains our manufacturing sector. Recognize that your policy of driving electricity rates through the roof has already killed thousands of jobs and is going to kill tens of thousands more. Recognize that you must come up with an electricity policy that provides affordable electricity, a reliable supply of electricity for industry, so that they can continue to operate and so that we can continue to sustain those manufacturing jobs in Ontario.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I appreciate the opportunity this Thursday afternoon to join in the debate on the opposition day motion. Without reading it all, the motion speaks about looking for “a comprehensive action plan to deal with local economic crises” affecting various communities. One of those communities referenced in the motion is Oshawa. I’m not going to speak specifically to Oshawa during my comments, but I certainly will in part, and in part I will speak to the broader issue of the greater Oshawa community, as one might think of it, if you live there. Certainly the things that are happening in the Durham community are in part a direct result of some planning by this government, and in part because of the current very positive economic climate we have in many sectors and in many parts of Ontario.

The motion speaks about a “devastating impact” on those communities. They do have an impact, but the degree of urgency expressed in the motion, as it might relate to Oshawa, particularly to GM, is probably not felt in quite the same way. This is not the first time the city of Oshawa has been faced with challenges around GM. I recall that in the early 1990s there were anticipated closures of plants and there was some considerable work then by some of the local politicians in Oshawa and by others engaging in that. That was turned around and they’ve had a very productive almost 15 years since then,

with planning for the future. I’m going to say more about that in a few moments.

I want to comment briefly on the critic from the opposition party, the member from Halton, and his comments with respect to China. I was surprised to hear a few days ago, and I was surprised to hear again today that in effect he doesn’t feel the mission to China had value, that there is some alleged value or mythical value, that the trade mission didn’t have a plan behind it. The members who have not reached outside a relatively minor geography in thinking about economic opportunities might miss what can happen internationally. I’m looking forward to some comments before this afternoon is out from the member from Markham, who has considerable direct experience in the area.

I want to talk briefly about my own experience in the context of the community in which I live and represent. Eco-Tec industries, whose president is Dr. Rocky Simmonds—he prefers just to be known as Rocky rather than doctor anything—has been doing business in China for the better part of 15-plus years. There was a hiatus in the mid- to late 1990s, when it wasn’t as attractive a market—they weren’t as receptive—but certainly during the late 1990s and the early part of the 2000s, the market has opened up somewhat.

One of the principal issues in his work in China that he drives home as I’ve spoken with him in meetings and other activities is that you need to build relationships. Doing business in China is about building relationships. One can’t walk in with an offer to bring jobs or to buy product and expect to get an immediate response. It doesn’t function economically in the same way it does here in Ontario or in Canada or in North America. It’s a different political structure, we well know, it’s a different economic structure, but it mostly requires that you spend time. One visit doesn’t do the job. One must go back a second, a third, a fourth time and build the necessary relationships that go with that, establish the networks, have agents working on your behalf in China, before you can actually realize the success that comes with doing business in Asia. I know that Mr. Wong, the member for Markham, will have some further insights. I hope he’ll comment on those during his time, because he’s certainly going to provide some insights I wouldn’t have.

I think it’s fair, as well, to recognize that China is Ontario’s second-largest trading partner. How can one assume that a trade mission to China is of no value when it’s the second-largest trading partner we have? With over a million people of Chinese origin living in Canada, and over half of those—500,000—residing here in Ontario, it’s a marketplace that one can’t, and shouldn’t, ignore, along with India, as the emerging international, global economic power. So there certainly is work to be done in that regard.

Let me speak about what’s been happening in the province over the past two years since we took office. There have been some 215,000 new jobs created; almost 190,000 of those are full-time jobs and a few—a much smaller number, some 26,000—are part-time jobs. In

fact, from October 2003 to October 2004—a one-year period—there were some 32,000 net new manufacturing jobs created in Ontario. In the year 2005, Ontario employment is up by some 83,000 jobs. There are issues around the province in regard to employment, there are issues where manufacturers or plants may be facing closure, that does occur, but overall net impact in Ontario at this point is such that we are seeing very healthy economic growth and healthy job growth in the province.

I want to talk a little bit about what the future holds for us. In doing that, I'm going to make a couple of comments that relate more directly to Durham region, and that would impact on Oshawa and the folks who live and work in those communities. Just in the past few weeks, unit 4 at the Pickering nuclear generating station came back on line. Unit 4 was a long project, but interestingly enough, that's a project that came back on line, with the approval of our government to go forward, on time and within a margin of the budget that was set that was quite acceptable. That's a far cry from the first efforts that were made to bring Pickering back on line. As the former mayor, having been through that, I could speak for some time on the follies of the government of the day from the mid- to late 1990s, through to 2003. The way in which they managed that process or had OPG manage that process caused, in my view, huge delays in the overall process—overruns in costs related to the way the process was being managed and the introduction of the magnificent seven, I think it was, that came out of the US, one or two of whom remain doing an excellent job, but some who were summarily sent packing, for very good reason, in my view.

General Motors is probably the particular reason that Oshawa is referenced in this opposition day motion. General Motors, through the auto strategy, which the minister referenced in his comments earlier, at a point in time when their research is underway, when the production-related new facilities that monies may be attributed to are underway, will receive some \$100 million from the province of Ontario. That money, along with the support of the government of Canada, has leveraged a commitment from GM through the Beacon project of some \$2.4 billion.

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There are those who will say that with what's happening in Oshawa today, we can't have any great degree of security in what GM is going to do. If one looks at the local papers, if one looks at the Toronto Star, as an example, as recently as yesterday and during the past few weeks, you will see full-page ads being taken out by GM. Those full-page ads speak to their commitment to the Beacon project. They speak to the commitment in Ontario of that \$2.4 billion. They speak to the retention of jobs within the context of the environment they have. Clearly, when GM decided they needed to downsize internationally to continue to be a strong and viable company, they could not leave Ontario alone. As an American-based company, they couldn't look just to their American enterprise as the only place where they would

have to trim operations. As a result, we got caught in the crossfire to some extent.

I remain hopeful—I wouldn't suggest necessarily confident at this point, but hopeful—that the experience of the early 1990s will be repeated in the years 2007, 2008 and 2009, and when the time comes, the Oshawa number 2 plant will see a new line introduced there. I'm hoping the negotiations with GM will see that occur. They certainly recognize the quality of the products. They recognize the value of the products being put on the street. They recognize the quality of those products. J. D. Power recognizes the GM product coming out of there as the number one product from the standpoint of consumer satisfaction. I'm confident that at the end of the day, GM will continue to see the value and not only make those investments but enhance those investments.

Part of the overall Beacon project, this \$2.4-billion investment in Ontario, is the investment in post-secondary education. UOIT, Ontario's newest university—I give some credit in this regard to the former government for having started UOIT, the University of Ontario Institute of Technology in Oshawa, although they left it sorrowfully in the lurch from a funding perspective. There was capital start-up funding, but they kind of forgot in their dying days to sign off on some pretty important documentation that would allow them to continue to function. Minister Sorbara, when he was the Minister of Finance, rectified that in the very early days, and I know that the president of the university was very pleased that the minister saw his way through that as we were preparing for our first budget process, to ensure their viability. Many of the students who are now at UOIT will be in automotive research and automotive design, and part of this \$2.4-billion investment GM is making as part of the Beacon project is for UOIT, McMaster and other universities as automotive centres of excellence, an automotive industry of excellence. It's time we were more engaged in the design phase, not just in the manufacturing side of the auto industry, and our time in that regard is coming.

I want to speak briefly about a new initiative in Durham region called DSEA, the Durham Strategic Energy Alliance. This is something that the local community within Durham has initiated, not as a result of any direct initiative of our government, but what we've been doing has been encouraging their initiatives. Our effort to establish a culture of conservation is supporting their efforts. Our focus on alternative generation strategies is supporting exactly what they want to do.

Last Thursday morning, a week ago, Minister Cansfield spoke at their first large annual breakfast. They've had a number of meetings; they launched it last fall. She was extremely well received, because they can see the synergies between what the energy industries in Durham want to achieve and what our government wants to achieve.

The current chair of the Durham Strategic Energy Alliance is Mr. Michael Angemeer, the president and CEO of Veridian Corp. Veridian is a new municipal

utility that involves four utilities in ownership: Pickering, Ajax, Clarington and Belleville. It initially started as a utility corporation, the first non-contiguous amalgamated utility. It's kind of an interesting arrangement. Mr. Ange-meer is the current chair. The membership on DSEA includes Durham region—the affected municipalities—Ontario Power Generation currently, Siemens; and Intellimeter is actively engaged in the process. There are probably about 30 or 40 members currently. They're establishing Durham region as an energy centre of excellence, a place they want to draw business to and grow business around energy opportunities, because we have two nuclear facilities, because we have the likes of Siemens located there, because we have the likes of new technology generators like Intellimeter, to develop smart meter technologies, located there. We have a very large presence of Hydro One and they are becoming engaged. The municipalities recognize the opportunities that exist for energy in the province of Ontario and Durham has the opportunity to be a leader in that regard; they can be a leader because our government is setting out the kind of energy policies that will encourage growth in the industry in a variety of sources, not just generation and not cogeneration, but particularly on the green side of energy and on the conservation side. We're going to see much more of that, and Durham is going to be well positioned to participate in that.

Communities such as Oshawa, which is part of the Durham Strategic Energy Alliance, are going to benefit from that. The folks in Durham, in Oshawa and, not necessarily but maybe, some of the folks that might find their employment with General Motors in Oshawa terminated through attrition or through early retirement may very well find, because of the skills they have, places in the energy industry in Durham region as a result of these kinds of initiatives.

Our government, in my view, has been working extremely hard on establishing economic plans and economic strategies; the Minister of Economic Development particularly has, with the auto investment as a first and major initiative to signal to the business community our willingness to work with the private sector and to put some of our money—the constituents of the province of Ontario, the taxpayers—where our mouth is as a community. The growing industries in our community, the growing jobs in our communities, are an important part of what we need to be doing as government. We can't just talk about doing it. We have to be willing to put something up; we have to have some skin in the game, so to speak. Part of that is the types of investments we are making in industry.

I found it interesting when the Leader of the Opposition, as recently as December of this year, on CFRB was asked, "What exactly can government do to stop these job losses?" Mr. Tory responded, "I don't think you can necessarily stop them." He acknowledged that there are some job losses that government can't control. To stand and rail, every time there's a job loss in Ontario, that somehow the government is responsible is not terribly

productive. We are better to look for ways of how we can get that person back to work in a new environment if the old environment doesn't work any more. We're not making as many wagon wheels as we used to; there's not the demand for wagon wheels that there was 100 years ago. When the wagon wheel company goes out of business, maybe we've got to look for places for those folks to work that's not making wagon wheels, because we're not going to reopen that company. I think there has to be an acknowledgment of that, and Mr. Tory has done that. We can't necessarily stop some of these job losses, but we have to find ways in which we can find new and better places of employment and more skilled places of employment.

I could speak for some time about our \$6.2-million commitment, investment, in post-secondary education and training and what that's going to mean for the next generation of workers following right behind us and the opportunities that are going to exist because of the training and education they're going to have and how competitive we are going to be in Ontario, in Canada and internationally because of those investments. Those investments are going to pay dividends, but you have to make some investments up front. If you are not prepared to make those investments up front, then we're not going to see the productivity, we're not going to see the wealth in this province that we all want to have. Our government has a very strong commitment to acknowledge that that's where we have to go. It's something different than we've seen in the past.

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I have a moment or so to conclude. We have to invest in our infrastructure as well, and we're doing that. Our \$30-billion plan for infrastructure renewal is incredibly important. One of the things we shouldn't do, though, is have municipalities invest in things that they shouldn't invest in. This is a particular peeve of mine that I'm going to take about 10 seconds to speak to. The last government had municipalities investing in 401 interchanges. Well, I think that's an absurd thing to do. I thought it as a member of council and spoke against it. Municipalities need to invest in the infrastructure that services their communities: water and sewers and for those kinds of purposes. They don't need to invest in highways. We want to ensure that our investments on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario serve the people of Ontario, and our \$30-billion plan is going to help to do that.

We're making investments in the province of Ontario. We have a sound economic strategy, and the results are showing. Where there's activity going on that results in job losses, we're going to do what we can to position those people for better jobs in the future and ensure that as we go forward, we're going to have young people with opportunities for gainful employment to provide a value-added, rich environment in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): In the short time I have today, I want to once again plead with the government, particularly the Premier, to pay attention to the job

losses that have occurred at an unprecedented rate in Collingwood beginning earlier this calendar year.

In my 15 years representing the area, we've never seen anything like it. In fact, during the time that the Harris and Eves government was in power, we saw exponential growth throughout my riding. I'm very fortunate to have Honda in the south end of the riding, but I've got a lot of parts plants in the north end of the riding, like Alcoa Wheel Products where there are 420 employees today wondering whether they're going to have a job tomorrow.

I've brought this matter up in the Legislature on several occasions, as has John Tory on four occasions, during question period. We asked the Premier in a very polite way if he would just hold a round table in Collingwood, to come up and talk to those people, those union leaders, those civic leaders, both elected and unelected, the economic development officials, those officials from the northern part of my riding, and sit down so that he can understand at first hand exactly what's happening to these companies. The job losses have been amazing. We're part of the over 52,000 manufacturing jobs that have been lost over the last year.

Backyard Products has already closed down. That was 230 job losses all at once in Collingwood. Blue Mountain Pottery, a historic business that's been there for decades and very much at one time put Blue Mountain and Collingwood on the map, closed, and 37 people are without jobs this Christmas.

Nacan starch products closed, again a company that was there for years and years. By the way, their head office in the United States indicated that the workers there were excellent and the productivity at that plant was fantastic and won all kinds of awards. But for a number of reasons, including high energy costs, the plant had to close. That's 87 people without jobs this Christmas.

Kaufman Furniture closed. Kaufman Furniture has been in Collingwood much longer than I've been alive, again decades and decades. It closed, and 150 people are out of work.

I mentioned Alcoa Wheel Products. Unfortunately, the very week—it was such an insult. The Premier basically, in response to the questions we asked about these very serious job losses, simply said, "Be happy. Everything's fine. There's growth in jobs in the province."

There's something very strange going on in the province right now and the government needs to get a handle on it. When prosperous places like Collingwood lose all these factories, with more to come, and if Ford, as we see today in the media, goes ahead with thousands of layoffs in the new year, many of them will be in Canada perhaps. GM has already had those layoffs. If the auto sector continues to be in decline, at least with the traditional Big Three in this province and in North America, then there will be more job losses in Collingwood.

The main problem that's been cited so far is high energy prices. I'm a former Minister of Energy, and I can tell you, you need an energy plan in this province. We had a plan to transition industry. We didn't last long

enough in office to put it in place. We were still consulting with industry. But as prices started to go up—eight cents to 13 cents a kilowatt hour is far more than these industries ever paid in the past. They were more used to four and five cents per kilowatt hour. Places like Alcoa, their electricity bill in October went up \$68,000, I think it was, just in one month. They can't sustain that.

Their major competitor is China. The very week we're asking questions about Alcoa in this House, and the week before, the Premier goes to China, the major competitor. He doesn't bother to say to me or Mr. Tory, "Yes, I'll hold that round table after I get back from China"—insults my constituents, insults the 420 workers at Alcoa, sloughed us off and gave us no indication. To this day he has never responded, not only to questions, but I went to the unusual step of co-signing a letter—I've never done this before in my 15 years—with the local mayor, Terry Geddes. He's doing a very good job as mayor of Collingwood. He's trying to keep his finger in the dike as we've been having these job losses. Terry's a very sincere fellow. I'm sure he's dismayed—I know he's dismayed—as are other members of council and local union leaders. I did my cable show in Collingwood last night, and people are dismayed that the government won't even have the courtesy of having a round table in Collingwood—or we'll come down here—just to listen to these people.

The one important thing a Premier can do is keep morale up, even if he can't solve all of the problems. The fact of the matter is, he needs to show that he cares. He needs to say, "I hear you and I'm going to do what I can to help you." But that's not what we get from Premier Dalton McGuinty. He sloughs us off, usually to his economic development minister, who's a fine person—I think most people like Joe Cordiano as a person—but he doesn't really have a plan.

We had a plan called the Common Sense Revolution. It was all about jobs. When I was in cabinet for eight years, you couldn't bring anything forward to that cabinet without making sure that it had something to do with jobs. The greatest dignity you can give a human being in life is the opportunity for employment and the opportunity for self-sufficiency and the opportunity to raise your own family and not have to be dependent on the state. That's what's a mistake. That's what separates us from the NDP. I can remember when Floyd Laughren was finance minister. He used to brag about how many people the state could support. He would actually get up and brag about how many people were on welfare. He'd say, "We're supporting 1.3 million Ontarians on welfare." We, of course, reduced that to less than half of that. During our time in office, using the plan called the CSR and making sure that every decision we made had something to do with human dignity and something to do with jobs, we created over one million net new jobs. Yeah, we had some months where we lost jobs in the province too; that happens. But over the whole period, we were able to create over one million jobs, all gains and losses netted in.

The NDP, after five full years in office, were minus 10,000 net jobs. We're going to see the same thing with the tax-and-spend Liberals. They did the same thing in 1987, when I was an assistant in this building. They had huge revenues. They had extreme economic growth. We hadn't seen anything like it since just after the Second World War. They squandered it all in a few months by just spending and having social programs and their steps-up-to-employment programs so that the same amount of money you got on welfare you could get on a job, so why would you go to the job? Plus, you got all the drug benefits and everything. This was the ideology they followed, and they're dangerously close to doing it again.

I don't know why we can't get any sympathy. If you can't solve all the problems overnight—and maybe you can't, but you can start by having a plan. That plan should include electricity pricing; it should include local health care. Honda always reminds me that we have to keep enough beds in the local hospital and the emergency room open. We lost our emergency room in Alliston for a while, and Honda was very jittery because they've got 4,000 employees on site, and they want to make sure there's emergency care nearby. You also want to make sure we've got good roads and infrastructure, and I'm not sure one ministry is talking to the other over there.

So I end again with a plea: for the Premier to have a heart, to listen to people. You can't begin to solve the problems if you don't know what the problems are. It's a very simple thing and it's good politics for him and it's decent human dignity to just come up to Collingwood, do a round table with people from all parties and unions and elected officials and corporate people, listen and have a sympathetic ear as a good start.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I just checked the time I have here. It's 18 minutes, I see.

I'd just like to talk about this. I have listened to a number of the speakers, both here in the chamber and watching some of it on television, to see what kinds of things the politicians are talking about in this Legislature, what kinds of accomplishments they're trying to say they've made and what kinds they are shying away from: "It's not my fault." I think there's a really big combination.

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If there's one thing I've learned over the 18 years that I've been in political life, it's that politicians are very happy to jump on when things are going well and say they are responsible for it, whether they are responsible or not. They're going to say, "We created 10,000 jobs this month," whereas in fact they probably created none. But on the other side, I have to tell you, when someone stands up and says, "You lost 30,000 jobs this year," you probably didn't lose those either. So let's be real about this. There is a macroeconomic thing in this world. We are all part of a global economy. When the economies of the United States, Europe and China boom, we boom along with them, and when those economies have down-

turns, we have downturns with them. That's the reality of all of this.

I looked at this today, I looked at protecting the jobs, and I thought, "Can we protect them?" I've heard some of the speakers say it's difficult on occasion to protect jobs when industries are no longer competitive, and that's true. It's not easy to protect some jobs in some circumstances. But what I want to talk about is what governments have to do to ensure that we maintain as many of the good-paying jobs in this province as we possibly can. It is one thing to create 10 or 20 or 100,000 jobs or whatever they want to talk about, but take a look at the jobs that we are losing. I have a list of them. I'm going to do a requiem for these workers in a few minutes, but almost all of these jobs on the list are in high-paid manufacturing locations in and around southern Ontario. That's where the majority of them are. Those are the jobs that are being lost. I am not convinced, nor have I heard anyone speak about the jobs that have been created, whether they are being created in the same kind of industrial capacity, with the same amounts of money being paid to the workers and the same prosperity being enjoyed in those communities. I don't think I've heard anyone speak of that, because I don't think there are any statistics or there is anything that can be said that these are the same kinds of jobs. I do know that when you lose a job at General Motors or you lose a job at Ford or at Chrysler, you lose a very high-paying job.

As an anecdote and an aside, I went out to talk to a group of unionists the other day who were having a seminar and were talking about the province and provincial politics, and they asked me as an elected representative to come out and say a few words. I offered at the end to answer any questions they had, and the first person stood up and asked a question I often get asked by children who wander through here: "How much do you make?" I had to tell them how much a politician makes here, about \$86,000 a year, which I didn't think was a bad wage, except that the three workers from Oshawa who worked in the GM plant all laughed because each and every one of them made more than I did. That is the kind of job that I am afraid of losing in this Ontario. That is the kind of job and the standard of living that the people of Oshawa have come to rely on. They don't want you to say, "I created a job that pays \$7 or \$8 or \$9 in your community." To them, that is not a job that they covet, they want, they need, or that is adequate for them and their lifestyle and their family. These are trained people who are certainly looking for much more.

I listened to some of the other talk that was going on around here today about the other things that are important. Yes, there are lots of them that are important, and there's lots that this government can do, either alone or in partnership with the federal or municipal partners. There are lots of things that can be done that will help ensure better jobs or longer-term jobs or better business opportunities. I haven't seen that kind of action, where I can say that a government is actually committed; not this stuff that all these jobs have been created when in fact

it's the business community, by and large, that is creating them and it is the business community, by and large, that is losing them. It's not you guys. It's not me. It's not the opposition. It's not the government. It's not politicians in general.

We need to start putting more emphasis on things like the US border. They are our biggest trading partner. I invite the members of this House to go down to Niagara Falls or Fort Erie or any of the border crossings and see the lineup after lineup of trucks coming both ways. Certainly we can do things with the infrastructure to make sure that doesn't happen. That's what governments can do to create jobs if the jobs are destined for export. We know to whom we export. We know it's largely to the United States, and we know most of that is centred on Ontario-based trade. We need to make sure that free flow takes place back and forth. We need to make sure that all those irritants that exist, and of which we have spoken many times in this House, are overcome.

I can only think in the last day or two about the issue of drivers' licences, and how the United States is now just a little bit more than worried about people having drivers' licences as identification in Ontario, and how the Premier is equally worried. That is something the government can do something about, and I am sure it's something that will help us protect jobs.

I've read about and heard about people talking about the high Canadian dollar. It is true that it's high in terms of where it has been in the last few years, but you don't have to go back very far—you don't have to go back more than 20 or so years—to see times when the Canadian dollar was actually worth more than the American dollar. It was worth more during the time of John Diefenbaker, who devalued the money, and then it crept up under subsequent Liberal governments to again reach above US\$1. In those times, our manufacturing sector did not suffer. So I cannot say that I think it's the high Canadian dollar. The Canadian dollar was trading yesterday at around 86 cents and that gives us an advantage of 14%. If Canadian workers and the Canadian economy and Canadian manufacturers cannot compete with a 14% advantage, then I have to wonder, because I think they can compete very well. I don't think the high Canadian dollar is a factor.

I've heard people talking about energy costs. I have to agree that this is causing some industries a great deal of difficulty. They did not expect rising energy costs to the extent they are seeing them in the last two years. Many of those people who own industrial plants, who have commercial facilities that use enormous amounts of electricity, were relying on stable electricity prices. I don't know why they wouldn't, because if they read correctly, and I think they did—they had accountants, lawyers and everyone to read what this government promised going into the last election—you promised to cap electricity prices. You promised there would be no rise in those prices. I think many of them relied, in the continuation of their businesses, on stable electricity prices, which they

are not now seeing. That is causing some considerable consternation in the business community.

I heard the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge talk about wagon wheels. I think that was an unfortunate statement. I don't know of any place in Ontario of any size, other than some place that may produce the occasional wagon wheel for decorative effect or for some antique operation or to try to do something for a television program that's depicting the Old West or prairie life, that still makes that kind of stuff.

In fact, most of the industries we are losing, and I'd like to go through them now, make commodities and products that are used in this province each and every day. I have a list here—if you'll bear with me, I think it needs to be told—of the job losses I have been able to find in Ontario in the last 12 months. Think about these job losses and multiply them. Each and every job loss involves not only the worker who was there, but his or her children and spouse and families and community around them. Think about these people, because that's where I want to go after this. Think about their lives.

Think about General Motors, 3,900 job losses; Imperial Tobacco in Aylmer, 500 job losses; Ford, 1,100 before today, and the paper today said there are going to be a great many more announced in January; Daimler-Chrysler, 1,000; Sears, 1,200; Backyard Products, Collingwood, 230; Blue Mountain Pottery, Collingwood, 37; Nacan starch, Collingwood, 87 plus; Kaufman Furniture, Collingwood, 147; Automation Tooling Systems, Cambridge and Burlington, 169; Nestlé plant, Chesterville, 300; La-Z-Boy, Waterloo, 413; Ferranti-Packard, St. Catharines, 212; Norampac Inc., Red Rock, 175; Uni-board Canada Inc., New Liskeard, 73; Trent Rubber, Lindsay, 124; ERCO Worldwide, Thunder Bay, 26 and growing; Glenoit, Elmira, 75; Hemosol, Mississauga, 50; Sleeman Breweries, Guelph, 40; Glis Inc., Corunna—this is near Sarnia—35 people; Bazaar and Novelty, St. Catharines, 200; Rheem Canada, Hamilton, 150; Ball Packaging, Burlington, 100; Va Tech Ferranti-Packard Transformers, St. Catharines, 212; Redpath Sugar, Niagara Falls, 20; Harrowsmith cheese factory, Harrowsmith, 89; World's Finest Chocolate Factory, Campbellford, 125; Hershey Chocolates, Smiths Falls, 50; KUS Canada, Leamington, 120—

Mr. Chudleigh: Michael, that's my list.

Mr. Prue: If you've got it, I'm doing it again.

Prescott Shirt Co., Prescott, 53; Nexen, Amherstburg, 20; Columbia Forest Products, Rutherglen, 63; Cascades Inc., Thunder Bay, 150; plus 2,300 jobs lost in the forest industry in the last year in Ontario. The reason I rhymed those off is to say that this is not in one location. This is widespread across the province. It is taking place in large towns and small towns; it is taking place in a way that is affecting literally thousands upon thousands of individuals and their families.

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I'd like to go back to my own experience with this all those many years ago. People were talking here yesterday about what they did when they were students. They were

talking about how they worked in crummy places, but knowing that they didn't have to work there because in September they would go back to school and they had a hope for a better life. But as to the people they left behind in those factories, the people who worked there, they still remembered how they toiled and the difficult conditions under which they worked, and the fact that their hands and bodies were scarred and it was difficult for them to stand up straight or tall, and that at 40 years of age they looked much older than their years.

It brought back to me the time I first started to work my first real good summer job, because I did have a couple of small ones. But the first really good one I had was when I was 17 years old. I worked at a place called Dunlop's. They made tires and conveyor belts. They were a worldwide company. They were located on Queen Street near Logan in Toronto. That company was a unionized shop, I have to tell you, even though the work was brutal. It was hot and dirty and people suffered from all kinds of ailments. It was a unionized factory where the wages weren't too bad. I worked there for three summers, until the day I heard on the radio, on CFRB at the noon news, that the grand old lady of Queen Street, as Dunlop's was then known, was shutting down. It came as—

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): They moved to Whitby. I worked at Dunlop.

Mr. Prue: No, they didn't move to Whitby.

Hon. Mr. Kwinter: They sure did.

Mr. Prue: The honourable member doesn't know of what he speaks. I'm going to explain. Many years before that they did move the tire division to Whitby, but the division that was on Queen Street made bicycle tires, conveyor belts and other rubber products. That's the one that shut down. Whitby stayed in operation for a number of years, combined with Pirelli and all of that. But they didn't move to Whitby back in that day. They literally, when they combined with Pirelli, shut down that factory. More than 1,000 men, and a few women who worked there, lost their jobs.

The workers fought very hard to keep those jobs. There were demonstrations. There were people who came down to the Legislature. The Legislature listened sympathetically, I think, but in the end was only able to do one thing. The people of this province should be eternally thankful that the workers of Dunlop's put up such a fight, because for the first time this province set out some rules and regulations that governed, when people were losing their jobs and when plants closed down, how people were to be given severance, how people were to be given money when the plants shut down. Before that, it never happened. It never happened at all. But when it shut down, thousands of people literally were put out of work.

I was a young guy. That was my summer job for three summers, so the next year I went and got a summer job somewhere else. It didn't pay as much money and it wasn't a unionized place and it wasn't as dirty and it wasn't as dangerous, but I got a job somewhere else, and

I'm thankful for that job to this day. I was driving a truck.

The people who lost their jobs: I knew most of them; some of them well, some of them not so well, because there were, after all, about 1,000 men and a few women who worked in there. Seeing what happened to those individuals when that plant shut down will tell me, I think, what's going to happen in every one of these plants around the province. Those who were older, those who were more than 50 or 55 years of age, had a very difficult, and some an impossible, time finding other work. They were put on the scrap heap. Luckily, in those days there was employment insurance that paid out for 52 weeks. A great majority of the people went on employment insurance, at least for some period of time. That's how they subsisted. When the 52 weeks ran out, most of those people who couldn't find a job were able to get welfare payments.

But today in this province of Ontario, workers between 60 and 65 who used to get the full welfare payment because quite literally it's difficult for them to find work—today in Ontario there's no special arrangement for those workers. There are going to be hundreds and hundreds and thousands of workers affected here who are going to be over 60 years of age in these locations who are not going to be able to find a job. You know it; I know it; they know it. They're not going to be able to find a job. When their employment insurance runs out—and it's now much harder to get than it was back in the 1970s; much harder today than then—when that runs out, if they can get it, they are going to find themselves with virtually no source of money. They are eligible, of course, as any citizen is, for welfare, but they are not eligible for the top-up that we used to give, which is now the equivalent of ODSP, because the Harris government in its wisdom did away with that.

This government needs to look at how you're going to treat those workers. This government needs to say whether it is fair or just or right that they can no longer get that top-up between what we pay for Ontario Works and what we pay for ODSP. I will tell you, I think that's something this government can do to assuage the problems of these workers who, through no fault of their own, are finding themselves on the street, these workers who will rely upon the government to make sure that they and their families do not go hungry. I am asking this government to look at that. I'm asking you very seriously. I'm out of time, so I'm asking you to do it. If you can do one thing, do that.

Mr. Tony C. Wong (Markham): I'm glad to join in the debate this afternoon. I want to speak to how important China is in our economic development and trade strategy. If I have time, then I will also speak to how our government is really doing a lot of things in terms of how we are promoting and cultivating a new spirit of innovation in the newly created Ministry of Research and Innovation, which the Premier is leading himself.

I want to start by echoing what my colleague the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge said: that China

is the second-largest trading partner of Canada, with a two-way trade of \$30.7 billion. Ontario has a share of 44%, which amounted to \$13.5 billion in 2004.

It goes without saying that many communities have suffered a loss of jobs, but what they should do is look for new ways to create jobs to develop their economy and not just come as crying babies to the province.

I have also met with the mayor of Cornwall and his economic development staff this morning. They were extremely interested in the tourism opportunities that would be available as soon as our federal government signs the ADS agreement, the approved destination status agreement, with China. Our Premier, in Beijing, when he met with the ministers of the central government, also raised this as an important issue.

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This is much more than tourism. What we know is that as China expands its economy, there are all kinds of opportunities that Canadians, with top technology and leading-edge expertise in many areas, whether it is biotechnology, aerospace engineering or architecture, can benefit from in a big way.

I want to give you a few examples so that members opposite will know that it's not just fiction; this is actually happening. I refer to a couple of companies in my riding of Markham. What I'm saying is pretty well public information. I want to just publicize this so we know that as Canadian companies, we can succeed, and I'm sure we will succeed if we do the right things.

Petroff architects, a reputable firm in Markham, told me that, starting in the early 1990s, they went into Shanghai, starting with the design and construction of a couple of commercial buildings, and they've never looked back. They said that they were not only able to live through the early 1990s, when a recession was taking place in Ontario and Canada, but they actually grew through that period. They've done so well that they participated, in a significant way, in the construction of an opera house and commercial-residential development in Hangzhou, a major city in China with over six million people. That project was completed in September of last year, and they of course benefited in a big way.

I also refer to another high-tech company dealing with data recovery. They have dealt with Chinese business prospects and opportunities for a number of years. They told me, "Tony, we were in China for a couple of years and nothing happened." But all of a sudden, they were able to secure a major contract with the army in China. This relates to what my colleague from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge was talking about. It's not a one-off thing. It is not easy to crack that market. It has a different business culture, it has a different mode of operation, and you have to be patient and persistent. But it can be done.

I also want to talk about some of the wisdom of companies that have succeeded in China. It has been said that it's maybe a five-step process. You need to start with basic research. Not everyone is ready to, or should, go into China. You have to make sure that your products or services are needed and marketable in terms of pricing.

So you do your research, whether it's over the Web site or your own reading.

The second step is that you should attend conferences and forums to hear what other people have to say, especially people who have succeeded, to learn the pitfalls, the techniques and the business culture, which you must be able to deal with, and challenges that you should overcome.

The third step is a major one, and that is to make that trip. You must make that trip so that you will be able to interact with your Chinese counterparts. That is why our Premier led this business delegation of more than 125 businesspeople: to make that direct interaction with their respective counterparts in China. Again, this is only one step. They will have to continue to make these trips and interact with their counterparts for anything to happen.

The fourth step is that many companies, unlike Nortel and Bombardier, which have their own marketing teams that can set up offices in a number of cities in China, are SMEs, small and medium enterprises, and they cannot afford that expenditure to set up shop, to send in their marketing team to do justice to their products and services. I think it's important for them to retain a consultant or an agent on their behalf.

Step five is to develop a medium-term strategy plan of at least a couple of years for it to have a good chance of success.

I also want to talk about how important it is that the Premier has created this new Ministry of Research and Innovation, because in this knowledge-based economy innovation is of the essence. We not only have to promote the business culture in an innovative way but we also have to cultivate this new spirit of innovation for all students and all young people as well as our entrepreneur participants in the province. I think what we have done is going to be conducive to this new spirit.

I want to give you another example. I was in Peterborough a couple of times in the last couple of months. The community of Peterborough, including the municipality, Trent University and the private sector, have come together to identify the niche of DNA research that they want to focus on. This is of course exciting to the business community as well as to Trent University. I was there for the kickoff of the DNA building and they were extremely happy that our province has supported them in a big way. It is a partnership between the federal government, the province of Ontario and the local community.

They have attracted the attention not only of local business people and scientists but they've also gained the support of an international organization, ICAV, the International Consortium on Anti-Virals. ICAV held their first conference in Toronto, the second international conference in Paris and the third in Peterborough. So all of a sudden Peterborough is right up there.

These are the things that we want to see across the province. I look forward to working with the Premier as his parliamentary assistant in this Ministry of Research and Innovation and doing a lot of good things to create

employment opportunities for all residents of the province.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise in support of the motion brought forward by my colleague the member for Halton, Mr. Chudleigh. I think it's a very wise motion, well written. We'll see what the vote brings but I fully expect it, by its language, to receive support from members of all three parties because at its heart it expresses concern about the state of the economy and the layoffs that we're seeing in the manufacturing sector. In fact, some 55,000-plus high-paying manufacturing jobs are leaving the province of Ontario. Cornwall, Oshawa, Collingwood, Thunder Bay, Windsor and St. Catharines, among many other communities, are mentioned specifically in the motion.

There are a number of causes for this that I'll address in my short time, and I have a couple of other colleagues who will be speaking after me.

First and foremost, we have a serious problem in Ontario with taxation and the resultant lack of competitiveness of Ontario's businesses. One of the first moves Dalton McGuinty made when he became Premier of the province was to bring in the largest tax hike in the history of Ontario. It was mostly noted because it broke his promise to working families not to increase their taxes. Part of that bill also included a substantial increase in our corporate tax rate, meaning businesses in Ontario are now paying substantially higher taxes than they were before Dalton McGuinty came into office.

Members opposite usually say, "Ontario's corporate tax rate, despite the tax increase, is still competitive with border states and other provinces." The problem with that argument is that it does not include the capital tax, which is a very high, punishing tax that impacts substantially on businesses, in fact discourages them from investing in businesses creating new production lines and creating jobs in the province. When you combine the capital tax and the corporate tax rate, Ontario's lack of competitiveness becomes readily apparent, not only to us in the Legislature but to businesses that instead are choosing to invest elsewhere, in this unfortunate new reality in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

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There was of course a schedule to eliminate the capital tax that Dalton McGuinty scrapped, once in office, and put on full bore that capital tax all over again on top of the corporate tax increases. In his next budget, I think the then finance minister, Greg Sorbara, realized the mistake that was made initially and said, "Well, we will eliminate the capital tax, but you're going to have to wait for about seven more years." So we have a vague commitment to eliminate the capital tax between 2009 and 2012, I believe, if the McGuinty government were to survive that long. But we know how much trust to put in that type of promise, particularly if it's a big promise. Hopefully we will not face that reality. I suspect we will not have to face that, and a government that is more concerned about reducing the burden of taxes on working families and on struggling businesses will come into office under John

Tory and get to work reducing tax rates and improving Ontario's competitive position.

I think one of the reasons we're seeing the flight of manufacturing jobs from our province today is the high burden of taxation. If you look at the work of Roger Martin, for example, the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity has recently cited the sliding competitive nature of Ontario's economy—its attractiveness for investment. I forget the number—I'd have to refer back to the study—but I think now we've dropped to the second-worst of the sister jurisdictions they compare us to. We were making progress, moving up the list, but now we have slid down, slightly above Quebec, I think, but behind other competing states, which does not bode well in a time of international flexible investment.

The second major area that I think we need to have concern about is the energy policy, which I can describe as nothing short of wacky. Dalton McGuinty's wacky energy policy—the notion of closing down 20% to 25% of our peak power supply—is ludicrous in a competitive economy. We've already seen the spike in energy costs, despite campaign promises to the contrary; on top of that, some 30% increase next year, and who knows what else will happen down the road if the coal plants are closed down. It puts our businesses in a very difficult position competing with other jurisdictions, on top of the increase in taxes they have already been forced to deal with.

Imagine instead if the government had invested in clean coal technology, had invested in scrubbers. It could have made a difference here and now substantially in reducing emissions. But instead, now postponing the promise to close down coal plants will mean smog for a longer period of time, as opposed to cleaning it up now and impacting on the competitiveness of our businesses and closing down—

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I think I'm right. I know my colleague is speaking after me, and hopefully my facts are relatively accurate.

On top of that, rolling the dice and gambling the whole time on gas-fired plants: We're probably the only jurisdiction in the world that is going to gamble almost exclusively on gas prices. We've already seen those prices increase. Most of the projects scheduled for the province, whether in Lambton county, Mississauga or Brampton, are far behind schedule, let alone the negative impact that may be felt on home heating costs and on the chemical industry as well, as natural gas is its main feedstock. So we do have a wacky energy policy under the Dalton McGuinty government.

I suspect it's a broken promise they'll get around to breaking once more, as they've already broken the commitment for the 2007 closures. But for stability and confidence in our province and for future investment, they should just say, "Do you know what? It's a broken promise. We're not going to close down the plants. We'll invest in cleaner technology and encourage businesses to expand in the province of Ontario." I would be much happier with a hydro policy that tries to increase the

supply of power and in that way drives down prices in the long run and makes our hydro rates competitive as opposed to going through the roof.

The third thing I'd add—I know my colleagues want to speak as well—is concern about the border economy. As much as we in Canada boast about a free and open border, it's really a myth. Look at Europe: countries that tried to wipe each other off the map 60 years ago. You can drive between France and Germany these days without much hassle, if you're an EU citizen. On the contrary, in North America, our border is becoming increasingly like a fortress, and the lack of investment in border infrastructure and trying to find ways to facilitate tourism and trade will have dire consequences not only for areas like Fort Erie, where I'm from, but on the internal part of the province as well.

The notion of passports and the impact they're going to have on our domestic economy, when you're walking or driving through the gates at the border, is frightening as well. The Premier had talked about trying to convince the governors to lobby their federal government to use a driver's licence, but when we find out that there are some 56,000 documents missing in the Ministry of Transportation, and a Minister of Transportation who doesn't seem to care and has taken no action of substance to turn those things around—

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Oh, yes, you care, huh?

Mr. Hudak: Obviously, the Minister of Transportation is more concerned about the goings on at the Chalmers corporation than at the Ministry of Transportation, or in turning things around. You'd think heads would have rolled over there at the Ministry of Transportation as soon as the minister found out about criminals working in those offices, but instead he tends to coast along and sing a version of "Don't worry. Be happy." It's unfortunate that the lack of action by the Minister of Transportation is jeopardizing initiatives at the border at the same time.

Representing the border, I have great concerns about the impact they're already feeling in Fort Erie, in Niagara Falls. We have seen significant manufacturing capacity closed down in the St. Catharines area. We've seen the mid-peninsula corridor, a needed new highway into our province, become the road to nowhere under the Dalton McGuinty government. That highway, in fact, has been taken back several years, scrapping all of the good work that was done since 2001. We've actually now lost four years in that project.

I know my colleagues want to rise to speak to this issue. Unless we see a turnaround in lowering tax rates and getting a hydro policy that invites businesses into the province, that fights pollution and increases supply of power, and, finally, some action on the transportation files, I fear that the 55,000 jobs that have already fled the province are, sadly, just the beginning in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lou Rinaldi): The Chair recognizes the member from Perth–Middlesex.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to see you in the chair. I was there just the other day. You're doing a wonderful job. We'll try not to bore you.

First of all, I just want to start by recognizing something that I don't think has been recognized in this House today: Today is the 25th anniversary of the death of John Lennon. John Lennon had a substantial impact on this world. I know many members are nodding their heads about John Lennon. I would quote him: "Imagine all the people living in the world agree," as he said in that great song of his.

I think that could be the spirit of the Leader of the Opposition in his remarks. If we could all just come together and work together on this problem, that would be a wonderful thing. I thought he made a compelling argument, but then I take a look beyond that rhetoric and I start to have some problems with it.

First, I want to preface my remarks by stating that I know of no person in this province who cares more deeply about the loss being felt by families across Ontario than the person I'm proud to call the Premier of Ontario, the Honourable Dalton McGuinty. I know—and I've talked to the Premier about this—that this is a concern he focuses all of his attention on. We can fall into the trap, like the opposition, of being economic ambulance chasers, running around the province and telling everybody that it's doom and gloom, or we can be the government and actually do our part.

First, I want to say that I completely disagree with Mr. Wilson, who has the notion—I think the member from Beaches–East York agrees with me as well, as he said in his comments—that somehow the government creates jobs. The government doesn't create jobs, nor do they lose them. I agree with the member. We set the conditions that allow the economy to thrive. That's our responsibility, and I know that is the focus of our Premier. That's why we have been working so hard implementing our plan. Despite the challenges of the situation that we inherited, we are undaunted, with our Premier, in that regard.

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I want to say to the member from Markham, who spoke briefly, and in response to the member from Halton, who seems to have some idea of recognizing that the People's Republic of China is the second-largest trading partner of this country and of this province, and doesn't feel that any tangible results are coming of it—I can say to the member from Halton that my whole community of Stratford was one of only four municipalities that took up the challenge and the opportunity to go to the People's Republic of China with the Premier on his trade mission. Our delegation was led by Mayor Dan Mathieson, our economic development officer, Larry Appel, and particularly Anita Gaffney, from the Stratford festival. We were able to sign an agreement, a sister city agreement, with the city of Suzhou in the district of Jiangsu. I can tell you that that has great economic benefits to Stratford. That part of China, in the province

of Jiangsu, is a cultural centre, like my home community of Stratford is. There is a burgeoning middle class of people who are fluent in English who, when we have preferred destination status in this province with China, will flock to my community to the Stratford festival. We are making those investments right now, those connections to make sure that that happens. I'm very proud of our Premier. I want you to know that our community is open to the Chinese for business in a full reciprocity.

I know that the opposition have repeated something about the fact that they see a lack of a plan. They don't like our plan, because they keep on voting against it. I would say that we're doing two of the key things that economists tell us we have to do to set that economic condition. We're investing in people and we're investing in infrastructure. We're investing in people through innovation and research, and training and development. I use as our example our tremendous \$6.2-billion investment in the post-secondary sector, in universities, colleges and training, something that I think the Leader of the Opposition thought was a good idea and then promptly voted against.

We recognize that ensuring our people have the best skills and training is key to building a strong and vibrant economy; doing our part. That's why we just signed a new labour market development agreement with the federal government that will provide \$1.4 billion for skills training to help those looking for work. Why did we do that? Because we identified a gap with our federal cousins and we were doggedly determined. I want to commend Minister Colle for making that happen. Many people in the opposition said that would never be signed. But we did that, because we're making those investments in the future.

I'm particularly proud of what we're doing in pre-apprenticeship and making sure that we have the skilled trades. We're investing in infrastructure. Why? We have a plan to invest \$30 billion in much-needed infrastructure because we inherited an infrastructure deficit. I look to my own riding, and what do I see? I see a redevelopment of the hospital, Listowel Memorial; I see a redevelopment at Stratford General; I see a redevelopment at Knollcrest. The total of all of those projects, close to \$50 million, will generate jobs and activity in my own riding, creating the infrastructure so that we can care for people—care for people on the worst days of their lives when they're in hospital, in the twilight of their years, for our seniors. I'm proud of that. That sounds like a plan to me, that we have our act together. We're not running around, chasing economic ambulances; we're actually getting down to the work that's required. And what I find is that at every instance, what does the opposition do? They vote against that, even when all of this economic goodwill goes right across the province—not just in my riding but in ridings from all parties, right across this province.

I also want to say quite clearly that when the opposition say we don't have a plan, it's merely because they can't read. They can't read our budget. Our budget is our

plan. That is the government plan. I say to all the people who are watching at home that that's how a government allocates some \$80 billion: through the budgetary process. A budget that goes through this Legislature—it isn't done over at Magna. No siree, Bob; it is done right here in the Legislature, where people know that the government is held accountable.

I know the saying, "There are none so blind as those who will not see," and I say to the members of the opposition, in regard to this motion, do you want to work together? Then why are you voting against our plan, a plan that's working? The opposition wants to take credit, and we say to the good people of Cornwall and to all the people who have those job losses that your government is working tirelessly every day to ensure that there is hope for the people of Cornwall, that we move forward on that ethanol plant—that's an ethanol plant that the opposition opposed. They didn't agree to that plan.

I listened to the member from Erie–Lincoln. He has a great plan: less taxes, more smog. What kind of plan is that? A plan that says—

Mr. Chudleigh: You are so inaccurate.

Mr. Wilkinson: I'm just quoting the member from Erie–Lincoln. He's a great guy. Very ambitious, but he's an interesting guy. What he just said is: "Taxes are too high and we've got to have coal; don't get rid of that coal." I can tell you, on behalf of the people who care about the environment, that we can rise to the challenge.

I know that there are new investments in Mr. Hudak's riding to develop wind turbines. Those are good jobs; I think they're excellent jobs. They look to the future. They look to having an economically sustainable economy that's in balance with our environment, that isn't tilted one way or the other.

The thing that's most encouraging in my riding is the fact that I know the good people of Toyota—and that announcement in Woodstock, during all of those years when there were 19 new auto plants in North America and they went right past Ontario every time, that now we have a new plant. I know in my own riding, we are in line for Echo announcements, because the good people of Perth south and Stratford and the county of Perth are working together, like they did in Oxford and Woodstock, to create the conditions so that the new jobs will be here. The best plan for the loss of old jobs is always new jobs, and that, sir, is what we're focused on.

Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): I support the motion that is before the House today, and I appreciate the opportunity to join my colleagues in this debate. I want to commend the member for Halton and the member for Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey for raising some vitally important arguments about jobs, for being concerned about our communities and for looking out for Ontario's economy and our future.

This is not the first time that our party has brought forward a resolution on jobs, and today I hope that all members will appreciate the tone of this motion and realize the urgency of its message about the immediate need to take action on jobs.

This advice, it seems, must be repeated again and again because, astonishingly, the McGuinty Liberal government has done very little to deal with the disturbing loss of manufacturing jobs in Ontario.

It's hard to imagine why they've taken so long; it's not as if the government hasn't been warned. In fact, more than six months ago, I put forward a motion in this House calling for an immediate investigation into our industrial and economic competitiveness. It called for an action plan to expand markets, and I believe that it would have encouraged the creation of jobs and prosperity.

At that time, I said, "We can't take our current favourable conditions for granted," and since that time, we have seen a disturbing trend unfold. The job loss problem is not going away, as much as we all might wish it to be so. So I've reintroduced my resolution for this second session. It has been on the order paper since October.

As reported in the *Globe and Mail* last Saturday, last month's jobs report showed that, in the last 12 months, Canada has lost almost 100,000 manufacturing jobs. Since the manufacturing sector is largely concentrated in the province of Ontario, we are being hit very hard.

More than six months ago—six months ago, I say again—my resolution called for an action plan. The task would have involved a study and creating an action plan, and it suggested that the job be given to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

I didn't join this debate to say, "I told you so," but it's past time that the government take action on the real and substantive economic issues that will determine whether or not Ontario can look ahead to a more prosperous future any time soon.

Ontario's business leaders agree. My resolution was supported by the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, the Canadian Chemical Producers' Association, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, the C.D. Howe Institute, the Employers' Advocacy Council and the Ontario Real Estate Association.

Every member in this House should be concerned about jobs and the trend of lost manufacturing jobs. I suspect they're also aware that when Canada's industrial powerhouse, Ontario, loses a significant number of manufacturing jobs, we must act together. If we don't, the harmful impacts will be felt severely in many other businesses and sectors that are interdependent.

I want to leave a substantial amount of time for my colleague the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke so that he can have an opportunity to participate in this debate as our energy critic. So I would say in closing: I want to encourage all members of this House to support this important resolution today.

1740

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): It's a pleasure to speak today to the motion by my colleague from Halton respecting jobs and job losses in the province of Ontario.

We've heard various speakers today from this side of the House speak about the horrendous job losses in a key sector of our economy, and that is manufacturing. When

this government talks about the number of jobs being created, they're not being created in the manufacturing sector. You've got to compare apples to apples and oranges to oranges. So numerically, you can't talk about jobs being created unless you're talking about similar types of jobs. Of the jobs that were created during the years of the previous government, the over one million jobs, many were in manufacturing. Manufacturing employment rose, contrary to what's happening under this government's guidance.

I heard the member from Perth–Middlesex talk earlier about the Toyota plant. There are no new jobs. Is anybody working at that new Toyota plant? There's nobody working there. They keep talking about that and about 1,300 and 1,500 jobs, but the place isn't operating; it hasn't even been built. So you can't talk about those kinds of things. Those are into the future and in no way compensate for the number of job losses in the automotive sector here in Ontario that have already been announced, that are happening at General Motors and Ford. You can rest assured that there could be more down the road, with the policies of this government.

One of the problems of this government is their energy policy. They just don't get it that their energy policy is what is driving the cost of energy skywards in this province, and that is a major contributor to job losses. When you talk to people at Domtar and Cascades and places like that, those are the kinds of issues that are affecting them. Energy prices are being driven by an ill-conceived, blind energy policy on the part of this government, in which they simply say, "We're going to eliminate coal-fired generation by such and such a date." They haven't made a single effort to invest in cleaning up those coal plants, and the technology is there, the opportunity is there.

They are sitting on their hands while we continue to operate those coal plants because we need them so badly, and because we don't have enough generation capacity in this province. They ran full out this summer, but they weren't running at the optimum level with regard to cleanliness. We could be investing in that so that those coal plants could be operating cleanly. What will we get four years down the road from 2003? We'll still have those coal plants because their energy policy is going to fail. Every credible person out there says it's going to fail. They will not have the new generation in the system prior to those dates. We'll still have to operate those coal plants, but we will be operating them without having done a thing to clean them up.

As part of the energy policy, those prices are going to continue to rise and will continue to affect job losses all across this province while this government sits on its hands, wringing its hands, bringing in all kinds of different legislation that really amounts to nothing. What we need is an economic strategy in this province that respects all aspects of economics: energy, monetary policy, finances—the whole bit. We need an economic strategy; this government has none. It's high time it got down to brass tacks and started to work on one.

I support this motion brought forth by my colleague from Halton and will be voting for it. I would like to pass this on now to my colleague the member for Lanark–Carleton, who also has some words to say on this subject.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): Today in question period I asked the Premier about a town I represent, Smiths Falls. The town of Smiths Falls has recently suffered job losses of 100 people, 100 jobs, partly from Hershey's chocolate plant, and from another smaller industry that is moving south of the border.

In addition to these private sector jobs that this community is losing, the Rideau Regional Centre, which has been operating in Smiths Falls now for well over 50 years, taking care of some of the most vulnerable people in our province. The average age of these people is over 50, and most of them have lived in this particular residence for 30 to 40 years, some even longer than that. The government has made a decision that they want to put these people out in the community. That has been a policy of several governments, that we should try to "deinstitutionalize" our most vulnerable people who require extra help out into the community. It's not only their government that has had this policy, it was the former Conservative government, the former NDP government and the former Liberal government. We go back and back.

The problem now is that we're getting down to the final, last people who remain in these institutions. I think about 70% of the people who are in the Rideau Regional Centre now are in wheelchairs or have more severe challenges than that, and the ability to take care of these people is really extreme. I guess it's estimated that it would cost well over \$100,000 a year to take care of people with these kinds of challenges.

This government, in spite of what the former government did in relation to these people, has decided to accelerate their exit from the Rideau Regional Centre. This is going to cost the community of Smiths Falls 800 jobs. The Rideau Regional Centre brings \$36 million to the community of Smiths Falls, and it's so important to their economy.

I introduced a bill for the second time in this Legislature to create, in eastern Ontario, outside of the city of Ottawa, a new kind of help for these communities that are really struggling: Smiths Falls, Cornwall, Prescott and a number of other areas in eastern Ontario. It was called the eastern Ontario economic—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Thank you. It's time to put the question.

Mr. Chudleigh has moved opposition day motion number 4. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. It will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1748 to 1758.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Arthurs, Wayne	Klees, Frank	Rinaldi, Lou
Balkissoon, Bas	Kular, Kuldip	Ruprecht, Tony
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Cordiano, Joseph	Marchese, Rosario	Smith, Monique
Delaney, Bob	Marsales, Judy	Sterling, Norman W.
Dombrowsky, Leona	McMeekin, Ted	Wilkinson, John
Duguid, Brad	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Milloy, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
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Gerretsen, John	Peterson, Tim	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Hudak, Tim	Phillips, Gerry	Yakabuski, John
Jackson, Cameron	Prue, Michael	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 44; the nays are 0.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2005 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2005

SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES (N^o 2)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 24, 2005, on the motion for second reading of Bill 18, An Act to implement 2005 Budget measures and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 18, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2005 et modifiant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Further debate? There being none, the minister has a right of reply.

Mr. Duncan has moved second reading of Bill 18, An Act to implement 2005 Budget measures and amend various Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed, say "nay."

The ayes have it.

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

This is from the government whip: "Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on the motion by Minister Duncan for second reading of Bill 18, An Act to implement 2005 Budget measures and amend various Acts, be deferred until deferred votes on December 12, 2005."

It being past 6 p.m. of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, December 12, 2005.

The House adjourned at 1801.

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Garfield Dunlop
Wayne Arthurs, Caroline Di Cocco,
Garfield Dunlop, Andrea Horwath,
Cameron Jackson, Kuldip Kular, Phil McNeely
John Milloy, Jim Wilson
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Finances et affaires économiques**

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Lou Rinaldi, John Yakabuski
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Andrea Horwath, Tim Hudak,
David Oraziotti, Ernie Parsons,
Laurie Scott, Monique M. Smith,
Joseph N. Tascona
Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

Justice Policy / Justice

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Bob Delaney
Jim Brownell, Bob Delaney, Kevin Daniel Flynn,
Frank Klees, Peter Kormos, Jennifer F. Mossop,
Shafiq Qaadri, Mario G. Racco, Elizabeth Witmer
Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Mario G. Racco
Donna H. Cansfield, Bob Delaney,
Ernie Hardeman, Rosario Marchese, Ted McMeekin,
Norm Miller, Tim Peterson, Mario G. Racco, Mario Sergio
Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente: Julia Munro
Laurel C. Broten, Jim Flaherty, Shelley Martel,
Bill Mauro, Julia Munro, Richard Patten,
Liz Sandals, Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

**Regulations and private bills /
Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Tony C. Wong
Gilles Bisson, Marilyn Churley, Kim Craiton,
Kuldip Kular, Gerry Martiniuk, Bill Murdoch,
Khalil Ramal, Maria Van Bommel, Tony C. Wong
Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Social Policy / Politique sociale

Chair / Président: Mario G. Racco
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Khalil Ramal
Ted Arnott, Ted Chudleigh, Kim Craiton,
Peter Fonseca, Jeff Leal, Rosario Marchese,
Mario G. Racco, Khalil Ramal, Kathleen O.Wynne
Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

Electoral reform / Réforme électorale

Chair / Présidente: Caroline Di Cocco
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Norm Miller
Wayne Arthurs, Caroline Di Cocco,
Kuldip Kular, Norm Miller, Richard Patten,
Michael Prue, Monique M. Smith,
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