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(Hansard)**

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 16 February 2006

Jeudi 16 février 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 16 February 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 16 février 2006

The House met at 1000.

Prayers.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

RURAL ONTARIO DAY ACT, 2006
LOI DE 2006
SUR LE JOUR DE L'ONTARIO RURAL

Mrs. Mitchell moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 49, An Act to celebrate and recognize rural Ontario / Projet de loi 49, Loi visant à célébrer et à reconnaître l'Ontario rural.

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

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): Mr. Speaker, as you know, I represent the most rural riding in Ontario, so I know first-hand what it's like to live, work and raise a family in a rural area. I'm very proud of our rural communities. Rural Ontario is the key to the health and the vitality of our province. This bill will recognize rural Ontario's strengths: hard-working people, numerous economic opportunities, bountiful and breathtaking natural resources and a solid sense of community.

This bill declares the Wednesday before Thanksgiving day in each year as Rural Ontario Day. This day falls in the middle of Ontario Agriculture Week. This week was established in 1998, and it provides recognition of the contribution of Ontario's agricultural community. Ontario Agriculture Week was established as a private member's bill, and it was put forward by former member Bert Johnson. That member was from Perth–Middlesex. I want to thank Bert for introducing his bill. I believe this is an appropriate time to declare Rural Ontario Day and also to highlight Ontario Agriculture Week.

The purpose of this bill is to have a day when we will reflect on the contribution that rural Ontario has made to our province and to highlight its great potential. The people of the First Nations opened the vast forests of Ontario. They were the pioneers who began to unveil the riches of this land. Their trio of crops—corn, beans and squash—were the first steps away from depending on hunting and fishing. Their technology had its limitations, and it was not until the Europeans began to settle that the

rural areas really started to open up. There were French settlers along the St. Clair River, and then the influx of the Loyalists. The history of Upper Canada is the history of rural Ontario. Our communities became strong as we faced and overcame the obstacles which geography had created.

Group action and innovation are the hallmarks, and working together for the common good is a thread that runs strong through rural Ontario. Rapid advances in technology made the land more productive and made transportation more economical. In the 19th century, towns and villages sprouted across the land. Progress was the word. Business followed the settlers, and manufacturers emerged to meet the local demands.

Schools and churches were built at almost every concession crossroad. If you look at the dates on the buildings in our towns and villages, you will note the date of construction. The early 20th century was the time when rural confidence manifested itself in very impressive local structures. Main Streets in many smaller towns have architectural gems from this time. The buildings showed a sense of achievement and confidence in the future. The period ended with the solemn cenotaphs that mark the contribution that our rural youth gave to the Great War.

The 20th century has seen great changes in the rural countryside worldwide. Again, it's technology that has triggered these changes. The population has shifted from a province where most of the population lived in rural areas, to the present, where the people live in our cities.

In the 20th century, the population began to shift. Again, technology was a major factor in making the urban areas important economically. Since the beginning, there has always been a gulf between our urban and rural areas. But technology changed that. Just as the first railway and the highways brought produce and people to the city, now technology has reversed that flow. As the world becomes global, first radio, television, electricity and now the Internet have reduced distances and the differences between rural and urban.

That brings us to today. Throughout the past years, many things have thrived in rural Ontario. Our rural people, when ignored by large financial institutions, turned to ourselves to create solutions. We invest in our own innovation. Credit unions, mutual insurance companies, independent phone companies, co-operatives—that's rural Ontario.

I want to highlight our unique health care services. As you know, people in rural areas have to travel a great distance to get to hospitals or health care providers. This

is a circumstance that our people have overcome. Many community groups have gathered together to offer modern services much more efficiently.

Many of our rural schools also face very unique challenges: With low enrolment, the threat of school closures hangs over. As well, busing expenses are high because of the large geographical area that they have to cover. But I must say that in rural schools, the families and the teachers work together to form a very strong community.

I want to mention the beautiful landscape and green space that rural Ontario has to offer: lakes, rivers, forests full of trees, wildlife, fields full of fresh produce, provincial parks and farmland. Many people from urban centres travel to rural areas to view our beautiful landscape. Rural Ontario has so much to offer: hiking trails, sunny beaches, hunting, boating, fishing. The land remains the most important influence and factor in our rural areas. Technology may change the means of making a living on the land, but the land is the essence of our rural life. It is the bond with the land that makes rural life different. Even if one does not earn one's living directly from the land, its importance is always felt as being our largest economic driver, which brings me to the summer months. Many exciting things happen in rural Ontario during the warm-weather months—and our warm hospitality during the winter months: live theatre, fairs, festivals and concerts, to name a few. Many people take advantage of all the events that we have to offer, and I know they always leave with a smile on their face.

1010

I would really like to recognize and highlight the strong sense of community that small towns and rural communities thrive on, as well as the wonderful volunteers who are committed to maintaining the high quality of life that we all enjoy.

There are many organizations that have been formed mainly to strengthen the voice of rural Ontario, and one of those voices is the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I want to read into the record the letter of support from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture:

“Dear Ms. Mitchell:

“The Ontario Federation of Agriculture wishes to thank you for the development of your private member's bill, Rural Ontario Day Act, 2005.... OFA supports the recognition of Ontario's rural communities and the farmers who have built and supported these communities since the first settlements in Upper Canada.

“OFA certainly agrees that rural Ontario has contributed largely to the success and prosperity of Ontario. We also agree that it is Ontario farmers who have and continue to contribute to the fabric of rural Ontario.

“Our farmers need to see a future for themselves, and their families in agriculture if they are to be expected to remain as part of the fabric of rural Ontario. Our rural communities are growing increasingly anxious about their long-term futures—if the farmers can't survive, they know their chances are slim. Statistics show that in 2003, farmers spent \$5 billion on fuel, fertilizer, veterinary services and electricity and telecommunications services.

All of these services support rural Ontario businesses and citizens.

“The survival of these service providers, implement dealers, co-operatives and other small businesses ... depends on farmers paying their bills.

“The untenable situation of negative income on Ontario's farms can be resolved with comprehensive short-term, urgently needed assistance and long-term programs as proposed by producers from both levels of government to provide the stability ... for farmers and rural Ontario.

“Other nations have decided that farming and rural communities are worth protecting. Bold and decisive leadership by the Ontario and Canadian governments is required to maintain a rural Ontario worth celebrating each and every year.”

Rural Ontario is home to committed people, diverse economic opportunities, plenty of natural resources and a thriving sense of community. Rural communities contribute to add to the high quality of life for all Ontarians. Through my private member's bill, I would like to declare the Wednesday immediately before Thanksgiving day in each year as Rural Ontario Day. I would like to thank the speakers who will be coming forward, and I look forward to further debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant):

Thank you, Speaker. I'll address Bill 49, An Act to celebrate and recognize rural Ontario. I guess the first question that comes to mind is, how does one celebrate and recognize rural Ontario, on one hand, and completely ignore the crises faced by farmers? I think we all recognize that farmers are the backbone of our rural way of life.

Over the last year, we have seen our farmers pushed to the edge of bankruptcy. Regrettably, a number of them have gone under. Farmers are on their knees. They need leadership, they need inspiration at a time like this, and the question remains: Where is that leadership? Where is that inspiration? Who do they turn to when the minister, who should be representing them, won't stand up for them herself? So this legislation does leave me with some questions. My question is this, what the Liberal government is offering today: yet another agriculture day, another day on top of Food Freedom Day, on top of the proposed Farmers Feed Cities day—I think that's slated for the same day—and on top of the already declared Ontario Agriculture Week. Nearly all of our sectors are either in crisis or about to be in crisis, whether it's cash crops, beef, tobacco, horticultural crops, cull cows, export, dairy heifers, deer and elk. Even beekeepers: Their costs are obviously more than what they're getting.

I can tell you that the signs I see at the various farm rallies—the most recent one was just this past Tuesday in Guelph—are not calling for yet another designated agriculture Day. I'm seeing signs like “Equity with US Farmers,” for example. Having attended so many of these anti-government farm rallies—I'm aware of at least seven major rallies in the last 12 months—I've yet to see a farmer holding up a sign calling for a designated day. I

see signs, one in Guelph this week, like “Our governments are only good at three things: study, stall, and study.”

Another motherhood piece of legislation. Now, this may look good on the 6 o'clock news tonight, but it does very little for farmers in their present time of crisis. They need help and they need assistance right now. As ag critic for the official opposition, I have had the opportunity to question the agriculture minister regularly on this need for action. Again, it's not only cash crops, but beef, tobacco, horticultural crops. For example, during the estimates committee last fall, I asked to what extent ministry staff are assisting farmers. Corn producers have some very good numbers people, but they need help from the Ontario government and from ministerial staff to assist them to work through and to come up with a viable risk management program that will get them through, at minimum, the next crop year.

The response from the minister was—and the admission was there—that CAIS, the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, has not worked well for grain and oilseeds. That was five months ago. If CAIS is not working well, according to the minister, why is something not being done to fix it?

What do we get? Today is a good example: We get announcements. The minister did show up on Tuesday at the rally and brought greetings; nothing specific. We get a call for a designated agricultural day, but no real action to attempt to address the very real, very unfortunate choices that our farmers are being forced to make.

This government is now sitting under a deadline. It's an ultimatum. It actually came from a Huron county farmer on CKNX Wingham radio, a call for a March 9 deadline for this government to come forward with a risk management proposal. Here we are debating agriculture day; I'm not sure what kind of message that would send to our farmers.

I have an idea: How about members opposite, as government, finally beginning to recognize the problems? Then, let's celebrate what's left of rural Ontario by supporting farmers. They are being run out of business, and there is a concern that this government either doesn't understand or does not have the wherewithal to even deal with so many of these untenable financial situations that we see out there.

I made mention of that sign at the Guelph rally, “Equity with US Farmers.” This was painted on both sides of a gigantic tanker truck that had been converted to haul corn. Why would a farmer paint a sign like that on both sides of his truck? In the United States—

Mrs. Mitchell: He did it while you were in government, Toby.

Mr. Barrett: I know the member opposite doesn't like to hear this. US farmers are receiving \$123 an acre in support for their corn. I suspect farmers in Huron county are getting maybe something in the order of \$7 an acre. How do those Huron county farmers, how do my Brant county, Norfolk county and Haldimand county farmers, my farmers on Six Nations compete on the Chicago

market? Maybe we need an Equity With US Farmers Day. We've essentially set up a situation—I compare it to sending David against Goliath, but in this case David doesn't even have a slingshot. Maybe declaring a rural day will help the bottom line for farmers; I'm not sure. I guess we put that into the “long run” category.

1020

I will wrap up. We have a number of speakers in the opposition who do wish to address this. But I remain concerned that the Ontario minister continues to fail to provide any details with respect to either a long-term plan or a short-term plan. I agree that this Legislature should do everything it can to celebrate rural Ontario and recognize rural Ontario, but I think it should start by recognizing the fact that if it doesn't act to support the people of rural Ontario—we're talking real action here rather than words—there won't be a rural Ontario to support at all.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm really pleased to debate this bill. Interestingly enough, people would think that because I come from Hamilton East, a bill dealing with the celebration of rural Ontario would not have much to do with me. But I have to tell you that that's not true. In fact, it's something that not only was part of my growing up, but also, when I was active on council in my local community, I learned a great deal about the value of the contributions of our rural communities to our city.

Hamilton is an interesting place. Although we are considered to be a city, per se, the vast majority of the land of the city of Hamilton is in fact rural. We have communities in Winona, Stoney Creek, Ancaster, Flam- borough and Glanbrook that are all rural and that in many cases still maintain significant rural lifestyles and contribute significantly to the rural culture, if I could call it that.

Notwithstanding my desire to echo a lot of concerns and comments raised by the previous speaker—because frankly I did have some opportunity not only the other day but last year as well to hear from farmers, to hear particularly the other night from grain and oilseed producers about the concerns they have with the government's lack of activity around making sure they're going to be able to maintain their farms, that they're going to be able to continue to feed cities. In fact, I was quite interested to learn that at this point in time they're considering it to be pretty much a crisis. Of course, right now people are trying to determine what they're going to be doing in terms of planting their crops, which is just several weeks down the road in terms of the calendar. So they're very concerned about their ability to make a go of it in this farming season. When I say that they're telling me it's a crisis, I'm not saying that with any hyperbole at all, but simply reflecting their deep concern that the government has not yet made a commitment to stable, long-term solutions to the farming crisis. Again, I understand that there have been attempts both federally and provincially, apparently, at one-time emergency types of funding. But as you can well imagine, these farms are businesses and

they need to have an understanding of not just their short-term but medium- and long-term investments and requirements for labour and for seed and for all of those equipment investments that need to be undertaken in a way that is planned and organized, and not off the cuff in response to perhaps some hope that there will be stabilized systems in place for them to rely on as they continue to feed our cities, or continue to desire to feed our cities.

One last point on that: The other thing that's disconcerting or concerning is the tendency towards, because of this destabilization, because of this lack of commitment, because of this sense that governments are not hearing the concerns they're raising, there are almost no—I shouldn't say "almost no." What I was told by people I was speaking to is that there is a significant concern about the lack of willingness and desire for the family farm to be handed down to younger people. What you see is that the average age of farmers is now in their 50s and those farmers' children are not willing to take on the risk of running the family farm. We're quickly going to be losing the very agricultural rural heritage that we're looking to celebrate in this bill if we don't do something really significant to assure not only today's farmers but their children that the farm is a good future to invest in, that it is a good place to raise a family and undertake a business that will feed people across Ontario, and in fact across the nation.

Having put those concerns on the record, I wanted to talk a little bit about what a great experience it was for me growing up in the community of Stoney Creek, which, when I was growing up, was a lot more rural than it is now. Unfortunately, a lot of urban sprawl has taken place and there has been a great deal of development in sensitive farmland areas. The Stoney Creek I grew up in doesn't look very much like it did when I grew up there. But I did have the opportunity not only to visit farms but to have friends whose families were farmers and who had horses and barns and all kinds of animals and crops. It was quite a wonderful experience. Interestingly enough, I was speaking to one of my colleagues, the member for—where is Michael Prue from? Somebody help me.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): Beaches—East York.

Ms. Horwath: Beaches—East York.

Interjection: He's your seatmate.

Ms. Horwath: He's only my seatmate. I know; isn't that funny? I'm thinking about rural things, not city things. Anyway, Michael and I were talking about some of the farming issues that had been raised with us around the grain and oilseed producers. He indicated to me, believe it or not, that he has never, ever in his life been on a farm. My understanding is that he's going to undertake that experience at some time this summer. But I found it interesting. One of the things I've learned as I've become more aware of the differences between, for example, where I grew up and where many other people experienced their lives in the province of Ontario is that oftentimes people don't have the experience of farming,

of understanding what that lifestyle is all about and how different, unique and wonderful it can be compared to living and growing up in the cities. There have been efforts made, I know, in many cities to provide opportunities, for example, for children to visit farms so they don't end up like the member from Beaches—East York and be of that age—I don't know how old Michael is exactly—never having had the opportunity to experience a farm.

That was a great pleasure for me. In fact, there were members of my extended family who operated farms, and every summer we would have a family gathering at this particular farm. Again, to the issue of what's happened to those farms, I know there's no longer farming happening in my family, extended or otherwise. I think it's indicative of the way of the future if we don't deal with how to support farmers and their efforts and their ability to compete.

The great thing about agricultural and rural communities, in terms of celebration and recognition, is that oftentimes they provide their own opportunity for local communities to come and celebrate with them. I think about things like the fairs we have—in Hamilton, being surrounded by so many of these great communities, we have everything from the Winona Peach Festival on one end—that I always went to every year as a child and into my teens because it was the thing to do. Peaches were being grown more or less just down Highway 8. We'd pack up the car and the family would go. The big talk for a couple of days would be who had the best peach sundae and did we buy peach jam or peach pies? All kinds of issues that we talked about during those weeks surrounding the peach festival were part of life for us. It was a great part of life. Something that we anticipated every year was, are we going to the peach festival? What day are we going? Who all is going? Can we go more than once? We used to drive our parents crazy just wanting to make sure that we got our chance to go to the peach festival, because it was such a great time and such a very close community event.

1030

There were all kinds of things going on there. It wasn't just the food—for me, it was just the food—but there was entertainment, there were all kinds of different events, there were community groups and organizations that people could connect with, there were games. It was just an amazing time.

But that was just on the one end, on the Winona side. Of course, on the other side of the city or above the city, we had the Ancaster Fair and the Binbrook Fair. We had all of these opportunities, living in a city where any one of those would take maybe 20 minutes maximum to get to. From being right down in the city, you could get to any one of these agricultural celebrations or fairs within 20 minutes—some quicker, obviously, and some took a little longer, depending on where you lived in the city.

I have to say that I think that's something that's quite unique. I think there are many people in Ontario who have not had the opportunity not only to attend these fairs

but to have them as part of their lives. I'm certainly going to be supporting this bill because I think the celebration and recognition of rural Ontario is something that is extremely important and something we should all value. I only wish there was a way to ensure that every single person in Ontario, and particularly every single young person, would have an opportunity to see the unique nature of the agricultural community, of the rural community of rural Ontario.

Some people will have that experience the way I had it. Other people, as the member bringing forward the bill indicated, will experience rural Ontario through perhaps a summer vacation or trips to cottage country. Again, I certainly feel very privileged that, not only as a young person when I was growing up—my dad was an auto worker, so we had the ability, once in a while, to go up north as a family and do some camping and fishing. I can still remember the day I caught my first fish. I don't think I've caught many fish since then, because it's certainly not a skill that I've been able to hone over the years. But I have those memories and they're very valuable to me.

A lot of the times when I think about my family experiences, they were often within that context. There was the one when our two-lane dirt road in Stoney Creek became a four-lane highway, almost to the QEW. But many of my memories as a young person are around family experiences in rural Ontario, whether those family experiences were the camping or fishing trips, whether they were my dad taking us to the fairs here in Toronto, to the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair—I can't remember the exact terminology—or whether it was the times when I went to the Winona Peach Festival or the Ancaster Fair or the Binbrook Fair. I've tried to take my son to some of those events. We've been to the Winona Peach Festival. He's 13 now. I don't know if I'll get him there this year, but certainly he's been there a couple of times in his life—the Ancaster Fair, the Binbrook Fair.

In celebrating that, we have to also acknowledge that there are threats to that way of life; there are threats to that piece of our lifestyle and our experience. They're under threat not only because of the issues we were talking about a little earlier in terms of stable funding and programs to assist farmers in the fluctuation of world market prices for their product, but also in terms of the broader threats to the environmental wellbeing of our communities. I think there are some things that have been done in that vein, but I get concerned that there are also many looming threats around what may happen to our agricultural areas.

I can remember being at a reception not too long ago where the Ladies of the Lake were talking about the threats to some of our Ontario watershed—I believe it was Lake Simcoe, if I'm not mistaken—and concerns about the encroachment of development in those areas, not only traditional development in terms of the expansion of cities, but also encroachment by cottagers on some of these areas.

Again, I think if we are going to be celebrating and recognizing rural Ontario and agricultural communities

through Bill 49, we also have to redouble our efforts and recommit to not only the planning principles and the environmental principles that will safeguard those communities for generations in the future, so that we can celebrate them and feel positive about them far into the future, but also making sure that the ability for people to maintain those farms and to continue to have strong agricultural production in our province is paramount. The government really needs to look at how we can put some stable programs in place for the long term for these small businesses.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I just want to start off by commending my colleague the member from Huron–Bruce. I want to tell all the people in this House that there is no member who has more of rural Ontario in her riding than Carol Mitchell. I come from the riding of Perth–Middlesex, which I am proud to say is the most productive agricultural riding in the entire country. If you want to talk about rural Ontario, in my riding I actually have the beautiful city of Stratford, with some 30,000 people, but each and every community in Carol's riding is rural. That's why I'm so happy to support my colleague as she promotes Rural Ontario Day as part of Ontario Agriculture Week.

I want to say that my predecessor, Bert Johnson, who at the time was the member for Perth county, is the one who introduced Ontario Agriculture Week. I thought it was very forward-thinking of him. I know it enjoyed the support of the entire Legislature. I think Bert has always been committed. I refer to him in the riding as the father of Ontario Agriculture Week, but I think we're going to have the new mother of Rural Ontario Day in this province, because I get a sense from everyone here that we are going to pass this bill and move it forward, and I commend it.

To come from my riding—I know that the member from Hamilton East was talking about her colleague, her seatmate, the member for Beaches–East York. We were on a bus together, we were on pre-budget hearings, and we drove through my riding, from the Middlesex part to Stratford. I don't think Michael had ever been in rural Ontario, and I invited him to come. That long trip was only halfway through our riding. We have large ridings. We have land; we have space. But despite the land and the space, we have community, and that is the essence of rural life, the fact that our community comes together as family, connected to the land. What we know and what we want to share and always promote with all of our colleagues in suburban and urban Ontario is that everything comes from the land and everything goes back to the land. If you live in a concrete world, you lose that. It's up to us as rural members, despite the fact that we are a minority in this House reflecting Ontario's population—it's important that we do that.

I want to commend the member. We were on the standing committee on finance and economics affairs together and we had three eminent economists come before us. One of the economists was Roger Martin, the head of the Rotman school of business, and he was

talking about something he refers to as the prosperity gap. The member for Huron–Bruce, the most rural of ridings, asked him to comment about rural Ontario, because there's this myth that somehow rural Ontario is not prosperous and does not contribute. He said no, his research shows how strong the rural economy is, how prosperous, how it has advanced because of technology. It isn't some backwater; it makes a huge and important contribution. Agriculture and agrifood are the second-largest industry in this province, something that we can never forget.

I think Rural Ontario Day will go a long way in reminding all of us in this House and right across this province what a tremendous resource we have in our roots. That's why I'm supporting the member.

1040

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I too am pleased to have the opportunity once again to speak about rural Ontario and agriculture in the Legislature this week. My colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant and I have been speaking this week because there have been a lot of protests this week trying to get recognition by the government here that we need action to be done. When the member from Huron–Bruce brings in An Act to celebrate and recognize rural Ontario, we are certainly supportive and pleased at the opportunity, but hoping that this is going to lead to actual action on this government's part to help our farmers.

Joe Hickson, who's from my riding, helped organize the Unified Voice for Agriculture/Farmers Feed Cities rally in Guelph, and some of my constituents, Bruce Webster and Dale Mountjoy and many others, were here at Queen's Park and delivered the postcards of the Unified Voice/Farmers Feed Cities to try again to impress upon this government that the need for action is now.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Joe is a great guy.

Ms. Scott: Joe is a good guy. Thank you. The member for Peterborough is commenting.

March 9 is the deadline they're giving to us. They're going to Ottawa on February 21. They need both levels of government's attention and they need the action now. They have given the date of March 9, and I'm hoping they're going to be able to get action from both governments on that, because it is planting season. As we know, this has been—I think my colleague mentioned seven protests. Ever since I've been here, the farmers have had to come to Queen's Park or go to Ottawa to demand action. We need to listen to them.

This day, as I said, is nice. We all want to praise rural Ontario and respect its roots, as was mentioned before by the member from Huron–Bruce. But there's a list: The farmers have gotten together and worked hard, and the Unified Voice for Agriculture has given a list that they developed themselves in the agriculture sectors. It's a commitment they need:

“A commitment to viable risk management and income support programs;

“Implementation of the risk management program for grains and oilseeds, with an interim payment to flow as soon as possible;

“An immediate down payment on other long-term programs to provide assistance for the millions of dollars lost by horticultural and livestock producers;

“Extension of horticulture's self-directed risk management program until the newly designated SDPI program can be operational;

“Adoption of inventory valuation changes to CAIS retroactive to 2003-2004;

“Provision of loan guarantees of up to \$100,000 per farm for dairy heifer producers to avoid financial collapse;

Recognition of and provision for the deer and elk industry's new partnership with Ontario, including the cervid transition, genetics and market research and development programs;

Provision of the promised \$6 million towards a cull cow program.”

I had to read that list. I wanted to get it in because they have worked together and have come up with a solution. They're going to both levels of government. We have the opportunity here again today to promote what they need. They need a fully funded long-term risk management program and they need it now.

I come from a very rural riding, Haliburton–Victoria–Brock. The city of Kawartha Lakes in my riding is the third-largest agriculture employer in the province. Every day I'm out in the communities and I speak to the farmers. Some of them will be here this weekend for the 160th anniversary of the Ontario Agriculture Societies; they have their annual convention at the Royal York. I wanted to put in a plug for that, that they even come to the city and they promote agriculture and tourism.

I know I have to share my time with the member from Simcoe North. We support this, and we want action by the governments, federal and provincial. I'm pleased to have the opportunity again today to speak to the agriculture crisis.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): I'm certainly glad to be able to speak in support of An Act to celebrate and recognize rural Ontario.

Rural Ontario is changing, just as everywhere else in the globe. We know that agriculture still remains the most important part of rural Ontario. We also know that a lot of people are making the choice to move to rural Ontario. A lot of things are causing them to do that. They're looking at things like the idea of open spaces, less traffic; they want to see the natural resources we have there, such as the lakes, the rivers and the forests. They also want things like access to recreational activities. They have the possibilities of trails and snowmobiles, all those kinds of things. But I find that the thing that draws them the most to rural Ontario is the sense of community. There's a very strong sense of community in rural Ontario. So it's clearly time that we start to celebrate rural Ontario with a day that is dedicated to recognizing the qualities and the people that make that happen. Our rural communities do

contribute to the high quality of life that all Ontario enjoys.

In 2005, shortly after being appointed as the parliamentary assistant for rural affairs, I had the opportunity to travel throughout Ontario as our government developed its rural plan, and that plan is called Strong Rural Communities Working Together for Success. In that rural plan we came up with four themes—strong people, strong economies, better health, and success for students—and we've enjoyed some successes in those endeavours.

In success for students, one of the things that happened when we first became the government—most of us during the campaign heard from our rural constituents about the issue of keeping rural schools open, so we came up with the keeping good schools open program, which is a \$31-million program to do just that.

Just recently I had the opportunity to be with Minister Kennedy when he announced the Lighthouse program, and in the Lighthouse program we are putting agriculture back into the curriculum. Along with that, we are also using the 4-H program. Those of us who come from rural areas are very familiar with the 4-H program, and I'm sure people in other areas have also heard about it. I have to apologize to my leaders, because although I still keep my collection of silver spoons from my 4-H days, I certainly haven't polished them in a while. I know some people who display them with great pride; they're polished and they are there in the numbers to indicate the number of clubs they had finished. And 4-H was a very important part of rural education. It not only taught you about livestock—it didn't teach you just about agriculture; it taught you life skills. We talk about having healthy food. We learned things such as how to prepare that food so we could retain the health benefits in that food. We learned things such as budgeting, parenting issues, all those things that help you in day-to-day life as an adult. That was through 4-H. It's been there for absolute decades, and I think we've all benefited from that.

Those are just some of the things that I think are very important in rural Ontario.

At this point, I'm going to leave this to my counterparts, who I'm sure want to speak on this, but I want to say that I certainly do support this bill. I think it's very important to recognize rural Ontario with a day that's dedicated to just that.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm very pleased this morning to stand and support Bill 49, An Act to celebrate and recognize rural Ontario. I compliment the member for bringing it forward. As the member for Huron—Bruce said many times this morning, she has a very beautiful rural riding, and I'm pleased that she recognizes that, as well as the fact that we could name a day after it.

I was pleased to hear the member for Perth—Middlesex mention that our former colleague Bert Johnson brought in Ontario Agriculture Week. I have to tell the members, particularly of the government, that I'm very dis-

appointed. When the Progressive Conservative Party was in government in Ontario we celebrated that week. We had breakfast here during rural Ontario week. Since the Liberals have taken power, I have seen no recognition whatsoever of Ontario Agriculture Week. So if we do pass this bill, and I'm assuming we can pass it here today and go to an agreement to see it become law, I hope the government will recognize that we have a Rural Ontario Day and an Ontario Agriculture Week, both brought forward by members of this Legislature, both from rural ridings. I appreciate that.

As Ms. Scott mentioned earlier, agriculture plays a very important part in our economy here in Ontario, and I think everyone here must recognize the very, very difficult time that our producers are facing here in our province. Just as an example, I have a clipping here from FM 102 CKNX in Wingham: "Guelph Rally Not the End." I'll just read it into the record:

"One of the organizers of today's Guelph rally says this won't be the last governments will hear about the farm income crisis. Another rally is set to take place in Ottawa next Tuesday. One of the organizers, Huron county farmer Bev Hill, says they'll continue to lobby until the proposed risk management program is implemented. Hill says they are giving the government a March 9 deadline, noting farmers don't have time for study and stall tactics.

"He says many will be going to the fields within the next few months and money is desperately needed to help get the crop into the ground."

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That's a message I'm hearing continually wherever I go. I've been to a number of rural meetings, agricultural meetings. We have agriweek in Simcoe county every year. It's the third week of January. I was at the Barrie Event Centre every day, and you know what? I was the only politician who arrived at the Barrie Event Centre for agriculture week. No one from the government came up for agriculture week—no one whatsoever: the parliamentary assistants or anybody from the rural Ontario sections. That's a very important week to the farmers in Simcoe county, which is of course the largest county in the province of Ontario. So that was disappointing.

Our critic, Mr. Barrett, mentioned that the Farmers Feed Cities want their day on exactly the same day as the member is calling for in Bill 49: the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

I will be supporting the bill, but I do want to make it clear that I don't think the government is doing nearly enough to help our agricultural partners.

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): C'est avec plaisir que je viens prendre part au projet de loi intitulé Loi visant à célébrer et à reconnaître l'Ontario rural, parrainé par ma collègue d'Huron—Bruce, une personne engagée sans réserve au développement du secteur rural. Elle est aussi l'adjointe parlementaire au ministère de l'Agriculture et des Affaires rurales.

Selon Statistique Canada, le recensement de 2001 démontre que 95 % du territoire total de l'Ontario est

considéré rural et compte plus de 4,5 millions de personnes, soit 39,7 % de la population ontarienne.

Le Jour de l'Ontario rural permettra aux Ontariens et Ontariennes de célébrer la richesse de son histoire et, d'autre part, de reconnaître la situation actuelle et de s'occuper du développement futur des régions rurales de l'Ontario.

Le gouvernement McGuinty reconnaît l'importance du secteur rural depuis son élection d'octobre 2003. En voici quelques exemples :

—plus de 31 \$ millions ont été investis pour garder ouvertes nos bonnes écoles rurales;

—un fonds de 512 \$ millions a été créé pour développer nos installations d'éthanol;

—20 \$ millions pour donner accès à nos communautés à nos écoles après les heures de classe.

Il y a aussi les centres de santé communautaire dont nous avons fait l'ouverture dans plusieurs régions rurales de l'Ontario, tels que celui de Bourget, dans ma circonscription.

Je suis natif de la région rurale, d'un petit village nommé Saint-Pascal-Baylon, dans la belle circonscription de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, un endroit où il fait bon vivre. J'invite la population urbaine à faire une randonnée dans les secteurs ruraux et voir de près les produits de la terre qui se retrouvent tous les jours sur nos tables. Oui, ces produits proviennent de la ferme du secteur rural. Nous avons de beaux endroits touristiques à visiter dans Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, dans le secteur rural : le zoo Papanack de Wendover; la production théâtrale *L'Écho d'un peuple*, à Casselman; les Glengarry Highland Games de Maxville.

L'appui des membres de cette Assemblée est très important afin de pouvoir reconnaître officiellement cette année, en 2006, le premier jour officiel de l'Ontario rural.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): In rural Ontario, the early-morning peak period in which commuter traffic is at its densest has a different nickname than it does here in the bustling greater Toronto area. In rural Ontario, they call it “rush minute.”

“Rural” no longer means only agriculture. Indeed, a look back into Ontario's past shows that it never really has. That quintessentially Canadian, elegantly simple implement of manufacturing excellence, the Robertson screw, was invented in what was then rural Ontario. Anyone who has ever tried to use a flat-headed or a Phillips screwdriver on any kind of an angle appreciates the sensible design, simplicity and true genius of this rural Ontario invention.

Our Ontario government's many initiatives in decentralized, renewable energy will soon be enabling rural Ontarians to access reliable and abundant local electrical energy. That leadership and inspiration by our government will mean that Ontario's farms, already among the most efficient and productive in the world, will continue to remain at the leading edge in the use of technology in all facets of agriculture.

Let's not minimize the challenges before Ontario's agricultural sector even as we celebrate its contributions

to our province. Here in the GTA, I represent a riding that is home to many businesses that are major purchasers of rural Ontario agricultural products. Food processors here in the GTA sell their products not merely in Ontario but throughout Canada, into the United States and all over the world. Healthy food processing businesses in places like Mississauga mean excellent markets for Ontario's farmers, and yet we have challenges to overcome.

The rising Canadian dollar is an indicator of the health and strength of the Canadian economy after recovering from nine long years of irresponsible Conservative deficit spending in the 1980s and 1990s. But a strong Canadian dollar means that Ontario agricultural products become more expensive when they're exported.

Ontario's grocers need to do better, and I mean much better, in supporting Ontario's farmers. Those packaged salad mixes that could and should be grown, packaged and bought in Ontario invariably come into Canada from the United States, en route to your store shelves. Nobody can say that US products are better or even cheaper because US grocers stock their shelves with Canadian farm products. Shop at Wegmans in New York and see where their vegetables and packaged mixes come from. Then look in Ontario at Dominion, Loblaws, Sobeys, Longo's and others and see where their packages come from.

Rural Ontario is very much a factor in our lives here in the city. Bill 49 gives us an event around which we can work collaboratively to make rural Ontario an even better place to work, live, play and raise a family.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? Ms. Mitchell, you have two minutes to reply.

Mrs. Mitchell: Rural Ontario Day Act, 2006, will help protect and recognize rural values. I want to thank all those who spoke today: Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant, Hamilton East, Perth–Middlesex, Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Simcoe North, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell and Mississauga West. The voices that spoke today are very much in support of promoting rural Ontario and protecting the values that make rural Ontario what it is today. The passing of this bill will demonstrate the recognition that this House will place on rural Ontario.

I'm very proud to represent the most rural riding in Ontario. I am probably biased, but I also believe it's the most beautiful riding in the province of Ontario. As our second-largest industry is tourism, it's certainly shared amongst many people across the world.

My colleagues have supported me today, as have the official opposition and the third party. I want to congratulate everyone who spoke so well and talked so well about rural Ontario. I'm sure this will go forward and become a successful private member's bill. I look forward to celebrating the day and I look forward to celebrating agricultural week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to present my bill today.

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VISUAL FIRE ALARM
SYSTEM ACT, 2006
LOI DE 2006 SUR LES SYSTÈMES
D'ALARME-INCENDIE
À AFFICHAGE VISUEL

Mr. Arthurs moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 59, An Act respecting visual fire alarm systems in public buildings / Projet de loi 59, Loi sur les systèmes d'alarme-incendie à affichage visuel dans les édifices publics.

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): It's with great pleasure that I rise this morning to speak to my private member's bill, Bill 59, an act that would provide for visual fire alarm systems in provincial and municipal buildings. This particular legislation is focused on public buildings in both the provincial domain and in the municipal domain, and it will provide for equipping them with a visual means to identify fire alarm systems. I think the need is self-evident. It's a simple matter of protection for those who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. It's a fundamental right in our society for individuals to be able to provide for self-protection in the event of an emergency situation.

What does Bill 59—a visual fire alarm system—include? What is it contemplating? The bill itself is quite straightforward. It's not complex in its wording nor in its intent:

“2(1) A visual fire alarm system shall include a strobe beacon or similar feature that is sufficient in the circumstances of the public building to alert people who are deaf or hard of hearing to the fire alarm.

“(2) A visual fire alarm system may include a feature that electronically displays messages in respect of the fire alarm, including some or all of the following messages:

“1. The fact that the fire alarm has been activated.

“2. Information on the appropriate response, including where to evacuate the building.

“3. Information on the nearest exit.”

For those of us who have sound hearing, sound sight and full capacities in other fashions, the fire alarm provides a signal for us to act. For those who are hearing impaired, for those who are deaf, an auditory fire alarm means nothing to them.

In consultations, I've had stakeholders who have expressed considerable enthusiasm and support for the bill in question. A number of those stakeholders and other interested parties are here today, and I want to thank them and offer the opportunity for you to join me in welcoming them here this morning. If I can, I'd like to identify, in a short period of time, some of the organizations and individuals who have taken the opportunity

not only to be here but to provide input and advice on the developments of the bill. These individuals and associations include Mr. Gary Malkowski, who members in this Legislature will know and acknowledge as a former member of this Legislature, Kelly Duffin, Jo Ann Bentley and Joyce Lange from the Canadian Hearing Society; Bev Dooley, Ontario Interpreter Services; Karen Walker from George Brown College; Dave Hamen from Durham Deaf Services; Ian Gadsby from ONESTOP Media; Susan DaDalt, Silent Voice, Community Services for the Deaf; and Kim Reid from Happy Hands Preschool, the Bob Rumball Centre for the Deaf. These are but a few of those who have contributed and had insight and input into the bill, and encourage its debate and adoption. And, of course, ASL interpreters, who are such a critical resource to those who are hearing impaired or those who are deaf.

In my role as an MPP, I have the privilege as well of serving as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance. At about 10 o'clock this morning, my BlackBerry went off on its vibrating mode—as opposed to its auditory mode—and my two staff members each sent me an e-mail saying they were just leaving or were standing now outside of the Frost building as a result of a fire alarm. They thought it rather ironic that this morning I would be presenting a bill on establishing visual fire alarms for those who need that resource at the very same time they were standing outside the building as a result of an auditory fire alarm.

We take for granted, I think, those of us who have a full set or a different set of abilities, certain kinds of community activity. When I drive down the highway and there are emergency vehicles, it never really occurred to me until I started to develop the bill and talk to the stakeholders that if a fire truck comes up behind you, if you have hearing, you can hear it, and if you have sight, you can see the visual alarms. Similarly, if a police vehicle approaches you, you can hear the siren and you can see the flashing lights, and if an ambulance comes roaring up alongside, similarly, it has both visual and auditory clues. Most of us take that as a very natural environment. Why would it be any less natural for us to provide exactly the same level of signal to both those with hearing impairments and those without? Why not establish in public buildings a visual means to respond to an alarm? It seems so natural to us in our everyday lives to expect that. I think if we saw the fire truck, the police cruiser or the ambulance approaching or passing us, and all we had were the auditory alarms going off, we would trigger something, saying, “Why aren't the lights going on that particular vehicle?” So for us, it's natural. For others in our community, it's not quite so natural.

Who in the province of Ontario and those who visit would this bill affect? According to the Canadian Hearing Society, almost 25% of people report experiencing hearing loss, although closer to 10% would actually identify themselves as deafened or hard of hearing and would use interventions such as hearing aids or other forms of amplification. About 1% of our general popu-

lation is culturally deaf and uses sign language. That means there are probably some 1.3 million Ontarians, or more, who require accommodation for hearing loss. That's a significant portion of our population. In my view, they have the right to self-protection in the event of emergency. What better place to start than in those public buildings either directly under our control as provincial government or with our municipal partners?

The average age of those experiencing hearing loss is some 51 years; although nearly one in four of those with hearing loss are under 40, seven in 10 are under 60. With an aging population, with a growing population, the issue of hearing loss and hearing impairment will grow in numbers. The deaf and the hard of hearing are not as easily identifiable. I know this from personal experience. I have family members, both a child and an in-law, who suffer hearing loss. You become acutely aware of the need to do specific kinds of things to assist them.

My child has only partial hearing loss and has a hearing aid. When he's not using that, though, for all practical purposes, he's a member of the deaf community. I've learned to speak directly to him. I've learned that when he's on my right side and I speak to him, he's not going to hear what I say. I've also learned over the years not to say to him, "Did you understand what I said?" because he understands exactly as much as he hears. Unfortunately, at times, he needs to fill in the blanks if I'm not being precise and clear. So I've personally become acutely aware.

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Probably eight in 10 Canadians have either co-workers or family members who have hearing loss of one degree or another. So this is a matter that affects all Ontarians, for all practical purposes, but most particularly and obviously, those who have hearing loss, significant hearing loss or deafness. They deserve the right to self-protection. They deserve the right to control their own lives in the event of emergency. I hope the Legislature, during the debate, will support this private member's bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): It gives me pleasure to stand up today and debate this bill that's been introduced. Let me have a look at it here, the proper wording: An Act respecting visual fire alarm systems in public buildings. I commend the member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge for bringing this bill forward. As we look at all the things that are happening in our society, it wasn't that many years ago that fire alarms were not mandatory in buildings and homes. You see some of them implemented, and then you hear stories about things that happened to people because the batteries were not working or the alarm was not loud enough because it was not in the proper place. We have disasters in our society that could have been avoided had there been proper alarms.

As the member's bill puts forward, it's very important to recognize that the ability of hard-of-hearing and deaf people to deal with the sound alarms puts them in the same position as people who cannot hear the alarm because it didn't go off because the battery was dead. In

fact, what we are doing is depriving them of the ability to be warned of a dangerous situation because we decided not to implement that in the bill. I think every member in the House would support the implementation of such a bill to make sure that we make everyone's basic rights protected, we make everyone as safe as possible in the environment in which they live. So I commend the member for doing that.

Having said that, I do have some problems. The bill, of course we would all know, is a one-page bill that just says that this should be made mandatory in all public buildings and all municipal buildings. But it doesn't speak to an implementation plan or what that actually means, whether we're going to have it in all public buildings as they're being constructed or whether, when this bill passes third reading, we're going to have a process whereby we're going to install them in all the present buildings. When I look at a bill and it doesn't include anything as to implementation, then I get concerned about whether there's an intent to have it implemented, or whether this is just an exercise to make sure that we all show we care but we're not prepared to do anything about it. I think that's a real concern, and I do want to speak just quickly to that.

I have some real concerns that relate to the implementation and government policy. The member will know that the present government has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario that any time the government passes a bill that is going to have an impact on the budgetary process in a municipality, they will have consultations with the municipality to deal with that issue. I'm not aware, in the presentation or information that I got, that this bill actually had any consultation with municipalities. I would suggest that if we are intent on getting this passed, that's a process that we need to go through to make sure the municipalities are aware of what is being asked for and that they can have some input into how it should be implemented. Should it be in all existing buildings, or should it be just put into the building code from now on so that when a public building is built, it must have these types of safety devices or warning devices put in place?

I guess my concern is that this isn't the first time this type of thing has happened, where we put these things forward and then after the fact we tell municipalities that this is what they have to do. But municipalities also don't have an endless pot of money, so then they start looking at other areas where they will have to cut back in order to accommodate what is being asked for. I'm sure we're not going to be there to help make that decision as to what it is they're not going to do in order to add this. I think this would go very high on the priority list of "Needs Doing," but there would be some other things that the municipalities will not be able to do. I think the member putting forward this bill would be quite aware of that. Having been mayor for quite a number of years, he would realize that every time a dictate from the province came along that said, "We have made a decision that this is a very important thing to do and a very appropriate thing to do,

and now you have to go about doing it," regardless of how important or how critical that issue is, municipalities do not see it as being appropriate for the province to make that decision in their absence. I think it would be very important that that was done.

Having said all that, if the intent of the member's bill is that the province is going to fund the implementation of this bill, then I don't have that same problem. If this is in the provincial budget, then I have no problem at all with suggesting that we carry on with it and that we all support it.

Again, I want to thank the member for bringing the bill forward. I don't think there's anyone in the House who would not support this bill. With that, I will turn the time over to my colleagues, who all have some very important things to say on the bill too.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I too am going to be supporting this bill, because I don't think anybody really could with any justification not support the bill.

I have to say that, like the member who's bringing the bill forward, the member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, I too have family members who experience hearing loss. I have a young niece who was just recently discovered to have a hearing impairment, and my brother, with his wife, is going through the process of making sure that she's able to receive the extra special care she needs to address that hearing loss and to address her future in terms of being able to receive information in the way that's best able for her to process it and communicate with all of the loving people she has around her.

I have to say that this bill is one where I think people probably would think, "Of course this is something we need to do," and I'm certainly one of those people. Having said that, it's interesting for me to note that I recently spent some time in the city that I'm from, the city of Hamilton. Of course, our city is an older city and goes through upgrades of infrastructure on a regular basis. After many years of debate, our city is now in the process of renovating its city hall, as opposed to tearing it down and starting all over again. Although I'm not positive, I'm pretty sure that those renovations are not going to include the kind of device that this bill outlines, and it's unfortunate. I can't say that with surety, but I do suspect that's the case.

You know what? Our city has been very progressive in the way that it's tried to acknowledge and accommodate various community initiatives around people with different kinds of disabilities. For example, we have a way-finding system in our downtown and in other parts of our community for the visually impaired, for people who have sight and vision challenges, where we have different coloured and different textured insets in our sidewalks to assist with way-finding, as well as other textured features in the corners of our sidewalks where we have intersections, and various other kinds of assistive renovations that have taken place to help people who have visual impairments. So we have a tradition in our community.

I can remember when I was first elected to city council back in the late 1990s, there was a committee for people with physical disabilities; we called it "physdis," the physical disabilities committee. Interestingly enough, I think over the years that committee has shifted to be more of an access and equity committee in that physical disabilities were not the only disabilities. Again, interestingly enough, in the member's covering letter regarding this particular initiative, one of the things he indicated, and so rightly, is that people who have hearing disabilities, hearing loss, deafness or acquired hearing loss are not visual; I mean, not visual in terms of people seeing that there might be a disability with hearing. So it's interesting that oftentimes this becomes a disability that's not acknowledged or that is not built into public policy or built into the kinds of progressive thinking around accessibility types of accommodations.

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So it's really positive that this is here. But the unfortunate thing about it is that not only was there not the consultation with municipalities, which was already described, so I'm not going into that, but it becomes a big problem in Hamilton, for example, where they're now renovating city hall. If this hasn't been built in already, it's going to cost that much more money to then go back and retrofit a renovation that's happening right now.

Yes, we have to start somewhere, definitely. But if the provincial government wants to make sure communities are implementing these kinds of initiatives, a part of that has to be the sharing of some of the finances around that. I say that because we continue to struggle, in the city of Hamilton, with significant budget pressure that's a direct result of provincial government policy from a previous government and now of course being sustained by the current government. Unfortunately, the city of Hamilton is not alone in that regard. Although I agree completely with this bill and I will be supporting it, it's with the cautious note that municipalities are struggling under a huge municipal fiscal gap. That gap is to the tune of some \$3 billion, which is provincial programs being funded at the municipal level. For different municipalities, that gap has a different dollar value on it.

Yesterday we heard my seatmate from Beaches-East York asking questions of the Premier about Toronto's fiscal gap, but Hamilton has a significant fiscal gap as well. Our mayor, Larry Di Ianni, was here last week, trying to convince the Liberal government to address in a sustainable way the problem that municipalities have with the current financing scheme. The first year we did this, back in 2004, the provincial government forked over about \$19 million. It was \$15 million last year. But the problem is that the pressures are growing, not reducing. This year, the city is identifying that gap to be \$25 million, not \$19 million, as it was in 2004. So the pressure is growing, just with the existing funding situation or the existing burden on municipalities for delivery of provincial programs like Ontario Works, the Ontario disability support program, land ambulance and social housing. I can go on and on about all the services that

were downloaded. Nonetheless, that existing regime continues to this day and each year it seems to get worse.

But when you add on the requirement to initiate new programs, it makes it that much more difficult. It would be really unfortunate if we ended up in a situation where municipalities got their backs up and said, "No, we can't implement these kinds of programs," knowing darn well that they're absolutely the right thing to do and they absolutely must be initiated. The way to get over that is not only to deal with the existing problem the province has in terms of the number of municipalities that are feeling overburdened by their responsibility for funding provincial programs—so get rid of that problem, and I'm sure the municipalities would ask no questions whatsoever when these kinds of initiatives come down the pipe. Or, if you're not prepared to do that—and apparently the government is not prepared to do that, to the great frustration and anger of municipal taxpayers. In fact, community after community is beginning to have public meetings about how the heck to get this government's head around the fact that there's a huge problem, and that problem is resulting now in municipal taxes going through the roof—no pun, because it's all property taxes. Nonetheless, it's not a laughing matter and there's a significant concern there.

If that's not going to get solved, then at the very least, when these kinds of initiatives come forward that are so important and really require our full support, they must include dollars. They must include opportunities for municipalities to obtain some financial assistance from the province. Otherwise, these great initiatives end up being seen on the other side as just another form of provincial downloading, and what a tragedy that is. That's a terrible tragedy, and it's completely unacceptable, on one hand, from the perspective of those of us in this gallery and in this Legislature, but reality is reality. At the municipal level, anything the provincial government does is going to increase costs, and that means the money has to come from somewhere. What many municipalities are saying is that the money doesn't exist. They're in the negative. They're in the hole right now. So anything that adds to that pressure and adds to that burden is going to be received with a bit of a negative view, and that is extremely unfortunate.

I wanted to talk a little bit about what that looks like in the city of Hamilton. Recently, we had the Centre for Community Study put together a report that very specifically outlines the pressures the city of Hamilton faces in regard to its balance of payments, if you want to call it that. You know, it's interesting: We're the only province in the country, and I think we're the only jurisdiction in all of the G8 nations, where you actually have social programs and health programs being funded off the property tax base. Those programs are income distribution programs and they need to be funded at a level where the taxation comes from earnings, not from property. Again, coming from the municipal perspective, having spent some time there, I know the frustration is that people have a certain amount of money left in their

pockets after taxation, and that's the money they then pay their property taxes with. So to have income distribution programs at the property tax level is simply inappropriate; they don't belong there. In fact, people may recall that when this downloading exercise was undertaken by the previous government, a very prominent Conservative person in our community spoke out against that initiative. The provincial government of the time, the Harris government, decided they were going to download a number of initiatives because, from the provincial level, it was what they called revenue-neutral; there was no imbalance. The problem was, when you got down to individual communities, that there was a huge imbalance. Perhaps from their perspective on this side of the fence, everything was fine. But on the other side of the fence, depending on what municipality you were coming from, it wasn't fine and it hasn't been fine since.

So we have a situation where the realities of older communities like the city of Hamilton have ongoing infrastructure needs. We have water main breaks on a constant basis and road, bridge, sewer, water and environmental issues that need to be addressed. We have huge infrastructure needs. Our economy is in stress because we're moving from a largely manufacturing-based economy, and with the pressures in that sector we're not seeing those jobs, as they're lost in our community, being replaced by similarly well paid jobs. Unfortunately, late or mid last year we became equal to Toronto in terms of the percentage of people living below the poverty line. So now Hamilton equals Toronto in terms of the number of people living in poverty, and that's certainly not something we as a community are proud of. We are also a community that's proud to welcome very many refugees and immigrants. The problem is that the governments, both federal and provincial, have not seen fit to assist our city at adequate levels in making the transition of newcomers into our community and to be able to contribute to our community. That funding, that assistance, has not been there.

So you can see how the challenges faced by a community like the city of Hamilton, where one in five children is living in poverty, are not financially sustainable. That is why the city of Hamilton year after year comes to this provincial government and says, "You're causing a great deal of this pressure by virtue of the fact that these downloaded provincial services don't belong on the property tax base. We're never going to be able to get all of the pressures we have addressed until you take a look at this formula and fix it."

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There are a lot of other pieces, a number of different pieces to that puzzle around education taxes and payments in lieu, but the big one is the downloading. The big one is the fact that this government has refused, even though they promised to do it, to put together a sustainable plan for how we're going to get out of these troubles in the future. As a result, when great pieces of legislation like this one come forward, when the opportunity arises

for us all to work together and pull together and say, "Yes, we support this legislation. We want to see this system implemented in municipal as well as provincial buildings, at the local levels," we don't see the funding that goes with it, the dollars that go with it to assist municipalities in implementing it. Unfortunately, we're then in a situation where I fear that the reaction won't be as positive as it should be on the other end.

So I support this legislation completely, but I urge the mover, considering that he is the parliamentary assistant to the finance minister, to bring back issues not only around downloading and the difficulties municipalities now have, but also on how we, as a province, can make sure they implement this initiative.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to join the debate and, hopefully, bring it back to the substance of the debate, which is An Act respecting visual fire alarms in public buildings, a wonderful initiative that has been put forward by the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge.

The member and I have a very similar background in that we come from the municipal sector. I served for 18 years as a member of regional council in the town of Oakville and in the region of Halton, and served during that period under all three parties in the provincial Legislature. I've had experience with them all, and I remember the days of downloading and the days of the social contract. What I loved about serving at that level, and what you search for, I think, as a new member when you come to the chamber here at Queen's Park, is that you like things to be logical, sensible and practical.

When you serve at the local level, you tend to look at things in that way and to deal with things in that way. When you come to Queen's Park, you get much more of a bureaucratic outlook, much more of a legislative outlook and approach to things. So you're always looking for those things that might have a practical and really immediate impact on people's lives.

It's got to be very satisfying for the member to be able to bring forward a private member's bill based on input from his own family, based on experience he's had as an individual in his everyday life, dealing with someone he loves, his son Joel, who, as I understand, came up with this idea in the first place and asked his dad if he would bring this forward as a private member's bill because it made a lot of sense.

It makes a lot of sense to me, and yet, still, we've had speakers who have stood up today and said, "How could you not support this? Who would ever speak against this initiative?" But here we are, in February 2006, in the province of Ontario, and we don't have visual fire alarms. If it hadn't been for the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, we wouldn't even be talking about it. So you might want to steer the debate off into any other realm you may choose and take advantage of the time to maybe criticize the government, but I don't think you can criticize the member for bringing forward this initiative.

As I said, there are a lot of fire prevention initiatives that we have in Ontario. There's a private member's bill

before us that would call for the implementation of sprinkler systems in homes. We say that we legislate what sort of building materials you can use in construction. We talk about the storage of flammable materials on construction sites and job sites. We talk about the response times of our fire services. We talk about those things and pass rules and laws about those types of things because we know what tragedies can occur and sadly still do occur as a result of fires.

Experience has told us that public standards lead the way for the private sector. What you implement, what you set as the standard in public buildings, eventually becomes the standard in private buildings. This would be a perfect example of that. The bill, in my opinion, is a complementary private member's bill to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, that was finally passed under the leadership of this government in the recent past.

We have to think about our own situation right here at Queen's Park as well, the Legislative Assembly. When we want to call our members to vote, we ring the bells. That's a sign to everybody that it's time to vote, that it's time to come and do your democratic duty and vote on behalf of your constituents. But we also flash the lights. This is in a building as old as Queen's Park. Somehow we've been able to implement that system that alerts people in an audible and in a visual way that it's time to take some action. We can do it at Queen's Park. I'm pretty sure we could do it at Oakville town hall. I'm pretty sure we could do it at the region of Halton building. I'm sure that, with technology being where it is today, it would not cost a lot of money.

Perhaps you think that, in a crowded situation, a hearing-impaired person might understand that something is happening—"maybe I should follow the crowd"—that a fire emergency may exist and that they might have to do something. But put yourself in the shoes of a hearing-impaired person who finds himself alone in a bathroom, or finds himself alone in a room in a public building, for whatever reason. You would have no clear indication that it was time to leave that building. You would have no clear indication that your life might be in danger.

I think a hearing-impaired person should understand and feel that they have as much right to be alerted that an emergency situation may exist in a building as a person who is able to hear. I think it's a fundamental right, a matter of equity, and I also think it's just simply the right thing to do.

How would a person who is able to hear know that somebody is hearing-impaired, know that they would need help in the first place? How would you identify a person in that situation, even if you were willing to help or thought perhaps you should help?

In emergency situations, we all know that seconds count. That's why we talk about response times for ambulances and fire trucks. It seems to me that if seconds count, with the technological abilities we have today in our society, it's not a big step, it's not a big leap, to think

we would be able to implement a system that would alert people in a visual way that it's perhaps time to evacuate the building.

Experience, as I said, has shown that public buildings would lead the way. This bill, in my opinion, certainly is a bill that is logical, as I said at the start; it's practical; it's sensible. The advantages that would be obtained by the passage of this bill are self-evident.

My understanding of private members' bills is that they cannot have a budgetary impact on the government. They cannot compel the government to spend money. In my estimation, this sets the groundwork for the implementation of something that would be advantageous, that would be supported at the municipal level as something that's got a very practical and immediate impact on people's lives, and is something that I believe my constituents in Oakville would support as much as the constituents who are being very well served by the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge in the implementation and introduction of this bill. I would ask that all members support this bill.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to participate in this debate. I want to commend the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge for bringing this legislation forward. It is indeed practical. It is needed. I'm hopeful that the direction of the Legislature, when this bill is in fact passed, will be taken seriously by the government, that it will not die here, as many private members' bills do, but that it is carried forward and the appropriate changes are made in building codes to ensure that those in our communities who are deaf and hard of hearing have the protection of this important provision.

I want, however, to take this opportunity to add my encouragement to the member and to members of the Legislature to in fact go beyond the bill as it is written. I believe that not only is there a need, a very important health and safety need, to protect the lives of those in our community who are deaf and hard of hearing, but every member of our community.

1140

I believe it is unconscionable that even in today's building codes, we still have not incorporated technology that ensures that all of us are protected in the event of a fire. Far too often when a fire happens, and particularly in public buildings, when the room fills with smoke, the current exit signs are very quickly obscured by it. Many of the lives that are lost are not lost because there hasn't been an exit sign; it's because people can't see them.

I would strongly recommend that what we should be requiring of the building code is to prescribe a technology for all exit signs in every public building that incorporates an electroluminescent technology which can in fact be seen through smoke, through fog, through any kind of distraction that may be caused as a result of smoke and fire. It's a phosphor-based product and it should be a mandatory requirement incorporated into the specifications of our building code.

I also want to encourage this Legislature to go beyond simply having this as mandatory within the building code

for municipal and provincial buildings. There is no reason why this requirement should not be made mandatory for every public building where people gather, whether that is a restaurant, whether that is any other place that is of a public nature where people in our communities gather and where there is danger of fire.

I know personally that the technology is there. I also know that it is not costly beyond the current signage that's available. In fact, it uses far less electricity than the current exit signs because of the nature of the technology. So on the one hand, we can do the right thing, and on the other, we can save lives. These signs can be designed to contain chevrons that, at the time an alarm goes off, indicate the direction of the exit, so it serves many purposes. That is the kind of practical recommendation that I believe is appropriate for this Legislature, to give direction to ensure that these specifications are contained in our building code.

I want to again commend the member for bringing this forward. I want to thank those who are here who have participated in helping to design this bill, members from the deaf community and all of those who have shown an interest and have shown leadership in helping us create good legislation in the province of Ontario.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): I'm very pleased today to rise in support of Bill 59, the Visual Fire Alarm System Act, 2006. What is so important about this bill, in my mind, is the simplicity that it brings forward. It's a very practical application. I think that, so often, we can get caught up in the process. When I look to the member, he comes from a municipal background; I come from a municipal background. Often we can get caught up in where we need to go by who does what and who should pay for what. But when I think about it, so often what we really need is just, where do we want to go, how do we want to get there, and what's the practical application of how to get there? I'm sure that when traffic lights first came out for the "Don't walk" or "Walk" signs and a beeper came forward, there was great discussion about who should pay for what. But that's the beginning. It's in recognition that we need to put in place what the people of Ontario need in order to ensure public safety. This bill does that; it recognizes that. It's talking about including a strobe beacon or a similar feature to alert people who are deaf or hard of hearing. This is in recognition that we don't all have the same abilities.

When I think about, over the years, when we've made decisions, be it from a municipal world or a provincial world, a lot of decisions were made with absolutely the best intentions, but we just did not take into consideration what would have been a better application. This bill demonstrates to me a very practical application and how we can move forward.

In the past, we just did not understand what could affect our hearing and how it was cumulative for our hearing. I think about some of the farmers out on the tractors over the years, before there were cabs and they wore ear protection, and the equipment they worked with and the constant pounding. We know what that did. We

know, in our seniors, how many have been affected by hearing loss. This is about recognizing and meeting the needs of the people of Ontario.

Imagine yourself in a situation where people are starting to react because they know what's happening, but you don't know—the sense of bewilderment you would have about knowing where you needed to go or why people were moving forward. It's something that I hope none of us ever has to experience.

I would be remiss if I did not get a quote from Helen Keller here. This is from Listen Up, Canada: "When you lose sight, you lose contact with things, but when you lose your hearing, you lose contact with people." Isolation can be dangerous, especially in an emergency. Bill 59 recognizes that and hopes to eliminate the isolation. It's practical; it makes sense. I'm pleased to rise today and support it. I want to thank the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge for recognizing a practical application, addressing a situation, and bringing this bill forward. I look forward to further debate.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I too am pleased to rise today in support of the private member's bill presented by the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, the Visual Fire Alarm System Act. I know that he has worked very hard with the Canadian Hearing Society, and I thank them for coming today and being present in the Legislature.

As MPPs, Thursday is for our private members' bills, and we have a chance to bring forward some legislation that helps all of the society. I think this bill is an example of that, and of the commitment from the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge.

The Canadian Hearing Society has members from a diversity of backgrounds, ages and levels of hearing. I think it's important to remember the MPP Gary Malkowski, who was the first deaf MPP in the Legislature and is here in the gallery today. Welcome. I believe he was responsible for bringing in the flashing lights as well as the alarm bells that go forward when we are called into the Legislature. I think he did a great job when he was an MPP of recognizing the problems that deaf people and hearing-impaired people have in today's society. I thank him for his work in that area.

I too have members of my family who are deaf and hearing impaired. They live in Belleville and had to go there to attend the Sir James Whitney Provincial School for the Deaf. When they were building their house, they had to get improvements made so that when the doorbell and the smoke alarm went off, they had the flashing lights as well. They have since got a dog to help them with their impaired hearing abilities. They have a young child now. She's about six years old and she starred on Sue Thomas: F.B.Eye as one of the nieces for the star of that show.

I certainly appreciate the efforts brought by the member here, and the challenges that are faced in society. In the survey done for the Canadian Hearing Society, they found that almost one in four adult Canadians report having some degree of hearing loss. As to the issue of

providing safety and services to a minority group, we're talking about one quarter of the population that requires extra assistance and extra insurance in receiving notice of an emergency. Smoke alarms, as we know, save untold lives every year. They alert people before a fire has spread widely. They certainly are the best preventive measure against fatalities from smoke inhalation and other potential injuries received in a fire.

1150

In order to alert more people, we need visual smoke alarms. It used to be that the only type of smoke alarm available was the high-pitched sound when smoke was detected. It's still the most common type of smoke detector, but for people with hearing loss the audible smoke detector's impact ranges from useless to barely passable, and for deaf people, of course, audible alarms are useless.

Other provisions like visual alarms must be made. There is a growing number of hard-of-hearing people as our older population increases in size. The member from Huron–Bruce mentioned tractors and the number of farmers without protected hearing over many years.

It is good legislation that has been proposed here this morning and we're going to be supporting the bill. Emergency plans typically are designed for people without disabilities, so the majority of us can escape with the usual hearing alarms that sound off. I commend the member for the consultations. I say, don't let the consultations end here. Hopefully today this will be passed and we can hear from firefighters and emergency workers who are involved, to enable this legislation to move forward as best as possible, how the buildings will be retrofitted, the ideas that are going to come from the communities.

I commend the member again for bringing this forward. He has our support. I am pleased again to welcome the people in the galleries from the Canadian Hearing Society and other groups that have come here today.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's my pleasure to support my colleague from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge and to echo some of the kind words spoken by my other colleagues, particularly my colleague and friend from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, who spoke so eloquently on this bill.

Some six years ago when I first made my run for elected office, a run at which I wasn't successful, one of the people I met at the time with whom I am still friends—who may be watching this morning; I'm not sure—was a young man named Chris Portelli. His disability wasn't hearing loss; his was an injury stemming from a spinal cord injury. He first brought to my mind, up close and personal, some of the challenges faced by Ontario's disabled, which is one of the reasons I was such a strong advocate for the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, which was finally proclaimed into law last year.

What a fitting add-on it would be, after the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, to follow up with what the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge has

proposed, which is such a logical, simple add-on, a visual symbol that tells you when a building may have a fire alarm or some other alarm, in addition to the sound.

For those of us who are not hearing impaired, even today when an alarm goes off, we almost instinctively think it's a false alarm. If in addition to the auditory signal we also had a visual signal, it would tell even those of us who are not hearing impaired that this is something to be taken seriously, that this is for real. When an alarm goes off, and most especially if it's not a false alarm, if it's very much a real one, my colleague from Oak Ridges came up with an excellent suggestion, which would be lit chevrons pointing the way toward the nearest exit.

This doesn't cause an architect or an engineer or someone contracting for a building to materially alter their plans, but it does ask for a little bit of thought. Should something go wrong in the building, how do you plan for the most efficient and safest means to provide the people working or living in the structure an orderly, quick and safe exit from the building?

There's so much in this proposal that is good common sense. It's a pleasure to see that all three parties have stood to endorse it. I join them in supporting the bill. I sincerely hope that it gets the committee hearings it so deserves quickly and expeditiously, and that as a Legislature we can rise and vote on it very soon and see it proclaimed into law.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

There being none, the Chair would like to recognize and draw to your attention the presence of the former member from York East, a member of the 35th Parliament, Gary Malkowski.

Mr. Arthurs, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Arthurs: Thank you for acknowledging Gary. I'd like to acknowledge members who have joined us during the debate, and those in the public gallery who have come today to support this particular initiative as well as being here for other reasons.

Two minutes, and less now, is not enough to be able to encapsulate some of the comments. I do want to thank the members from Oxford, Hamilton East, Oakville, Oak Ridges, Huron-Bruce, Haliburton-Victoria-Brock and Mississauga West who have all spoken to this bill this morning. They each set out some issues that would need resolution. I was pleased to hear one of the members make reference to private members' bills and the difficulty often in seeing those move through to legislation. This is not a government bill; this is a private member's bill. With support of the members of this Legislature and the community, I'm sure that this, along with other private members' bills, could be enacted as law.

Would there be a need to consult with our municipal partners? Clearly there would be, but the memorandum of understanding really speaks to government initiatives. In my view, until this is at least beyond—if it's adopted for second reading and off to committee, then that stage is the appropriate time to engage directly in that type of consultation.

I can tell you that in a brief conversation with my own mayor, over some things we were doing, I casually mentioned my bill, and he said that in our community we're very supportive of that. They have a diversity and equity committee, and that's exactly what we should be doing. Mr. Flynn, the member from Oakville, spoke in the same regard. I think it's something municipalities would embrace, the opportunity of setting the benchmark, of setting new standards, and then encouraging the private sector to be engaged. Government has an obligation and a role to set out those standards, to set the benchmarks, to take a lead role so that others can join in doing that.

I'm pleased to bring the bill forward. I think it's the type of practical politics members have spoken of. I was pleased with the member from Oak Ridges and his comments about other technologies; the bill provides for that. I look forward to its adoption and movement to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you to all members. The time provided for private members' business has now expired.

RURAL ONTARIO DAY ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006

SUR LE JOUR DE L'ONTARIO RURAL

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall first deal with ballot item number 17, standing in the name of Mrs. Mitchell.

Mrs. Mitchell has moved second reading of Bill 49, An Act to celebrate and recognize rural Ontario.

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

Mrs. Mitchell?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I would ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

The Deputy Speaker: Mrs. Mitchell has asked unanimous consent that the bill be referred to the standing committee on finance. Agreed? Agreed.

VISUAL FIRE ALARM SYSTEM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LES SYSTÈMES

D'ALARME-INCENDIE
À AFFICHAGE VISUEL

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 18, standing in the name of Mr. Arthurs.

Mr. Arthurs has moved second reading of Bill 59, An Act respecting visual fire alarm systems in public buildings.

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

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1200 to 1205.

The Deputy Speaker: All those members in favour, please rise.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Horwath, Andrea	O'Toole, John
Balkissoon, Bas	Hoy, Pat	Patten, Richard
Barrett, Toby	Hudak, Tim	Prue, Michael
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Klees, Frank	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Kormos, Peter	Racco, Mario G.
Broten, Laurel C.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Scott, Laurie
Delaney, Bob	Marchese, Rosario	Smitherman, George
Di Cocco, Caroline	Martel, Shelley	Van Bommel, Maria
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mauro, Bill	Watson, Jim
Dunlop, Garfield	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mitchell, Carol	Wong, Tony C.
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Zimmer, David

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 42; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): Speaker, I request the bill be sent to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

All matters relating to public members' private 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 1207 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HOCKEY

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Good evening, hockey fans, and welcome to the Paul J. Yakabuski community centre here in beautiful Barry's Bay, Ontario—now known as Hockeyville—where the Ottawa Senators will face off against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Sound unbelievable? Well, it might just happen if 10-year-old Michael Papania's application to the CBC/Kraft Foods search for Hockeyville is successful. While watching Hockey Night in Canada, Michael saw the ad telling people of the contest, open to communities all across Canada. Michael—whose dad, Mike, mother, Ann, and sister Chyanne all play hockey—filled out the application and, along with Barry's Bay and District Minor Hockey Association president Shaun O'Reilly, got the ball rolling.

This weekend, as part of the annual Timberfest celebrations, Barry's Bay will be visited by a television crew from the CBC to measure how much it deserves to be called Hockeyville. Communities are evaluated on their love of the game, community spirit and grassroots hockey stories. The CBC crew will be treated to a number of community events, many of them hockey-related. The annual Timberfest Stanley Cup will be played this

Saturday night. This game pits players with allegiances to the Montreal Canadiens against those who love their Leafs. I myself have had the honour of playing for the Leafs and hoisting the cup the past two seasons.

Added to the Timberfest roster this year will be a Friday "chicks with sticks" tournament and, later in the spring, a new Heritage Cup tournament, which I know will be enjoyed by all.

Let me take this opportunity to thank and congratulate young Michael Papania for his initiative, and let me encourage all those in Barry's Bay to get out there this weekend and show their enthusiasm and community spirit as they vie for the title of Hockeyville. I encourage all communities to make their best effort to become Hockeyville themselves.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham–Kent Essex): On February 4, I attended Road to Freedom, a celebration of Black History Month presented by the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum. The museum, located in my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex, is home to a rich collection of artifacts relating to the history of the Underground Railroad and to early African Canadian history.

Shannon and Bryan Prince are lifelong residents of North Buxton. Shannon is the curator of the museum. Bryan is a member of the museum board and a historian. He is the author of several works on this subject, including a new book, *I Came as a Stranger*. The book is a powerful history and a valuable guide to sites and communities that commemorate the courage and suffering of men, women and children who made the perilous trip from slavery in the United States to freedom in Canada. The fugitives—most of them penniless, many of them illiterate—carved out new, independent lives. They built homes, schools and churches. They became teachers, business owners and writers. Mr. Prince has generously donated a copy of his book to the legislative library. Artifacts from the museum can also be seen in the display cases downstairs on the main floor.

It is important to recognize the achievements and the contributions of original settlers. Black Canadians play an important part in Canada's unique cultural heritage. Our diversity has made Canada a model of co-operation and fellowship around the world.

I would like to thank the volunteers and the residents of North Buxton for their continued hard work and commitment to preserve and promote the history and accomplishments of the original settlers.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I rise today to add my voice to those who are concerned that this government has no plan to respond in the event of a garbage crisis. The only plan we have seen so far is the Liberals' amazing plan to ignore the pending crisis

and to try and pass the buck to municipalities. But that is not a plan; it's an abdication of responsibility.

If the border were to close, it would have an impact not just on Toronto, Durham, Peel and York but also on communities all across Ontario. The emergency landfill capacity in Ontario is just under 29 weeks, and the government knows that. They know that because it's contained in the Gartner Lee report when they outlined an emergency plan for GTA garbage. The plan is simply to dump trash into dumps in nearby communities, but implementing this report's recommendations would require provincial action. People across Ontario need to know if this is the amazing Liberal plan to deal with the garbage crisis.

In December, John Tory called on the Premier to make public his government's plan for garbage in Ontario before the end of March. We haven't seen this plan yet. John Tory has also called on the Premier to convene a summit of municipal leaders, environmentalists, experts and other affected parties to help in the development of a plan. All we've seen is a government with its head in the sand hoping against hope that they will not have to do anything. If the amazing Liberal plan to deal with the trash crisis is to do nothing, it's time to get a new plan.

AGNES CAMPBELL MACPHAIL

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): It's indeed an honour to stand today and talk about Agnes Campbell Macphail, the first woman elected to the House of Commons in Ottawa and, as well, the first woman to be elected to this Legislature. This was in 1921, before women were even declared to be persons.

After a 19-year career at the federal level, Agnes was elected, as I said, as a member of the provincial Parliament for York East, which encompassed all of what is today modern-day East York in the city of Toronto. She was the first woman seated in the Ontario Legislature, in 1943, where she was a leader in the fight for hospital insurance.

Agnes's work and passions are well known. They encompassed things like women's rights, fairness to seniors, penal reform, international peace and disarmament, access to housing and health care. Most recently, in latter life, they were about the development of youth and education.

It is in this regard I stand today to talk about the contest that we hold every year in East York for young people to come forward to contribute and to show their parliamentary skills and their ability to speak in public. The quality of these contestants, I will tell you, will very often match the level of debate that we hear in this House. The young people have done their research, they have organized their presentations and they've spoken in front of their family, friends, peers and judges. They talk on a broad range of topics. This year it will be held on February 21 at 7:30 in the True Davidson council chamber at the East York Civic Centre, 850 Coxwell

Avenue. Please, if you can possibly make it, come out and see some very good public speaking.

OMERS PENSION FUND

Mr. Tony C. Wong (Markham): Recently, quite a few retirees who are collecting pension benefits from OMERS have come to the constituency office of my riding of Markham worried about the security of their pensions. It is very unfortunate that some have chosen to try to scare pensioners into believing that any changes are being made to their pensions just to try to score some political points and make the government look bad. The truth, as has been stated many times in this House this week, is that there will be absolutely no changes made to existing pensions, and those collecting pensions have nothing to worry about.

Some pensioners in my riding have been led to believe that they will have to pay for the supplemental benefits that firefighters and police officers negotiate. This is completely untrue. Any supplementary benefits will be paid for on a 50-50 basis by the municipality and the employees who will benefit. As a matter of fact, Bill 206, if passed, will do something that will benefit pensioners. For the first time, a representative of pensioners will have a vote on both the administrators and sponsors boards of OMERS. For the first time, pensioners' voices will be heard at the table when any changes to the OMERS plan are being negotiated.

I'm happy to say that the McGuinty government has taken steps not only to protect current OMERS pensioners but to give them a voice that they've never had.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Ontario's manufacturing sector is in trouble. Some 54,000 jobs were lost in 2005. January alone saw a further 32,500 jobs disappear. What will February bring? The Minister of Economic Development and Trade has the answer. Is it a comprehensive plan to build competitiveness within key industries in Ontario? No, that's not it. Is it a series of meetings with affected communities to find out what they need to be competitive? No, that's not it either. Is it a plan to make electricity rates for small businesses competitive to other jurisdictions? No, that's not it. Is it a plan to make Ontario business and industry tax-competitive with competitive jurisdictions? No, that's not it either. Well, what is the answer?

1340

The answer from the minister is, "It's not our problem; it's the exchange rate." In 1977, when the Canadian dollar was US\$1.07, Ontario had a competitive and productive manufacturing sector because the government of the day kept us competitive. In 2003, when you were elected over there, Ontario and Canada were the third most productive nation among OECD countries. Now we are 12th. That's under a federal Liberal regime and a

provincial Liberal regime. I say it's not the exchange rate; I say it's not Ottawa. I say it's you. Develop a plan like you promised you would on December 8, 2005, when you supported our resolution to do so. Roll up your sleeves, get to work and develop a plan to keep Ontario competitive and stop the bleeding in our manufacturing sector.

OMERS PENSION FUND

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I rise today to clear up some of the myths being propagated about Bill 206. This bill, if passed, will not affect any current pensioners. It doesn't discriminate against women and low-paid workers, as some would have you believe, and it does not force anyone to pay for supplemental benefits that they won't be receiving. But the most important myth I would like to clear up is the idea that the bill stacks the deck against improvements to the OMERS pension plan.

The truth of the matter is that the two-thirds majority required to make improvements to the plan applies to any effort to diminish the plan. This means that major changes to the plan, before they can go ahead, will have to have a significant number of employers and employees in favour. What's more, if 50% plus one are in favour of a change but a two-thirds majority cannot be reached, the proposed changes could go to a mediator. The same formula applies to going to arbitration after the mediator reports back.

This government has done everything in its power to make Bill 206 acceptable to all sides. The bill has been sent to committee after both first and second readings. A number of amendments have been accepted, including some suggested by stakeholders and the opposition. It is unfortunate that myths are being spread in an effort to derail a bill that has support on both sides of this House as well as from many stakeholders. I hope I have been able to dispel some of these myths today.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I rise in the House to acknowledge the work that the public safety officials do on a daily basis. Police officers and firefighters selflessly put their lives in danger to protect the public every day. Think about that for a minute. We're talking about the people that are running into buildings in flames as people are running out. We're talking about people who place their lives on the line on a daily basis, dealing with the worst elements of our society every time they answer a distress call.

Police officers and firefighters have, to put it mildly, unique job challenges. The McGuinty government, through Bill 206, is recognizing that selflessness. We're allowing police officers and firefighters to negotiate supplemental benefits to the OMERS pension plan that they belong to. What we're doing is ensuring that the very people who ensure our safety have a greater chance to retire in good health.

It's unfortunate and it's shameful that a campaign of misinformation has surrounded these changes. So I

would like to set the record straight: The supplemental benefits that are negotiated between municipalities and police officers and firefighters will be paid for on a 50-50 basis. It's inaccurate for AMO to suggest they will have to increase municipal taxes.

Devolving the OMERS plan has been discussed for more than 10 years by every government. Transferring control of the pension plan is the right thing to do. I'm proud to say that we've done this in a way that's fair to all members.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): Over the past few weeks, we have heard a great deal about our government's Bill 206 and the effect it might have on OMERS pensioners. There are others who are counting on us to pass the bill. In fact, in my riding of Brant, the Brantford Professional Fire Fighters Association sent me 100 letters in support of the bill. Quite frankly, some of their points should be put in this House.

"I commend you for this bill's introduction and recognizing the necessary amendments required during second reading of the bill. As a firefighter, it is very important to have the flexibility to enhance our pension to afford a respectable retirement at an earlier age."

One goes on to say, "My concern lies with recent media advertisements sponsored by other stakeholders and their attempt to kill this bill."

Finally, "To have your government turn down this opportunity and not move forward ... would leave my colleagues and I in a plan that cannot meet the needs of professional firefighters across the province."

Concerns of the costs have been raised. The total worst-case scenario predicted by AMO—even if it were correct, which it's not—would take 11 years to negotiate and fully implement at the local level.

Finally, our firefighters have double the rate of cancer of any other member in this plan and they live shorter lives. They have a right to ask us to take care of them and their families in this time of need for their pension negotiations—double the rate of cancer of anyone else in the plan, and they live shorter lives.

I support Bill 206. Everybody should support Bill 206.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

GOLDEN DREAMS HOME AND DECOR LTD. ACT, 2006

Mr. Qadri moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr19, An Act to revive Golden Dreams Home and Decor Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Pursuant to standing order 84, this bill stands referred to the standing committee on regulations and private bills.

TRILLIUM GIFT OF LIFE NETWORK
AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE
RÉSEAU TRILLIUM POUR LE DON DE VIE

Mr. Kormos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 61, An Act to amend the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act / Projet de loi 61, Loi visant à modifier la Loi sur le Réseau Trillium pour le don de vie.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): The purpose of the bill is to ensure that upon the death of a person, tissue from the person's body may be removed and made available for transplant into another person's body and that this may be done without the consent of the person from whom the tissue is removed.

Currently, the act requires that consent be obtained before tissue can be removed from a human body. Under the proposed amendments, consent is no longer required, but a person may object to the removal of tissue prior to his or her death or a substitute may object on his or her behalf after the death has occurred. If an objection is made, no tissue shall be removed from the body. Part II of the act sets out the manner and circumstances in which an objection may be made by or on behalf of a person.

To date, it was considered an exceptional act to donate an organ. I put to you that it's time in Ontario for it to be considered an exceptional act to deny an organ where it could save a life or extend a life.

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ELECTION STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Mrs. Bountrogianni moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 62, An Act to amend the Election Finances Act and the Legislative Assembly Act / Projet de loi 62, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le financement des élections et la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): This bill, if passed, will make it easier for new political parties to register in this province. Registration in Ontario entitles political parties to receive a number of benefits. These include having the ability to solicit contributions, issue tax receipts to contributors, request and receive a copy of the permanent register of electors and become eligible for campaign expense reimbursements.

Under the provisions of this bill, new parties could register by endorsing at least two candidates in a general election or in two or more concurrent by-elections. Outside a campaign period, parties could register by providing the Chief Election Officer with the signatures, names and addresses of at least 1,000 electors. By facilitating the registration of new political parties, we're encouraging better representation of the full diversity of perspectives across this province.

We're also taking steps to make sure that the integrity of the party registration and political finance regime is maintained. There are provisions that impose obligations on parties and enable the Chief Election Officer to deregister parties that aren't meeting those obligations.

I'm very proud to introduce this bill today and urge my colleagues to join me in supporting it.

NOWRUZ DAY ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE JOUR NOWRUZ

Mr. Racco moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 63, An Act to proclaim Nowruz Day / Projet de loi 63, Loi proclamant le Jour Nowruz.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): March 21 marks the first day of spring, and to Iranians all over the world it marks the first day of the new year. Nearly 100,000 Iranians have come to live in our beautiful province, and it is only appropriate that we honour them with recognition of Nowruz Day.

SENATORS SELECTION ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006
SUR LE CHOIX DES SÉNATEURS

Mr. Runciman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 64, An Act to provide for the election in Ontario of nominees for appointment to the Senate of Canada / Projet de loi 64, Loi prévoyant l'élection en Ontario de candidats à des nominations au Sénat du Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): The purpose of the bill is to provide for the selection of nominees for appointment to the Senate by way of democratic election. Once nominees have been selected by election, the government of Ontario shall submit the names of the Senate nominees to the Queen's Privy Council for Canada as persons who may be summoned to the Senate of Canada for the purpose of filling vacancies relating to Ontario. This is an historic opportunity for Ontario to play a leading role in the democratic renewal of the Canadian Senate.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the standing committee on social policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley is asking for unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the standing committee on social policy. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Notwithstanding the order of the House dated Thursday, June 17, 2004, regarding the schedule for committee meetings, the following committee shall be authorized to meet as follows: The standing committee on social policy on Monday, February 20, 2006, between 9:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. for the purpose of considering Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts.

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

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

KYOTO PROTOCOL

LE PROTOCOLE DE KYOTO

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): Today marks the first anniversary of the coming into force of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the good work being done across Ontario by families, communities, businesses and governments to address those twin demons of the 21st century: air pollution and global warming.

Our government has committed to protecting the health of Ontarians. By actively working toward a healthier environment and cleaner air today, we can help pass on a better world to our children and the generations of tomorrow. Recently, former US President Bill Clinton was widely quoted saying that climate change “has the power to fundamentally end the march of civilization as we know it.” Those are potent words, but the sense of imminent danger they conjure up is all the more potent. With so much at stake, our efforts are critical.

Climate change is, in simple terms, a major threat to the sustainability of our quality of life. Its effects will be felt gradually and then rapidly in many different ways. If we do not act decisively, climate change and our trans-boundary pollution will erode our health, our environment and our economy.

Si nous n'agissons pas de manière décisive, les effets du changement climatique et de la pollution trans-frontalière continueront de dégrader notre santé, notre environnement et notre économie.

We have the scientific knowledge and the technology to address the threat. We have the responsibility as an environmentally conscientious society to campaign against it. As North American leaders in the pursuit of better air quality, we are determined to act. What we build, where we live, how we get our fuel and energy: These have changed many times in our history; they will change again, and it is our responsibility to see they change for the better.

By taking real action on climate change, you'll find that in 50 years our province could look like a very different place. Ontario could build North America's most advanced economy based on clean and renewable fuels, on zero emission transportation and on energy-efficient homes and businesses.

Our government has taken major steps to cut emissions of greenhouse gases and air pollutants. As you know, we are strongly committed to closing all coal-fired electricity plants by 2009. This will have both local and global benefits. It will reduce emissions of air toxins and smog-causing pollutants dramatically. At the same time, it is the single largest greenhouse gas reduction initiative underway in Canada. This one action will eliminate up to 30 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, which is equivalent to taking almost seven million cars off the road.

Cars on the road in Ontario will be cleaner. Our government has implemented a new regulation that requires gasoline in Ontario to contain 5% ethanol, on average, by 2007. We've improved the Drive Clean program, which now focuses on older vehicles at higher risk of polluting. Our government has also worked with industry to find workable ways to achieve lower emissions. We've set tough new standards for 40 harmful air pollutants and placed strict emissions caps on our largest industrial sectors. Every step we take to reduce pollutants in our airshed helps improve the air we breathe.

Our government has found innovative ways to meet our province's energy needs while reducing our environmental impact. We have made an important commitment to clean, green renewable energy, and we're on track not only to meet, but to exceed our target. New renewable generation will account for at least 5% or 1,350 megawatts of our capacity by 2007, and double that by 2010.

1400

In just two years, our government has advanced projects that will provide us with nearly 10,000 megawatts of clean, renewable power by 2010—enough power for 4.8 million homes. In the past two years, Ontario has secured more new generation capacity than any other jurisdiction in North America.

In 2003, this province had less than 15 megawatts of wind generation. In just two years, this government has set the wheels in motion to bring on-line over 1,300 megawatts of wind power, an 80-fold increase.

We're boosting clean hydroelectric capacity with a major expansion of the existing facilities at Niagara Falls. We are encouraging businesses to use co-generation and letting them sell surplus energy back to the grid. Further, we're building a culture of conservation that is instrumental to our climate change efforts. Ontario will become a leader in energy efficiency by curbing demand, changing entrenched habits and promoting the wise use of energy in homes, business and the community.

Our target is to reduce growth in peak demand by 5% by 2007. We're setting an example by cutting electricity use in government operations by 10% over the same period. By undertaking energy-efficient retrofits and upgrades to our buildings, the Ontario Realty Corp. has reduced electricity demand in buildings they manage by as much as 7.8%—well within the reach of our 10% target by 2007. We're also installing deep lake water cooling, which will further reduce our energy consumption during the summer period.

Our government has come a long way in our quest to improve Ontario's air quality and keep our province clean and healthy. We still have more to do. Addressing the twin issues of climate change and air pollution demands clear focus and a strong plan of action, and our government has both. We will continue to work as innovative and respected leaders in the area. We look forward to meeting our new federal counterparts to ensure a healthier Canada. Most importantly, we will continue to challenge our neighbours to the south to follow our lead and commit to major reductions in transboundary emissions of smog-causing pollutants and greenhouse gases.

Just before Christmas, Canada hosted one of the largest-ever gatherings of climate change and air emissions experts for an international conference. The Conference of Parties in Montreal was a chance to hear about the latest research, the best new technologies and the examples being set by governments and industries around the world. I had a chance to attend this conference along with my colleague Minister Cansfield. No matter who I was speaking to, there was total agreement on a number of points. Climate change is a real threat to our shared future health and prosperity. We have the knowledge and the tools to address it, and we can only succeed through shared effort.

Le changement climatique menace réellement notre santé et notre prospérité. Nous avons les connaissances et les moyens de combattre ce fléau, et nous ne pourrions être efficaces dans cette lutte qu'en agissant de concert.

Governments, industry, educators and scientists all came together on these statements. It is clear to me that there is continuing opportunity for Ontario to play a leading role in this challenge.

US President John F. Kennedy once said, "We have the power to make this the best generation of mankind in the history of the world—or to make it the last." We are committed to working with all governments and all jurisdictions to deliver cleaner air, a higher quality of life

and to make this the best generation in the history of our great province.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response?

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to rise today to mark the anniversary of the Kyoto agreement, which entered into force on February 16, 2005.

This government likes to make announcements about the work they are doing to improve the air quality here in Ontario, but what has the government really done to improve our air quality?

Let me see. The Liberal election platform talked about the importance of responding to the health needs of Ontarians by improving our air quality. Buying electricity from dirty US-based coal plants does nothing to improve the air quality of those in southwestern Ontario.

In recent months, we've seen the government back off on their time lines for coal plant closures. The 2007 date changed to 2009, and now they're shying away from that date.

In 2004 and 2005, they were required to buy more US energy from dirty coal plants. Those plants continue to operate without any effort to make them clean in Ontario. If you're backing away from the coal-burning plants, are you making any movement to put on the new technologies available to make those plants emit more cleanly than they are presently doing? Has this government done that? We've seen no evidence of it.

What about gridlock? It's probably the number one contributor to Kyoto. Have we seen anything? Has there been a transportation plan? What about the expansion of the 404 or the 407? Manufacturing jobs are going away, so maybe people aren't going to be out there driving to work. Is that the plan to deal with gridlock?

Energy conservation: You cut the Energy Star program. Is that an incentive for people to buy energy-efficient appliances? In my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, the Frost campus: an energy-efficient building. Maybe we could look at that as a model for municipal and provincial buildings.

Where has the movement been on ethanol plants? I don't see any movement by this government for conservation. So the question has to be asked of this government: Are you improving air quality in Ontario, or are you just talking the talk and not walking the walk?

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): New Democrats support the provisions of Kyoto. New Democrats have always done so, and our federal party in Ottawa has played a leading part since Kyoto was first announced.

But I have to tell you that I find ironic some of the things the minister had to say in her statement here today, because this party and this government have no climate change plan. Alone among the provinces in Canada, this government has no climate change plan. They also have no greenhouse gas emission reduction target. This government has never put forward a target. Unlike other provinces, this government has never seen fit to do what I think most of our citizens would expect.

The David Suzuki Foundation thinks this province is not on the right track. I read from page 22 of their booklet, *All Over the Map: A Comparison of Provincial Climate Change Plans*. They make recommendations for Ontario, but they only make three. The first is to “Develop a climate change plan with ambitious GHG emission reduction targets,” something you have failed to do. Number 2: “Rely entirely upon conservation, energy efficiency and renewables for new power, rather than natural gas and nuclear power,” something that is diametrically opposed to what you are doing. Number 3: “Implement policies to encourage the purchase of fuel-efficient vehicles and discourage the purchase of gas guzzlers,” something you have never talked about, never implemented and never worked on.

I have to tell you that I am very disappointed. I support Kyoto. I think I support everything the minister had to say, but I want to see some action. I want to see something other than the mere words that flow on what a good program Kyoto might be.

In regard to what is happening in the city of Toronto—the announcements and the questions and the response I got yesterday about the Toronto Transit Commission—the Toronto Transit Commission is receiving \$180 million less from this government this year than they received in 1994. What is that going to do? It's going to cause gridlock, it's going to cause more cars on the road, it's going to cause more pollution. The money is not there. Your words are nice, but the money is not there. And when the questions are asked, the answer that comes back is, “Toronto, drown in your own problems.” If you are truly committed to Kyoto, if you are truly committed to a good environment, then you will put some money into things like transit in Toronto; you will at least put in the same amount of money they were receiving back in 1994, because for 12 years they have been going backwards.

In the last two minutes, I want to talk about the port lands. I think the people in my community, the people in the east end of the city of Toronto, are very, very upset with this government's actions, or should I say lack of action, on the port lands and on conservation. They came forward with a 10-point plan—

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): You want to have the Americans run it, eh, Mike?

Mr. Prue: If the minister wants to listen, he could.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. The Minister of Health will come to order.

Member for Beaches–East York.

1410

Mr. Prue: The people in my community came forward with what was a very realistic 10-point plan. They are supported by the local council, they are supported by the mayor, they are supported by the waterfront regeneration and Mr. Fung, they are supported by Toronto Hydro and they are literally supported by all of the neighbourhoods and committees and people who live in proximity.

Their 10-point plan has been rejected out of hand. They are talking about the necessity for some gas-fired generation inside the old Hearn plant. They are not NIMBYs. They know that we might need some more electricity, but they question why their ideas about the energy-efficient use of buildings have been rejected, why the raising of efficiency standards that they talked about has been rejected, why you have rejected household energy retrofits, the Toronto Hydro loan program that was in existence before. They wonder why you have rejected the cool cities program, why you have rejected renewable energy, why you have rejected cogeneration and tri-generation on the site. They wonder why they cannot burn the gas from the sludge to help further dry the sludge. They wonder why the Toronto Hydro conversion standby diesel generators will not be operating.

They have so many questions, and we have absolutely no plan and no answer from this government.

VISITORS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I draw members' attention to the members' west gallery, where we have visiting with us today from the city of Cornwall His Worship Mayor Phil Poirier; CAO Paul Fitzpatrick; the finance officer, David Dick; and from the United Counties of Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry, Warden Jim McDonell. I welcome them.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): That of course was not a point of order, but welcome, gentlemen.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. On December 8, 2005, we had a very constructive discussion, I think, in this House about the impact of the job layoffs and the job losses that have taken place, particularly in the manufacturing sector, across the province of Ontario. We had a vote on that day, which was joined in by all three parties, including members of the Liberal Party, to call on the government to bring forward a comprehensive action plan for working families and communities. Northern Ontario and other parts of the province have been devastated by additional layoffs since then. When are we going to see the comprehensive plan that all parties voted for on December 8, to be brought forward on an immediate basis from that day?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm pleased to take the question. I want to welcome the mayor of Cornwall and his contingent here to Queen's Park. I had the opportunity to speak with the mayor shortly after they faced yet another economic challenge, and we will continue to

work with the mayor of Cornwall to strengthen that community.

I can say that we always feel for those families and those communities that have been affected by some of the challenges that we're facing on the economic front these days, but as you know, it is not all bad news. Since we first earned the privilege of serving Ontarians as their government, the economy—that is hard-working Ontarians—has created 215,800 new jobs. The unemployment rate is at its lowest point in some five or six years. In the supplementaries, I look forward to discussing in further detail some of the specific initiatives our government has taken to help strengthen the economy.

Mr. Tory: We had the discussion on December 8, I say to the Premier, on the specific topic of what was then 50,000 families that had been affected by the loss of jobs across the province, particularly in the manufacturing sector, in the last 12 months. That number has now risen to 80,000. Above 80,000 families have been affected by the loss of a job in the manufacturing sector alone in this province in the past 12 months. In northern Ontario, for example, we learned just yesterday that Neenah's Paper in Terrace Bay will be closing, with 400 jobs gone; Weyerhaeuser in Dryden, 80 jobs gone; Tembec in Timmins, 20 jobs gone; Bowater in Thunder Bay, 280 jobs gone; Cascades in Thunder Bay, 380 jobs gone.

As the Premier will know, a good many of those layoffs have taken place since the time we had the debate on December 8 in this House.

The list goes on and on. Even your own member from Thunder Bay—Superior North says it is clearer than ever that areas where the province has a significant role played a major role in these layoffs. So I ask you again, when are we going to see the action plan your party and your members voted for on December 8 to help these 80,000 families who have lost jobs across this province in the last year, on your watch?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I'm sure the leader of the official opposition would also want me to bring to the attention of the people of Ontario that in January alone, this past month, this economy generated 15,600 net new jobs, just so we have the full picture. Maybe the leader of the official opposition can make this commitment, but I can't—I can't guarantee that we can keep all the existing jobs we have at present in Ontario. I can't. But what I can tell you is that we work as hard as we can, working with the private sector and our communities, to generate more new jobs than we are losing old jobs.

Let me tell you about some of the funds we have in place. First, there's our half-billion-dollar auto sector fund.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): You were against that.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: This was originally opposed by that party.

As a result of that investment, and that initiative, we have attracted \$5.7 billion worth of new investment. The new Toyota plant we are getting—I know the leader of

the official opposition would have been warmed by this recent news—the first of its kind in Canada in some 10 or 15 years, has recently announced that instead of hiring 1,300 people, they're hiring 2,000—

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

Mr. Tory: Indeed, when those announcements take place, we're all warmed by that, but the question wasn't about that. The fact of the matter is that while there are announcements taking place with respect to people who are creating jobs, there are also well-paid manufacturing jobs that are being lost in northern Ontario, as I mentioned. Western Ontario is not immune from this: Ford in Windsor and St. Thomas, 2,300 jobs gone; B.F. Goodrich in Kitchener-Waterloo, 1,100 jobs gone effective July 22; La-Z-Boy in Waterloo, 413 jobs gone. I have never asked you, and the resolution did not call on the government, to guarantee all jobs would continue to exist forever. What it said was that there was the need, as expressed by all members of this House and all parties—or all the members who voted from all parties—to have a plan to help the now 80,000 families, just in the manufacturing sector, who have lost jobs on your watch in the last 12 months. All I want to know is, when are you coming forward with that plan to help those families and those communities in northern and western and eastern Ontario? When is it going to happen?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): It is important to recognize what we are doing and what we're building on. First of all, there is, as the member should know, the adjustment advisory program. Whenever there is an unfortunate event such as a layoff or a closure, what immediately happens is that the ministry contacts the company, contacts the union and contacts the community to provide the type of support, the type of referral and training referral support necessary.

Second, we are now building on what the previous government either refused to do or could not do, the labour market development agreement and the labour market partnership agreement. They put us eight years behind the eight ball by not negotiating an agreement. We're going to build on that.

Third, they didn't invest in our post-secondary sector. We have made several announcements with respect to pre-apprenticeship positions, co-op diploma apprenticeship positions.

All of these create opportunities for workers to retrain, retool and integrate fully into the modern economy. That's what we're doing. We're going to be doing more and we'll—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

Mr. Tory: My question again is to the Premier, and it's on the same subject. We've had a history lesson now, we've had various and sundry other measures, but no reference whatsoever to the comprehensive action plan

called for by all parties in this House on December 8, just a couple of months ago.

We were talking about western Ontario: VSA LLC in Kitchener–Waterloo, 150 jobs gone; Saint-Gobain Advanced Ceramics in Hamilton, 40 jobs gone; John Deere in Woodstock—

Interjection: Gloom and doom.

Mr. Tory: You know what? It's not about gloom and doom; it's families who are losing their jobs, including the area you represent. You should be ashamed of yourself for not doing anything to help them out—GDX in St. Catharines, 200 jobs gone; Industrialex Manufacturing in Windsor, 50 jobs; Imperial Tobacco in Guelph we've talked about before, 640 jobs.

I am asking a very simple question today. I would have thought it would be simple to answer because we all voted for a resolution saying we needed a comprehensive action plan to help these communities and families. When is the plan coming?

1420

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: We have articulated, in part, so far during this question period some of that plan. It's just that the leader of the official opposition doesn't like the plan. I think it's important to distinguish between there being no plan and a plan that the leader of the official opposition doesn't like.

Since coming to office, as I mentioned, we've generated 216,000 net new jobs. The De Beers Canada Victor project, Ontario's first diamond mine, will create 600 jobs during construction and 375 during operation. That's a \$1-billion investment. As I mentioned a moment ago, the Toyota plant to be built in Woodstock will create not just the original 1,300 jobs, but now 2,000 jobs, plus about 5,000 spinoff jobs. Our energy supply initiatives will create 5,109 construction jobs and at least 377 direct, full-time jobs. GlaxoSmithKline recently announced 75 new jobs in Mississauga. In Kitchener-Waterloo, that community alone, last month: 1,600 new jobs.

Mr. Tory: It's very interesting that on that long list we had the 5,000 jobs in the energy sector in construction. There's not a shovel in the ground for anything, so there's not a single construction job being created anywhere. The fact of the matter is, I say to the Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I need to be able to hear the member asking the question. The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: The fact of the matter is that in the month of January, last month, we lost 1,000 manufacturing jobs every day of the month; more than 30,000 manufacturing jobs lost in the month. Look at eastern Ontario, particularly the Cornwall area, which has been hurting for some time now: Satisfied Brake Products in Cornwall, 50 jobs; Mahle Engineering plant in Gananoque, 90 jobs; Domtar, 1,290 jobs gone; Hathaway in Prescott, 50 jobs.

In Cornwall, I met the mayor and city councillors and others, and their greatest fear was lots of talk and no action. I sent you a letter outlining the 18 things they told me that the McGuinty Liberal government could do to help them. Could you give me a report on how many

things have been done to help them since that time? What has been done for Cornwall?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I had the opportunity to chat with the mayor and, beyond that, to meet with the mayor personally. As I understand, the Minister of Finance will be meeting with the mayor again this afternoon.

To date, let me tell you about some of the things that we have done working on behalf of and with the community of Cornwall. In partnership with Service Canada and Domtar, an action centre has been established on-site to help Domtar employees with their loss of employment. We have agreed to a request for a fund for a project manager to coordinate extra demand that will be required for social services. We have agreed to a request to help develop an updated economic development and marketing strategy that will assist in attracting key new investments. We have agreed to a request to hire a replacement worker at the local enterprise centre to assist and support new entrepreneurs and small business owners.

There is more that we have agreed to, and we will continue to work hand in hand with the community of Cornwall to ensure that it continues to prosper.

Mr. Tory: I'm delighted you had a meeting, I had a meeting and the Minister of Finance is having a meeting later today. That is actually their worst fear: that there will be a whole lot of meetings and nothing will actually get done.

The list of measures you just went through, which talked about hiring a project manager and putting one replacement worker in a place, will make a small contribution, but there were 18 specific things. I assume if they've identified those 18 things to me, they did to you as well, they have to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Economic Development. I wonder why it is, a couple months after this started with Cornwall in particular, that nothing is done.

Furthermore, you mentioned that list of little things. What this House voted for was a comprehensive action plan, to be brought forward immediately, to help the 80,000 families who have lost jobs and paycheques. When are we going to see the comprehensive plan? When are we going to see action on the list that Cornwall has given to you and to me and to your government? When are we going to see some real action?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I want to begin by acknowledging the nothing less than heroic efforts made by Jim Brownell, inside caucus and outside caucus, when it comes to supporting the future of his community of Cornwall. He is absolutely relentless in his efforts and is one of the primary reasons that we have reacted so quickly, and we will continue to respond and support the community of Cornwall.

Let me just say that I see the world a little bit differently from the leader of the official opposition. I see all kinds of hope and prosperity in Ontario's future. He says we're losing 1,000 jobs a day. In fact, we're creating 1,500 jobs every day as well. He says the cup is half empty; I say it's three quarters full.

We have a wonderful foundation on which to build. We are working together with our manufacturing sector with our new advanced manufacturing plan. The Minister of Natural Resources has put together a wonderful plan to support the forestry sector. The Minister of Energy has helped recently in terms of putting a cap on hydro rates. We're doing everything we can to invest in people, develop our human capital: more apprenticeship programs; more college and university spaces; learning until 18.

We have every reason to believe, as do the people of Ontario, that there's every reason to be hopeful about the future in our province.

OMERS PENSION FUND

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. You promised workers in the OMERS pension plan a fair, reasonable dispute resolution mechanism modelled after the teachers' pension plan. You promised arbitration if there is a 50-50 deadlock on an evenly balanced employer-employee pension board. That was your promise. But your legislation that you have before this House now doesn't provide for that. It doesn't provide a 50-50 go to arbitration if there's a deadlock. What it says is that you have to have 51%. That effectively means that employers have a veto.

Premier, you're facing the prospect of a province-wide work stoppage because you've broken your promise. I'm going to ask you again, will you keep your promise of a 50-50 arbitration pension dispute mechanism? Will you keep that promise and avoid a province-wide work stoppage?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Let's take a moment and talk about this prospective province-wide work stoppage. Our government has introduced a bill in order to honour a specific campaign commitment. That bill has been introduced in this House. It has been the subject of 11 days of committee hearings. It's had two days of hearings on second reading. It will be brought back to the House for disposition by way of third reading and a final vote.

We have always respected the process and our opposition throughout. Mr. Ryan is now saying that because he is unhappy with the result of a lawful process, he will protest that in a way that is illegal. I think that is wrong. I think my responsibility is to follow the process, to respect that process and to respect those who might be opposed to this legislation that we have, and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Hampton: We have the latest iteration from Premier McGuinty: You can make any promise you want and then simply wipe it out by process. Well, it doesn't work that way: not when you're messing around with people's pensions; not when you're talking about their retirement security.

You made a promise. You promised a 50-50—

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): You have to tell the truth, Howard.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. Minister of Community and Social Services, I'd like you to withdraw that comment.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I withdraw.

Mr. Hampton: You promised a 50-50 pension dispute resolution mechanism. We know that your government thinks that's okay for teachers; that's good. It's okay for firefighters; that's good. It's okay for police officers; that's good.

Here we're talking about some of the lower-paid municipal and education workers in the province. You promised them the same dispute resolution mechanism. They're angry now. They're angry because you've broken your promise. I ask you again, Premier, will you simply keep your promise and avoid a potential province-wide work stoppage?

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Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I think what Ontarians are concerned about is, Mr. Ryan has decided that because he is unhappy with the result of a lawful process, he will now protest in a way that is illegal. What's more than that, he's not threatening me; he's threatening Ontario families.

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Mr. Bisson may find it comical, but Mr. Ryan is saying that because he's unhappy with the result of this lawful process, he is threatening to keep children outside of their schools; he is threatening to withdraw snow removal services from our roads; he is threatening to remove important municipal services from Ontario families who count on them.

This threatened protest has eclipsed, I tell Mr. Ryan, who is sitting there, any discussion of any substantive nature about this bill. What the people of Ontario really want to know is, why does someone think it is right for them to object to the outcome of a lawful process by objecting and protesting in an unlawful way? That's what Ontarians want to know.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, I think Ontarians also want to know something else: when you're going to stop breaking your promises; when you're going to stop telling workers that you're going to give them the benefit of a fair pension resolution system, and then you yank that out of the way. They want to know why it's reasonable, according to the process, for teachers to have that pension dispute resolution process, why it's reasonable for police and why it's reasonable for firefighters, but when it comes to hundreds of thousands of women who work in our schools as caretakers and who have very low incomes, when it comes to people who work in municipalities and provide important public services, you're not prepared to honour your promise. Somehow, they aren't worthy.

It's your promise, Premier. This is what you told them, and you told them in writing. Now they're disappointed, they're hurt and they're angry. Are you going to keep your promise? Is Dalton McGuinty going to keep the promise he made in writing to those workers?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I want to take this opportunity to speak directly to CUPE members throughout the province who are considering what they should do in these circumstances and what would serve both their interests and the greater public interest.

First of all, I want to say thank you to those several locals which have now indicated—in Ottawa, in Peel and in Peterborough, to begin—that they will not engage in an illegal strike. I also want to remind all CUPE members of our track record when it comes to labour relations. We have a four-year deal with Ontario teachers that has never happened before. We have a four-year deal with our own union, OPSEU, that has never happened before. We have a four-and-a-half-year deal with Ontario doctors that has never happened before. We will work as long and as hard as we can to continue to establish good labour relations. There is no more pro-public-service government in Canada, Mr. Ryan, than there is here, and I would ask CUPE to understand that.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Hampton: Premier, once again, it's about your promise. This is the original Bill 206 legislation which was introduced into the Legislature on June 1 of last year. Here's what's remarkable: If you go to section 43, what you find is that in fact what you promised in the election is in this bill. You promised the same kind of dispute resolution system for pensions that exists in the teachers' pension plan. That's what was in the original bill. These workers who are here, and CUPE workers, were happy with this. Then you read your most recent amendments and, lo and behold, what happens in the most recent amendments? The 50-50 resolution was yanked. A promise that you made in writing and then put into the original legislation—you yanked it. That's why people are upset and angry. Will you pass the original sections that you put in the bill before you yanked them out in the middle of the night? Will you keep your promise that way, Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Some people are concerned that the option for new benefits that we create for our police and firefighters will come at the expense of other plan members. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is a specific provision found in the bill that protects the interests of plan members.

But let me say this, and I say this in the presence of those firefighters who are here today: We think it's important, worthy and right that we recognize that these men and women assume special responsibilities, that they assume great risk and danger every day as part of their job. When we rush out of burning buildings, they rush in to help us get out. We've created a provision in this bill that recognizes the work they do on our behalf.

Mr. Hampton: We don't object to the pension clauses that firefighters may gain, we don't object to the pension clauses for—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. It's really a quite simple process: One member asks a question, everyone else is quiet; one member answers a question, everyone else is quiet. Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Speaker, it might help if you pointed out it's the government that wants to interrupt the question.

Here is the reality: You made a promise in writing to those very low-paid workers. You actually put the promise in the original bill, and they actually thought that there might be some pension improvement for them too, or at least some potential. But then, in the clause-by-clause process, you yanked that. You took that out. You've broken your promise. So I say to you, Premier, is there any doubt about why they might be angry? Is there any doubt about why they might be frustrated? Is there any doubt about why they might feel that they've been taken advantage of, been treated unfairly? All they're asking you to do is what you promised in writing before the election and to do what you put in the original clause of the bill before you yanked it out in the middle of the night. Will you honour the promise you put in writing?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I want to remind the leader of the NDP about how much time and effort and goodwill have been invested throughout the process so that we might improve the quality of the bill itself. Two days were devoted to debate in this House so far; 30 hours, or 11 days, were devoted to debate in committee; we received 141 separate submissions; we heard from 54 presenters. There were dozens of amendments that were introduced; many of those were adopted, including three very good amendments we received from the NDP.

Again, the leader of the NDP is telling me that he is not happy with the result. I accept that he is not happy with the result. My concern is that there are those in Ontario today who are saying that their response to an unhappy lawful result would be to do something unlawful, and I ask them not to do that.

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Mr. Hampton: I say to you, Premier, that all the process, all the back and forth, is not going to make up for a situation where people feel that they have been taken advantage of and deceived. What they heard before the election, what they saw in a written promise, what they saw when the bill was first introduced, has now been reduced to something which is not an acceptable pension dispute resolution mechanism; it is a roadblock. Lower-paid workers who work in our schools, who work in municipalities, who are part of the OMERS pension plan, know that it will be almost impossible for them to increase the benefits because of the roadblock that you've put in their place. All they are asking you to do, Premier, is to keep the promise that you made, to keep the promise that you originally put in the first version of the legislation. Why, Premier, is it so difficult for you to keep a promise?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I can say that a great deal of work, once again, has gone into this bill. We look forward to moving ahead with this bill and to having it

become the law in Ontario. Again, I say to all those involved who will become part of this new process by virtue of this bill that we have gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure that we meet a couple, maybe three, important and overriding objectives.

We should not be having control over this pension plan. It's something to do with our municipalities and their workers, so we'll divest that responsibility to them. We're going to recognize that our firefighters and police in particular have especially challenging jobs, and we recognize that in very specific and meaningful ways in the bill. Finally, we have done that in a way that does not compromise the benefits or the ability to obtain changes to benefits on the part of other plan members. We're putting forward something that we think is fair, balanced and responsible.

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): My question is for the Premier. Your Minister of Transportation, Mr. Takhar, has clearly broken the members' integrity laws, yet we saw a great display of solidarity and sympathy for Mr. Takhar from you and your caucus yesterday in this House. You seemed to have no problem—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. When members have the floor, it is they and only they who can speak. We do not need noise that prohibits me from hearing what a member has to say. I need to be able to hear the questions. It is not helpful to have other displays during that period.

The member for Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, you seem to have no problem being sympathetic towards Minister Takhar, who has been found guilty. Yet, when you were in opposition, you repeatedly called for the resignations of myself, Bob Runciman, Cam Jackson, Chris Stockwell, Tony Clement and Dianne Cunningham. You did this even before any of us had had a fair hearing. Even when we—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. I know it's Thursday, but the same rules apply on Thursday as they do Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. I need to be able to hear. If members do not want to listen to the rules, they can't stay here.

Mr. Wilson: You condemned us and asked for our resignations even before we had a fair hearing, and even after we were fully exonerated the calls for resignation continued. I ask you, what happened to the Dalton McGuinty who used to stand on this side of the House and talk about principles, integrity and public trust? He used to stand here and say that all the time. Your website, your personal biography today, continues to say that you stand for those principles of public trust and integrity. What happened to that Dalton McGuinty?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): What the Conservative

Party feels is that when it comes to these matters, the facts are not important. I feel that they are important.

You will recall that there were three separate allegations made by the leader of the official opposition. One was that Minister Takhar had somehow enriched himself. The Integrity Commissioner said that was not true. Mr. Tory then said that it was a case where Minister Takhar had been involved in the management of his business. The Integrity Commissioner said that was not true. Mr. Tory then said, and this was found to be true, that the trustee which had been originally approved by the Integrity Commissioner was no longer operating at arm's length. Therein lies the breach. The Integrity Commissioner went on beyond that and said, as I know the Conservatives will recall, "... I have to recognize that the minister did not go about intentionally trying to short-circuit the system."

I think the facts are important. I am comfortable saying, on the basis of those facts, that this minister's apology is sufficient.

Mr. Wilson: Premier, you still have not explained your double standard in this matter. You said in this House on Monday, "We're not talking about expensive steak dinners," yet your \$70-per-steak finance minister, Mr. Duncan, is still in cabinet. You said on Monday, "We're not talking about a case of hiding expenses," yet Mr. Duncan hid expenses through the bureaucracy and Mr. Cordiano hid expenses through his riding association, and they're still in cabinet.

So I just want to get this straight: If it's PC cabinet ministers, they have to resign without even a fair hearing; just a public lynching from you and your colleagues. But if it's one of your Liberal cabinet ministers, they get to do whatever the heck they want and still stay in cabinet. Is that the standard you're upholding, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Ultimately, we'll all be held to account, as we should be, by the people of Ontario at election time. I look forward to talking about our record. I look forward, should the matter be raised, to explaining exactly why I felt that, given these circumstances and this set of facts, the appropriate response for me, as Premier, was to accept the minister's full and unequivocal apology. I don't think Ontarians who may have had the opportunity to listen to Minister Takhar yesterday would come to any other conclusion than that this man is sincere in his desire to represent his constituents and to fulfill his responsibilities as minister to the very best of his ability, and the sincerity of his apology. Again, this is something I look forward to speaking to Ontarians about, day in and day out, should they call upon me to do so.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Premier. My question is about the port lands fiasco, as it's been best known in Toronto: your plan, the McGuinty plan, for a mega power plant on Toronto's waterfront. It's a question about energy, yes, but it's also a question about democracy and fairness. You told local

citizens, you told Toronto Hydro they had until Monday to submit a positive alternative to your flawed plan, but on Friday, three days before that deadline, you and your minister short-circuited the process and you announced a mega plant for Toronto's waterfront.

My question to you is simple: How do you justify this unjustifiable action?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): I'm very pleased to respond to the member from Beaches-East York. The interesting part of the proposal that was put forward for the port land site, where Hearn was involved, was that the proponent for that particular site did not have an EA and wanted an environmental assessment actually excluded from the process. They also wanted to transfer half of that asset to an American company, Florida Power & Light. That asset belongs to the people of Ontario.

1450

There is also a 20-year contract on the Hearn site, with two five-year extensions, where the proponent is a private developer. That proponent would have to be bought out. That particular contract has a provision in it, a covenant that says, "No generation on the Hearn site." So there is a great deal to this issue when looking at the fact that we'd have to put up \$120 million worth of temporary generation, which would then be torn down, and then we would have to exempt an EA process—

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

Mr. Prue: Minister, you and the Premier promised a new relationship with Toronto, based, and I quote him, "on respect and mutual understanding." The actions you have undertaken don't match the words. Instead, I would say the Premier is showing contempt for the mayor, the council and the people of this city by ignoring the people, by ignoring the positive alternatives and, in the end, by rigging the process.

Show the mayor and the people of Toronto some respect. Reopen the bids for the port lands project and give positive alternatives like energy efficiency and conservation a fair hearing. Will you do that?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: As a matter of fact, the generation that will go on the port lands site is cogeneration. The first phase will be for 300 megawatts; the second phase, 550. In my discussion with the mayor, that is exactly what he wanted. We are putting in 300 megawatts of demand response and conservation, which is also what the mayor wanted, in my conversation with him.

I met with the deputy mayor, I met with the councillor, I met with OPA, I met with Constellation, I met with OPG. I have met with everyone and made a decision in the best interests of how to use money prudently and responsibly for the people of Ontario and keep the lights on.

The Independent Electricity System Operator has been very clear: rolling blackouts for the city of Toronto in 2008. It is our responsibility to spend money wisely, keep

the lights on for the people and provide cogeneration for heat and/or steam in the future, which we have done. We will continue to work in the best interests of all the people of Ontario, using their assets wisely.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Would you stop the clock for a moment?

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the Russian Federation representing the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation, the Leningrad and Tyumen regions and the Republic of Tatarstan; the state council of the Republic of Tatarstan; and the Tyumen region Duma. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests.

OMERS PENSION FUND

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The Ontario municipal employees retirement system, OMERS, is a \$39-billion pension plan that serves more than 360,000 current and former employees of municipal governments, school boards, libraries, children's aid societies and other local agencies throughout Ontario. OMERS also covers our most brave of public servants; namely, police officers, firefighters and paramedics, many of whom are here today.

The plan provides guaranteed retirement income for life, including inflation protection and survivor and disability benefits. But as the OMERS website states, "Bill 206 and OMERS are in the news. Unfortunately, the coverage has caused some confusion, misunderstanding and concern among our members, retirees and employers regarding the viability of OMERS operations and the security of OMERS pension fund."

Minister, let's clear up the confusion; let's resolve the misunderstandings. OMERS plan members need to know whether they should be worried about their pension. Does Bill 206 put their pension in jeopardy?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I'd like to thank the member for the question. As the OMERS website clearly indicates—and let's just talk about who OMERS is and who the OMERS board is. It's made up of 50% employers and 50% employees, including members from CUPE. What does it say? It says categorically, "There is nothing in Bill 206 that puts the pensions of our members at risk. In fact, this model gives members a voice in making the final decisions on their plan." As a matter of fact, for the first time ever, we've actually put a voting retired pensioner on both the administration and the sponsorship boards so that they will have a say as well as to how their pension is being used.

Further, if there is negotiated at the local level a supplementary plan, there can be no subsidization from the supplemental plan to the main plan or vice versa. No

pension is at risk. The OMERS members and the pensioners are fully protected under this bill.

Mr. Wilkinson: As I've learned, the OMERS pension plan was established in 1962. It has a long history and a varied membership. It has about 900 participating employers.

Changes to the 44-year-old OMERS pension plan have been talked about for more than a decade. This government is working to give control of the OMERS pension plan to those Ontario workers and employees who pay into it and benefit from it. There's a myth out there that this devolution will cause higher property taxes this year. The myth assumes that all municipalities will have to pay for many expensive benefits all at once. Minister, I need you to put my constituents at ease. Put this myth to rest and clarify how Bill 206 will affect this year's property tax bills.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: The supplemental plans that we are merely allowing to be negotiated at the local level for our emergency workers—the fire, police and paramedics—can simply not be done in such a way that it will affect the main plan in any way whatsoever. As a matter of fact, it will take 11 years before the plan can be fully utilized by anyone. There is only one new supplemental benefit that can be negotiated, if the parties want it to happen, at the local level every three years. So the figures that AMO is throwing out there are grossly exaggerated and cannot happen for at least a decade.

GREENBELT FOUNDATION

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): A question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, it's been eight months since you dedicated some \$25 million to the Greenbelt Foundation. Aside from big grants to Liberal-friendly advertising firms, can the minister inform the House how many grants have been delivered to greenbelt farmers, greenbelt municipalities, tourism groups or other worthy parties?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I'd like to refer this to the Minister of Tourism, who has carriage of the Greenbelt Foundation.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): As my friend the member for Erie–Lincoln would know, the Greenbelt Foundation, similar to the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation established by the previous Conservative government, has exactly the same mandate and was established exactly the same way. In other words, we did not invent anything new; we simply took your model and applied your model to the Greenbelt Foundation. It's exactly the same model. It was such a great model, we followed it and implemented it.

As to the dispensing of funds under that particular foundation, that is strictly arm's length. It has nothing to do with me. I don't direct them; nobody else directs them. They are a board established to do as they deem appropriate. I hope that you will encourage any and all

individuals who think that the funds can be used in a particular way to do so. I trust you will be doing that.

Mr. Hudak: I say back to the minister, the only thing your foundation is a model of is flowing taxpayer dollars to Liberal-friendly advertising firms—in fact, millions of dollars. To date, eight months on, not a single penny has flowed to greenbelt municipalities. Not a single penny has flowed to greenbelt tourism operators. You heard from the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers that not a single penny has gone to worthy agriculture products. To make things worse, Minister, you can't even get a grant application from the Greenbelt Foundation yet unless you're a Liberal-friendly advertising firm.

I know the minister cares. I know he supports the issue. I'll ask the minister to say this: Right after question period, you're going to call over to that Greenbelt Foundation, tell them to get out of their plush offices in Yorkville and get to work helping out our greenbelt farmers.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I won't do this. I'm very tempted when I hear about plush places, plush houses and plush offices to think of where some people reside and where some people represent, and I'm not going to deal with that at all. I can't do that. Honestly, I couldn't do that.

1500

But I want to say to the member that I encourage my friends from Halton, Erie–Lincoln and so on to make representations directly. Were I to give any instruction to the Greenbelt Foundation, I know I would have, justifiably, a question in the House the next day saying, "Why are you interfering with the Greenbelt Foundation?"

I hope they're watching this today, that they will hear what you have said and that appropriate action can be taken as they deem necessary to provide funding in a way that they think would be good for the greenbelt and good for the people of Ontario. I really look forward to that, but I will not fall into the trap of directing them when I don't have that responsibility.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Premier, forest industry companies have told your government repeatedly that your policy of driving hydro rates through the roof and your policy of forcing up delivered wood costs have killed thousands of forest sector jobs across northern Ontario. But your Minister of Natural Resources says that workers are to blame for forest industry layoffs.

In Terrace Bay, woodland employees represented by the Steelworkers have offered \$15 million in concessions to help the Neenah Paper mill continue to operate. The workers have offered pay cuts, pension cuts, benefit cuts and increased contracting out to save the company \$15 million.

Premier, why is the McGuinty government blaming forest sector workers for forest industry layoffs when it's clearly your government's hydro policy and forest policies that are killing jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): From what I've just heard from the leader of the third party, that's very good news. I've been saying to the communities and to the workers that everyone has to roll up their sleeves and get to work on this problem. This is a horrendous challenge for northern communities, northern Ontario, our economy and especially the forest sector.

Certainly we here, with \$680 million and continuing to work on this, have really rolled up our sleeves and contributed to this. The forest companies are looking at every way they can to increase their efficiency to make sure they can continue to produce sustainable jobs. In many cases, workers have also come to the fight and they've made contributions. To hear what the member has said here today is very encouraging, and I encourage all workers to say, "Let's all get together and work on this together and make sure we have a sustainable industry."

Mr. Hampton: The minister says this is good news. When this was offered, the company said that it's not enough. It's not enough to overcome the sky-high electricity rates of the McGuinty government. It's not enough to cover the increasing costs of delivered wood fibre caused by the McGuinty government. Here's the tally so far.

Forest sector jobs destroyed under the McGuinty government: Thunder Bay, 860; Terrace Bay, 130; Kenora, 420; Red Rock, 175; Rutherglen, 63; Hearst, 106; Timmins, 19; Dryden, 510; Opatatika, 78; Cornwall, 910; Ottawa, 200. When you add them all up, it's 3,700 direct jobs and thousands of indirect jobs.

The company actually agrees with the workers. They're saying, "Thank you for offering to take a 15% pay, benefit and pension cut. But you know what? The problem lies with the McGuinty government. You pay eight cents a kilowatt hour for electricity in Ontario if you're a paper mill. You pay 3.5 cents in Quebec, 3.5 cents in BC or three cents in Manitoba. That's the problem."

When is the McGuinty government going to do something about its problem—

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

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: Of course, the member knows that this is a Canadian problem, this is a worldwide problem, and forestry companies right across this country and around the world have been shutting down facilities. It's not just an Ontario situation.

I'd like to remind the member that Premier McGuinty said the other day that we're going to do more. He's asked me to work with the companies and see what else we can do to help the companies, so we're doing that. We're working every day with the companies and trying to work on that delivered wood cost, trying to reduce that cost, because that's going to help them to make the

decision going forward, to make the investments that are going to help with the energy piece. We got the electricity price cap announced last week. So we're doing a lot here—I know the member knows that—and there's more to come.

PETERBOROUGH REGIONAL HEALTH CENTRE

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have a question today for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. First of all, I want to thank the Premier and the minister for bringing a new hospital to my community of Peterborough. But my question today is because many of my constituents in the riding of Peterborough were watching television yesterday and heard the Leader of the Opposition making the most absurd comments I've ever heard about our Peterborough hospital.

Minister, Mr. Tory speculated that, under the powers of your ministry, you might close our hospital through the LHINs, withdraw services and even stop the construction project. I've heard in my time, in 20 years of public life, a lot of speculation, but these comments by Mr. Tory are sparking fear in my community.

We're all so pleased that, after the delays under the Tories, who couldn't deliver the hospital, this government is moving forward with our new hospital. Minister, can you tell us about the work our government is doing for the new hospital in the riding of Peterborough?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I want to thank my honourable friend for the question. I heard last night that Mr. Tory debuted in his new role on CHEX Television. It's a new show: It's called Reverse Fear Factor. In this one, the audience gets squeamish.

The circumstances are clear: Mr. Tory went on television last night to tell the people of Peterborough, who waited a long, long time for our government to finally move forward after they had talked for a long, long time to build them a much-needed hospital—that hospital is under construction. A website, prhc.on.ca, has a live camera that shows the construction ongoing. Our government has committed new funding to that hospital every year that we have been here, and we have already committed new funding for the next two fiscal years.

I send this message today: The people in Peterborough have waited for a long time for a government that was willing to work with them to improve the quality of their health care, not just in hospitals, but also with a networked family health team. They have no fear except the fear of a return of the Tories, because it's clear from Mr. Tory's \$2.4-billion proposed cut—

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

Mr. Leal: I'll be a little quieter this time. My supplementary is to the minister, but even the Tories in Peterborough think that this Tory is a regular Jackie Gleason.

Minister, I think it's clear that our government's record speaks for itself, and I want to thank you for

sending this strong and clear message to my constituents in Peterborough. I also want to thank you for working with me to deliver Peterborough's new network of family health teams, one of the three networks in the province. As you know, my family health teams have hired new nurse practitioners and are providing care to my constituents.

I would like to bring us back to Mr. Tory's comments of yesterday, because it sounds like the kind of fear Mr. Tory is raising is the spectre of having health care in Ontario managed the way the Tory government did for eight years. Can you provide some information on our government's plans for hospitals throughout our communities in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I don't know who Jackie Gleason is, honestly, but I think it's very clear—

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: What do you mean, I resemble him?

I think what is clear is that Mr. Tory has some explaining to do, because he is on record all across the breadth of the province—

Interjection.

The Speaker: I need to be able to see the Minister of Health. Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: We have to get a more complete explanation from Mr. Tory, because he has on record a commitment to cut health care spending in our province by \$2.4 billion and he has not yet indicated where that is. But we see a glimpse into the Tories of old when he talks about the closure of hospitals, because sitting in his midst are two health ministers that, through their time, wreaked a lot of havoc on hospitals in the province of Ontario.

Our commitments are clear: We believe that every hospital that is operating in Ontario today fulfills a valiant and crucial mission, and it shall continue. To the people of Peterborough, I offer the reassurance that I did in my first answer, as well: We're proud to be their partner in building a new hospital. We support it and we will support it operationally, and that's why we've already committed to new additional operational funding for the Peterborough hospital this year, next year and in the future, with more to follow.

1510

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. The events and circumstances surrounding Minister Takhar's breach of the Members' Integrity Act tell us as much about your judgment and standards of integrity as they do about the minister's.

Premier, you were present in the House yesterday when the minister spoke to the report of the Integrity Commissioner. Earlier, you mentioned that the facts are important. Can you tell us, has the minister or anyone else disclosed to you how many of the achievements for which the minister took credit yesterday in the course of

his speech were in fact initiated by him and how many were actual projects and legislation developed—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. We know better than this. Order. Government House leader.

The member for Oak Ridges.

Mr. Klees: I simply would like the Premier to respond as to how many of those projects and how much of that legislation for which the minister took credit he has disclosed to you were in fact developed by the previous government and he had nothing to do with.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): This is a unique form of question. Let me say this, and I say this with sincerity: Every generation of government has the privilege to build on a foundation established by a previous government. There were in fact some good things—I hope Hansard is not taking this down—done by the previous government and we continue to build on some of those, and I'll leave it at that.

Mr. Klees: I want to thank the Premier for his response, because de facto what the Premier has admitted is that the list of accomplishments that were articulated by the Minister of Transportation yesterday were in fact all policies of the previous government. The question remains: How in good conscience, Premier, can you contribute to the blatant embellishment of the minister's resumé?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Let me just reiterate some of the things the Minister of Transportation has done, and keep in mind that he has done all of this in the face of close to a \$6-billion deficit that we inherited. He launched more secure drivers' licences; he launched Ontario's first high-occupancy vehicle carpool lane; he launched new safety initiatives for school buses; he launched a new program for booster seats in cars; he launched the new Viva transit system in York region; he launched the new GTA fare card; he launched a rental truck safety inspection blitz; and he's putting in place a new northern Ontario highway strategy. This is the good work of our good Minister of Transportation.

ABORIGINAL HEALTH CARE

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): My question is to the Minister of Health. You would know that Anishinabek Nation Grand Chief John Beaucage sent you a letter today, and it said that they're contemplating a constitutional challenge to your government's Bill 36, the LHINs legislation. They feel that the consultation process of this bill ignored aboriginal treaty rights with respect to your duty to consult. You will know that the Supreme Court of Canada has consistently upheld First Nations' rights to be consulted and accommodated on issues involving aboriginal rights. This was upheld in the Sparrow decision of 1990 and subsequent decisions in 1997, 2004 and 2005.

My question to you is this: What are you going to do to negate the necessity of First Nations taking your government to court in order to assert their rights to be consulted and accommodated in regard to this bill?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'll speak to the issue on content. Obviously, people will avail themselves of legal advice and take actions accordingly. On the issue of accommodation, it's clear from the amendments that we made in the legislation that we've created a network capacity for a government-to-government relationship between First Nations and our government around the stewardship and strategy for health care. At the same time, we're going to work with First Nations and support them financially to create more planning capacity for them to work at the local level with the LHINs on integrated health services plans. We've also added an accommodation—I believe it was an amendment by one of the other parties—that would see specific reporting on the status of First Nations health.

On the issue of consultations there were direct meetings with me on February 10, May 10, and October 4, 2005, and January 10 and February 7, 2006. The next meeting is on March 16. We funded the First Nations task force on LHINs. We funded the Metis Nation of Ontario to develop a rapport on the impact on LHINs. We worked very closely, sought to be consultative in the most appropriate fashion, and are very excited at the opportunities that the bill presents for us to work on a government-to-government basis with First Nations.

Mr. Bisson: Chief Beaucage, Chief Toulouse and others were very clear with you in meetings. There are a number of issues. One of them is that they need to make sure there's a non-derogation clause so that at the end of the day their rights are not eroded under this bill.

The other issue is that the LHINs themselves give First Nations very little voice: one appointee to the LHIN 13 board, one appointee to the board that covers the northwestern part of the province, in order to deal with all health issues. They're going to be lost within a large structure and not have their voices heard when it comes to developing the system of health that is needed in those communities and making sure their needs are met.

I say to you again, they have written to you today, February 16. They've said they're taking you to court unless you change your direction. Are you prepared to do so: yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member said he assumed that I had read the letter. I assumed that he had as well. The last paragraph that deals with the issue of a potential court challenge does not say that they've made such a decision. It says that this is something they're contemplating, and it is of course within their grounds to do so. I can't offer further comments.

But on the content, it's clear that we have undertaken a tremendously consultative process. But way more important than that, on the very direct question that you asked me, "What is the opportunity for them to be engaged?"—you say that they'll be lost in it. To the

contrary: We have created what is unprecedented for any other group in Ontario, and that is the opportunity, through the development of a network at the ministry level, where the government of Ontario, represented by the minister and the Ministry of Health, will work alongside First Nations communities—not just on reserve, not just off reserve, Metis Nation included—to create the capacity for strategic planning to address what we all recognize are tremendously problematic challenges that have gone on for too long.

At the same time, we are going to compel local health integration networks to engage with First Nations communities on the development of integrated health services plans, and we're going to fund First Nations communities to be able to be involved in the development of those integrated health services plans through a contribution of—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): This completes the time allocated to oral questions. Petitions?

PETITIONS

BROCKVILLE GENERAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"The outpatients clinic of the Brockville General Hospital is important" for citizens, and they urge you to keep it open.

I share that sentiment and I have affixed my signature in support.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm pleased to join with my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, in this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet) there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

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

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

It's my privilege to sign this petition in support and to ask page Mark to carry it for me.

1520

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

ONTARIO SPCA

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario SPCA, Lennox and Addington branch, has been forced due to budget constraints to close its doors; and

“Whereas the services provided by the Ontario SPCA, Lennox and Addington branch, to our community include animal cruelty investigations; 24-hour emergency rescue of injured animals; acceptance of abandoned animals; acceptance of owned animals where people can no longer care for their pets; adoption of animals; family violence assistance program, allowing women entering a shelter to temporarily house their pets with the Ontario SPCA; humane education to local schools and community groups; and

“Whereas none of these services are provided by any other agency in the county and the municipal dog pound is small and not able to take cats or other small animals; and

“Whereas investigation services will fall to the Ontario Provincial Police and they do not have the resources or training to fulfill this role and they are already overworked; and

“Whereas the Northumberland and Quinte humane societies are already facing financial challenges and will not be able to accept the additional animals;

“Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario act now to help prevent the closure of this facility and others across Ontario by ensuring that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services immediately implement the recommendations made in the February 2005 report of Grant Thornton, which called for interim funding to facilitate the operation of the Ontario SPCA until a long-term strategy is developed for animal welfare in Ontario.”

I give this to Hannah to deliver to the desk.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition:

“Whereas the Honourable Michael Bryant, Attorney General of Ontario, is elected to safeguard our justice system on behalf of the people of Ontario;

“Whereas the ministry of our Attorney General may not be aware of the serious and important issues facing individuals involved in areas of the justice system even though the Attorney General's ministry is continually monitoring;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Honourable Michael Bryant, Attorney General, for his in-depth investigation of the Ontario judicial system and [to] make the public aware of his findings immediately.”

I affix my signature.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale): I join my colleague the honourable member from Peterborough in presenting this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

“We are suggesting that all diabetic supplies as prescribed by an endocrinologist or medical doctor be covered under the Ontario health insurance plan.

“Diabetes costs Canadian taxpayers \$13 billion a year and increasing! It is the leading cause of death and hospitalization in Canada. Many people with diabetes cannot afford the ongoing expense of managing the disease. They cut corners to save money. They rip test strips in half, cut down on the number of times they test their blood and even reuse lancets and needles. These cost-saving measures often have ... disastrous health consequences. Persons with diabetes need and deserve financial assistance to cope with the escalating cost of managing diabetes.

“We think it is in all Ontario's and the government's best interest to support diabetics with the supplies that each individual needs to obtain optimum glucose control. Good blood glucose control reduces or eliminates kidney failure by 50%, blindness by 76%, nerve damage by 60%, cardiac disease by 35% and even amputations. Just think of how many dollars can be saved by the Ministry of Health if diabetics had a chance to gain optimum glucose control.”

Mr. Speaker, I also put my signature on this petition.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents of Durham, which reads as follows:

"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'm pleased to present this petition to Amelia and sign it in their support.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition which has to do with a special home for the aged, and I'm pleased to present it. It's addressed to the Legislature of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Portuguese Canadians number 171,545 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 agree, I'm delighted to sign this petition.

GAMMA FOUNDRIES

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have numerous petitions here addressed to the Parliament of Ontario from residents of the town of Richmond Hill. They read 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 has 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 provincial officer's order issued on November 3, 2005, and to ensure that residents are afforded the right to enjoy their property and neighbourhood as is their right under law."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition, and I appeal to the Minister of the Environment to adhere as well.

1530

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): This petition that I'm presenting to you now has to do with cancer treatment in Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario has an inconsistent policy for access to new cancer treatments while these drugs are under review for funding; and

"Whereas cancer patients taking oral chemotherapy may apply for a section 8 exception under the Ontario drug benefit plan, with no such exception policy in place for intravenous cancer drugs administered in hospitals; and

"Whereas this is an inequitable, inconsistent and unfair policy, creating two classes of cancer patients with further inequities on the basis of personal wealth and the willingness of hospitals to risk budgetary deficits to provide new intravenous chemotherapy treatments; and

"Whereas cancer patients have the right to the most effective care recommended by their doctors;

"We," therefore as undersigned residents of Ontario, "petition the Parliament of Ontario to provide immediate access to Velcade and other intravenous chemotherapy while these new cancer drugs are under review and provide a consistent policy for access to new cancer

treatments that enables oncologists to apply for exceptions to meet the needs of patients.”

I present this petition to you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. John O’Toole (Durham): I’m pleased to present the second group of petitions on the same issue.

“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’m pleased to present this to Michael, the page, and as well, sign it in support of my constituents.

CURRICULUM

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition from students from my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka and it’s to do with grade 12 mathematics curriculum changes. It says:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Education plans to remove the study of derivatives from the grade 12 mathematics curriculum; and

“Whereas the grade 12 university preparation course Advanced Functions and Introductory Calculus is designed for students intending to study university programs that will involve calculus; and

“Whereas the course currently provides an introduction to the fundamental concepts of calculus, which are also required in grade 12 physics; and

“Whereas it contains three strands: advanced functions, in which students explore the properties and applications of polynomial, exponential and logarithmic functions; underlying concepts of calculus, in which students develop an understanding of the basic concepts of calculus by analyzing the rates of change involved in applications; and derivatives and applications, in which students develop, consolidate and apply to graphing and problem-solving the rules and properties of differentiation; and

“Whereas all of these strands are requirements for most university programs, and to remove any of them from the high school curriculum will leave the students of Ontario at a disadvantage when compared to the students from other provinces;

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

“To ensure that the Ministry of Education continues to retain all parts of the current grade 12 mathematics curriculum and stop making changes that put the future careers of Ontario students at risk.”

That comes from a number of students from the Muskoka area.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 15, 2006, on the motion that the Legislative Assembly adopt the report of the Integrity Commissioner dated January 4, 2006, and approve the recommendation contained therein.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): It’s time for debate. The Chair recognizes the member from Halton.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): From when we stopped last night, I see I have four minutes and 50 seconds or so left. I’d like the House to know that in Olympic hockey Canada is leading Germany 4-1 in, I believe, the second period. I’m sure everyone will be delighted with that news.

When I left off, I had made the point that we were talking about when a cabinet minister should step aside and I had outlined a way, which I’ll recap very briefly. Mr. Runciman found himself in a situation where his parliamentary assistant had read off some names of young offenders, which was inappropriate. At his first opportunity—that happened in the evening and Mr. Runciman was not in the House—the next afternoon, when the House convened, Mr. Runciman immediately stepped aside, pending an investigation. That investigation took some time, found him to be not in error, and he resumed his duties.

The same thing took place when Mr. Wilson, then Minister of Health, had an executive assistant who made an inappropriate comment. Immediately, at his first opportunity in the House the next day, he stepped aside. An investigation ensued and he was found to be without error. I think that is an appropriate way for the ministers to handle a situation when they are being investigated, and that is how it happened in places other than this House in Ontario.

Just today, Ernie Fage, the Minister of Economic Development in Nova Scotia, stepped aside. He wasn’t accused by anyone. He wasn’t being harassed. He simply found, on reviewing some loans that had been made, that

one loan had been made to a company that his family had an interest in. When he reviewed that information, he said, "That's not right. That's not correct. That's not the way it should happen." He has immediately, today, stepped aside. He stepped aside of his own volition. I think that shows a tremendous amount of integrity, and we contrast that with what's happening in the House around us today.

I would ask whether or not the Premier—and I went through this last night—fully understands what the facts are here, and I think that he does. In his quotes from February 14 in Hansard, he talks about what the Integrity Commissioner was examining, what he was looking at, how he was doing that investigation and what he found. Indeed, the Integrity Commissioner did find that the Minister of Transportation had been in contravention of the act.

In my mind, the Minister of Transportation should have stepped aside during the period that that investigation was taking place, the way Mr. Wilson did, the way Mr. Runciman did, the way that Ernie Fage has stepped aside and the way that other ministers have stepped aside when they have had a situation which makes the integrity of this House and the members of this House suspect when it comes to the opinions of the people of Ontario.

After all, there was a period of time, not too long ago, when Premier McGuinty—he was not Premier then, he was leader of the official opposition—during a Liberal convention, I believe, called the then-Minister of Health, Mr. Tony Clement, corrupt. Mr. Clement took issue with that fact. It was a libellous charge. He brought a libel charge against the Premier, and the Premier, on advice from his lawyers, had to apologize for calling Mr. Clement corrupt. I wonder if that's the kind of integrity that this Premier is bringing before this place.

So when we look at all of the facts that are before us here, and we wonder where integrity comes from, where the people of Ontario expect integrity to come from in this place, it comes from each and every one of us. It's up to each of us to ensure that we conduct ourselves at the highest levels, in the way in which the people of Ontario expect us to do.

1540

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I hope other members agree that it's never pleasant for any of us to have to address this sort of matter. We are probably incredibly fortunate in that it is the exception rather than the rule that debates like this are before this assembly. I take no pleasure in having to participate in this response to the Integrity Commissioner's report, which means, as well, his findings.

I do want to raise an interesting matter at the very onset, in terms of what the responsibility of this assembly is. Clearly, in my view, section 34 of the Members' Integrity Act is what we're guided by: "The assembly shall consider and respond to the report within 30

days...." That's what this motion—I agree—gives effect to.

But in terms of the power of the assembly, there is some significant restriction. Subsection (3): "If the commissioner recommends that a penalty be imposed, the assembly may approve the recommendation and order that the penalty be imposed, or may reject the recommendation, in which case no penalty shall be imposed."

Further, in subsection (4): "The assembly does not have power to ... impose a penalty if the commissioner recommended that none be imposed, or to impose a penalty other than the one recommended." It's that final, last restriction that's of interest, because the commissioner is restricted in terms of what he or she can recommend in his or her report:

"(a) that no penalty be imposed;

"(b) that the member be reprimanded"—and that's the case here;

"(c) that the member's right to sit and vote in the assembly be suspended," etc.;

"(d) that the member's seat be declared vacant."

Clearly, there's a hierarchy of recommendations here, starting with no penalty, all the way up to vacating the seat.

But what's interesting is that—and I'm not speaking to the Minister of Transportation and that situation at all—in an instance where the commissioner recommended that the seat be declared vacant, the assembly's hands are tied in terms of either accepting that or rejecting that. It can't say, "No, we think that"—because that's the most serious penalty, if you will, that's imposed, right? The assembly doesn't have the power to say, "With all due respect, Integrity Commissioner, we accept your finding, of course, that a breach, a contravention, occurred, but we would recommend that, rather than the seat being vacated, the member merely be suspended or that the member merely be reprimanded." In other words, it's one thing to say that the assembly doesn't have the power to impose a higher penalty on that ladder of responses, but it's another thing, in my view, to say that the assembly can't impose a lesser penalty, other than for the fact that this may be, in the views of the authors of this legislation, an implicit understanding of the fact that the government is always going to protect its own and perhaps not protect opposition members. Is this the reason why the legislation doesn't permit the assembly, for instance, to consider another consequence/penalty, albeit a lesser one, because then the government would abuse its power to circumvent the Integrity Commissioner and simply arbitrarily impose the lesser penalty, or indeed recommend a mere reprimand, when the commissioner has recommended suspension or, in an even more serious contravention, the vacating of the seat? Which brings us, then, to the responsibility of this assembly.

This is an incredibly grave consideration by this assembly, just as it is by the Integrity Commissioner because, as is indicated, the Integrity Commissioner has the power to recommend that a seat be vacated, that the will of the electorate of a particular riding be overridden.

The assembly has the power, of course, to either reject that or to accept it, a very serious consequence. It is my view that it should be undertaken in a non-partisan way, but we haven't seen any of that, with regret, from government speakers to this matter.

The other observation is this: We've been incredibly fortunate—this is just my view; I don't know if others share it, but I hope you do—in terms of the people who have fulfilled the role of Integrity Commissioner here in the province of Ontario. All of us remember with great regard and fondness Judge Evans, who was an incredibly valuable participant in the development of this whole process. Judge Rutherford: I remember him with great fondness; again, an experienced judicial authority, just like Judge Evans, years and years of experience under their belts. And now, the skill and talent and incredibly hard work of Judge Osborne.

Why I name these people, and obviously Judge Osborne, the author of this report, is because they are drawn into these debates, in my view, in a most unfortunate way. I've listened to and reviewed so many of the comments by government members. There has been, I say to you, some very purposeful distortion of the comments made by Judge Osborne in his report, which he, of course, can't respond to. He, of course, can't clarify. He, of course, can't correct.

There has been the selectivity. There has been the very selective reference to very limited portions of his well-crafted, I'm sure, and well-thought-out comments. For instance, Judge Osborne in his final statement says, "... I think it would be unfair to sanction the minister beyond issuing a reprimand under section 34(1)(b)."

I don't think it's very fair in any way, shape or form to suggest that by that Judge Osborne was in any way commenting on the Minister of Transportation's political future or the responsibilities of the Premier vis-à-vis the minister or the responsibilities of the minister. Clearly, Judge Osborne is just talking about those sanctions contained in section 34, ranging from no penalty through to vacating a seat. He wasn't talking about the sanction of being dismissed by the Premier. That's the Premier's responsibility. Judge Osborne knows that full well. For participants in this discussion to have used that language by Judge Osborne as somehow some sort of direction to the Premier that the Premier shouldn't act any further on this matter is inaccurate and, as I say, puts the Integrity Commissioner in a difficult position, because I believe his words are being misused, and he doesn't have the opportunity to correct the record.

Mind you, I find it equally interesting that in juxtaposition to that very statement by Judge Osborne, in the very sentence prior to it, he writes, "I also recognize that in circumstances like this, there is a political price that sometimes has to be paid." He then says, "Since this is a matter of first impression, I think it would be unfair to sanction the minister beyond issuing a reprimand...."

1550

Exactly what is Judge Osborne saying? Judge Osborne, I put to you, and I do this after a careful reading

of his comments, is very cognizant of the fact that ministerial misconduct—and he's referring to the misconduct of the very minister who is the subject matter of this report—may well carry with it a political price. In this context, I suppose it could range from, on one hand, mere disfavour with his or her electors through to—you've got to be from Mars not to understand that the price to be paid for ministerial misconduct is termination of your position as minister. I'm not suggesting that Judge Osborne was recommending that; I'm suggesting very clearly that he wasn't telling the Premier not to, and that, furthermore, he was clearly tempering his penalty with the consideration that Mr. Takhar, the Minister of Transportation, may well find himself in serious trouble vis-à-vis his Premier and in terms of his ongoing role as minister.

This isn't about Mr. Takhar anymore, is it? Let's be clear. Mr. Takhar is as pleasant a person as you're likely to meet. I have no quarrel with that observation and no qualms in expressing it. But look, I read the statement made by Mr. Takhar in the assembly yesterday and how it was reinforced by subsequent members of the government in their comments: "He didn't steal any money. He didn't enrich himself." Let's face it: He got caught. He didn't turn himself in; he didn't surrender. He got caught.

The defence offered up yesterday, or at least the mitigation, caused me to pull newspaper clippings from back in 1998, because it struck me as the Clinton defence that was being offered. Do you remember that? I wanted to make sure I had the exact quote. It was the Clinton defence in 1998. Bill Clinton: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman: Ms. Lewinsky."

"I did not enrich myself as a result of my breach of the integrity act. I did not profit as a result of my breach of the integrity act." Just like Bill Clinton misunderstood what most people regard as sexual relations—and there are children here, so I'll not get into details—Mr. Takhar, with all due respect, doesn't seem to understand the purpose of the rules.

When you're dealing with integrity, perception is as important as reality. You know the case—what is it? What is that case, Speaker? Is it the judges' case? Justice must not only be done; it must also be seen to be done. Have I got that pretty close? I'm doing it from memory. To maintain integrity, there not only has to be, in this instance, the reality of arm's length; there has to be the perception of arm's length.

Just what did the Integrity Commissioner have to say about the minister's attendance at Chalmers? He said, "There is, however, no doubt that the minister was egregiously reckless in participating in the April 29 meeting at Chalmers. He virtually invited a complaint by his conduct."

To be perfectly fair to the findings of Judge Osborne—and unlike others, I'm not going to try to be selective—he goes on to say that with the evidence before him, with the facts that he had available to him, if he were to conclude, on those facts alone, that the

minister engaged in the management of a business, he would be “trespassing on the ground of speculation.” That’s fair enough. Mr. Takhar isn’t being cleared by that statement. Judge Osborne is indicating that Takhar virtually invited a complaint by his conduct, by his participation in the April 29 meeting, his “egregiously reckless” participation. Furthermore, while the facts weren’t sufficient to find as a fact or to conclude that the minister engaged in the management of a business, Judge Osborne says, on page 28, “I can find no more than an error in judgment, that is negligence, on the minister’s part.”

The Members’ Integrity Act doesn’t cover errors in judgment, it doesn’t cover negligence, but parliamentary standards sure as heck do. This is the problem. There is more than a little bit of pettifoggery in the positions taken by government members in their effort to analyze and interpret the Members’ Integrity Act. Do you think so? I think so. In their zeal to acquit their colleague Mr. Takhar, they do a disservice to the act and to its intent. Again, whether the Premier dismisses Mr. Takhar or not is the Premier’s decision. I know all about that. The Premier has the power to put people in and out of cabinet, and voters have the power to put you in and out of Parliament. But it seems to me, like Mr. Runciman, who has been here at least twice as long as I have, that in the 18 years that I’ve been here there has been a decline in the standard that ministers are expected to adhere to. It’s everybody’s fault. It’s our fault. With the rejuvenation of the press gallery, we’ve gone through a generation of journalists, at least, in the course of that 18 years. There is a loss of some institutional memory, and that’s truly regrettable.

Quite frankly, in a practical way, at the end of the day, from a political point of view, Mr. Takhar and the Premier would have been well served by Mr. Takhar’s prompt resignation and his restoration to cabinet three months later. The sad thing about this is that there is a stain now—I’ll go further and say there are probably many, but let’s deal with this one—on this minister and this Premier’s judgment or standards when it comes to ministerial conduct with respect to judgment. Isn’t the Premier responsible for ensuring that ministers exercise good judgment? Here we’ve got Mr. Justice Osborne clearly finding an error in judgment, to the point of negligence on the part of the minister. Again, I don’t relish pointing that out, but that’s what Judge Osborne—an entirely independent, very skilled determinator of fact—found. He goes further to find that there was a breach of the act.

The defence of ignorance of law: He’s a minister of the crown. He’s paid a whole lot of money and has a big staff, a whole lot of people paid a whole lot of money to advise him and counsel him. It’s his job, it’s all of our jobs to know what’s in the Members’ Integrity Act, especially if you’re a minister. If we don’t know what’s in the act, if we don’t take the time to read and understand what’s in the act, then it’s all for naught. Then it’s all a charade, isn’t it? It has nothing to do with integrity,

either de facto or the appearance of it. It has everything to do with just playing a game of “Oh, well, we’ve got the Members’ Integrity Act, but, oh, to Hades with it” when it becomes bothersome, and I don’t think that’s good enough. It’s not good enough for us and it’s not good enough for the people of Ontario.

1600

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women’s issues): I’m very happy to speak today, and I want to speak specifically about Minister Takhar. I had the privilege more than two or three years ago of being one of the members of the McGuinty team who was out across the province searching for candidates when we were getting ready for the last election. I had an opportunity to see Harinder Takhar in his home riding, with his constituents, friends of his, colleagues, people he served with in voluntary occupations. I had a very good window, which I think many people in this House have not had, of Minister Takhar, because what we see here and what the public has largely seen is the Minister of Transportation. He’s out building roads and doing things for safe children in cars and all of those good things around his portfolio.

But the man I met years ago is an individual who, like people many of us know in our own constituencies, came to this country as a young man with virtually nothing, educated himself in the evenings, while he went to work during the day, and because of his own initiative and his own hard work, he made himself into an extremely successful businessman.

The man I met is one who had already started giving back to his community by joining local voluntary organizations. He was on the school board trusteeship. He was the eagle eye on the finances of the school board in his area. That’s when I met him. He’s involved with his own heritage organization of which he is very proud. Everyone knows Harinder Takhar in his own constituency and they think a great deal of this man.

Here was an individual with the kind of values that I believe are Liberal, an absolutely perfect individual who could be a candidate for us in the last election, and sure enough he was. He had an overwhelmingly successful election. I have to say that most MPPs new to the business don’t get elected and put into cabinet right off the bat; in fact, very few do.

I did not mention the idea that he would have to put his multi-million dollar business in a trusteeship, that he would virtually walk away from his second home, which is the empire that he has literally built over the years, that he would turn everything he has over to somebody else in a total blind trust, that he and his family, in particular his spouse, would have to fill out—this isn’t his; I brought a copy of mine—the submission that we need to make, each of us, to the Integrity Commissioner to divulge every single thing that you own or do—and your shoe size also, which is about how my husband saw this.

When my husband took one look at what he was now required to submit to some fellow he doesn’t know, although he has a great respect for Justice Osborne, a

retired judge who is the Integrity Commissioner, he couldn't believe—no one in my family, none of my neighbours would believe what we need to submit as MPPs to the Integrity Commissioner. He just said, "You've got to be kidding me. This is outrageous. Why should they know my bank account number, my RRSPs, my stocks, what my stocks are, how my stocks are doing"—it was just unbelievable. I said, "You know, you've got to do this." He was actually going to be quite difficult about it and wanted to refuse, and thankfully he didn't, so that I could actually join the Premier in cabinet. But I have to say that it is very extensive and intensive.

I didn't mention that to Minister Takhar when I was trying to seek that he would run for us in the last election. Nevertheless, he went through that process. Yes, we've all read the integrity act. It's one of the first things all of us do, but I have to say that when it comes time with your own family members and one of them is going off to university and you've got to have a good, solid financial conversation with your wife about how you're organizing the financing for this daughter to go to school, you go to her at work, over lunch, and you have this conversation. I think anyone on my street would look at that and say, "Yes, that sounds normal." But not in this world, because in the world we live in, perception beats reality. That's just the reality we face in this business, that what it looks like is different from what it actually is. After 11 years here myself, I've learned that innumerable times the hard way: that depending on how very normal, everyday things are seen makes all the difference in the world to people.

I can say that I did not expect that this leader of the opposition would have his operators out with cameras and lenses to take a photo of Minister Takhar having lunch at his wife's place of business, which, up until 2003, was his second home that he built from scratch. I have to admit that that was a little surprising to me and I was a bit taken aback, because I think it's inappropriate to be chasing people around with cameras. It begs the question, are you taking pictures of me? What kind of pictures have you got of me? I mean, it's got a very creepy feeling to it. That is very disgusting about this whole story, because that in fact is what they then presented with a bit of glee: "Look, he's at his wife's place of work."

Harinder's reaction was what everyone on my street, I think, would say: "Yes, so?" But the perception—because that used to be his place of work, he's not supposed to do that. I have to tell you that when it was pointed out to him that you can't do that, he was quite surprised, in fact, that you do have to worry about what you do and where you go and who you're seen with because of some of the allegations that have come out of this, that somehow he might have personally benefited in his position as the minister.

He's the Minister of Transportation, people. Did he get himself a new road, like an extra road? Please put this in perspective. Yes, he should not have been at his wife's place of work, which just happens to be his second home

which he built out of nothing. Yes, that's true. I think he's learned that lesson, but I have to tell you that he is new to the business of politics.

He was just elected as an MPP in these last two years. I think he's learned a great deal. I think he too has brought a great deal to the job of minister. He comes from a business community where he's in charge, and he's used to an environment that says, "No, no, this is the business way that we are going to apply to this situation to solve this problem." He doesn't get the luxury of that anymore, because he's got to deal with the bureaucracy of government, with permissions that extend to treasury board, central agencies, and the Premier's office, when in the end, what he's used to doing every day for a living is solving problems. That's what he's been doing for his career, and he's done it very well.

I, for one, having known him in a very personal way with his constituents, with his family, am proud to suggest that this is the kind of integrity that I like to put forward and say, "That's a Liberal. That's the kind of man who runs for our party and does a good job for us, who cares about the people where he comes from." I acknowledge that we all have an awful lot to learn about perception over reality in this job. I'll say that we're all going to make more mistakes, me included, and I think all of us will at some point fall into that without realizing what something might look like. But I stand behind Harinder Takhar, and I would stand behind him again tomorrow.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this debate. I guess the intervention by the Minister of Community and Social Services—as one who sat in the government benches for a little over eight years and listened to the attacks from the Liberal opposition, I have to say that that so-called contribution was disturbing, to say the least. We can go back over the Hansard record of the unrelenting viciousness of the Liberal opposition with respect to ministers of the former government.

I want to say to anyone who's tuning in this evening—they may wonder what this is all about. What it's about is an unprecedented report by the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario with respect to a member of the McGuinty cabinet, wherein the Integrity Commissioner calls for a reprimand of the minister and references his conduct as "egregiously reckless." It's unprecedented to have those kinds of words describe a minister of the government and for the Integrity Commissioner to call on the government, call on this assembly, to exercise a reprimand.

1610

The Integrity Commissioner also explains that he cannot, in terms of the powers in his act, explain what that reprimand should be. We believe, in terms of defining what that reprimand should be, that that bar was set back in 1997. Who set it? A gentleman by the name of Dalton McGuinty. He set the bar, back in 1997. I'm going to make some reference to that as we go forward.

We heard the Minister of Community and Social Services talk about this poor new member who came into

this building very naively to make a contribution. Okay. Well, we all hopefully come in here to make a contribution. This is a man with extensive business holdings. If anyone should have been paying attention to the requirements of the Integrity Act, it's someone with significant business holdings in the province of Ontario, because there's quite a process you have to go through to put them into a blind trust and know the requirements with respect to contact or business conduct or business participation. If anyone should have known, Mr. Takhar is a prime example.

The Minister of Community and Social Services referenced the official opposition, the Progressive Conservative Party, retaining a photographer to go out to Chalmers corporation to see what was going on. Did we just pull a day out of the hat to go out there and, lo and behold, there's Mr. Takhar? The reality is, we were advised—whether it was a disgruntled employee, whomever; that's irrelevant—that Mr. Takhar was at that place of business on a regular timetable, conducting business. He was there on a regular timetable, not just one day. Our photographer happened to be there on one day. Lo and behold, as the government members would suggest, this happened to be a fluke, a miracle. It was anything but, and the Integrity Commissioner suggests that in his report. He can't decide whether or not Mr. Takhar engaged in the management of business. He doesn't have the evidence before him to confirm that; he only had the photograph from one day, which Mr. Takhar could not deny, but how many other days was he out there? Our photographer was there based on reports that he was appearing at that business and participating in the management of that business on a regular basis. That's the reality, and we don't hear these folks talking about it. That's the kind of conduct which they are endorsing.

You go back to their time in opposition. They certainly wouldn't endorse this kind of precedent-setting activity on the part of a cabinet minister; no siree, Bob. It was much less in terms of the bar: They wanted people's heads on a plate. They wanted us fired. I happened to be one of those, so perhaps I have a bit of a grudge, because in the throne speech there was a suggestion that a young offender may have been identified by the mother standing up and applauding the government for its activities in dealing with young offenders. The opposition said that that was something the minister should resign over. There was some question about a breach of the Young Offenders Act. I stepped aside because there was some question. I stepped aside until an investigation was conducted. The RCMP conducted that investigation and determined that I had not violated the act, and the Premier of the day restored me to office. That's the sort of thing that they wanted resignations for.

If we go back to the Integrity Commissioner's report, in 1997, Minister Al Leach was reported to the Integrity Commissioner for a breach where he wrote a letter to the restructuring commissioner on hospitals asking for some relief, I gather, for the recommended closure of a hospital in his riding. He wrote as a private member, not in his

capacity as a minister. The Integrity Commissioner indicated that that was wrong, but there was no reprimand recommended. He suggested that a series of things be done, which the Premier of the day complied with. He complied with all of those recommendations.

But of course that was not enough for the Leader of the Opposition, one Dalton McGuinty. Quoting from Hansard on June 25, 1997, Mr. McGuinty said: "The Integrity Commissioner found that the minister, Al Leach, is in breach of the legislation that governs our behaviour.... It seems to me that in those circumstances what the Premier should have done today is he should have stood in his place and said that he has asked for the resignation of the minister, and to that he should have added that he accepted that resignation." That was on June 25.

Later on in a supplementary: Minister "Leach is in breach of the legislation.... He has broken the law and ... he should resign." Then he said, because two somewhat similar letters were written by other members of the executive council—Dianne Cunningham and Robert Runciman—that those ministers should resign; they should do the honourable thing. They should quit too, or he should demand their resignations. That was the Dalton McGuinty standard when he was right in this chair, right here. That was the standard. What is it, 20 feet here, 25 feet?

Mr. Chudleigh: Two sword lengths.

Mr. Runciman: Two sword lengths. Now what is he saying? We have an unprecedented report on our desk where a minister of the crown engaged in egregiously reckless behaviour and now, all of a sudden, that's okay to Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government. That's shameful, shameful, shameful. They should be embarrassed.

I see Gerry Phillips, the Minister of Government Services, sitting over there. I have a quote from Mr. Phillips in that debate. Mr. Phillips should be standing on his feet and saying, "What's different between 1997 and 2006?"—other than the fact that his minister was engaged in a much more serious activity and has a much more serious reprimand from the Integrity Commissioner. Mr. Phillips—and I have a quote here from him—was again referencing the Leach affair, and Jim Wilson as well. But this is Leach. Gerry Phillips, on June 26, said, "You broke the integrity act; you broke the law. My question is very simple: Knowing all of that, why did you not tender your resignation?"

I think it would be nice to hear from Mr. Phillips today during this debate why his position has changed, why his party's position has changed, why the Liberal Party, now that they're in government, have a much different standard in terms of the conduct of ministers of the crown than they had in 1997, when they were sitting in opposition.

Mr. Chudleigh: Double standard.

Mr. Runciman: It's clearly a double standard, and we could use language much stronger than that. But, Mr. Speaker, you would find it out of order. It would be

unparliamentary for me to use the kind of language I would like to use and that most people viewing or listening today would understand very clearly. But hopefully they're getting the message. You say one thing here when you're in opposition and do completely the opposite when you're in government. We can be upset about whether you said one thing about, "I won't increase your taxes," and you go across the floor and you increase taxes. That's upsetting enough. But what we're talking about here is integrity; we're talking about honour; we're talking about trust—very, very serious questions, especially when we're dealing with the Premier of the province, the current occupant of that seat. He's the one who said these things not too many years ago. Did he believe them then or was he trying to fool the people of Ontario? Why would he say, for a much less serious offence, that the minister should be gone; he shouldn't be serving in the executive council? And four or five years later, when he has one of his own ministers, one of his own Liberal cabinet ministers, found guilty by the Integrity Commissioner of the province, a very respected judge, that that minister engaged in egregiously reckless conduct, it suggests, I think strongly implies, there is much more involved in this than he could report on simply because the evidence wasn't before him.

But now, under changed circumstances, 20 feet across the aisle, the Premier says it's okay. What are his standards? We can talk about Mr. Takhar. I have no doubt that Mr. Takhar is a nice guy. Well, I know that Dianne Cunningham is a very nice person. I know that Jim Wilson is a good fellow. But that never—never for a moment—was a consideration when they were viciously attacking those individuals day after day after day. Now they get on their holier-than-thou pedestal and say, "This wonderful man: He decided to come in here and make a contribution."

1620

The reality is, all of us are here trying to make a contribution. We're good people, hopefully, every member of this assembly. But to use that as a justification, a defence for not doing the right thing, not firing that individual when he was found responsible—guilty—of egregiously reckless behaviour as a minister of the crown, again I say is shameful, and every member of that Liberal bench across the way should be hanging their heads in shame, especially those who served in the loyal opposition. They participated in this. They knew the position of their party five or six years ago, yet here they are sitting in the government benches, silently. When we do hear from one of the former members, we get this baloney, the stuff about what a good person the member is, so we should overlook egregiously reckless behaviour because he's a good person. Egregiously reckless behaviour doesn't mean a damn thing.

You know, the reality is, though, that a young offender might have been identified. Off with his head. Jim Wilson's assistant may have said something they shouldn't have said. Off with Jim Wilson's head. Dianne Cunningham might have written a letter supporting the hospital in

her riding. Off with her head. Did anyone suggest that, because they might be nice people, they shouldn't lose their heads? Absolutely not; a completely different position to the Liberal members of the day.

Why don't you stand up and defend it, given what your member said five, six years ago? Why have standards changed? Why has the bar been lowered? Let's hear a good explanation instead of getting up, getting the crying towels out and talking about good people. That just doesn't wash with people like myself who have been around here and listened to those attacks day after day after day on good people, very good people. They didn't care about their reputations. They didn't care about their futures. They attacked and attacked and attacked.

You wonder why I'm upset? You wonder why we are upset? You set the bar. Respect the bar that you set. That's all we're asking. You don't have one standard over here in opposition and then another standard when you cross the floor, 20 feet, and become the government of Ontario. That's not right and you should own up to it. The Premier should have done the right thing. If he can't, if he is unwilling or unable to do the right thing, Minister Takhar should do the right thing.

We're going to continue this debate. It is unprecedented in the history of this Legislature and we believe it's extremely important. We're talking about standards; we're talking about integrity; we're talking about honesty. What kinds of standards does Premier McGuinty have for members of his executive council, for his government, if egregiously reckless behaviour is okay? All of a sudden it's okay. But we don't accept that. We're going to keep this debate going. We're going to keep it going as long as we possibly can within the rules of the House.

I am the House leader of the official opposition. I know the House leader of the third party. We've worked very well with the House leader of the government. We want to see things move. We don't want to be obstructionists. If there are certain things that we disagree with, then we'll make sure we, in the most effective way, put that on the record. But in terms of moving ahead, from our perspective, we are so upset with this and Ontarians should be so upset with this.

Obviously there are other things going on. This is not getting much attention. So be it. That's the way it is. Sometimes people listen, sometimes people heed and sometimes they don't, but this is a matter of principle for us in the official opposition. We feel extremely concerned about this issue where the Integrity Commissioner had taken such a strong, strong position, and then to find it virtually ignored by Premier McGuinty.

I wonder what the Integrity Commissioner was thinking when he drafted this report. He must have been wondering. Maybe he went back and looked at Hansard and saw what Mr. McGuinty said in Hansard. He said, "Well, there's the bar Mr. McGuinty set in 1997." Al Leach was the bar, as far as McGuinty was concerned, that justified firing, that justified removal. So the Integrity Commissioner, in drafting this report, said, "So

that means I can feel comfortable in the fact that when I say 'reprimand,' that means this man is gone for egregiously reckless behaviour," because this is much more serious, and I don't think anyone for a moment doubts or questions that.

It's disturbing to hear, when the occasional government member participates in this debate, their justification and rationale. I think all of us should participate in throwing back these quotes, throwing back these positions, and hopefully getting the message out over the course of the next weeks that we debate this, having more and more people across the province understand the double standard, understand the positions Mr. McGuinty took as Leader of the Opposition and what positions he's taking now as the leader of this province.

I want to say that with respect to standards, our leader, John Tory, is I think very enthusiastic about accountability and about changing the standards in this place to improve the reputation, the tenor of this assembly itself in terms of debate in question period. He certainly encourages us, and we see it in the House every day, where government members—today was an excellent example, where questions from the opposition were drowned out on a regular basis by the members on the government benches. That's the sort of thing that's happening on a regular basis. But I think it's indicative of the change, if you will, in approach from the opposition benches to government with the Liberal Party of Ontario. They don't stand by anything they said in the past. There may be the occasional promise or two or commitment or two that they deem to be politically wise to keep, but when it comes to important matters like this, important matters of principle, they fail to keep them, and that is doing a grave disservice to this assembly and to the people of Ontario. I believe that very strongly.

I would encourage the Minister of Government Services—he's here this evening—later on to get up and talk about what he said in 1997 and why he has a different perspective, why he and his colleagues have a different perspective today now that they're sitting on the government benches, now that they're sitting in cabinet, now that they have the chauffeur-driven limousines, the expense accounts, the world travel. That wouldn't have anything to do with it, I'm sure. But we would certainly like to have some kind of valid and understandable explanation of why they had such a dramatic change of view with respect to what should determine the appropriateness of a minister staying in cabinet. This is a dramatic change, one that merits a fulsome explanation, and we haven't had it today.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): Normally, one would lead off their speech by saying, "I'm pleased to participate in this debate today," but I've got to say, quite frankly, that I'm not.

I think a couple of things are at issue here. The way I see it is that individual citizens out there, more and more as we talk to them on the campaign trail in federal, provincial, municipal or school board trustee elections, are participating at a lesser and lesser rate. We're seeing

governments elected in some cases with barely 50% voter turnout. The thing we hear all the time when we're talking to voters is that they're saying, "Oh, they're all the same. They say one thing before they get elected, and once they get elected, they go out and do completely the opposite." I say that in this particular debate, what's happening speaks exactly to the cynicism voters are feeling, not only here in Ontario but across this country.

1630

We've just come off the heels of a federal campaign. Those federal campaign results, like it or not, changed the government from being a Liberal government that had been in power for almost 13 years to being hoisted out and replaced by a Conservative government. What I think Ontarians and Canadians said generally in that election was that they were trying to punish the federal Liberal government for a very simple reason. Yes, the Gomery issue was one big issue; they had lost confidence in the government. But there was a sense among voters that at the end of the day this government could not be trusted because it had a standard that was not acceptable to most people.

Their feeling also was that the whole issue of ethics, which the Conservatives basically ran on, along with the New Democratic Party and others, was really the crux of it. Canadians in the last election were saying, "We want things to change. We want governments to do a couple of things. We want governments and politicians specifically to be held to a higher standard, so that when they say something in an election, they say and do what they mean."

More importantly, when things happen—because things will. Nobody can predict what's going to happen in the life of a Parliament, which member is going to say what, what minister is going to do what, what the circumstances may or may not be around particular situations we find ourselves in. But at the end of the day, people want to know that if something happens, people will be accountable.

I hearken back—I don't normally talk about politicians from outside the country, but I think it'll make the point—to John Kennedy when he was elected President back in the early 1960s. He had been approached by the CIA and others in regard to the Bay of Pigs invasion. Yes, that was something that had been contemplated by the Republican administration, something they had planned, but at the end of the day he gave the go-ahead for that fiasco, as it turned out, to go forward. The interesting point is this: Back then, as today, the normal reaction of a President or any politician would have been to say, "Not my fault. It was the other administration. Not my fault. It was Dwight D. Eisenhower and Tricky Dick Nixon as the Vice-President who decided this was the thing to do, and I didn't know all the facts," or whatever his defence would have been, "and I went ahead." When his advisers came to him and tried to advise him to deflect the attention from himself, as far as responsibility was concerned, on to the previous administration, Pres-

ident Kennedy said, "No, I'm the one who made the final decision and it's my fault." Case closed.

What happened to his popularity? His popularity actually went up. People responded and said, "Listen, agree or disagree with the decision he made, at least he took responsibility for the actions in regard to the decision he took."

I think that's all Canadians and Ontarians are asking. They recognize that MPPs and MPs, politicians, are citizens who run and are lucky enough to be elected. All people want to know at the end of the day is that when we fail—and we will; we have all failed. Anybody in this Legislature and who says, "I can stand here and say that I have never failed" or, "I haven't done something that I regret, said something to somebody or acted in a particular way," I think is lying. The reality is, we're all human beings. Citizens get elected to become politicians and they come to Legislatures like this, and all the other citizens want is to say, "When you fail, take responsibility." I think that's the crux of this issue. We have in this case a minister who erred in judgment. He has said that, the Premier has said that, and the Integrity Commissioner has said that very clearly in his report.

I think what is not unreasonable is for the public to expect that the minister and, more importantly, the Premier will take the responsibility and say that there's been an error and the minister will step aside. Like it or not, the parliamentary system says there is ministerial responsibility and if a minister does something wrong, he or she must take the responsibility and step aside.

There are many cases in the past where that has happened. A good example is the speaker before us, Mr. Runciman. He and I have been on the opposite side of a lot of issues, sometimes on the same side. He and I have been in this Legislature for many years. But when he erred as a minister under the Harris government, what did he do? He stood aside, and eventually the Premier called him back. The Premier felt he had paid his price and, at the end of the day, he was able to come back. Ontarians said, "All right. He was in the penalty box. He accepted his responsibility. He accepted that he erred and now he's back. That's fine. Slate wiped off." If it had been something really serious, that's a totally different issue. Then maybe there would have needed to be a resignation.

The point is, somebody has got to take the responsibility. Until Premier McGuinty figures that out, I think he's failing Ontarians. It's as simple as that. The Premier has got to understand that, as Truman said years ago, "The buck stops here." It stops on the desk of the Premier. To all of a sudden try to say whatever gobbledygook he's been trying to give us about, "Oh, the minister is really sorry for what he did; he made an error in judgment," and then the minister came into the House yesterday in a very emotive way and said he was sorry—well, I'm sorry, it's not good enough. You've got to understand what Ontario voters are feeling. If they don't come out in large numbers to vote, it's because of instances like this. People say, "There we go again." You can do this, and you can try to get away with it and spin it

whatever way you want, but, at the end of the day, citizens say they want you to take responsibility.

Do I have a high regard for Minister Takhar on some fronts? Yes. I think he's a decent human being—like all of us—who comes to this assembly, who tries to do the right thing. He worked hard all his life to study and to build up his business, as we all did in our careers or businesses. There is not a member in this assembly who would have got elected unless they cared, unless they worked hard, unless they studied, unless they really had their shoulder to the wheel and did what they had to do in order to advance and do better for their families and their communities. We're all the same. We're all honourable members. But that's the key: We are honourable members. And the honourable thing to do at this point would be for him to stand aside.

I say to Minister Takhar that you'd be doing yourself, this assembly and all elected members a good service by saying, "Not only have I erred; I will stand aside." After that, it's up to Mr. McGuinty, our Premier, to accept that. I would urge the Premier, once offered, to take it. If after a given period of time, after time has gone by and people feel that he's paid his time in the penalty box, it's up to the Premier to decide if he wants him back, as did the former government and the previous Premier with Mr. Runciman. Take him back. The debt has been paid. But people want to know that you're going to be accountable.

I'll give you an example of what happened to me, I think it was this morning. A constituent had called my office yesterday and complained that a letter had been given to me in the fall and there had not been a response. It turns out that we had responded to it but it didn't get there for some reason. I said, "Listen, I'm sorry. I apologize. Our fault. It didn't get to you. It's nobody else's fault but my own. I am endeavouring to respond to the issues you have. That's why I'm calling you now." The woman was upset as heck. I don't blame her. She wrote her MPP a letter back in October. It had been responded to, but for some reason the letter never got to her. I saw it on the system as being drafted, signed and sent, but that doesn't matter to her. All she knows is that she never got a response. I said to her, "I'm sorry. I really want to apologize." She said, "It doesn't sound like it was your fault." I said, "It is my fault." Because I'm the MPP and whatever happens in my office, if it's a failure of my staff or a failure of the system or whatever it might be, ultimately, I have to take responsibility. That's just a simple thing. Obviously, you're not going to resign because of a letter, but my point is that she appreciated it. She said, "I'm still a little bit upset over the issue but I accept that. Can we work together and respond on the issue?"

I think we've all done that at times, because all MPPs deal with thousands of issues every year. How many phone calls do we get in our offices, how many letters and e-mails? Obviously, something is going to fall through the cracks at one point, but what citizens want to know is that you're going to take responsibility when you fail. That's really what I want to bring to this debate and

just to say to the minister, listen, I have no doubt in my mind that you're a nice guy. I have no doubt that you worked hard to be here and that you did everything you could for your family. I heard your speech yesterday; it was quite moving. Quite frankly, I felt for you. It's an awful position to be in when you're in the middle of a controversy like that. It's a tough thing, because this business is a very public business. It's a glass house. Everybody is looking in and everybody sees. I can well imagine how awful the minister and his family feel being dragged through this whole thing. But the best way to deal with it is to say, "I accept responsibility and I resign," and then move on.

1640

Quite frankly, I don't understand why the government just doesn't do it. At the end of the day, it's the easy thing to do; it closes a page and moves on. It does two things. First of all, to the public it says that we are—I was going to say the word in French. Every now and then I revert back and I can't bring a word back from French to English. What it says to the public is that we have integrity, that we say what we say and we do what we said we would do. I remember the speeches. I could stand here for the next 20 minutes and read Dalton McGuinty's speeches, and the speeches of a whole bunch of members who are in the cabinet now. They're all on my desk. I can read them. They all said the same thing. It was egregious when it happened to the Tories, and they demanded, as the Scots would say, to "Impale their heads on stakes." They really wanted to have payback. I'm not going to go through all those quotes; I think you know what the quotes were. We know that the Liberals in opposition were pretty hard on the previous administration when their ministers failed in one way or another. So I say to the government across the way, you owe it to the public and you owe it, I think, to the Liberal Party to do the right thing.

The second thing is, from just a political point of view, it's a smart thing to do. What good are you doing yourselves? This thing is dragging out in the media, day after day. It's got to be hard for some of the backbenchers, especially those in the 905 who are close to this situation. You're being dragged through this thing as you go out and try to do your good work as MPPs. I know all of you personally. You all work hard. I wouldn't vote for you, because you're Liberals—that's a whole other story—but I know you're all honourable members and you work really hard. But at the end of the day, it's got to be tough for you to go back into your constituencies and take heck over something that's really silly. End this thing. At the end of the day, bam, put an end to it. Close the page. Move on. I think you owe it to yourselves as a caucus to basically say, "Enough bleeding. We've got enough trouble. We're trying to deal with LHINs—and people are mad on LHINs—and we're trying to deal with issues of changes to the family services act," and all kinds of things your government is doing, some of which people support but some of which they don't and they're bugging you about. And you're having to take heat on this?

Politically, I think it's stupid. I really don't understand what's in the Premier's head.

I detect there is a little bit of a change of attitude with this government in this session as far as confrontation. It really bothered me yesterday, but especially today, to watch the responses that the Premier gave to Sid Ryan, as he was here in the gallery, over the whole OMERS thing. I'm not going to go through that debate, because that's for another day, but my point is that it's almost as if the government was looking for a fight. I say to myself, "How can you win that with the public?" I'm sorry; at the end of the day, if you pick enough fights with the public, eventually you're going to lose one. I remember the Conservative government picked their fights, and I remember our government picked our fights. I'll tell you, at the end of the day, it doesn't work. I just wonder what's going on with this government. They get tagged as the Liberals or the Lie-berals—I can't say that other word, "lie," in the Legislature—but they basically were tagged as Lie-berals. Now, all of a sudden, you're getting tagged as arrogant, and I don't know what the up side is. So I'm appealing to the backbenchers of this government. You guys should go to a caucus meeting and say to your Premier, "Enough. Let's cut our losses. This is enough of this. Let's move on."

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke):

It's a pleasure to join this debate on this issue today. I think my friend from Timmins–James Bay and my colleague from Leeds–Grenville, and our leader John Tory yesterday, articulated very well what this is all about. This is not about a single person. This is not about a single party. This is about this very chamber and the acts that we conduct and how we conduct the acts within this chamber and how we act as people who are elected to this chamber. It's about the standards that we expect people to live by, because we set them. The standards that we set indicate how we see things, not only within this Legislature but outside the Legislature. I think we are expected to live by the standards that we profess to believe in. It really comes down to the standards of the Premier, Dalton McGuinty, and how those standards have changed. If we want people to take an interest and care and believe that what we do in this House and as legislators is relevant, then we have to respect those standards and abide by them and adhere to them.

One of the big debates going on today is why people seem to be tuned out of the electoral process, why people don't really have any interest in what party forms the government and who happens to be elected as members of the government. One of the reasons they feel that way is that they feel completely disengaged and uninvolved in the process.

When they're talking about electoral reform, they're talking about all kinds of different things we can do to bring people back into that process and into that exercise. The recent by-election in Scarborough–Rouge River had a voter turnout of 19%. You have to admit that the electorate was tuned out, has tuned out, felt that their involvement wasn't necessary.

We see things happening like are happening in the House now, where a minister of the crown has been found by the Integrity Commissioner, for the first time ever, to have engaged in egregiously reckless behaviour with regard to breaches of the Members' Integrity Act, and the Premier's response is to say, "Well, he's suffered enough. His name was in the newspaper; I guess he's suffered enough. He's been subject to criticism; he's suffered enough." But not a word from the Premier saying, "I have failed. I haven't got the guts to ask for this minister's resignation because I'm concerned about how it's going to look. After having had to accept the resignation of one minister not so long ago, I haven't got the guts to ask for this minister's resignation. Therefore, I admit that I have failed with regard to the standards I set and the standards I professed to believe in when I was the Leader of the Opposition in the last Parliament."

We all know what we're talking about there. In that Parliament, many members of the then Progressive Conservative government did resign when there was an accusation that they may have acted improperly. They stepped aside immediately. The Premier of the day's reaction was to accept those resignations or to call for those resignations immediately, to have them step aside until a proper investigation was done and the air was cleared so that person could either be accepted back into cabinet, should it be the Premier's choice, or sit in the backbench if that was deemed reasonable and fair.

But this Premier has said, "You know what? I was just politicking. I was just making statements. I was just trying to be political and partisan." You know, that's what the people of Ontario and the public in general are saying they've had enough of. Is what you say on one side of the House completely disconnected from what you say on the other side of the House? If that's the case, are we to believe anything you say in this chamber? How can we decipher what we can or can't believe or should or shouldn't believe?

1650

There were strong statements on the part of the Premier when those situations came up in the previous Parliament, when Ministers Leach, Cunningham and Runciman acted as what they felt to be constituency representatives and approached the Health Services Restructuring Commission, I believe it was called then, to plead on behalf of hospitals within their constituency, something that I, as a backbencher, would do without a second's consideration. That would be automatic. I would fight for my constituency. Unfortunately, it was ruled that under the act, as ministers of the crown, they were wrong in doing so. The Integrity Commissioner did not find them guilty of egregiously reckless behaviour. No, he did not. But then, the then leader of the official opposition, Dalton McGuinty, demanded in the most blunt, vicious way that those people resign and that the Premier call for their resignations.

The double standard is something that people cannot and should not accept from politicians. It adds to that, I believe, wrong impression out there that we don't care or

that we have no regard for the truth. That is not the impression we should be creating out there. We should be ashamed of ourselves when we behave in such a way that actually adds to that kind of thinking. Where are the ethics when you can say one thing on Friday and something else on Monday? We can't continue to act in that manner as parliamentarians and expect people to take us seriously and expect people to actually become involved and interested in this political process.

The Minister of Transportation has been found by the Integrity Commissioner to have acted with egregiously reckless behaviour in his breach of the Members' Integrity Act. The right thing to do, the proper thing to do, would be to step aside. The right thing to do on the part of Premier Dalton McGuinty would be to call for that resignation. He will not do it. Even under questioning he will not do it, even in spite of the evidence and the opinions of the media throughout this province calling for exactly that, saying there is no justifiable reason why he would remain in cabinet under these circumstances.

For the Premier to say that he has suffered enough is absolutely ridiculous. How has he suffered? Because he has to sit on the government side and accept the criticism of the opposition? That's how this place works. If you're on the government side, you accept the criticism of the opposition. That is part and parcel of the job we do here. We on the opposition side also have to sit and accept the barbs of the governing party if they think our suggestions or our positions are untenable or preposterous.

The Minister of Transportation said when he was first found to be visiting his place of business, Chalmers Group, "I've done nothing wrong." After the Integrity Commissioner found him guilty of egregiously reckless behaviour: "Now I apologize. I'm sorry. I'm very contrite. That's my suffering. Leave me in cabinet."

When he said he'd done nothing wrong, he also said that he's never been there. He doesn't have anything to do with the company; he's never been there. A little later the same day, "Well, I don't go there very often." But on his campaign website and on his biography, he talked about how the Chalmers Group was his company and that in 1995 it was recognized as a finalist as one of the 50 best-managed companies in the country.

"I've never been there. I don't go there very often. But if it's in my best interest when I'm campaigning, I want the world to know that I'm the owner, the chief executive officer of one of the biggest, best-managed companies in the country."

The Integrity Commissioner himself, in his ruling, said he found the position of the minister very, very questionable, because after it was proven that he did go there—because he was photographed there—and only after a reporter brought that to the attention of the public, did he actually admit that he'd been there. It raises the question, how was somebody that lucky to happen to show up at the Chalmers Group offices—where there's a parking spot, by the way, with the initials "HT"? Well, I don't know. Could it be? Is it possible? I've never been there; that's the truth. How could somebody be that lucky

that they could show up at that exact time, on that exact day that the minister happened to be visiting that office? It didn't happen as a coincidence. It happened because it had happened repeatedly before that.

For the minister to say, "I didn't understand. I'm new to politics. I didn't understand the Members' Integrity Act. I didn't understand that it was wrong for me to do that and now I know"—we expect more from a minister of the crown. A minister of the crown is not somebody who becomes a cabinet minister without having some excellent qualifications to do so, and one of those is judgment. You don't rise to the level, and the minister in question has risen to a very high level in the business community—well-respected. He's a very capable, qualified, intelligent human being. He must have judgment. He cannot simply brush it off and say that it was an error in judgment. That's not good enough; I'm sorry, but that is not good enough. We expect more. We expect more from our ministers.

One thing I did note here too was that even into this year, on the day the Integrity Commissioner released his report, the gentleman who was managing his affairs and was also the treasurer or something for his riding association had not been replaced. All through the time of the investigation, and all through the time that that cloud existed, he still must have felt he was doing nothing wrong. Is there anybody else in his riding that could have taken over that job with the riding association? Was there only one other person possibly capable of doing that job? I think not. I think there might have been somebody who could do it, but he didn't replace that person all during that entire investigation. Is that judgment or is that a personal belief that he continued to hold up to that point, maybe, that he hadn't done anything wrong? And until he was told point blank by the Integrity Commissioner, "You are guilty of egregiously reckless behaviour," he must have thought he was doing okay, that everything was just fine. You have to make some kind of connection. Good judgment would tell you that as a minister of the crown, you are not going to have the same person running your business affairs, which is supposed to be completely arm's-length, and also involved in your own riding association. Good judgment would absolutely prohibit you from drawing that kind of conclusion, that that would be all right. It's simply utterly and totally unacceptable.

But what is saddest and what I think people will remember the most—and the Premier said today that governments are judged, and they are judged, and people only get the opportunity to judge them once in a while. Come election day they do get that opportunity to judge them. But what I hope they remember, and I trust they will remember, is the absolute, deplorable disregard for honest standards that this Premier has, based on what he said, and he demanded the resignations of, as Bob Runciman said, good people. I am not judging the Minister of Transportation. That's not my job, nor am I qualified to do so. I am judging the actions of this Premier, who has stated over and over again that according to the standards

we should live up to, he should stay in cabinet. That Premier is wrong.

1700

The minister spoke yesterday in a very emotional way. He talked about how he came here for the right reasons. He ran for political office for the right reasons. I absolutely believe that 100%. I know this is not fresh; this is not new. We all say it. Everybody who has spoken has said that, because it is the truth: Everybody who would put their name on a ballot to stand for political office, public office, does so for the right reasons. This is not an easy choice to make. It's not an easy choice for anybody to make. When you make the choice that you are allowing your name to stand on the ballot for public scrutiny during an election, you've done it for the right reasons. We've all done it.

What we do once we get here is important. We have to ensure that everything we do in this chamber is for the right reasons and continues to be for the right reasons. We have to be able to get up in the morning and look at the man in the mirror. If you look at the man in the mirror and you say to yourself, "We haven't been perfect, but I think we've done all right. I think we've lived up to the standards that we've set for ourselves," if you can say that at the end of each day, or promise that to yourself at the beginning of each day, then you'll be doing something positive. You'll be doing it right. But those standards that you've set are your standards. No one can set standards for you but yourself. You set the standards that you abide by and commit to. This Premier has been shamefully and woefully untrue to himself, based on the standards he claimed to be his, that he believed in, that he could live with, the standards that he is willing to accept today.

All of the opinion writers in this province who have written on this particular subject cannot accept this. You know, in the world of politics this will blow over. It will. It always does. That is part of the unfortunate side of it. But history is going to look at this situation and they are going to evaluate it based on other circumstances and how people on this side of the House today, when they were on the other side of the House, were attacked mercilessly by the then opposition Liberals. That is recorded; it is part of Hansard. People will remember. They're going to ask themselves at some point, hopefully they're going to ask themselves on or about October 4, 2007, "Does this government have standards that deserve its re-election or not? Can it live up to the standards that it set when it was on the other side of the House?" I think the answer will be an emphatic no.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I was here yesterday. I was sitting in the chair and I heard all of the debate. I think, for those of you who ever get an opportunity to sit in that chair, it seems to focus your mind. Not only do you have to listen in case someone says something outrageous or in case there is an affront to this House or to one of the members in the House, but you have to listen very carefully to what is being said.

I just want to start by telling you how it began and what happened. The government House leader, Mr. Bradley, stood up and made a motion. The motion is not a complex one. What we are debating here today is not complex. People are straying from the issue, I think, but the issue is a very simple one: "That the Legislative Assembly adopt the report of the Integrity Commissioner dated January 4, 2006, and approve the recommendation contained therein." That's what we're debating.

I listened all day yesterday to the many speakers, and I listened today to see whether there would be any amendments to that motion. There have not been any amendments. There can be, but no one has yet stood up to make an amendment. Therefore, the only thing properly before this Legislature, before this House, is that motion. Our motion is constrained. It is that we can either approve or not approve the report of the Integrity Commissioner; we can adopt it or not adopt it.

The Integrity Commissioner, in his wisdom, having studied all of this, having gone to, I think, considerable length to interview the parties involved, to look at the circumstances and the letters, recommends a reprimand. This is the first time, to my knowledge—and I tried to do some research—since the coming into force of the Members' Integrity Act that a member or a minister has been recommended for a reprimand. So this is a very serious event. I looked at the powers and authorities that the Legislature gave to the Integrity Commissioner, and his authority is pretty much confined to what he did. He cannot order a person out of the cabinet. In fact, I think he would have a hard time, unless some criminal activity were involved, having someone removed from the House. In the circumstances of the case, this is the most severe penalty that he can recommend, and it is the most severe penalty that we can debate having carried out.

Yesterday, I listened to what I consider to have been some of the finest debates taking place in this House. I listened to the government House leader as he initiated the debate. He took about five minutes, and he laid out quite clearly the case the Legislature had to meet and what we had to debate over these two or three or four days, however long it takes. He set it out.

Then I listened to the Minister of Transportation. The Minister of Transportation was tearful. What he said was heartfelt. He made an apology for his actions. I think that everyone who was here felt empathy for him. Everyone who was here knew that they conceivably, at some point, could find themselves in that same circumstance, either through inadvertence, from ignorance of what had to be done, and possibly—although I'm not saying so in his case—for just doing the wrong thing. It is hard not to feel sorry for the individual. It is hard not to feel sorry for a man like Mr. Takhar in the circumstances in which he has found himself.

I take no great pleasure in standing up and talking about this. In fact, I wish the whole thing had never happened. I'm sure all the members of this House wish that it never had happened. They wish that Mr. Takhar would have known not to go to his previous place of

employment. They wish that Mr. Takhar had not made the decision to bring in the treasurer from his riding association, that he had kept a more arm's-length relationship.

I listened, then, to the argument of the Leader of the Opposition. I have to tell you that, whether you agree or disagree with what he said, he said it in one of the most straightforward, most balanced presentations I have ever heard. You could have heard a pin drop while he was speaking for almost an hour. What he said was poignant; what he said was correct. What he said in the end was that he believes that Mr. Takhar has an obligation to resign. I cannot fault anything that he said, technically or correctly. He said it, and he said it well.

I listened to the leader of the third party, who spoke next. He spoke in a very energetic way. He made what I think were very strong comments. He said it forcefully and he said it well. What he said was different from what Mr. Takhar had to say. What he said was very different from what the leader of the official opposition had to say. What Mr. Hampton, the leader of the NDP, had to say was more in tune with previous comments that had been made by Mr. McGuinty prior to his becoming Premier, and there were many quotes. I agree with my colleague from Timmins—James Bay that I don't need to read those back. They are a part of history. Everyone knows that Mr. McGuinty, on this side of the House, spoke in very different terms than he is speaking on that side of the House. I leave that for the public. I leave that to whether you think that's right or wrong, but history will show that the statements quite clearly are very, very different.

1710

While I was in the chair, I thought about what I was going to say here today and I pondered what contribution I might make. I also gave some considerable thought to an amendment that I might make, an amendment that might be appropriate to more closely focus this debate on where I think it should go. But I'll tell you, even though I wracked my brain, and I'm sure even though members on both sides of the House have wracked their brains on what an amendment could properly do, to date, no one has made one. No one has made one because it is very difficult to make an amendment to the Integrity Commissioner's position. It is almost impossible to amend that the recommendation of a reprimand be somehow changed. The Integrity Commissioner can only make that recommendation. The Premier can only make the recommendation about who sits in his cabinet. This Legislature does not have the authority to expel a member who is duly elected. So I don't know what kind of amendment I could make. So unless someone has an amendment I could possibly make, here we are. Unless someone has an amendment, we are going to vote on the narrow issue of reprimanding a minister of the crown.

Now, what is a reprimand? We all use the word. We've all used it, I think, a hundred times or a thousand times in our life, but I wanted to be very cautious before standing up here today. I looked it up, of course, in the dictionary and there were six definitions. But the easiest

one to remember and the one that most closely follows what I think is intended here is a “sharp rebuke.” That’s what a reprimand is: a sharp rebuke. Our duty here is to sharply rebuke if we agree with the Integrity Commissioner about the actions of the Minister of Transportation.

Is he deserving of a sharp rebuke? I think so. As a matter of fact, he thinks so too. He has admitted in his poignant, eloquent and heartfelt statement that he was wrong and that he deserves to take the punishment of the reprimand.

We have to find, in order to back that up, that he did egregiously reckless behaviour. I don’t think there’s any doubt that he did. He admitted it. The Integrity Commissioner found it. The Premier has agreed it happened, and speaker after speaker has referred to the “egregiously reckless behaviour.”

It is hard for me to believe that we will do anything else but reprimand him. What else can we do? We can reprimand him, and I have no doubt in my mind that at the end of the day he will be reprimanded. He will be reprimanded if only because there are 71 Liberals in the House who are bound and determined to reprimand him and, in the end, that will carry.

Now, I listened to the other debates. I listened to what other people had to say. What is being said here is what can be done, and that is our authority to agree with the Integrity Commissioner and to reprimand him. The other debates are what should be done; not what we can do, but what we should do. Those debates are that we should be forcing the Premier to ask for the resignation of the minister. Should this Legislature be saying that? I pondered that too. I pondered that and came to the conclusion last night sitting in the chair, last night thinking about it, and this morning when I was looking up some notes and trying to do the research—I wondered, should this Legislature be going beyond what we are required to do? Should we be taking the step beyond reprimanding a minister of the crown? Should we be asking the Premier to do something else? I came to the conclusion, having heard some excellent speeches, that we have no alternative but to do so.

I say that with sadness, because I know that in the end all that is likely to happen is that he will be rebuked. He has admitted he should be rebuked. But the question is, should we, as the Legislature, as a group of 103—now, I think, 100—individuals, be saying that we expect more? I think we should expect more.

I wanted to think a little bit about integrity, and of course, as you know, I always love to go back and look at what great people have talked about of integrity and what integrity meant to them and what definitions of “integrity” are. I found the finest quote. It’s an old writer. It’s going back to the 18th century. Samuel Johnson said it so brilliantly in a couple of lines. It’s from his famous essay *Rasselas*, 1759. He said this: “Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.”

I want you to stop and think about that for a minute, because that is what is happening, I think, in this debate.

Did Mr. Takhar know what he was doing? We have no doubt that he is a man of integrity, and he claims he erred because he did not know what was required of him, although I have to tell you, I believe that he had an obligation, on the day he decided to become a minister of the crown and to sit on the executive committee, to acquaint himself with everything that was required. He had an obligation to divest himself, which he did. He had an obligation to know the laws that impacted upon him and his decisions. He had an obligation to his constituents, because he would not be able to be as available as if he were a backbencher. He had an obligation to his family. He had an obligation to his Premier. He had an obligation to his caucus and his colleagues. He had an obligation to this House.

He should have made himself fast aware of what was involved. His failure to do so—that’s what it says: “Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless.” Because he did not have the knowledge, because he did not find out what he needed to know, his integrity was weak and useless. Now that he has the knowledge, and I think he does, it is important that he show the integrity, because if he does not, it says, “Knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.”

The question comes down to, what should he be doing? Not what we should be asking him to do, because I don’t think we can ask him. I don’t think we have the authority to ask him, nor do I think we should ask him. He is the man who has to do what is right, and if he does not do what is right, then he has to answer to the Premier, who must then force him to do what is right.

I think he had an obligation at the time this report was written to step aside. I watched in great sadness when the finance minister of this province stepped side. He stepped aside because he had no alternative. He stepped aside not because he did anything wrong. He stepped aside not because someone had found he was egregiously reckless. He stepped aside not because, I believe, in the end anyone will find that he did anything in his job that jeopardized in any way this Legislature, this government, this province of Ontario. He stepped aside because he’s under investigation. He did what was right and what was honourable. He did what he did to protect this institution, the caucus of which he is a part, the government of which he was a minister. I think that was his responsibility, and so do all of us. One day—and I hope very soon—I want to see him move from that seat back to the seat he occupied, because when he is no longer under investigation, he is a man who deserves to move along the row; he is a man who can make a great contribution.

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But I also noted, when he moved there from the executive bench to the front row of a government bench, that the earth did not fall. Within five minutes of his resignation, there was a new finance minister. A few minutes after that, because of the juggle, there was a new Minister of Energy. The earth did not fall. There was a new Minister of the Environment. Bang, bang, bang—it all happened. Is the government weaker for that? I don’t

think so. If you think you're weaker for that, I think you're making a mistake. What happened there was that the government was able to say, "We have lost a minister. It is regretful, but we can move on. We have other people who can pick up the pieces," and the people have picked up the pieces very well. I'm telling all of those who are afraid that, should this minister do the honourable thing and resign, the pieces can and will be picked up.

I know most of you. You know all of you probably better than I know you, but I know all of you too. There are people of great competence on the government back bench. There are people who can pick up that piece, be it for a week, a month or a year. There are people who can do that job. But you have to ask yourselves, what is this government gaining and what is this member gaining by remaining in that seat, by remaining in his portfolio, by remaining in the cabinet? I don't know. You'll have to ask yourselves that question because, as I said before, you will rally around and there will be at least 71 votes to vote for the Integrity Commissioner's report. If there are any other motions to do anything else, those will not pass; you know they will not pass and I know that certainly they will not pass. In the end, all that will remain is the government's action and the people's impression.

I remember, in the minute that's left, the first time I walked through that door to be sworn in. I remember looking at this Legislature. I remember its ornateness. I remember looking at the people who were in here. My heart was pounding even though I had been a politician for 15 years before, even though I had been on Toronto city council and the mayor of East York. My heart was pounding coming into a place with so much history. As you walk up and see the Sir John A. Macdonald portrait, the Fathers of Confederation, the statues, the names on the wall and all that this institution gives to the people of Ontario, you have to hold it in awe and you need to hold it in awe.

This is not about one man who made a mistake inadvertently or through thought; this is about an institution. It's about a government; it's about the way people look at the government. I am asking you to do what is right. I am asking you what is right for the thousands of wide-eyed children who walk in here every day to look at this building and to see government at work. I'm asking you to do it for the visitors who came here today from Russia and Ukraine, to do what is right and to make the government work. I'm asking that this institution that has been built up for 800 years under common law be allowed to work, and work well. If that means one man has to resign, then so be it.

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): I'll be sharing my time with the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale.

It's my pleasure to speak on the report of the Integrity Commissioner which was issued on January 4, 2006. I read the report in its entirety. At that time and now, I believe that the Honourable Coulter Osborne made a

detailed and fair analysis of the allegations that were made by the Leader of the Opposition against the Minister of Transportation.

First of all, I want to state that I have known Harinder Takhar for a long time, well prior to him becoming elected and becoming the Minister of Transportation. He is an honourable man in every aspect of the word.

Now, getting back to the report by the Integrity Commissioner, the minister accepted the report's findings and addressed the very minor concerns that were raised. We all know the report dealt with three issues. The first issue was if the minister benefited by using his position or the knowledge gained from his position. The Integrity Commissioner found no merit whatsoever in the argument that the minister personally gained from his position as a cabinet minister.

The Integrity Commissioner also examined if the minister participated in the management of his business after being appointed minister. He found no evidence whatsoever that confirmed Minister Takhar participated in the management of his firms.

The last issue of contention was whether the relationship with Minister Takhar's trustee was arm's-length. In this issue there may have been some lack of judgment on the part of Minister Takhar. This was nothing intentional and the minister immediately began working with the Integrity Commissioner to correct the situation, a situation that has long since been corrected.

As I mentioned before, I have known Minister Takhar for a long, long time. He entered politics for the right reasons, which are to serve his community and the people of Ontario. Since becoming minister, there have been great accomplishments under his watch at the Ministry of Transportation. He delivered on the promise of giving two cents of the existing gas tax to municipalities to expand and improve public transit. Under his watch, we have seen high-occupancy vehicle lanes on Ontario's highways so that commuters spend less time on the road and more time with their families. He has begun measures to ease congestion at the border. The list goes on and on.

I'm proud of Minister Takhar and his accomplishments, and knowing him, he will continue to work on behalf of all of us.

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale): I am glad to share my time with the member for Brampton West–Mississauga. It's my pleasure to speak today regarding the Integrity Commissioner's report. I want to thank the Integrity Commissioner for this fair report.

I have known Mr. Takhar for the last 20 years, well before he became a member of the provincial Parliament for the riding of Mississauga Centre. Throughout all those 20 years, I have known him to be a man of impeccable integrity and an extremely hard-working and dedicated man in all his endeavours.

Like myself, Mr. Takhar came to Canada from India. Although our backgrounds prior to being elected as members of the provincial Parliament are different—

Minister Takhar was a businessman and I am a physician—we both entered politics for the same reasons. We became politicians to give back to our community and to contribute to Ontario in ways that would benefit Ontarians in the long run. So since being elected to office, I have worked with Mr. Takhar on many issues; and working together, we have been able to accomplish a great deal.

Under Minister Takhar's leadership, Bill 169, also known as the illegal taxi drivers bill, was passed. He was instrumental in delivering two cents of the existing gas tax to municipalities to expand and improve public transit, which benefited all Ontarians. He has launched numerous initiatives to make our roads and highways safe. But Mr. Takhar's activities are not just limited to his critical duties. Outside of our Legislature, he has been an ardent supporter of not just the South Asian community but all the various communities across Peel region. He has been involved with many community and sports events and he has been active in the United Way's fundraising drive. Although he is a busy man with many duties, he continues to give back to others and to contribute to this great province of ours.

Let me emphasize again that Mr. Takhar is a hard-working, dedicated man, one who commands respect from not just his friends but his colleagues as well. His demonstrated expertise in handling his ministry duties is appreciated by all who know and realize just how much he has done and accomplished while in his position. He would never knowingly do anything to violate the trust that his constituents and his colleagues have placed in him.

I echo the views of the honourable member from Brampton West–Mississauga. Mr. Takhar is a person who has worked very hard to come to this Legislature, and I support that he should continue to serve his constituents as he has done before.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

On Monday, February 20, in the afternoon, government order number 9; and for the rest of the week, to be confirmed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): That seems clear. Thank you.

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER (continued)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I'm going to join the debate on the issue of the fact that the Integrity Commissioner, the highly respected Coulter

Osborne, did find that Minister Takhar did break the integrity act by assigning a political ally to manage his business assets in a blind trust.

I've been listening to some of the presentations that have been made in this House. I want to compliment those who have made speeches, beginning with my leader, John Tory, who I think made an excellent presentation and focused very much on standards, expectations and traditions of this House. After listening to the last two speakers, I would say that what we're debating is not the fact as to whether or not an individual is an honourable member or whether or not an individual has done a lot of work on behalf of their community and the province. Everybody in this House comes into this position well intended, wanting to make a difference in the lives of the people in their community and wanting to make a difference in the lives of the people in the province of Ontario.

I would also say that I just heard expressed the fact that what has happened are very minor concerns. However, I would like to remind this House, as a former cabinet minister, who had the privilege of serving in four different positions, we have to remember that when we are entrusted with that responsibility, we also must have knowledge of the Members' Integrity Act. That integrity act is given to us. There is an expectation that we will read it, we will understand it, we will sign it, we will have complete knowledge of it. So, yes, we can all say that we didn't know or we didn't understand, but the reality is, there is no excuse. When you become a cabinet minister, you are expected to have full knowledge of the implications. You can't say, "I didn't know."

My colleagues who were asked to step down, and did, and resigned, were as equally honourable members as the individual in question here. Ministers Runciman and Cunningham, Mr. Leach and Mr. Wilson are people who have served this House for many years. Collectively, they accomplished many things in their capacity as ministers of the crown. So this is not about being a good person, being a nice person, being a person who wants to do good for other people. This is about fully accepting the consequences of knowing what is in the integrity act and then following through when the act is breached, which Coulter Osborne, the Integrity Commissioner, says it was.

I want to remind you what it says in the Members' Integrity Act in the preamble:

"3. Members are expected to perform their duties of office and arrange their private affairs in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity of each member, maintains the assembly's dignity and justifies the respect in which society holds the assembly and its members.

"4. Members are expected to act with integrity and impartiality that will bear the closest scrutiny."

I would remind the members of this House that this has nothing to do with the personality of any individual or whether or not they've accomplished great things on behalf of their constituents or people in Ontario. This is about, when you assume the office of a cabinet minister,

fully understanding your role, your responsibilities and the integrity act, and if you don't, then you had better make sure that someone explains to you what this means, because what we have here is a situation all about standards.

In this instance, we have learned very quickly that the Premier of this province has a double standard, and that has been exhibited certainly in the last few months. In fact, yesterday my leader asked the Premier to explain what his standards are for his cabinet ministers because they're certainly very different than the standards he held when he was in opposition. It seems that the McGuinty cabinet ministers, as my leader said yesterday, can get away with just about anything before he would ask them to step aside. He goes on to say that this was not Dalton McGuinty's standard while in opposition. Now no one knows what a minister has to do in order to lose their job in his government.

So we continue to ask Mr. McGuinty, the Premier of this province, what his standards are, because in this particular instance, this individual, Minister Takhar, has broken the integrity act. He is the first cabinet minister to ever be reprimanded by the Integrity Commissioner, and I want to emphasize that: He is the first cabinet minister to ever be reprimanded by the Integrity Commissioner, and yet he did not resign, as many of my colleagues did, and he was not asked to do so by the Premier of this province. People are left asking, "What does it take? What are the Premier's standards, or are there none?"

We don't know what the Premier's standards are, but I can tell you, if I go back in Hansard, there are quotes here that speak to what Premier Dalton McGuinty thought were the standards. On June 25, 1997, he talked about how, "The Integrity Commissioner has in fact made the finding that this minister is in breach of the law, that he has contravened the act that governs our behaviour in this Legislature ... " and that if that was the case, "then you have no choice, Premier, but to stand up once again, tell us that you are going to ask for the resignation of Minister Al Leach, of Minister Cunningham and of Minister Runciman, because they have all clearly, in keeping with the words offered by the Minister of Health on numerous occasions in this House, broken the law. You have no choice."

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On another day, June 26, 1997, he went on: "You have no choice but to stand up and ask for the resignations of Al Leach, Bob Runciman and Dianne Cunningham, Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty shouted across the floor of the House. 'They have broken the law, and therefore, you have no choice.'"

The Premier of this province had very different standards—in fact, you could say he had double standards—when he was in opposition compared to where he is today. Also, we all have the Minister of Government Services, Gerry Phillips, saying on June 26, 1997: "You broke the integrity act; you broke the law. My question is very simple: Knowing all of that, why did you not tender your resignation?"

We've got Gerard Kennedy saying on June 26: "This is an integrity issue, and I don't think you can weasel on an integrity issue. This cabinet has been acting in an improper fashion, and the Premier is avoiding the issue, hiding behind very flimsy protection."

The record goes on and on. It quotes this Premier; it quotes other cabinet ministers. Certainly, they did believe, when they were in opposition, that situations such as the situation that Minister Takhar found himself in did warrant the resignation of the minister, and yet, in this particular instance, it did not happen.

The concern that I have is for this institution, and also for the public, who obviously have to wonder about what they might see as the declining standards in this House. What expectations can they have in the future?

If you take a look at what the press wrote about this particular article, I think it becomes clear that there is widespread belief and support for the fact that the action that is appropriate was not taken.

Allan Findlay, in the Toronto Sun on January 26, said: "Takhar became the first Ontario politician to ever draw an Integrity Commissioner's call for a formal reprimand." That I quote in order to emphasize the seriousness of what has happened.

Christina Blizzard writes, on January 5 of this year, and asks the question: "So what does it take to turf a Liberal minister accused of wrongdoing out of cabinet? Former Finance Minister Greg Sorbara hung in despite calls for his resignation until he was embarrassed to discover he'd been named in RCMP search warrants in a probe into Royal Technologies, a company of which he was once a director...."

"Now we have Premier Dalton McGuinty and his Transportation Minister Harinder Takhar hanging tough, even though Integrity Commissioner Coulter Osborne released a scathing report about Takhar's visit to a company he owns, Chalmers Group."

She goes on to say: "As a cabinet minister, Takhar is supposed to hold the company in a blind trust and not be involved in its day-to-day operation."

"Not just that, it turned out that the company's CFO, Joseph Jeyanayagam, was Takhar's trustee as well as treasurer of his Mississauga Centre riding association. And that, according to Osborne, is a no-no."

She goes on to talk about the meeting that was held in the offices of the Chalmers Group that the minister had with his wife and the person who was responsible for his association. She goes on to say that after the meeting strange things happened. "Osborne" in his ruling said "Takhar was 'egregiously reckless in participating in the April 29 meeting at Chalmers. He virtually invited a complaint by his conduct.'..."

"Osborne has issued a reprimand and, shockingly, McGuinty and Takhar seem to think that's that. McGuinty put out a news release thanking Osborne for 'clarifying the rules.'"

"Clarifying? Osborne came close to saying he didn't believe Takhar's story, that's what's clear."

“Osborne cannot force Takhar to quit cabinet. Only McGuinty can do that. And clearly that is the only path of action he can take now if he wants to retain the credibility of his government.

“He can’t keep a minister in cabinet who has breached the integrity rules. He should forget this holier-than-thou claptrap and fire Takhar.

“How convenient that the Liberals scheduled their hastily thrown together, window-dressing, hot-air crime gabfest for the same day when Osborne released his report.”

It’s very clear that, according to the decision that was handed down by the Integrity Commissioner, a rule has been broken.

Michael Prue made an interesting statement in the column written by Christina Blizzard when he said: “I don’t see how he can show up in the Legislature with any credibility from this time forward. Frankly”—he goes on to say, interestingly enough—“the Tories had much higher standards of integrity.”

I think that’s important, because my colleagues did step down. My colleagues were proactive in stepping down. My colleagues lived up to the Members’ Integrity Act. That’s what it’s all about. It’s not about being a good person, because I would like to think all the members of this House, the 100 of us who are currently here, are good members, that we became MPPs in order that we could make improvements to health, to education, to crime, to the environment, to make sure that this province had a stable supply of energy. We all came here with the best of intentions. But we also have to remember that when we become MPPs there are certain obligations that are put upon us. It is a tremendous honour to be elected as an MPP, but it is also a tremendous responsibility. Then, when you become a cabinet minister, it is again a tremendous honour, but there is even more responsibility. There is absolutely never, ever—even if it

might be so—any excuse for not living up to the Members’ Integrity Act.

I want to stress again what it says in the preamble, paragraph 3: “Members are expected to perform their duties of office and arrange their private affairs in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity of each member, maintains the assembly’s dignity and justifies the respect in which society holds the assembly and its members”—preamble, paragraph 3.

Preamble, paragraph 4: “Members are expected to act with integrity and impartiality that will bear the closest scrutiny.”

I would remind the Premier of this province that he and his colleagues in cabinet were asked to read this and to live up to this obligation, and they are not doing so. The standards that this Premier tolerates are very different from the standards that he talked about that were necessary in order to live up to the integrity act when he was in opposition.

This is not about any individual; this is simply about a Premier who has double standards or, as some might say, no standards whatsoever. I would hope that at the end of this debate, some of the members in government will carefully consider this particular situation. I hope that they will be reminded of the fact that the individual in question did breach the Member’s Integrity Act; I hope they will remember that it is unprecedented for an Ontario cabinet minister to retain his or her position after being found in breach of the Member’s Integrity Act; and I hope that they will encourage their leader in the future to live up to the obligations of the Members’ Integrity Act.

The Acting Speaker: Seeing that it’s approximately 6 p.m., this House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, February 20, 2006.

The House adjourned at 1752.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. James K. Bartleman
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown
Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Algoma–Manitoulin	Brown, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (L) Speaker / Président	Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)
Ancaster–Dundas– Flamborough–Aldershot	McMeekin, Ted (L)	Haliburton–Victoria–Brock	Scott, Laurie (PC)
Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC) Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Halton	Chudleigh, Ted (PC)
Beaches–East York / Beaches–York–Est	Prue, Michael (ND)	Hamilton East / Hamilton–Est	Horwath, Andrea (ND)
Bramalea–Gore–Malton– Springdale	Kular, Kuldip (L)	Hamilton Mountain	Bountrogianni, Hon. / L'hon. Marie (L) Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Brampton Centre / Brampton–Centre	Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Hamilton West / Hamilton–Ouest	Marsales, Judy (L)
Brampton West–Mississauga / Brampton–Ouest–Mississauga	Dhillon, Vic (L)	Hastings–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L) Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Huron–Bruce	Mitchell, Carol (L)
Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Kenora–Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Burlington	Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener–Centre	Milloy, John (L)
Chatham–Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Kitchener–Waterloo	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
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Don Valley East / Don Valley–Est	Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy government House leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement t	Lanark–Carleton	Sterling, Norman W. (PC)
Don Valley West / Don Valley–Ouest	Wynne, Kathleen O. (L)	Leeds–Grenville	Runciman, Robert W. (PC)
Dufferin–Peel– Wellington–Grey	Tory, John (PC) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition	London North Centre / London–Centre–Nord	Matthews, Deborah (L)
Durham	O'Toole, John (PC)	London West / London–Ouest	Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (L) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Eglinton–Lawrence	Colle, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (L) Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration	London–Fanshawe	Ramal, Khalil (L)
Elgin–Middlesex–London	Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail	Markham	Wong, Tony C. (L)
Erie–Lincoln Essex	Hudak, Tim (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga–Centre	Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke–Centre	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Mississauga East / Mississauga–Est	Fonseca, Peter (L)
Etobicoke North / Etobicoke–Nord	Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L) Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie	Mississauga South / Mississauga–Sud	Peterson, Tim (L)
Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Mississauga West / Mississauga–Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (L) Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement	Niagara Centre / Niagara–Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Guelph–Wellington	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Niagara Falls	Craitor, Kim (L)
	Sandals, Liz (L)	Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)	Stormont–Dundas– Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior- Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L) Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Ottawa–Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Trinity–Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Ottawa–Vanier	Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L) Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Sorbara, Greg (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Waterloo–Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Parkdale–High Park	Kennedy, Hon. / L'hon. Gerard (L) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Parry Sound–Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Perth–Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Windsor–St. Clair	Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L) Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	York North / York-Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Prince Edward–Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Cordiano, Hon. / L'hon. Joseph (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	York West / York-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Sarnia–Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Nepean–Carleton	Vacant
Sault Ste. Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	Toronto–Danforth	Vacant
Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	Whitby–Ajax	Vacant
Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse		
Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)		
Scarborough–Agincourt	Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L) Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux		
Scarborough–Rouge River	Balkissoon, Bas (L)		
Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)		
Simcoe–Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St. Catharines	Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L) Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader / ministre du Tourisme, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées, leader parlementaire du gouvernement		
St. Paul's	Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L) Attorney General / procureur général		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Estimates / Budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Cameron Jackson
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
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Finance and economic affairs /
Finances et affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Phil McNeely
Wayne Arthurs, Toby Barrett, Pat Hoy, Judy Marsales,
Phil McNeely, Carol Mitchell, John O'Toole,
Michael Prue, John Wilkinson
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

General government / Affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Présidente: Linda Jeffrey
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Vic Dhillon
Vic Dhillon, Brad Duguid, Andrea Horwath,
Linda Jeffrey, Jean-Marc Lalonde,
Deborah Matthews, Jerry J. Ouellette,
Lou Rinaldi, John Yakabuski
Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Government agencies / Organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: Tim Hudak
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Gilles Bisson
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Gilles Bisson,
Michael Gravelle, 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

Legislative Assembly / Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Bob Delaney
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Mario G. Racco
Bas Balkissoon, Bob Delaney,
Ernie Hardeman, Rosario Marchese, Ted McMeekin,
Norm Miller, Tim Peterson, Mario G. Racco, Mario Sergio
Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

Public accounts / Comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente: Julia Munro
Shelley Martel, Bill Mauro, John Milloy,
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**

Chair / Présidente: Andrea Horwath
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Tony C. Wong
Gilles Bisson, Kim Craitor, Andrea Horwath,
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 Craitor,
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,
Norman W. Sterling, Kathleen O.Wynne
Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

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