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Thursday 26 October 2006

Jeudi 26 octobre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 26 October 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 26 octobre 2006

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

TRANSCANADA HIGHWAY
IMPROVEMENT ACT
(HIGHWAY 17), 2006

LOI DE 2006

SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DE L'AUTOROUTE
TRANSCANADIENNE (ROUTE 17)

Mr. Orazietti moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 149, An Act respecting the improvement of Highway 17, part of the TransCanada Highway / Projet de loi 149, Loi ayant trait à l'amélioration de la route 17, qui fait partie de l'autoroute transcanadienne.

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

Mr. David Orazietti (Sault Ste. Marie): I am pleased to enter into debate on Bill 149, the TransCanada Highway Improvement Act, referring to the Highway 17 portion of the Trans-Canada across northern Ontario, because it's incredibly important to thousands of people in northern Ontario and, if passed, will have very real benefits for the entire province.

Bill 149 proposes federal-provincial discussions for the development of a plan for the improvement of the Highway 17 portion of the Trans-Canada Highway to enhance the regional economy and improve public safety. The plan should include not only designated areas to be four-laned but other improvements such as additional passing lanes, paved shoulders, rest stops, and what are referred to as rumble strips, the indented pattern of asphalt on the side of the road that helps to alert drivers when they are too close to the shoulder of the road. This has proven to save lives.

An equally important part of the bill is the implementation process, which requires the plan to contain a cost sharing agreement between the Ontario government and the government of Canada. In the time that I have this morning, my comments will focus on why this bill is important to northern Ontarians and to the province as a whole and why the federal government should play a role in supporting these improvements. While we all know that highways are a provincial responsibility, there is

substantial historical precedent when it comes to those links in Ontario, and in all provinces for that matter. That says the federal government, in the context of national interest, is at the table, and I'll elaborate on this later.

In particular, I want to talk about the economic importance of the Trans-Canada, the importance of improving safety, accessing services, and the cost sharing component of the bill.

First, I think it's probably helpful to clarify a few important facts about the Trans-Canada. The Trans-Canada Highway is the world's longest national road, extending 7,821 kilometres from Victoria to St. John's. On October 25, 1949, almost 57 years ago to the day, the Trans-Canada Highway bill was introduced in the House of Commons and said that the government of Canada would pay 50% of the cost of new construction. The highway was officially opened in 1962 by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, although it wasn't completed until 1971. The total length of the Trans-Canada Highway 17 portion from the Manitoba border to Quebec through Ontario is 2,081 kilometres, and of that portion, only 191 kilometres, or about 10%, is four-laned.

If you compare this to New Brunswick, 80% of the Trans-Canada is four-laned, and it's expected to be fully completed by November 1, 2007. In the province of Saskatchewan, 91% of the highway is four-laned, and the entire section is expected to be completed in 2007. In Manitoba, 90% of the highway is four-laned, and construction is ongoing to complete the four-laning. In Quebec, nearly the entire Trans-Canada Highway from the Ontario border to the New Brunswick border is four-laned. The point is, the longest section of un-four-laned Trans-Canada Highway is in northern Ontario, and it's a section of the Trans-Canada that helps to link the entire country.

One of the primary reasons for introducing the bill, certainly of significant concern to all constituents across this province, is safety. While Ontario has the safest roads in North America, even one collision, one fatality, is too many. Regrettably, people are dying on this highway. Every year there's an average of 488 accidents, with 839 people injured, on the Trans-Canada. Even more unfortunate, an average of 39 people lose their lives each year. As anybody who has driven it will tell you, when you combine some of the heaviest snowfall in Ontario with oncoming traffic and unpaved shoulders, there's not much of a margin for error and you certainly increase the risk of an accident.

In addition, as members of this House know, there are many health services, as an example, that are concen-

trated in two regional centres in northern Ontario, Thunder Bay and Sudbury, and if you can't get the services there, you may need to travel to Toronto, London or Ottawa. The difference is that the distances are much greater, so the cost is much greater to residents. Even in Sault Ste. Marie, which has better access to health care than many other northern communities, being on the Trans-Canada, residents, many of whom are elderly, travel three hours to receive radiation therapy in Sudbury on what is mostly a two-lane highway. It's like saying to someone, depending on where you live in the GTA, "You'll receive your radiation therapy in Kingston or Windsor."

My vision for the north is to see a much more modernized Trans-Canada Highway with improved safety measures outlined in this bill that will ultimately lead to a four-lane divided highway. To achieve this, what we really need is a much greater level of federal involvement.

Another important reason for introducing this bill is to support and expand the economy of northern Ontario, which benefits us all. Each year, 342,000 commercial trips are taken across Highway 17. That's an average of 938 trips a day shipping valuable consumer goods and commodities that are vital to the north and the province. The annual value of goods travelling across Highway 17 is over \$1.2 billion worth of forestry products alone, and up to \$14 million a day of furniture, pulp and paper, lumber and other products. In the mining sector, almost \$1.5 billion worth of metals and minerals travel across our highway in the north, the Trans-Canada. During high volumes, there's almost \$12 million a day being moved on the Trans-Canada of those goods alone. Nine billion dollars worth of manufacturing products are also shipped on 17. On high-volume days, it's almost \$7.5 million.

Major companies such as Algoma Steel, St. Marys Paper, Flakeboard and Tenaris in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie contribute significantly to the volumes of goods on our highways and to our economies. Some \$1.4 billion worth of transportation products in terms of vehicles that Ontarians drive are shipped across Highway 17 in northern Ontario.

It's clear that the Highway 17 portion of the Trans-Canada is a vital economic link, not only for northern Ontarians but for all Ontarians and for Canadians. Recently, the federal government announced millions of dollars for a new container ship port in Prince Rupert. This is a positive infrastructure development step. The port is being built to take advantage of the expected 10% annual increase in container cargo shipments expected to reach North America from Pacific Rim countries. In fact, China's exports to North America are expected to double by 2020.

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The new infrastructure in Prince Rupert represents tremendous prospects for Canada and certainly northern Ontario. We need to increase our capacity on our highways to take advantage of these new opportunities. We know that border congestion in Ontario costs us over

\$5 billion a year. Places like Sault Ste. Marie, on an under-utilized border crossing with increased east-west shipments, are well positioned to handle this growth. The Trans-Canada improvements are critical.

The question is, how many more businesses, how many more job opportunities, how much more would be contributed to the province's economy with improvements to the Trans-Canada Highway in northern Ontario? I would suggest it's substantial.

The final aspect of the bill I want to discuss today is the cost sharing aspect. The original Trans-Canada Highway Act, introduced in 1949, prescribed that the government of Canada and provincial governments would share in the costs of constructing a national highway. The bill stated that the federal government would reimburse the provinces for 50% of the cost for any portion built between 1928 and the date of the legislation, which was 1950. The federal funding actually recognized previously incurred costs by the province, and the government of Canada mandated that 50% of future costs would also be paid for.

Federal contributions to our country's major highways continue today through SHIP, the strategic highway infrastructure program, but it's well below the historic level of support. The SHIP agreement has provided \$485 million throughout Canada since 2001. In comparison, our government has committed \$843 million on northern highways alone since 2004-05. A study done by the Canadian Automobile Association found that the federal government currently only pays for 7% of Trans-Canada Highway improvements, a far cry from the historic 50%.

Similar examples could be cited when it comes to the US interstate system. We know that post-World War II, the development of interstate highways in the US led to considerable economic growth in many states. Here in Canada, provincial governments are responsible for design, safety and construction, and financial support is very limited from the federal government.

We can probably draw a parallel with the Canada Health Act. Where we have expected a 50-50 cost sharing agreement, we know that the federal government has not lived up to that and it falls well below what's expected by Ontarians. It seems unbalanced, given the fact they recently posted a \$13.2-billion surplus, 30% to 40% of which is money paid by Ontario taxpayers. It's time for the federal government to stop running away from the fiscal gap and its historic commitments and start funding projects that matter to people in the province of Ontario, like the Highway 17 portion of the Trans-Canada Highway.

Businesses and industry will not build our roads, but they will come to the north in greater numbers if they are built. There are some things that everyone expects will be addressed by government, and improvements to the Trans-Canada Highway in northern Ontario is one of them.

I want to encourage members in the House today to support this bill, a bill that has the potential to bring much-needed improvements to northern Ontario infra-

structure, a bill that improves safety and supports Ontario's economy.

I will be sharing our caucus time with the hard-working members from Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh, Ottawa–Orléans and Nipissing, who are supporters of this bill.

I also want to thank Fiona Watson from the legislative research branch for helping provide such important information.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my pleasure to add some comments today on the private member's bill from the member for Sault Ste. Marie, Bill 149, An Act respecting the improvement of Highway 17, part of the Trans-Canada Highway. Certainly I and John Tory and the Ontario PCs understand the importance of infrastructure improvements, particularly improving Highway 17 in the north. But the member from Sault Ste. Marie is a member of the government, and this private member's bill is completely unnecessary. He doesn't need a private member's bill to make a plan to upgrade Highway 17; he's a member of the current government.

I note in the bill, in the section "Implementation of plan," it states, "Implementation of the plan shall begin within five years of its adoption"—five years. I say that this bill is more about making it look like the member is doing something in supporting improving Highway 17 than it is about actual action.

I had the opportunity to drive most of northern Ontario, going up Highway 17 and back on Highway 11, a couple of years ago. When I stopped in Thunder Bay, the main issue when I met with the chamber of commerce and stopped in the cancer clinic was the fact that, where Highway 11 and 17 are one highway from Nipigon to Shabaqua Corners, there had been major concerns about shutdowns. I think they said that that year they'd had 100 shutdowns of the highway, with concerns about safety. It is something that very much needs to be done.

I also note that on that trip I stopped in Red Rock, just east of Thunder Bay, and heard from the mill manager about all the challenges they were facing. This was a couple of years ago. Unfortunately, that mill has in fact now closed. Obviously, the government didn't listen to the forestry sector and make the necessary improvements to delivered-wood costs and energy costs in that sector.

As I say, this bill is more about making it look like the member and the government are interested in this. He is a member of the government; he doesn't need a private member's bill to start to make plans to improve Highway 17.

I happen to have the Minister of Northern Development and Mines' notes from April 2003: "However, the ministry has also advanced the Shabaqua project in portions of the Thunder Bay-Nipigon corridor for consideration under the joint Canada–Ontario highway programs. In the interim, MTO is focusing on developing future reconstruction projects with adding passing lanes, paved shoulders and other improvements through the

Highway 11-17 corridor"—exactly what the member is talking about.

What I will support the member on is that I do believe it's important to involve the federal government in four-laning and improving Highway 17 and Highway 11 across northern Ontario. I very much believe that there is a significant role for the federal government in that. However, as I say, it's totally unnecessary to have a private member's bill to accomplish that, absolutely unnecessary. I do support involving the federal government, but this private member's bill is unnecessary.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): It's certainly a pleasure for me to stand today to support my good friend from Sault Ste. Marie on his bill, Bill 149, the TransCanada Highway Improvement Act (Highway 17).

The member has been a strong advocate for his citizens from the north, from his riding of Sault Ste. Marie, and I think this is just one more example. A comment was made: "Why is the member doing this? Why is this needed now?" First of all, the member is always advocating for his people. He understands the issues, he understands what's required, and he understands that good modes of transportation in his riding are important for the economy, important for tourists and important for people just getting around the riding and the surrounding ridings. He understands the importance of upgrading Highway 17. He knows that for public safety and for economic growth, it's important.

He also knows that it's a part of the Trans-Canada Highway that has been neglected in the past. He pointed out that 7% of the costs are presently being borne by the federal government, whereas at one time it was to be a 50-50 cost sharing arrangement. If it was 50-50, it should be 50-50, but we have seen downloading in the past; we have seen that at the provincial level. I was in municipal politics and saw that happen. I'm here.

Mr. Oraziotti, the member for Sault Ste. Marie, has indicated to us that this 50-50 arrangement is now very unfair. When you have the need for passing lanes, the need for rumble strips for security, for rest stops, for example—all of these are ideas to put in place the need to support public safety opportunities along that section of the highway.

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The member pointed out many reasons with regard to the economy of the north. I have never travelled that part of the Trans-Canada in his area, but I certainly have travelled other areas of the Trans-Canada. I've seen transports; I've seen the moving of goods and commodities across the country. He has pointed out many examples—the forestry industry, metal and minerals, manufacturing, the moving of vehicles, transportation and whatnot—all requiring an upgrade to that section of Highway 17. Certainly, anybody travelling in the area would know that with the width of that highway—if we have it in other parts of the province where you have four-lane goods moving very freely, and you get to this area where there today is a bottleneck—we do need, and I think the

member pointed it out very clearly, to enhance those opportunities for construction.

He also pointed out the need with regard to safety, the fatalities, and certainly there has been an average of 31 fatal accidents per year, giving fatalities in the area of about 40. With improvements to the safety of that highway, I think we will see those numbers come down.

The member indicated too that with the surplus that the federal government enjoyed in the past, it's time that some of that \$13.2-billion surplus is taken to improve that highway, which was originally agreed upon as a 50-50 cost sharing arrangement. Let's see some of those funds, some of those dollars, move to improving Highway 17, not only in the member's riding but in other sections of that highway. We need a fair arrangement.

I know we just had a comment made, "Why is the member standing up?" He's advocating for the people of his riding, he's advocating for the people of the north, and that's what you need in this House. He's also working with our minister, the Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Donna Cansfield, as I am. I have a highway in my riding, Highway 138, a link to the nation's capital. I have been working with the minister, advocating on behalf of the constituents of my riding. That's exactly what this member is doing for the good people from Sault Ste. Marie. I appreciate this opportunity to speak in support of the member's Bill 149.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I very much look forward to addressing Bill 149 and the member from Sault Ste. Marie. First of all, to Marion and Ernie, Godspeed, and we wish you a speedy recovery in the Soo.

It's good to hear that the member from the Soo is actually paying attention and listening to petitions, because as I'm sure the member knows, I've presented numerous petitions dealing with this very specific issue on entering into agreements with the federal government in moving forward with improving the interconnecting highways throughout the province of Ontario.

I believe that the member's bill is probably showing his constituents he's dealing with the issue that's been a long-time concern in the Soo, along with a lot of other parts of the north, whether it's Kenora, Thunder Bay or Timmins. All through the north, we see a consistent push for four-laning of highways for a number of issues: safety issues, trucking issues and other things. But I think the member would have been far better to address the concerns that deal with the reassessment issues I'm hearing about from the north in the unorganized townships, because those individuals with camps in the north are living in municipalities such as the Soo, or the question I brought forward to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines would have been a far better issue, dealing with the closure of the unorganized dumps and the impact on municipalities.

But he's decided to move forward with this bill, trying to push an issue that a government member is trying to deal with the federal government about, in bringing in negotiations for expanded funds. This is something that

MTO has been dealing with since—well, I can remember it was the same issue in 1995, trying to get some funds to move forward and ensure that consistency was taking place for funding with interprovincial roads. I think the bill is lacking in a number of areas and is far too limited. The member should have included the concern or initiative of Mayor Rowswell of Sault Ste. Marie dealing with the rail factor as well.

The bill should have taken into consideration his own mayor in the Soo's initiative in trying to use Sault Ste. Marie as a hub for rail transfers throughout Ontario, as a connecting link to bring people from western Canada through the Soo and then use that link in the Soo as a key location.

That would do a number of things. One, it would reduce the truck traffic that is currently utilizing the highways and reduce the amount of wear. I'm sure the member knows that an improperly loaded truck can put as much wear on the highway as 100,000 vehicles going over a stretch of the road. So an initiative to reduce the truck traffic and increase rail service within the Soo should have been included as part of that bill as helping out.

There's another area that I thought should have been addressed as well, and that was air transit. For example, I mentioned Ernie. He happened to be in Sudbury and needed air service out of Sudbury into the Soo. Well, there was no service available to provide that transport from Sudbury to Sault Ste. Marie, which was there once upon a time and needs to be there now. The bill should be including things such as air service into the Soo. I know his own mayor had the transpolar initiative that he tried to address as well, but even within the province of Ontario there is a lack of service going into the Soo dealing with things such as air service. We've also mentioned the issue of rail service that Mayor Rowswell has tried to bring forward.

I think the other area is that the bill is extremely limited with the ministries it deals with as well. If you look at it, there is one key area that's not addressed and that people are sometimes reluctant to deal with: It should have included the Native Affairs Secretariat, federally and provincially. The reason for that is that a substantial portion of what he's talking about has to go through treaty lands, and they are not being included there. They need to ensure that the Native Affairs Secretariat, both federally and provincially, is included in that aspect of the bill so they can resolve the issues, making sure that the natives are completely compensated for and brought into the process so they can be made part of the Trans-Canada going through that particular area. That's a huge issue.

Also, I'd like to say that once upon a time, so many decades ago, a wise individual in Ontario had the foresight to look forward to the future and see that the 401 was a key connecting link through all of Ontario and right into Quebec. If you look at that and at the impact the 401 has had on the development of the province of Ontario, the same thing needs to take place in the north. I

personally believe that a commitment to put forward a program that eventually four-lanes the north will give that equivalent of the 401 linking southern Ontario along with all those US jurisdiction states along the Ontario southern border, and would make it far more attractive for business, individuals and lifestyles to move north. I happened to be at a place and somebody just amazed me. They had no idea. They said, "You go four hours north of here and nobody can live there." I looked at this individual and thought, "You have no idea what it's like in northern Ontario." There's a huge wealth of forest industry, of mining industry, of development, of quality of life, and so many things to offer there.

I just think that a program coming forward that dedicates and continues on with what the previous government did—the previous government had been moving forward with four-laning for a number of parts of southern Ontario and linking the north to the south, whether it's up to Sudbury, which is coming along quite nicely, as well as up to North Bay. Once those key links are done, I think the four-laning of those other sectors as well, moving from Sudbury to the Soo and Thunder Bay and out, and North Bay up to Timmins, will have a huge impact, in the same fashion as the 401 did.

In conclusion, I'd just like to say I think the bill is too limited in its perspective. It's good to hear that the member is listening and has taken up the challenge on my petition to move forward with negotiations, but you should include the rail and forestry sectors and other departments that are going to have to resolve issues to make it move forward, which includes of course the native secretariats.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I'm glad to participate in this debate because I think it's quite a unique debate. I've probably not seen a debate like this one in my 16 or 17 years here.

What is this all about? First of all on the issue, do we as members agree that we should do more in order to construct highways anywhere in this province, including northern Ontario? Of course. We'll vote for the bill just on the basis that it's trying to do something positive. I want to put on the record that, as New Democrats, we'll support the bill, because we think in the end any improvement to our highway system—and specifically, for me, in northern Ontario—is a good thing.

But let's talk about what this bill is really all about. This guy has been a member of the government for the last three years and is lobbying, trying to get highway improvements in his riding. He's supposedly influential within his own government and has not been able to deliver. So he brings a bill into this House as a way of saying to his constituents, "Look what I'm doing for you."

I just say, listen, all of us who have been members around here for a long time understand what the process is. If you want to have a highway fixed or you want to have four-laning done, you basically lobby the Minister of Transportation in order to get funding for your particular community.

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I look at our friend the page Breanna, who comes from Kapuskasing. As a member of the opposition, with your own government we were successful in getting roads fixed through Kapuskasing in regards to reconstructing that stretch of highway. There have been all kinds of roads fixed on Highway 11. The way that I did that is, I went and talked to the Minister of Transportation, along with the mayor, Mr. Caron, along with Mayor Audet from Moonbeam, with Madame Réjeanne Demeules from Smooth Rock Falls and, up in Hearst, the work that we've done there along with Roger Sigouin. There's a process, and that process is that if it's a connecting-link funding application, the municipality makes an application, they work with the provincial member, and together we lobby the minister and the Ministry of Transportation to provide the funding to fix the road. We're successful in doing that, all of us, as members, because that's part of what we do. I just find it somewhat strange that the member has got to bring a bill in here to try to deliver on something for his constituents when really it's his job as a member to do it in the first place. I want to put that on the record.

If it's a question of saying, "I want a four-lane highway," or "I want to improve the Trans-Canada system," I've got a couple of things that I think the member has to add to this bill. I want to add that the Trans-Canada system is not just Highway 17; it's Highway 11. In fact, there is more traffic on Highway 11 in the winter months than there is on Highway 17. So if we're going to have a bill to deal with trying to lobby the federal government to up the dollars from 7% to 50%, fine, but we should at least try to bring the rest of the Trans-Canada system into this bill, because all you're doing is talking about one section of the Trans-Canada Highway, not the entire Trans-Canada Highway. As we know, Highway 11 from Thunder Bay to the Manitoba border is the Trans-Canada system, and Highway 11 from Thunder Bay to North Bay is the northern route utilized mostly in the winter by the transportation industry because of the hills along Lake Superior and along Lake Huron. So I think the member is being somewhat parochial in his approach to what should be government policy.

I guess this is the other point I want to speak to. If the member is saying, "I believe we need to have a legislative initiative in order to deal with the Trans-Canada Highway," don't just do it from the perspective of your own backyard. You have to look at all of northern Ontario and to say that is something that we should be doing for the entirety of the Trans-Canada system.

But let's be clear: What's this bill about? It's about the member from Sault Ste. Marie not having been able to deliver on highway improvements that are wanted by that community and by northerners, and he is saying, "Look at me. I've solved the problem. I can go into the next election because I passed at second reading a bill that got the support of New Democrats, Conservatives and Liberals. Look how great I am." Of course we're not going to vote against it—it would be like voting against

motherhood and apple pie—but I just want to say this is really a toothless wonder.

If you look at the bill, the bill in itself is quite unique. First of all, it's only a one-page bill. That's normally the case in private members' bills. But there are basically two sections that are really important when it comes to the federal cost sharing initiative. It says under 1(3) that you're going to have five years to be able to implement basically—it says, "Implementation of the plan," so five years to implement the plan, but only if condition (4) is met. Condition (4) is, "The government of Ontario shall enter into discussions with the government of Canada for the purpose of reaching an agreement relating to sharing the costs of implementing the plan."

Well, you know, Dalton McGuinty, Mike Harris, Ernie Eves and Mr. Bob Rae all lobbied the federal government for the past 15 years to get the federal government to pay its fair share when it comes to Ontario services. To date, none of them have been successful. So what makes you think that by passing and introducing a private member's bill you're going to get a 50% cost sharing agreement with the federal government? We all agree: The federal government is missing in action. They've been removing themselves from the business of infrastructure and supporting the province of Ontario, as far as our fair share, for many years. Premiers since I've been here, since 1990, have all that made that argument, and to date the federal government has not responded by way of three Prime Ministers: first Mr. Chrétien, then Mr. Martin, and now Mr. Harper. So this particular bill basically—

Mr. Brownell: We've got to keep on trying.

Mr. Bisson: Well, the guy says we've got to keep on trying. I don't disagree, but I'm just saying let's see this for what it is, because it really is a toothless wonder. If in 16 years we've not been able to get the federal government to deal on one of the most fundamental cost sharing arrangements, which is health care, where they used to pay 50% and they're now down at about 12% or 14%, what makes you think you're going to be able, by way of a private member's bill, to bring the cost sharing arrangement on the Trans-Canada up to 50%? It's pretty nil. What it basically means is that if there's never an agreement on the cost-sharing agreement, this bill doesn't do anything.

So what is it about? I'm going to come back to the point. I'm going to be blunt to my good friend from Sault Ste. Marie. He's caught in a bit of a box. The people of Sault Ste. Marie, along with many other people in northern Ontario, want to see four-laning and passing lanes put on the Trans-Canada system. I know my good friend Madame Smith, myself and all northern members agree with that, and we should do that. We all agree that we should involve the federal government. That ain't the point. But the reality is that we've not been successful in, first of all, getting the federal government to increase its share. No Prime Minister or Premier or party has been successful in that. He's basically trying to find some cover for the next provincial election. That's all this is

about. I just say to my good friend, we'll vote for it in the end, because why wouldn't we, but I think we need to say what this is all about.

The other thing is in regard to the precedent this sets. I just want to say a few words on that. If the only way a local member from a constituency could get highway construction was by bringing a bill into the House, we'd never get a highway built in this province. There's not enough legislative time for 103 members to bring legislation into this House asking for some legislation to build some strip of highway somewhere. It's a bit of a ridiculous process. That's why we've got the Ministry of Transportation. We have a Ministry of Transportation that is charged with maintaining our system of roads in this province, and the way we do that is that there are capital allocations made by the province and then applications are made by municipalities and others to reconstruct roads, to construct new roads or to do four-laning, and the Ministry of Transportation does that.

If we have to go to the lengths of having to introduce a bill every time we want a highway fixed, I can tell you that it would be a pretty cumbersome process, because every member in this Legislature would probably have three or four bills per session asking for a road to be fixed. Right now in our particular constituency of Timmins—James Bay, we've got applications for road construction in Moosonee, Hearst—Highway 11 by Opatatika was done—the south part of Kapuskasing in regards to Highway 11. There's connecting link funding in the community of Timmins. There are at least four applications that I'm aware of at this point from my constituency that are going into this year's capital allocation process that will be basically rolled out this spring. If I have to bring a bill into this House for each one of those—I understand how this process works. You have very limited time. A member can introduce only one private member's bill per session. You're lucky if that equals two bills per the life of a Parliament of four or five years. It would virtually mean that you can only get one, maybe two highway projects done in your constituency if we had to go by way of a bill. So I just say to members, I don't think we want to have a process where we've got to use legislative time to fix highways. That's why we have a Ministry of Transportation.

Again, do we agree with the concept that we need to be able to do more to four-lane Highways 17 and 11 and other important highways in northern Ontario? Of course. We don't argue with that for a second. We understand that it is a question of making sure that our economy is vibrant in northern Ontario, and one of the key issues is making sure that all transportation—but in this particular debate road transportation—infrastructure is adequate. I would agree with the member from Sault Ste. Marie that the road system is inadequate in northern Ontario. There is much improvement that needs to be done as far as repairs to existing infrastructure and four-laning, especially in those busy spots along Highway 17 and Highway 11, plus passing lanes. We all agree.

I was a member of a government that did an extreme amount of work when it comes to four-laning Highway

11 and Highway 17, and especially on passing lanes. That's one of the things we did on Highway 11. We had a program that basically saw, from North Bay to about Kapuskasing or Hearst, five passing lanes built per year. It was a commitment we got from the Minister of Transportation, and it has done a lot to end the bottleneck on that road.

I just say that we agree, but as my good friend the member from Parry Sound had mentioned—it might have been somebody else, but I thought it was the member from Parry Sound who made this point—we need to look at transportation as a whole. That, I think, is probably the bigger debate for us in northern Ontario, because if our northern economy is going to not only survive—there are some real problems within our economy. We have a bit of a schism right now. Mining is doing well because of gold and base metal prices, and thank God for that, because it's providing some boom in communities like Timmins, Sudbury and Kirkland Lake and other mining communities. But forestry is in real peril. The member from Sault Ste. Marie knows, I'm sure, as we do, that St. Marys Paper filed for bankruptcy protection last night. That tells us of the challenge we have in northern Ontario in securing a primary industry. But one of the issues we have to deal with to secure primary industry is to provide a transportation infrastructure that allows them to compete on the world stage and on the North American market. It is more expensive to ship goods the further you are from market. Of course, in northern Ontario, we're further than most. Because we're the northern part of the province, we have a longer way to ship our goods.

1040

So one of the things we need to do is look at transportation infrastructure and transportation policy so that we're able to give northern manufacturers and northern employers some sort of equalization of the playing field when it comes to transportation. I would be bold and say we need to subsidize. I'm going to say it right upfront: We need to find ways of being able to subsidize transportation costs for manufacturers in northern Ontario, either by way of rail, air or road, whatever makes the most sense.

Now, somebody is going to say, "Oh, well, that's crazy. We shouldn't subsidize." Highway 401 is a provincial infrastructure, or partly federal—no, it's all provincial—paid for 100% by the taxpayers of Ontario. Every manufacturer along that line uses it as a way of being able to ship goods from warehouse to production plant to market. Basically, that road infrastructure is the key part of the southern Ontario economy. The taxpayers of Ontario pay for that 100%, so we are subsidizing Ford, GM and all of the manufacturers along the Highway 401 corridor, and rightfully so; that's part of what you do as a province.

The problem we have in northern Ontario is that we need to have some way to lessen the cost for our manufacturers so that it would make some sense to situate yourself as far as producing something in northern Ontario and selling it to market.

I would like to see in this bill, if we get to second reading, some debate and some amendments about how we're able to develop policy infrastructure, transportation policy, in northern Ontario to find ways of reducing the cost of transportation for northern employers.

If you're a pulp and paper mill in Sault Ste. Marie, if you're a sawmill in Opasatika or wherever you might be, or you're, for example, a value-added plant in Hearst, such as others that are there, that you have some way of being able to transport the materials you need from southern Ontario to the north, that you're able to assemble them and do what you have to do with them and then transport the finished goods to wherever you're selling them—we need to have some way of being able to reduce the cost for the manufacturer so that it makes more sense for them to establish themselves in northern Ontario.

In the last minute I have, I would be remiss if I didn't talk about the James Bay, because if we're going to talk about roads, there's a part of the province we need to talk about. There are no roads. The community of Moosonee is looking for paving inside that particular community. None of the roads are currently paved; there's a real dust problem. The mayor is going to be coming forward, along with his council, with an application this spring. I am hopeful and will be working in consultation with the provincial government in order to get some funding so we can do some paving on those particular roads.

Then the other issue is that we need to take a look at some sort of a permanent, all-season road from the James Bay up to Attawapiskat and north, if possible, in order to be able to help develop that part of the province. I understand that is a very expensive project, but I just want to remind members that it was the building of the Ontario Northland Railway, the old TNO, at the beginning of the last century that basically developed all of northeastern Ontario. All of the sawmills, all of the mines were found, constructed and developed because of the construction of a railway paid for by the province of Ontario.

The next frontier when it comes to development is going to be along the James Bay, for diamonds, gold, lignite and a whole bunch of other metals that are in that particular area, not to talk about hydroelectric potential.

So, I just say that one of the things we need to take a look at is a policy that would look at a period of time of being able to develop an all-season road system along the James Bay. Thank you very much, Speaker, for this fine opportunity to participate in the debate.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I'd just maybe start off with two comments: Karl Walsh, the president and CEO of the Ontario Provincial Police Association, "The Ontario Provincial Police Association congratulates MPP David Oraziotti for taking the initiative to approve public safety on our highways through the introduction of the private member's bill"; and Doug Mayhew, manager of public and government affairs for the CAA, "Highway 17 is the lifeblood road from eastern to western Ontario. It carries not just the goods we produce, the products we need and the tourism we require, but our futures." I don't

think there is any doubt that this is an extremely important issue in transportation in our province and in our country.

I lived on the Trans-Canada Highway as a child. When I went to school, I walked along the Trans-Canada Highway. I recall when it was reconstructed into a new location, and we had both highways passing through our farm along the Ottawa River. I had a friend—Ross and Sandy Dunning moved out of Rockland, Ontario. The Trans-Canada went through Rockland then, and you had to travel 20 hours, I think, to go to their place on the Trans-Canada Highway almost at Thunder Bay. It's a major lifeline of our province, from the Quebec border to the border with Manitoba. It's extremely important.

Ontario has the safest highways in North America. I think we have to be very proud of that achievement of our province. We're investing heavily in infrastructure in the north of Ontario: \$357 million this year, an all-time record. We've proven our commitment by releasing the first ever five-year construction program in June 2006, the northern highways program, an update to the northern Ontario highways strategy released last year. The northern highways program will be updated every year to ensure key projects are moving forward.

Four-lane sections of Trans-Canada Highway 17 already exist, as we know, in the vicinity of North Bay, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay and, of course, Ottawa. Planning studies to four-lane Highway 17 to the Sudbury and Ottawa area are currently under way, where the annual average daily traffic is over 10,000. Even in Ottawa, in Kanata, there's a \$50-million project to improve the section through Kanata, and that's part of 17. There's a recently constructed portion of Highway 17 near Arnprior, and of course the member for Renfrew has spoken often about the need to four-lane Highway 17 north of Arnprior.

Because of increasing traffic volumes, other parts of Highway 17 will require improvements, so we need to get on with these improvements. In the northwestern part of the province, Highway 17 is the only link to western Canada. Even with our current funding levels, we are not able to undertake all the improvements needed. We need federal funding now. That's why I welcome this private member's bill.

Last year the provinces and territories completed a national transportation strategy, *Looking to the Future*. The strategy reinforces the fact that key highways, border crossings, urban roads and transit in Ontario are critical to Canada's economy. We need an integrated approach to strengthening the transportation system. According to Transport Canada's annual report of 2004, provinces and territories reinvest more than 92% of their fuel tax revenues in transit and roads. In contrast, the Canadian federal government reinvested less than 10%. The US federal government returns over 90.5% of federal gas taxes to the states where they were collected, worth \$286 billion over six years. So while the federal government is wallowing in excess revenues, where they have \$13 billion dollars at their disposal to put energy into the

north, to help with the economy of the north, they haven't made the steps forward yet: 10% of the dollars they collect on gas taxes go back into roads and transit.

Canada has to keep pace with its neighbours and trading partners who are making substantial investments in transportation infrastructure. We depend too much on the industries of northern Ontario to not provide the investment that they need. This can't be done by the province of Ontario alone. We need the dollars from the federal government.

So I very much support this bill from the member—how important it is to Ontario, how important to eastern Ontario, how important to northern Ontario and western Ontario. If we want to go out west from our area, we use the Trans-Canada Highway. The federal government should be there. We certainly feel that this is the right time to put this bill in. Let's get our friends who were in this House, who know how important roads are, to support this bill in the federal government and to make sure that Highway 17, this lifeblood of Ontario, is improved in the very near future.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I want to join other speakers this morning in the few minutes I have in indicating that this is rather a strange bill. I certainly will support it, as the Minister of Northern Development and Mines during Mike Harris's and Ernie Eves's time. I'll just remind the previous speaker, who said they're putting in \$357 million, which is supposed to be some sort of record—try \$1.8 billion, audited dollars, truly spent up until April 2003 during our time in office. You won't, as an accumulative over your years, even come close to that, I'm pretty sure.

1050

I find it passing strange that Dalton McGuinty is crapping on the federal government over the fiscal imbalance. He's crapping on the federal government over his problems in post-secondary education. He's trying to pin the mess in Caledonia on the federal government. He's trying to force the Prime Minister's hand on Senate reform. He's fighting the feds for keeping their promise on child care. The feds kept their promise. In Niagara-on-the-Lake in the last couple of days, he's been crapping on the Prime Minister for having no innovation agenda in his remarks, which were very, very partisan and inappropriate for a Premier.

Now today, this private member, who is a member of the government, suddenly wants the government that they've been crapping on, which is clearly their re-election plan, to come to the table and, over the next five years, come up with some plan for the Trans-Canada Highway. Frankly, if I were the honourable member from Sault Ste. Marie, I'd get up and say the feds should pay 100% of the -Canada Highway. When I grew up, I thought they did. We were always taught in school that the feds should pay for the Trans-Canada Highway. I told every northern mayor who used to come to me that I'd help them out in their communities with the Highway 17/11 corridor, which I've travelled many, many times during my lifetime, from one side of the province to the

other. The fact of the matter is, I agree with the honourable member, but it shouldn't be just 50-50; the honourable member should be asking for 100%.

I also want to say that the portion of highway that this bill pertains to has had fewer accidents than the portion of highway that you cancelled between Stayner and Collingwood over the years. So you don't care about southerners; you don't care about the people of Collingwood, Wasaga Beach and the hundreds of thousands of tourists who go up to Collingwood and Wasaga Beach to go to the skiing area and go to Blue Mountain every year. There are more accidents in my 6.7-kilometre piece of highway—I looked it up with the OPP yesterday—than you have on this piece of highway, and you have the gall to cancel my highway.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nipissing.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): That was a lovely display from the former minister.

I'm proud to be able to support this bill today and speak up on behalf of real northerners, who know the importance of their roads and highways and how important it is to have a link to the rest of our province and our country.

I want to commend the member for Sault Ste. Marie. I want to just quote his mayor who today, in reference to this legislation, stated: "Ontario needs good transportation infrastructure because our region is the inner core of Canada—we tie Canada together. In the global economy, a strong core builds a strong country that can compete globally. David Oraziotti's private member's bill advances our nation and the province of Ontario with critical infrastructure to ensure we are successful for decades to come."

I agree with his mayor. We have shown a strong commitment to the building of highways in the north during our tenure. We have a northern highway strategy that has instituted unprecedented investment in the north. I don't know where the member for Simcoe gets his numbers, but this year alone we are investing \$357 million. Included in that, this year we are investing in my area. We're investing in Highway 11, south of North Bay to Highway 654 junction to Highway 17 at Laronde Creek, all the way to North Bay, and Highway 63 and Highway 17 west of Mattawa for 26 kilometres—those are 26 brutal kilometres that I travel quite regularly, so I'm glad to see we're doing some work on that—Highway 522 and Highway 64 at the Sturgeon River Bridge.

We're making some major investments in our northern highways. That does not even begin to address what we're investing in Highway 11: \$120 million over the next two years to continue the four-laning that I know we've spoken about many times in this House, the four-way laning of Highway 11 that started in the 1950s under one of their governments. Up until this year, we did not have an end date, but now we know that we will have the four-laning completed by 2012. This is a major initiative and a major commitment to my community of North Bay, which is delighted to see that we are finishing this project that is long overdue.

That's just one of the many indications of our government's commitment to highways and transportation into the north, of our government's commitment to the north. I have to say that I was delighted to hear the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka say that he was committed to this idea and committed to the notion that we should have the federal government at the table.

I hope he will pick up the phone and call his federal counterpart, Tony Clement, to put pressure on him to come to the table, to recognize the importance of our highways and to recognize the importance of this linkage of the south to the north. I know the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka is all too familiar with the benefits that we've reaped from the Highway 11 four-laning, and I know he can appreciate how much benefit we would reap from the improvements to Highway 17 of the Trans-Canada Highway.

I agree with the member for Simcoe on one point, and that is that I too thought when I was a kid that the federal government supported the Trans-Canada Highway and was in charge of the Trans-Canada Highway. I was shocked to see that in fact they had given up that responsibility. I hope that he too will pick up the phone and call his counterparts and friends in Ottawa, who are now sitting on a \$6.8-billion surplus, and that's after only five months into this fiscal year. Surely they can give us some money to help us with our northern highways. I believe the members for Parry Sound–Muskoka and Simcoe believe themselves to be strong advocates for the north. I believe they too will stand up and put some pressure on the federal government to come to the table and develop with us a northern Ontario highway strategy that will allow us to continue the good work that our government is committed to and has already begun.

As I said, we've announced many projects in the north. We have done a great deal of work in the north on our highways, on our infrastructure—our roads and bridges—in various communities, and we are seeing those benefits, but with federal participation, we could see so much more. That's why we're calling on the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka and we're calling on his leader, John Tory, who claims to be such a great fan of the north and who appears occasionally in the north for photo ops and press conferences attended by few. We want to make sure that he understands that highways and the infrastructure of the north are important to our growth, to our economic development, to our tourism industry, and to making sure that northern Ontario continues to prosper. That is the focus of this government. We've shown our commitment through a variety of programs, including our investments in highways, and we will continue to do so as we move forward.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to provide some comments on the bill this morning, Bill 149, the TransCanada Highway Improvement Act.

I'd like to begin my remarks by following up on those of my colleagues. We certainly understand how important infrastructure is to towns and municipalities in north-

ern Ontario and throughout Ontario. When I considered some of the things I'd like to see in legislation, the prominent thought that kept returning to my mind was how areas throughout the province are affected by infrastructure needs. No question, safety is foremost in the mind. The member for Sault Ste. Marie has brought forward safety, but from an economic development perspective, we appreciate the benefits of improved highways and routes. It's about making it easier for tourists to access areas; for businesses to ship and receive products, as mentioned before; to enhance safety and security in our communities.

In my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, residents, businesses and chambers of commerce have been working tirelessly with me in bringing forward signed petitions for four-laning expansion improvements to Highway 35. I'm sure members opposite can relate to examples in their own ridings, that expanding highways is vital for our safety and economic development for the residents and businesses. The Highway 35 expansion will open up the Kawartha Lakes area, open up the Haliburton area, open up whole parts of my riding. It needs to be brought through as quickly as possible.

The member who just spoke promised the four-laning of Highway 11 in the first year. Wasn't it in the first year?

Interjections.

Ms. Scott: I'm just saying—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wilson: That's exactly what—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Let's all settle down and listen to the member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member for Simcoe–Grey, the member for Nipissing, do you listen to me at all up here? Order. The member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock.

Ms. Scott: In the few seconds that I have to wrap up, it's good to bring attention to the fact that the infrastructure needs to be developed as quickly as possible, but this private member's bill is not needed. We need a real plan for northern Ontario, not an excuse to do nothing.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Oraziotti, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Oraziotti: It's a pleasure to respond. Certainly this bill is a significant undertaking; we recognize that. I don't share the defeatist attitude of the member for Timmins–James Bay. This isn't about the election. This is about northern Ontario's infrastructure, and nobody has a monopoly on saving lives on our highways in northern Ontario.

I recognize the comments that were made today to support the bill. I want to congratulate and thank the member for Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh, Jim Brownell, Monique Smith from Nipissing and Phil McNeely the member for Ottawa–Orléans, for their support and their remarks today.

1100

Our government has supported infrastructure and highway development in northern Ontario, with increased passing lanes—15 kilometres—by Highway 527, a truck-climbing lane outside of Ouimet and a four-lane section outside of Sault Ste. Marie, something the community is anxiously awaiting the opening of. We've increased the funding by \$357 million in this budget. It's a record investment.

This deal is long overdue. The federal government has not been at the table. We're going to stick to the facts on this side of the House. The historic funding for the Trans-Canada is 50-50. That's what we're asking for; that's what we're going after in this bill. We expect the federal government to be at the table. We expect the federal government to be at the table when it comes to the Canada Health Act as well, and they've been missing in action. We need to raise awareness of the surpluses that Ottawa has, 30% to 40% of which is Ontario taxpayers' money.

We want you, on this side of the House, to stand up for Ontario, to stop making excuses and to stop talking about your record that was dismal in northern Ontario. We're happy to run on our record as northern members. We need support from you, on all sides of the House, to get the federal government to come to the table to support this bill.

ELECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006

MODIFIANT LA LOI ÉLECTORALE

Mr. Patten moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 146, An Act to amend the Election Act / Projet de loi 146, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Patten has moved second reading of Bill 146. Pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I'm extremely pleased and honoured this morning to be able to bring forward my private member's bill, An Act to amend the Election Act. This is the second time I've introduced this bill, so I hope we can carry it through.

The bill in front of us today is a very straightforward, simple piece of legislation but considerable in potential. It amends the Election Act and it implements two ideas: First of all, it requires that a candidate's nomination papers be accompanied by the endorsement of the registered party; and secondly, it provides for the inclusion of political affiliation identification of the candidate on the ballot, in other words, the name of the party that the person is running for.

Many Ontarians have advocated for these changes over the years, including past and present members of the Ontario Legislature. In fact, the proposed changes mirror closely the intent of a bill introduced in June 2003 by

Sean Conway, who was the former member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. It's somewhat ironic that Mr. Conway's bill was not debated because of a called election which was his bill's intent to improve. It was widely supported by the members of the last Parliament, and I'm hopeful that there will be support for this bill from all sides of the House today. Mr. Conway, at the time, had said that he believes this bill will become an important part of the democratic reform of our government and will champion these initiatives and help increase voting participation. I'm grateful for his thoughts and his support.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Mr. Rossano Bernardi, a graduate of Algonquin College and Carleton University. This young gentlemen sent me a letter in which he proposed changes to the act to allow placing political affiliation on the ballot, so I'm grateful to him. He spent a considerable amount of time and effort researching and writing his proposals because he firmly believed this change would benefit our democratic system in Ontario. It's important for us, therefore, to move forward on behalf of Rossano and his generation.

This bill puts into action recommendations from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, which approved placing political affiliations on the ballot as far back as 1989. The Chief Election Officer of Ontario has tabled numerous reports in the Legislative Assembly that have recommended the need to include the candidates' political affiliation on the ballot. These reports from the Chief Election Officer of Ontario have consistently said that placing political affiliation on the ballot aids electors in making an informed decision at the polls. It is recommended that section 27 of the Election Act be amended so that a candidate's political affiliation is designated on the ballot, and to review the wording of section 34 with regard to the form of the ballot. Today we have an opportunity to follow these recommendations in order to stop restricting the electors' access to basic information about a candidate's political affiliation.

It should also be said that the electoral law of Canada and, in effect, every other province, with the exception of Ontario, the giant, and the little giant, PEI—so we have Ontario and PEI that are out of step with all the other jurisdictions.

On March 15, 2001, in a presentation before the standing committee on procedure and House affairs, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, stated:

“The Court of Appeal for Ontario found the provisions of the Canada Elections Act confining the right to indicate political affiliation on the ballot to candidates of registered parties to be of no force and effect.

“This declaration of invalidity is founded on an extremely important conclusion: that limiting identification of political affiliation to registered parties infringed on the right to vote guaranteed by section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which includes the right of all electors to vote in full knowledge of the facts.

“Therefore, in the court's opinion, the right to vote implies the right to full and complete information necessary

to vote in full knowledge of the facts, and the political affiliation of a candidate is information that is necessary to permit an informed vote.

“In fact, in the court's view, political affiliation constitutes basic information for electors.”

Amendments to the Canada Elections Act were made in 1970—that's 36 years ago—allowing the placement of political affiliations on the ballot for all subsequent elections. The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada has indicated to us that these amendments have worked well. In other provinces such as BC and Alberta, where we contacted their offices, the chief electoral officers indicate that placing political affiliation on the ballot has improved clarity and choice for voters. So, in effect, Bill 146 will ensure that Ontario is in step with electoral practices in Canada, and our changing demographics and living patterns.

Currently in election campaigns, the political affiliation is present on campaign signage and can be multilingual to represent the multicultural demographics of a particular area. These inclusions improve clarity, improve choice. These improvements can also be applied to the ballot.

Bill 146 addresses many issues regarding elections in Ontario. It addresses problematic situations when candidates have a similar name or the exact same name. Placing the political affiliation on the ballot can solve this particular problem. It must be interesting in PEI to see Mr. MacDonald, Ms. MacDonald, Mr. McDonald, Ms. McDonald, because there are so many McDonalds in PEI.

It acknowledges today's reality of voter mobility. The rise of the mobile society has resulted in people moving often and not necessarily residing in the same riding for too long. Mobility, however, does not change one's beliefs or one's values. Providing political affiliation will allow them to identify with a candidate and associate themselves with the party they feel may best represent their views.

Finally, the bill will help recent immigrants, especially those who speak different languages, to make a more informed choice at the ballot box.

I want to continue by recognizing the importance of democratic renewal in our province. As you know, our nation—a Confederation that was born in 1867—was based on a democratic system of responsible government which was adopted by all our provinces. However, there have been few changes to our democratic system since then. Parliamentary rules in the electoral system that elects members still very much resemble those of the 19th century in Britain. Our government believes the time has come to bring these 19th century traditions in line.

Today marks an important day in Ontario, one in which the democratic institution has an opportunity, in a small way, to improve the electoral system by ensuring it is more clear to the people of our province. I will say at this point that our minister responsible for democratic renewal will direct the newly created citizens' assembly

on electoral reform to bring some real change to proposals to this particular Parliament.

I will continue my remarks on a more personal basis. I know that a healthy democracy is an issue that is near and dear to the hearts of every member in this assembly. I recall several years ago writing a paper on democratic renewal, and I want to say a few words about that.

1110

It's perhaps a measure of the well-being of our democracy that we rarely, if ever, think of it as being in any peril. By and large, we think of the health of our democratic institutions as stable and solid, if nothing else. On the rare occasions that our thoughts do take a dark turn, we tend to imagine the loss of our democracy not through a singular act, but perhaps some kind of cataclysmic event that would shake us to our foundations, something that would overturn our world, like an invasion or an occupation by a hostile, undemocratic enemy or a radical military coup from within. But what if our democracy started to slowly slip away in front of us and we did not take notice?

Early in my career, working with international programs in the YMCA, I travelled and lived extensively in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, South America and the West Indies. Those travels illustrated to me the meaning of having a thriving democracy, as well as the value of keeping it healthy and vital.

Today, while on the government side the sanctity of the democratic process is further confirmed to me, keeping democracy healthy is something that never happens naturally. It must be nurtured and, on occasion, even fought for. Sometimes democracies can be seen to be slow, burdensome and a difficult exercise. Without doubt, it has its frustrations, but it also has its responsibilities and is one of the best systems in the world.

In closing, I know there are some strong defenders of the status quo. I would of course defend their right to their position and opinions, because we need to have full debate about democracy. However, I hope that they will eventually realize that Ontario politics, government and democracy are not working as well as they could or should and need change. So I say to them that we truly have an opportunity to do something in a small way for the people we serve. These amendments will be made in the name of a better democracy.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I want to congratulate the member for bringing this issue again to the legislative floor.

While elections and the method by which we elect people are important, I have stated before, and stated again this week, that how this institution runs once we are elected is really much more important. We do need huge reform to our institution here at Queen's Park. This place, in my view, is at its lowest depths with regard to how it functions in a democratic way and I blame the government of the day for that degrading of this Parliament. Constantly, day after day, we have ministers who shout across the floor with gross misrepresentations of

what, in fact, the position of the opposition parties is. This does nothing to instill confidence in the public or with regard to our institution or our MPPs.

With regard to this particular matter—the name of the party affiliation of the candidate—I sat on a committee way back in 1989 that dealt with this matter. It was an all-party committee during the Peterson majority government, just prior to the 1990 election. The committee unanimously put forward a proposal, a report dated July 1989. It recommended the two changes that are a part of Mr. Patten's bill here today. At that time, I supported them and I continue to support them.

Interestingly enough, in history, it would have been of great help in the 1990 election to have the party affiliation on the ballot. You may remember at that time, Mr. Peterson called the election prior to three years passing in his term from 1987. The public was bound and determined to throw the Peterson government out at that time. I heard story after story about people walking into the polling place in September 1990, when the election took place, and saying, "Who is the NDP candidate?"

They didn't know who the candidate was in the area, but they knew very much that they wanted to vote for the NDP. Unfortunately for us, the Conservatives at that time had a fairly unpopular Prime Minister, which unfortunately transposed onto the provincial election. I think that was probably the biggest telling factor in terms of why Bob Rae became the Premier of this province in that election in 1990.

Having said that, what happened was that there was great confusion in the polling booths, because people were not coming in and saying, "I want to vote for John Smith," they were saying, "I want to vote for the NDP." So they couldn't look to the ballot. The lineups got longer, as people wanted to go and find out, as it was posted in the polling place, the party affiliation. But they had to leave the line, go back around, and find out who was who and all the rest of it. So it's kind of ironic that a legislative committee in 1989 recommended that, and had it been implemented prior to the 1990 election, it would have provided a much smoother polling day in 1990.

The other part I think is important is that there have been several studies done with regard to how people vote in provincial and federal elections. Some people cast their ballot on the basis of the individual candidate running. All of us in this place would like to think that we have a great deal to do with the fact that they voted for Norm Sterling or Richard Patten or whoever. Unfortunately, most of the studies that have been done show that the individual candidate counts third with regard to how a person actually casts their vote. In most cases, people cast their votes first for the party, second for the leader and third for the candidate.

There was a study in the January 2005 issue of *Electoral Insight* published by Elections Canada, which shows that in the 2004 federal election, 50% of the voters voted on the basis of party, 24% voted on the basis of leader, and only 20% voted on the basis of the local

candidate. You can find as well different kinds of statistics on this, but you will find that study after study points to the fact that most voters vote on the basis of party.

It's also interesting to note that we have stated in this Legislature many, many times that we want to encourage young people to be involved in the political process. According to a study of voters, that same survey I talked about shows that those who were 36 years of age or younger put a greater reliance on party affiliation than the general public. The younger voters, 59% rather than 50%, voted on the basis of party, 27% voted on the basis of leader, and 14% voted on the basis of the local candidate. If in fact we are true to our words and we want to engage younger people in the process, we should be transparent about what happens at the polling station so that they can in fact go and vote for the PC candidate—as most of them will want to do, as you know. That's a little bias, Mr. Speaker. I make jest.

The other part with regard to the endorsement of the party I think is extremely important as well. All political parties have, shall I charitably say, eccentrics within their realms. We have heard this week about a particular eccentric who's engaged in our party. I believe that because the party system is so entrenched in our democratic system at the present time, the leader of the party and the other members of the team who are running under that banner have some right to say to a candidate who presents extreme views, "You cannot register as a candidate of our party because your views are too extreme to be accepted by those people running under the name of the Liberal Party," or the Conservative Party or whatever. So if a particular person happened to get nominated in a riding and had racist views, I'm certain that John Tory would exclude that individual from ever running under the banner of the Progressive Conservatives as a candidate in our provincial election. We would say, "You cannot run." Or if somebody made some extreme statements with regard to other kinds of issues, John Tory and the party would say, "You cannot run for our party. You do not express the overall intent and policies of our party."

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Under those two important areas, I do support the member opposite with regard to that. I might also add, on a personal note, that Mr. Patten happens to represent the area where I spent the first 22 years of my life. It's now called Ottawa Centre; it used to be Ottawa West. I lived very close to Fisher Park high school and Elmdale Public School, where he and I actually went to—I don't know what year it was, the 65th—

Interjection.

Mr. Sterling: Maybe it was the 100th anniversary of the school that I went to. But I've said to Mr. Patten, notwithstanding the statistics I've read, that I'm sure more than 20% of the people in his riding vote on the basis of the candidate. If he should ever decide not to run, maybe I'll go back and run in that particular area. I say that in jest, because the people in my area have been very

loyal to me and I'm loyal to them. But I want to congratulate him for persevering on this particular issue.

The other part I might say is that I am very hesitant to support private members' bills, from various members in here, which are complicated and which deal with complex issues and require wide consultation before they are in fact put into place. One of the bills which I opposed being brought in through the back door, as I would call it when it deals with a major policy issue, was the adoption disclosure bill brought in by other members of the Legislature here. I believe, though, that a bill like this is simple in its scope. It has been discussed extensively in this Legislature before and can be considered by this Legislature, and actually not only pass second reading but go to committee here and offer the public the opportunity, perhaps, to hear what other people have to say about it and be passed.

I will be supporting this, but I want to also indicate that there are other members of my party who have opposing views. I don't know whether we'll hear those today, but I do indicate that this party does have people with views other than my own on this issue.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): It's indeed an honour and a privilege for me to stand here this morning to support Bill 146, An Act to amend the Election Act, brought forward by my good friend from Ottawa Centre, Richard Patten.

Mr. Patten, the member from Ottawa Centre, was certainly working on democratic reform, democratic renewal—whatever you want to call it—for quite some time before I got into this House. Coming from eastern Ontario and subscribing to one of the newspapers in the area, I got to know the work of the member from Ottawa Centre, and certainly his passion and his interest in bringing more opportunities for democratic renewal and reform to this House. At that time I thought it was great. But when he introduced this in the Legislature and during first reading debate, having had an opportunity to say a few words then and seeing the gentleman the member from Ottawa Centre encouraged to come to this House, a gentleman by the name of Rossano Bernardi, a student who studied at Algonquin College and Carleton University in Ottawa—in doing that study and supporting what Mr. Patten had done in his research, and to have somebody else, a younger individual, a student, bringing this information forward, was just another indication that this is important. This is one other step in that process of democratic renewal and reform.

We've already heard from the member that this bill will do two things: It will require that a candidate's nomination paper be accompanied by the endorsement of a registered party; and that the inclusion of the party affiliation be on the ballot. Certainly, I think we all could support those two notions with regard to that bill.

This being one of only two provinces in Canada not doing this, I think it's time for this Legislature, for this government to step up to the plate and to come into the new century, to come into seeing that this is going to provide more clarity, more information for those people

who step into the ballot booth, for those people who step in to put their check mark or their X beside the name.

I'll just give you an example with regard to clarity. It doesn't relate to the ballot booth, but it relates to the name. The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, Jean-Marc Lalonde, in first reading debate made a comment about the last election in his riding, the turmoil and confusion between two similar names on the ballot at that time. I look in my own riding right now. I'm the provincial member, but we do have a member of council for the township of South Stormont whose last name is Brownlee. Just the other day, I had an individual stop me, saying, "I didn't think the election was until 2007." I looked at her and I said, "It's not." She said, "Well, I see your name out on the sign." I said, "Well, that's not my name; that's Mr. Brownlee." Just on a sign, the confusion that can cause—I see that all the time. In fact, I had another person approach me wondering if my brother was running for township council. I had to say, "No. Make sure you understand that's a Brownlee, an L-E-E and not an E-L-L." Those things can be confusing.

I think this information, this idea the member from Ottawa Centre is bringing forward, brings clarity to the ballot itself. It brings to the ballot itself the opportunity for immigrants, those people who have language barriers thrown in front of them when it comes to that opportunity of casting a vote, for those people in a mobile society—we know that people today are moving around this province, around this country, and going in and being a new resident in a constituency where they're not familiar with the candidate but understand the party, understand the party's values and the ideas expressed by that party. Seeing that name on the ballot will certainly allow that individual a greater opportunity of making the decision that individual wants to make when he or she gets to the ballot box.

This has been around for quite some time. The member from Ottawa Centre indicated that the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the Honourable Sean Conway, when he was here, tried to get this through the Legislature. I think he had a private member's bill on June 11, 2003. I was looking back too and seeing that it was also a recommendation of the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly in 1989, some 17 years ago, when this idea was brought forward that it is and should be the right thing to do in a first process of democratic reform and renewal. We as a party made that an issue during the last election. We certainly saw the minister responsible for democratic renewal given the responsibility of making sure that we move forward in this century with new ideas. From 1867 to now, we need those new ideas, and it gives me great pleasure to add these few words on the bill from the member for Ottawa Centre.

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Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): In the one minute I have, I just want to say that I don't support putting party affiliation, political affiliation, on the ballot, and I don't support party leadership having to sign off on your nomination papers. I think we should go in the opposite direc-

tion. We should make the private member, the MPP, more important in his or her riding.

You know, I arrived here in 1990 when there were just 20 PCs elected, because Mr. Mulroney was a hated person among the electorate in Canada. I happened to work for three years as chief of staff to the Honourable Perrin Beatty in Ottawa, so my Liberal opponent kept saying throughout that campaign, "You're just a Mulroney kid and you're running." Well, thank God the people in my riding knew Jim Wilson, knew that our family had lived there some 250 years, knew that I had been the assistant to George McCague for six years and helped farmers and small business people, and helped people with their workers' compensation and welfare and all that. I'd like to believe that, at least during that election, my name had something to do with getting elected, not just the party.

Plus my party, in the last election, surprised me. They were putting a four-lane highway right through my riding. That's what came out in the blueprint document. No one consulted me on that. So I think that private members should be more important, and we shouldn't allow party brass to run our elections. I run for my constituents first and my party second.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): You know, I wrestled with this when the member from Ottawa Centre first stood in the House and reintroduced the bill that had been put forward by Sean Conway, the former member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I remember, at the time that Mr. Conway stood, thinking that this is a reasonable bill. When Mr. Patten stood in the House last week and came with virtually the identical bill, I remember thinking at that point, why is he doing this now? Why is he doing it now? The struggle that I have is I have to question the timing more than I have to question the contents of the bill.

In March 2006, the Honourable Marie Bountrogianni, the minister responsible for democratic renewal, set out to set up a citizens' forum to discuss changes to the way people get elected here. This very week, on Tuesday, she introduced the bill that will mandate and set out how the citizens are to come to a conclusion and, once they've come to that conclusion, how the electors of the province of Ontario are going to deal with it.

This bill is not going through that process. This bill, should it pass here today, should it be ordered to committee and should it eventually become law, will not be part of the process of democratic renewal which the Liberal Party ran on in the last election, and the bills—the very substantial bills—that are before the Legislature for debate at this time. In fact, what it will do is usurp the citizens' function, the 103 people who are meeting this weekend, and every other weekend from now through March or April. It will usurp their function, because what it will do is it will change in a very meaningful way how elections are conducted in this province and what the ballot looks like. It will change it from an election in which individuals run—sometimes affiliated to parties, sometimes not—for elected office, and will now include a party affiliation on the ballot.

Now, the question has to be asked—and I listened with some intent purpose to what the member from Lanark–Carleton was saying, and it is true, that people make up their minds on how to vote on a variety of factors. It can be the party that people belong to, it can be the leadership or the debates, it can be the policies, it can be individuals; it can be any number of things that go on in an individual's head that make them determine to vote one way versus another. But it forces those people during an election to weigh and balance all of those factors, only one of which is what party that person belongs to, only one of which is Liberal or NDP or Conservative or Green or Communist or Rhinoceros. It forces people to become informed voters. What this will do is allow people to be less informed voters. Mr. Sterling made the point. People were lining up saying they wanted to vote for the NDP candidate but they didn't know who that was. With the greatest of respect, I believe the electors have an obligation to be informed when they vote. They must know why they're going to vote, for whom they're going to vote. I'm not sure that this is going to do it.

I have to state that I'm troubled because the opposition parties in the Legislature the other day spoke about the 60% platform that the Liberal government has set to force change, should we change the way we vote. This bill will not be subject to the 60% vote. We're not going to go and ask the citizens' assembly to consider this. We're not going to go and ask the citizens of Ontario to meet the 60% platform and plateau so that we can put party names on a ballot for the first time in 140 years. In fact, we're going to treat this very differently than we treat democratic renewal. Is this renewal? Probably. Is this subject to the same vagaries and the same discussions and the same citizens' input that we are expecting for every other potential type of renewal? No, it is not.

I have to question why this bill is being introduced this way, when the citizens' assembly will and can determine this very issue. The citizens' assembly can look at this as one aspect of changing the electoral system; they can look at a great many more. And that's the problem I have with it. Yes, it's a private member's bill. Is it illegal? No. Mr. Patten is suggesting it's not illegal for him to do this, and of course it's not. But it is, should it pass today, should it be ordered to committee today, going to usurp the function of the 103 individuals, because that is their responsibility. If they are going to recommend that the system remain the same, they can do so by amendment, and one of the amendments, quite possibly, could be this. I believe we should be leaving that to those individuals.

That is what should be happening, and, quite frankly, that's what the minister had to say the other day. I just go back; it's only a couple of days old. This is what the minister said in the House in introducing her bill, in response to the bill she introduced on October 24: "On or before May 15, 2007, the assembly will announce their recommendation. If the assembly decides that there should be a change to our current electoral system, a referendum is needed to allow all voting Ontarians the opportunity to participate in the final decision." That's not what's going to happen here, and that's why I have that problem.

I have to say that the citizens' assembly will look at far more than whether to put a name on a ballot, but they could do that. In fact, that might be all they do, should they decide the system is one that should be retained. But I do have a problem as well, because the system, as it has existed in Ontario for 140 years, with all of its flaws, is well understood by the people of this province. Notwithstanding that it got as far as an all-party committee in 1989, there has never been a serious effort to actually have this passed until today. This is the first time it's ever been debated in this Legislature. With all respect, in 2003 it was not debated. In 1999, there was a private member's bill that was not debated as well. I've done the research on this.

Mr. Patten: And 204.

Mr. Prue: Well, 204 was not debated—

Mr. Patten: You spoke to it.

Mr. Prue: We could not find it, nor could the library.

But I want to let the citizens' assembly do what they need to do, and what the citizens' assembly needs to do is not figure out whether or not to put a name on a ballot, but in fact how people are elected to this House. There are three basic types of democracy, as the select committee that travelled across Canada and to Europe this year found out. There are three basic ways that people get elected.

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One is the system that we have used here in Ontario for 140 years, the Westminster model, also known as first past the post. In that system, it is not necessary to have, and in fact very often does not have, party affiliation on the ballot. The reason is that, as it was developed, it was possible and is still possible for individuals to run without party affiliation and, provided they get the most votes, they can win. They will be here and will serve in the same capacity as someone who is elected through the party process or is a member of a political party or campaigns with party literature. We have, over the 140 years of using this model, seen fit not to include the party label primarily for that reason: to give individuals who are not affiliated the same opportunity as those who are to seek election and to be seen to be fair on a ballot, listing them only alphabetically and in no other way.

There is another type of system that was studied by the select committee, which exists primarily in Ireland and in Malta, and to some very small extent in the state and senate Legislatures of Australia, called the STV system. It is a system in which parties are important, because the parties determine which candidate they are going to run in the multi-member constituencies. It is the parties that determine the candidate to put forward and the number of candidates they are putting forward, and where it is literally impossible for people not affiliated with a party to be elected. In that, party affiliation is necessary, because in an STV system it would have to be on the ballot.

The same is true with an MMP ballot, the mixed member proportional system, used, with the exception of Britain and Canada, probably everywhere else in the

world. People generally get two votes: one for the person to represent them in the constituency, who is not named as a party member, save and except in Germany; and a second vote for the party they would like to see in the Legislature, where they would cast their second vote. In that system, party affiliation is not necessary and ought not to be put on the constituency level, but it would be absolutely essential if you are casting your second ballot in favour of a party.

The reason I'm talking about this is not to confuse this issue but to simply say that this is what the citizens' committee is going to be wrestling with. They are going to have to look at whether or not the system as it exists is an appropriate one and whether or not it should be changed, and if it's changed, how is the party label attached? This will usurp that function.

I have to say, I'm somewhat puzzled. I remember the heady days—or at least they were heady days for the new Liberal government back in October 2003. They ran an election and won 72 seats. We in the New Democrats were reduced to seven seats. We acted very much as a party, the same as everyone else in that election. We had debates, we had leaders, we had posters and all kinds of literature that went out and ads on television and everything as a party. But when it came to the Legislature on the first day we were here, the Liberal government in their wisdom said we weren't a party. Remember that? We were not a party. We were seven independents. The legislation said we were independents because—

Mr. Patten: Because the rules said that.

Mr. Prue: Because the rules said that. Then these are the same—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Prue: If we were independents, it's because the election process mandated that you were independent. I have a hard time saying, "You're seven independents in here." It forced Marilyn Churley to change her name at that time to "Marilyn Churley NDP" so she could be recognized in the House for what she believed was a party. Yet here we have a bill that does the opposite.

Mr. Patten: It's not the opposite.

Mr. Prue: It's the opposite. I didn't heckle a single time when you spoke. I don't know. You must be very bitter about something.

Mr. Patten: You are.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Prue: In the end, we need to do many things. Mr. Sterling was correct that there needs to be a reform of the Legislature, perhaps, so that there is not mindless heckling taking place while members are trying to debate important issues that are before the Legislature and other things that need to be done. That is important. But in the final analysis, a decision has to be made whether this is a good idea. Were we not looking at electoral reform, were we not doing anything else, I would say that this is not a bad idea. Send it to committee, see what people have to say about it, pass it if you want to.

But in the whole analysis of what is taking place, what is going to happen next March or April when 103 citizens

report, what is likely to happen in terms of a referendum, what is likely to happen in terms of discussion and education, what is likely to happen on October 4, 2007, when people will not only vote for a new government but will vote on all of the reforms that the citizens are putting forward, should they put reforms together at all, I do not believe that this should be instituted. I do not believe that it should, if it is passed here today, go to committee. I do not believe anything should happen to it save and except that the citizens' committee should be informed that the members who were here in the Legislature and who voted on this today think it is an idea that they may wish to consider. That is the only thing that should happen to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I'll just try to make the point of why we should support this bill, based on being the member for Ottawa–Orléans and a member from the Ottawa community. I'm really pleased that the member for Ottawa Centre, a good friend and a very hard worker for his community and for Ottawa—I'll just try to make the point why we should certainly support this bill.

The member for Lanark–Carleton made a good point. It's one of the few good points that I've heard him make since I got here three years ago. He's a fellow engineer; I should be more supportive. But he said that approximately 50% of people vote party when they get into the booth, so that's an important thing. From my perspective as the member for Ottawa–Orléans, I'd be very proud to have "Liberal" beside my name on that ballot. I think I should have my name and then the word "Liberal" beside it, because I think the record is what we should be running on.

I'd just like to go over the record in Ottawa–Orléans. What the Conservatives did is they closed the Grace hospital. Well, the Liberals added three MRIs, so I think that's a record that we can be proud of. They closed the Riverside hospital; we expanded the Queensway Carleton. So again, it's a record. Let's have the record in there beside our name. I think it's important. What have we done in the preceding years so that the voters should support us?

The Conservatives tried to close the Montfort Hospital, et c'était grâce à Gisèle Lalonde et le groupe de francophones et francophiles à Ottawa qu'ils ont gagné en cour et l'Hôpital Montfort est ouvert aujourd'hui. Ce n'est pas seulement ouvert aujourd'hui; the Liberal government, which I'm a proud member of, will double the size of the Montfort Hospital. That will be great for my community of Ottawa–Orléans. So I want to run on that Liberal record.

The Conservatives tried to close the CHEO cardiac unit. We added newborn screening.

The Deputy Speaker: I know the member is going to bring this line of discussion back to Bill 146 and the content of that bill, please.

Mr. McNeely: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that.

The purpose, I think, of what is being advanced by the member for Ottawa Centre is that we should have our

party affiliation on the ballot. It is extremely important. It's extremely important if you look at what's happened to our health system. It's important if you look at our record on the education system. It's our investments. Liberals invest in our country and in our province. You look at a federal surplus of \$13 billion, yet no dollars for commercializing our great research that we're doing in this province.

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So I think that's what we're talking to: What does that mean? What does Conservative mean? What does Liberal mean? What does the New Democratic Party mean? I think that's what we're talking about. I'd just like to say that I want to run with that label beside my name; I am proud of it. On this side of the House, I think we all want to do that. I can understand that the member from Simcoe–Grey would want to run against the record of that party and so would not want the name there. But I think that we as Liberals on this side of the House feel it is extremely important that the Liberal name be beside our name, because when people go into the polling booth, as they do in our riding, in Ottawa–Orléans—we have a lot of military moving in and moving out, we have a lot of civil servants who are moving in and moving out, and if they move in just shortly before the election, it lets them know what the party affiliation is they would be voting for. I'm very much in favour of that.

I think there are a lot of reasons why we should run on our record. If a party decides to cut all funding for public transit, if a party decides to not have a good environmental program in place, that it's going to ignore Kyoto, that name should go against the name of the person running for that party, because those are their historical positions on important issues and those are going to be their positions on current issues.

I am very much in favour of doing this; I think we should. We have a party system in this province. I'm very supportive of the bill brought forward by the member for Ottawa Centre, and I hope very much that it gets the support of this House. We're all proud of our record. Let's put the name of the party that has that record on the ballot.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock):

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to debate the bill brought forward this morning by the member from Ottawa Centre, Bill 146, the Election Amendment Act.

I do understand and appreciate the intent of the bill in identifying the party affiliation of candidates on provincial election ballots in Ontario, and I support that. There have been times throughout the history of Ontario where there's certainly been confusion—candidates with similar names, which was brought forward today, voters who speak different languages and immigrants, just to name a few.

There is a lot to be said for democratic reform, and it takes different angles. I know the member from Lanark–Carleton is certainly a statesman. He's been in the Legis-

lature for many years, and his comments on this issue also lead us to the behaviour in the Legislature that we need to reform, that this is where a lot of reform needs to take place. I can cite many examples of ministers and members talking back and forth to each other, and that kind of decorum is not an example that we want to present to Ontarians.

Part of this bill is the fact that we're one of only two provinces that do not list party affiliations alongside candidates' names. In 1989, there was a report commissioned, and it recommended these two changes that the member has brought forward. So I certainly hope that the government on that side is going to move forward on this bill.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): Thank you for giving me the chance to speak for a couple minutes in support of Bill 146. I'm sorry, I was in a committee and didn't hear all the debate about this bill. But I received Mr. Patten's speech last night and I read it all. I know what he's looking for. There's no doubt about it: The member from Ottawa Centre always brings unique ideas and has a different perspective on many different issues in this House, probably due to his experience in this place, where he has participated in many elections. I think I will take his wise advice as a person with experience, because he's been, as I mentioned, through many elections.

Also, I listened to my friend my colleague from Ottawa–Orléans when he was talking about a very important element: why we have to attach the name of the party to the name of the candidate. It's very important when you have a society or a community with a big university or a military base, for instance, where the soldiers and military move back and forth on a regular basis or the students move back and forth from their locations. So it is very important to attach the party to the candidate's name. Most of the time, people vote for the platform of the party, which is very important. When you have a platform presented by the NDP or the Conservative Party or the Liberal Party, the people, before an election, agree or disagree on the platform of the party. As you know, most of the time, realistically, most people in this place, whether they're from the opposition or the governing party, vote with their government, vote for their platform and fight for their platform.

This gives some kind of democratic process to elections, when we allow the people of Ontario, the electorate, to know exactly what they're voting for when they go to vote, to know exactly what they are getting when they vote for one party or another party, which I think is very important, because most of the time we vote for the platform; we don't vote for the individuals. Due to respect for many individuals, the candidates, in the province of Ontario, many people who don't like the party like its members. But in general, to give an indication of a very good range of approaches to the democratic process, I think we have a right to apply some kind of mechanism that will allow the people to know which party they are voting for.

So I agree with the member from Ottawa Centre. He brings a very unique perspective. As we are reviewing the Election Act at the present time, a part of it should be to look at adding the name of the party before the name of the candidate. Then I think we will have applied the full democratic process.

I know the citizens of this province are always looking at us as the people who represent them. They want to see a full presentation, they want to see their views being implemented and reflected in this place. Therefore, I think it's very important to add the affiliation of the party before the name of the candidate. It's very important to allow whatever party has a good platform, whether it's on education or health care or infrastructure, to be elected.

So in the end, I support my colleague from Ottawa Centre. Hopefully all members of this House will give him support, because it's very important for our democracy.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Patten, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Patten: I want to thank the members who have spoken on this, regardless of their views. I think it's an important issue, albeit a small step on the long road of democratic reform, of which many of you have spoken.

I thought the first member who spoke, the member from Lanark–Carleton, shared some insightful information, something that has some validity, by sharing some views of the studies which show that party affiliation is the basis on which most people do things.

This particular bill, by the way, would identify independent people, so that for the member from Beaches–East York, when he worries about the nature of affiliation, an independent would be identified. I think of somebody who runs as a Liberal one time and then has a falling out with their party and runs again. People may think, “Well, that person is still a Liberal,” but in the next election the person would be identified as an independent, and that would clarify that for people as they were engaging in this.

By the way, for the member from Beaches–East York, this bill is different from last time. I remember some people were concerned about asking the parties to sign off on who the candidates representing the party might be. But you'll have to agree that whatever your basis is, each party has to endorse a candidate to use their party affiliation. That's why I took that section out as to however that is done.

I also agree that the citizens' assembly might want to address this. I'll try to see if there's a way in which I can in fact introduce this concept to them, because it seems to me most members are in agreement with this. The fact is that we are out of step with our siblings across Canada. There is some reason why they have found this to be useful and continue to promote it, and I hope that members will support this.

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

TRANSCANADA HIGHWAY
IMPROVEMENT ACT
(HIGHWAY 17), 2006

LOI DE 2006
SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DE L'AUTOROUTE
TRANSCANADIENNE (ROUTE 17)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We'll first deal with ballot item 55, standing in the name of Mr. Orazietti.

Mr. Orazietti has moved second reading of Bill 149. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. David Orazietti (Sault Ste. Marie): I'd ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on general government.

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

ELECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2006
LOI DE 2006
MODIFIANT LA LOI ÉLECTORALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item 56. Mr. Patten has moved second reading of Bill 146, An Act to amend the Election Act. Is 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. Carried.

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I'd like to refer this bill to the standing committee on public accounts.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been asked that this bill be referred to the standing committee on public accounts. Agreed? Agreed.

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

The House recessed from 1201 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): After eight long months of increasing tensions and disruptions in Caledonia, the Premier now says it's time to shift the problem entirely to the federal government. He is even going to give them a bill for his mismanagement, all of which seems to be an attempt to divert attention from this government's abysmal response in Caledonia. Let me give you some examples of the responses to date by this government.

In response to questioning about the cost, the minister said, and I quote, it would “cost what it costs.” Now that

the costs have mushroomed, the Premier has suddenly decided to present a bill to the federal government, including policing costs, which are a provincial responsibility. Yet the federal government says to date it has received no formal request for compensation.

Earlier this year, Minister Ramsay said, "The dispute really is an accounting claim, by and large. While there are some particular parcels that are involved in a land claim, the overall dispute is an accounting claim." The minister boasted that the province was taking a lead role in Caledonia, and the Premier stated that he took pride in working hand in hand with the federal government every step of the way. In June, the Premier stated firmly that community safety was a condition of further negotiations, and yet, to date, the people wanted for serious charges remain at large.

All the people of this province can know with certainty is that this government and this Premier will say whatever is most advantageous at the time.

WORLD PSORIASIS DAY

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): It seems that there are days, weeks and months set aside to celebrate, acknowledge and raise awareness around so many causes, concerns and issues, many of which—most of which, actually—are noted, even founded inside this Legislature. October 29 is no different.

For a number of years, various patient groups discussed the idea of having an annual day especially dedicated to people with psoriasis. In 2004, members and non-members of psoriasis associations all around the world launched World Psoriasis Day to raise awareness of psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. World Psoriasis Day is truly a global event, giving voice to the 125 million people with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis around the world. World Psoriasis Day aims to raise the profile of a condition which needs to be taken more seriously by international and national authorities. People with psoriasis need to know that they are not alone, and others need to understand that while psoriasis is not contagious, it is a disease that can be quite devastating and cause much misery to its sufferers.

As with many health issues, there is little comfort level with discussing psoriasis, but if we are to achieve better health care options for its sufferers, we need to be more forthcoming in our discussions. This statement is an attempt to make a contribution to that end. This October 29 is an opportunity for us all to educate ourselves about psoriasis and to show our support for its sufferers.

WATER QUALITY

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I rise today to state the clear position of John Tory and the PC caucus with respect to Bill 43. We on this side of the House have stated from the very beginning that we fully support clean water and source water protection for On-

tarians. The McGuinty intention with Bill 43 has never been about clean water; it has everything to do with downloading legal and financial obligations.

It's important to correct what a number of members across the way have tried to suggest, and it's a shame that they have stooped so low in their partisan ways and are trying to make fools of Ontarians. The member for Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh, the member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot, the member for Scarborough Centre, the member for Perth–Middlesex, the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, the member for Northumberland, the member for Huron–Bruce and, of course, the Minister of the Environment, who is gleefully carrying the baton in this relay of in-accuracy—I say to those members, how dare you turn your clean water into a political issue?

Shame on you for trying to make fools of hard-working Ontarians, and shame on you for breaking your promises and doing anything to get elected. If any one of the members I've mentioned had one ounce of courage, they would come clean with the people of Ontario and say this bill does not do what they are pretending it does.

The minister says they're rolling up their sleeves on that side of the House. If that's what you call avoiding responsibility, hiding behind yet another layer of bureaucracy, downloading responsibilities and providing inaccurate information to Ontario, Minister, you're doing one heck of a good job.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): Toronto and Ontario have been witness to great festivities in recent days as three of Ontario's major faith communities all marked significant occasions on their religious calendars. The Muslim community celebrated Eid, the Hindu community celebrated Diwali and the Sikh community celebrated Bandi Chhor Divas.

In addition to timing, another similarity these occasions share with one another is how they touch upon themes like transcendence over intolerance, altruism and community building. Eid marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, a time of worship and contemplation. The month also teaches social consciousness and solidarity. Diwali commemorates Lord Rama's return after 14 years in exile and the victory over darkness. The Sikh community commemorates Guru Hargobind Sahib's return from being jailed as a political prisoner.

My riding of Toronto–Danforth is home to followers of all three faiths, many of whom converged at Gerrard India Bazaar, also in my riding, this past weekend as it hosted a vibrant celebration to honour this auspicious time amongst believers.

I wish to take this opportunity in the Legislature to again wish my constituents from all three communities, Eid Mubarak, Shubh Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas Mubarak.

MAC CUDDY

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): Words like “hard-working, driven, ambitious, competitive and proud” would appropriately describe Mac Cuddy. This self-made millionaire was born on a farm near Kerwood and was a graduate of the University of Guelph. In 1950, he started his business with the purchase of a farm and 1,500 turkeys near Strathroy.

Mac Cuddy was more than a producer; he was a natural geneticist. Together with his friend George Nicholas, they developed the first white turkey, which was more tender and better muscled than the black birds we had traditionally seen on our tables. Mac wanted to make turkey more than just a Thanksgiving and Christmas meat, so the business continued to grow as the turkey king of Canada expanded into processing, marketing and transportation.

Soon, one in every six turkeys sold in the world came from a Cuddy egg. By the 1980s, Cuddy Food Products had won the Canadian contract to supply chicken McNuggets and filets to McDonald’s restaurants.

He received many honours for his work as an innovator in the agri-food industry. For many years, Mac Cuddy was one of the largest employers in his hometown of Strathroy, and he supported its residents by generously donating to local charities and events. In return, the community of Strathroy has taken its identity from its association with Cuddy Farms. We have our annual turkey fest and proudly call ourselves the turkey capital of Canada.

The original brick house still stands as the family home. That’s where Mac Cuddy died last Wednesday of complications from his 19-year battle with multiple sclerosis. He was 86 years old.

SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): Liberals will say anything to get re-elected, as they’ve shown with their false rhetoric about the Ontario Landowners and supply management. But remember, one doesn’t look behind the bedroom door unless one has hidden there himself, and the Liberals have been hiding behind that bedroom door for quite some time.

On October 5, I met with the Ontario Landowners. The next day, the landowners sent out a press release, and now the Liberals are calling it a secret meeting. Let me quote a September 21 letter from the Ontario Landowners: “We are currently making arrangements to meet with the members of the Liberal Party’s rural caucus to voice our concerns with the problematic pieces of legislation. They appear to be quite eager to accommodate us.” The Liberals offered two possible dates for their secret meeting. Why are the Liberals being so secretive? What are they hiding?

Yesterday, George Smitherman questioned opposition support for supply management. My question: Why hasn’t he signed on his support for FarmGate5? It’s not

just him; 31 Liberals oppose supply management. I’m proud that every PC member has signed the FarmGate5 initiative supporting supply management. But this raises the question, if George Smitherman massaged the facts in his most recent press release, can we really believe anything the Deputy Premier has to say?

1340

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In terms of decorum in the House, I believe a different way of saying that someone told an untruth was just done, and I think it should be withdrawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): While it is a point of order, I am not exactly certain that that’s what occurred. But I know that all members will try to use their best judgment in ensuring that not only the strict rules are adhered to, but the general spirit of the rules is adhered to.

AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, often referred to as Lou Gehrig’s disease, is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. Motor neurons die, and the brain’s ability to initiate and control muscle movement is lost. Patients in the late stages of the disease may become totally paralyzed, although, for the vast majority of people, their minds remain unaffected. Sadly, in all cases, ALS is fatal.

Across the country, 3,000 Canadians live with ALS. One of these individuals is Don Genier, who lives in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh. Mr. Genier, a former OPP constable, faces his disease bravely and with the unwavering support of his loving wife, Traci Trottier, and his extended family of Corus Entertainment, our local radio station. Tonight, Corus Entertainment will be presenting a concert at Aultsville Theatre that will draw awareness to the disease while simultaneously raising funds to help Mr. Genier find alternative treatment for his condition. This concert will feature prominent local talent from eastern Ontario, with performances by Ashley MacLeod, the Bobby Lalonde Band and Traci Trottier’s own sister, Kelli Trottier, who is an outstanding fiddle player.

I wish to draw to the attention of this House the situation faced by those suffering from ALS, and to wish Mr. Genier and his family the best of luck with the concert this evening. Certainly, they will be in the thoughts and prayers of all those attending.

REPORT, OFFICE OF THE INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): Yesterday the Honourable Coulter Osborne, Integrity Commissioner of Ontario, tabled a report in this House that found that the member from Leeds–Grenville violated the Members’ Integrity Act when he tried to influence a criminal court

proceeding related to Louise Russo. I filed that complaint on behalf of my constituent. The Integrity Commissioner ruled that Mr. Runciman's statements were a clear violation of the Members' Integrity Act and were intended to influence the criminal proceedings before the court.

Mr. Runciman owes Louise Russo an apology for his bully tactics and his attempt to revictimize her. This ruling is a vindication for Miss Russo and our justice system, and a harsh rebuke of Mr. Runciman and his bullying ways. What's worse is that Mr. Runciman and the Leader of the Opposition are now turning their cheek to the violation of the Members' Integrity Act and turning their backs on Louise Russo. Yesterday, the member opposite showed no remorse and said that, if given the chance, he would attempt to interfere with court proceedings again. At the time, Ms. Russo's attorney said that Mr. Runciman's bullying caused her great distress and that she feels she is at risk of being further victimized.

Thank goodness Mr. Runciman's bully tactics did not work. The criminals were punished and Ms. Russo got the order she deserves. I am demanding that Mr. Runciman do the—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Members' statements?

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I'm proud of the investments this government has made to strengthen our justice system. Ontarians should know that we're investing \$300 million more now in justice initiatives than back in 2003. Actions speak louder than words: 59 more judges; 83 new crowns; more than 1,000 new police officers on the front lines; 67 new parole and probation officers hired; new courthouses; and the creation of a guns and gangs unit that has successfully made the streets of Toronto safer today than they were the summer before.

Members of the opposition would like you to believe that they're tough on crime, yet one quick glance at their record proves this is certainly not the case. As a former minister, Bob Runciman knows full well that his party slashed \$181 million from the Ministry of Public Safety and Security. To that I say shame.

Now the Leader of the Opposition and other members of his caucus are having secret meetings with a radical right-wing group that breaks the law and threatens OPP officers. The Liberal government has shown support for front-line officers by investing in over 1,000 new police. We've invested in the correctional system by keeping jails open and bringing a Tory private jail back into the public fold. We changed the crown policy manual so that crowns always oppose bail for gun crimes wherever possible—something the Tories never did. We stand for law and order and peace and stability, and the members opposite stand up for people like Randy Hillier, who brags about breaking the law.

Unlike the Tories, who—

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

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I ask for unanimous consent to put forth a motion without notice regarding meeting times of the House.

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

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I move that when the House adjourns on Thursday, November 2, it stand adjourned until Tuesday, November 14, 2006.

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

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK AND FISCAL REVIEW

PERSPECTIVES ÉCONOMIQUES ET REVUE FINANCIÈRE

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I rise today to present the 2006 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review and the second quarter financial results.

J'ai l'honneur aujourd'hui de vous présenter les Perspectives économiques et revue financière de l'Ontario de 2006, ainsi que les résultats financiers pour le deuxième trimestre. Ces résultats, those results, indicate that we are on track to meet the fiscal plan for 2006-07.

At the same time, by next year, the province's treasury will begin to feel the impact of an economy that is growing more modestly than expected even just a few months ago.

Since we came to office, Ontario has benefited from sustained economic growth. That growth is rooted in our plan designed to enhance Ontario's long-term success.

Notre plan vise—

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want to point out that we do not have copies of this statement. Are we not, as members, entitled to have a copy of this statement?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): My understanding is that there were copies delivered to the leader and critics of the various political parties in here, is that not correct?

Mr. Klees: Members of the government have copies. It has been traditional, Speaker, that members of this Legislature—

The Speaker: This is a ministerial statement. Everything that's happening is in order and is according to tradition, as I understand it. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notre plan vise à consolider l'Ontario en investissant dans la santé.

1350

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): No respect for the traditions of this House.

The Speaker: The member for Halton will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: As I was saying, it is a plan to build a stronger Ontario by investing in the health of our people, by investing in the education of our people and by investing in the competitiveness of our people. It's a plan designed to ensure that Ontario succeeds over the long term.

It's been a busy three years. Cast your mind back to 2003, when our public education system was failing our students, when our public health care system was anything but healthy, when public transit was an orphan of public policy, when investment in post-secondary education and training lagged badly, when provincial and municipal governments were at loggerheads, when Ontario woke up to a \$5.5-billion deficit. In simple terms, our mandate three years ago was to build a better Ontario. Notre mandat il y a trois ans était de bâtir un meilleur Ontario.

Today, our school system has more teachers, smaller class sizes, higher test scores and improved school buildings. Today, better primary care, community care and long-term care are improving the health of Ontarians. Today, hundreds of thousands of students are benefiting from our historic \$6.2-billion investment in post-secondary education. Today, construction workers are building more than \$30 billion worth of public infrastructure through ReNew Ontario. We are investing \$1.2 billion in new transit and municipal roads and bridges across the province. We have a comprehensive energy plan that secures electricity supply and encourages conservation. And today, the province's finances are managed with the transparency and prudence required by a thriving democracy.

Ontarians know and appreciate the progress that we've made thus far, and they know that there is much more to do.

There are business cycles to every healthy economy. Aujourd'hui, l'Ontario connaît une période de croissance économique plus modérée. Today, Ontario is in the midst of a period of somewhat more modest economic growth. Just months ago, most economists expected Ontario's economy to grow at a higher rate than was predicted in our budget. Since that time, several external factors have changed those expectations. There's slower growth in the US economy; that's Ontario's largest trading partner. A slowdown there has an immediate impact here. The Canadian dollar hit a 28-year high in May of this year. A higher dollar challenges the ability of Ontario's exporters to compete. Oil prices reached a record high of more than US\$78 per barrel in July of this year. Higher oil prices are tough on businesses everywhere; they're tough on businesses in Ontario. Indeed, higher oil prices are tough on individual Ontarians and their families. These and

other factors have led private sector forecasters to reduce their expectations of growth for Canada and Ontario in the near term.

Let's be clear: The economy is growing and is creating jobs, and it will continue to do so. Our concern is that most experts predict slower growth in the short term. Let me explain. On average, private sector forecasters expect Ontario's real GDP growth to be 1.7% in 2006, 2.1% in 2007, and 3.1% in 2008. At the same time, the Bank of Canada has recently said that interest rates will remain unchanged for now. Some economists predict lower interest rates over the next few months. I say that that would be welcome news in Ontario.

Our practice is to take into account the risks on the horizon and adjust our fiscal plan accordingly. So the Ministry of Finance now projects real GDP growth of 1.6% in 2006. That's down from the 2.3% projected in the 2006 budget. However, by 2008 we expect a return to growth of 3%, and that's just up from the 2.9% that was projected in the budget earlier this year. In other words, this period of more modest economic growth represents a kind of bridge to a new cycle of expansion within an economy that is fundamentally strong.

Let us remember in this House that economic forecasts are more than lines on a graph and percentages on a page. Slower economic growth has real impact on real people and the communities they live in. Our responsibility is to take steps that will mitigate that impact. So our ongoing strategic and long-term investments in people and the economy will continue, and in addition we will focus on four key areas:

(1) We'll focus on services and programs to help job-threatened and laid-off workers.

(2) We are going to fast-track a number of infrastructure projects to generate immediate economic activity and job creation.

(3) We are going to encourage interprovincial trade, including matching the industrial needs in Alberta with industrial capacity in Ontario, and we're going to explore the merits of joining the Alberta-British Columbia trade agreement.

(4) We are going to launch a new campaign to encourage Ontarians to vacation and travel in their own province, right here in Ontario. We want to strengthen tourism, because it is one of the most important sectors of our economy.

This year, we have also agreed to a single corporate tax administration system, we've proposed a new, enhanced dividend tax credit, and we have accelerated a capital tax rate cut. All of these things will help to create jobs and generate new investment in the province.

The current period of more moderate economic growth will have an impact on our financial plan. To be sure, we've made real progress on eliminating the \$5.5-billion deficit that we inherited. Indeed, the public accounts for last year, 2005-06, show a modest surplus of about \$300 million for that year. In 2006-07, that is the current year, we continue to project a deficit of \$1.9 billion. Now, if the reserve is not required, the deficit would be about \$900 million. However, for the time

being, we are adjusting our medium-term forecasts as set out in the March budget.

So if current economic trends continue, our 2007-08 deficit is projected to be \$2.2 billion—that's up from \$1.5 billion—and that is largely due to the slowing US economy, the value of the Canadian dollar and rising oil prices. If the reserve is not required, the deficit would be about \$700 million. However, by 2008-09 we expect a \$500-million surplus, again, if the reserve is not required.

1400

Let me be clear: We are determined to reach the firmer fiscal ground of sustainable balanced budgets. Ontarians expect no less from us. But remember, slower economic growth means reduced revenues and greater spending pressures, so achieving our goal will require even more prudence and greater discipline in managing our expenditures and, indeed, managing expectations.

One of the greatest risks we face comes from the possibility that the federal government will not live up to its obligations to the people of Ontario and to our government. La possibilité que le gouvernement fédéral ne respectera pas ses obligations envers la population ontarienne et envers notre gouvernement représente un très grand risque.

According to a recent article by TD chief economist Don Drummond, and I quote, "The net federal take from Ontario represents a huge fiscal drag that makes it difficult for the Ontario economy to compete." Premier McGuinty fought that battle on behalf of Ontarians when he negotiated the \$6.9-billion Canada-Ontario agreement with the federal government.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: That agreement was intended to help address the unfair gap between what Ontarians send to Ottawa and what they receive back. Prime Minister Harper endorsed that agreement, but so far his government has failed to honour that agreement. La population du Canada et la population de l'Ontario s'attendent à ce que le gouvernement fédéral tienne parole. The people of Canada and the people of Ontario expect the federal government to keep its word.

Let me be very specific. We look forward to a full funding of the Canada-Ontario agreement. We look forward to a true partnership in major Ontario infrastructure projects, including public transit and the North American gateway. We look forward to addressing the inequities in the distribution of the Canada health transfer and the Canada social transfer. We look forward to implementation of the labour market partnership agreement to provide training and employment assistance. We look forward to employment insurance rules that treat Ontarians as fairly as workers in other parts of Canada. Did you know that, on average, unemployed Ontarians receive some \$3,600 less in employment insurance benefits than unemployed workers in other parts of Canada?

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'm having great difficulty hearing the minister over top of the interjections. I need to be able to hear him. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: We invite the people of Ontario to join with us as we continue to press the federal gov-

ernment to honour its commitments to our government and to honour its responsibilities to the people of Ontario. Anything less is just not good enough.

The Ontario economy has performed well. L'économie ontarienne se porte bien. It has created more than 250,000 new jobs in the past three years. Elle a créé plus de 250 000 nouveaux emplois ces trois dernières années.

Our investments in health care, our investments in post-secondary education and our investments in infrastructure have made a real difference to the lives of Ontarians. But we're facing an economy that is growing at a slower rate. That is why we are taking the actions that we are taking, that is why we will continue our prudent and disciplined fiscal approach, and that is why we will continue to insist that the federal government treat Ontarians fairly.

As we prepare for next year's budget and as we reshape our strategy for the years to come, I want to hear from Ontarians in every walk of life and from every corner of the province. I want to hear from you because we have so much more to do and we can do it so much more effectively if we do it together. Together, we can unlock the real potential of this province and of the 12.5 million people for whom this magnificent stretch of land is home.

The Speaker: Responses?

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I rise to respond on behalf of the official opposition to what I think most people across the province are going to find is a profoundly disappointing statement.

I think oftentimes when you have no plan, it's difficult to come in and really tell us what's next in terms of trying to move the economy forward. There were words used today like "bridge" or "cycle," or the Premier made reference to an "inevitability," but the fact is that while the McGuinty Liberals sit comfortably here in Queen's Park spending hard-earned taxpayers' dollars on a lot of projects that I think many Ontario taxpayers would call into question, at the very same time that their punitive taxation levels—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order, Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Stop the clock. I need to be able to hear the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: The fact is that the punitive taxation of the McGuinty Liberals, the illogical regulation and the irresponsible spending are leaving a lot of Ontarians gasping for air, and they won't have received any oxygen as a result of what they saw today.

We know there's somewhere in the neighbourhood of 100,000 manufacturing jobs that have been lost in this province in the past year alone, 4,000 forestry industry jobs lost, an unemployment rate that is higher than the national average for only the second time in 30 years, and the RBC report, to name one, says we're going to be dead last this year in terms of projections for economic growth. Yet they find an economic update statement from the Minister of Finance today and from the McGuinty government that has more time devoted to reciting things

from the past or to criticizing others than it does to actually outlining any concrete initiatives whatsoever that are going to be taken for real people in this province. There's about a third of a page that is allocated to saying they're going to focus on certain things. We've come to learn with these people that when it's comes to focusing on or promising to do or committing to do anything, we mightn't have even wasted the paper and the ink to put that down.

Do we have a comprehensive plan to help families and communities hard hit by job losses? The answer is no, but we have \$6 million to drop the C from the logo of the lottery and gaming corporation.

Les 90 000 familles en Ontario qui ont perdu des emplois dans l'industrie cette année n'ont rien reçu de M. McGuinty. Même si les constructions se font, ça ne sera d'aucune aide pour ces familles.

1410

Do we have any initiative at all to attract and retain investment in Ontario by addressing some of the taxes that discourage investment in this province? No, but we have \$91 million to fire nurses we desperately need in Ontario.

Do we have any meaningful help for farmers, who are still themselves gasping for air across the province and hurting as badly as ever? No, but we have \$20 million to give to Liberal appointees in raises for people who serve on boards, agencies and commissions.

As we see the government ramp up spending by billions more than their own projections already this year—barely halfway through the year they've already spent \$1 billion more than their own plan, which they put forward a few months ago—do we have any relief at all for the taxpayers out there who Mr. Dodge says are going to be the only people, despite the McGuinty government, who are going to keep the economy from slipping into recession? There is no relief for them at all. They get it in the neck on an ongoing basis with the health tax. There's nothing for those people at all, and yet at the same time there is \$100 million in partisan propaganda ad campaigns financed by those very same taxpayers who are getting it in the neck from this government.

This government's revenue, without the health tax revenue, is now \$2.7 billion more than they said they needed in their own election platform. Clearly they're spending the money they've taken in on a tax they said they would not bring in—the biggest broken promise of all—on everything but health care. It's on all kinds of ad campaigns and logo changes and firing nurses and severance payments and so on and so forth. This government is so out of touch—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I need to be able to hear the Leader of the Opposition. Minister of Health, I'm going to warn you for the last time.

Mr. Tory: The 16 people lying in the emergency room at the hospital in Brantford, where I was yesterday, waiting for a bed upstairs got nothing in this statement. The 35 people in the acute care beds upstairs in that same hospital, waiting for a long-term-care bed, got nothing.

People who are losing their jobs—425 of them at NRI Industries in Toronto who heard about that yesterday—there's nothing, not one thing in this statement for them. The small business people I met in London last night, who are struggling to stay open in light of the regulation and taxes imposed by this government, got nothing.

This is a plan from a government that promised to responsibly spend money; it has failed that test. It promised not to raise taxes; it has broken that promise many times over. This government is disconnected from reality. It is disconnected from the lives of ordinary families who are out there struggling to stay afloat and keep going, and they're down here having a champagne party to celebrate their so-called success, to wallow in an orgy of self-satisfaction and self-congratulation. That fails the test of leadership, and the people will see through that by the time of the next election.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): In year four of the McGuinty government, they suddenly discover that hundreds of thousands of Ontarians have been losing good jobs, well-paying jobs. Everyone else in the province has realized this has been going on for a couple of years now, but it takes the McGuinty government until year four before they finally wake up and recognize the social and economic reality that literally hundreds of thousands of working families have been struggling with for the last two and a half years.

But what is incredible is the so-called plan to respond to this. For eight years, the former Conservative government said the answer to every problem was another tax cut. So what do we hear from the McGuinty government in terms of a plan to address this? Well, they want to give more corporate tax cuts and a dividend tax cut. Boy, is that ever novel, coming after eight years of Conservative government that said the answer to every problem is a tax cut.

This government talks about services and programs to help job-threatened and laid-off workers. The only thing that's happening that I can see is workers getting a ticket to British Columbia, to Alberta, to Saskatchewan. That's the only help that's happening out there. This government talks about fast-tracking infrastructure projects. People have been telling you for over two years that we're losing jobs. You're too late—much too late. Anything you start now is not going to have an effect for all those hundreds of thousands who have already lost their jobs.

And then, finally, a new campaign to encourage Ontarians to vacation in Ontario. Let me tell you, forestry workers in northern Ontario who lost their jobs can't afford to go on a vacation. Auto sector workers who've lost their jobs can't afford to go on a vacation. Women who are working two and a half and three jobs trying to pay the rent and put food on the table don't go on a vacation. What world is the McGuinty government in? The people who are struggling out there don't have money sometimes even to pay the rent, never mind go on a vacation.

Do you know what is really sad about this? Let me give you an example: Two and a half years ago, the pulp

and paper sector came here during the Bill 100 hearings on the McGuinty government's electricity policy. They said, "Things are so tough in the pulp and paper sector that if you do as you plan to do, drive hydro rates through the roof, you will kill tens of thousands of jobs in the pulp and paper sector." Do you know what reception they got from the McGuinty government? They got the back of the hand. These are people who were very earnest, very honest. They came here and said, "If you do this, if you drive hydro rates through the roof, you'll kill tens of thousands of jobs."

What did the McGuinty government do? At the worst possible time, they drove hydro rates through the roof. And what has happened? In Kenora, Dryden, Thunder Bay, Red Rock, Smooth Rock Falls, Espanola and now Sault Ste. Marie, thousands of jobs have been destroyed, and now we're seeing the derivative and spin-off jobs being destroyed.

Another example: One of the advantages of the Ontario economy, an historic advantage, has been our hydro rates, as compared to Michigan, Ohio, New York and Pennsylvania. The McGuinty government has given that economic advantage away.

What's one of the other advantages that we've had? It's called the medicare advantage, the fact that medicare is so cost-effective compared to private health insurance in the United States. Some economists have said it amounts to \$4,000 per manufacturing job. That's how much less expensive health insurance is here compared to the United States. But what have we seen under the McGuinty government? Well, we've seen more profit-driven private delivery of home care, more profit-driven private delivery of long-term care, and now we're seeing profit-driven private finance of hospitals. And what do we know? We know that that hospital financing costs a lot more. Even the Premier said, in reference to the Brampton profit-driven private finance, that it will probably add \$150 million to \$200 million to the bill. That's what it's adding. But now the McGuinty government wants to have 30 profit-driven private finance hospitals. Do a little multiplication: \$200 million added per hospital, 30 hospitals; \$6 billion added to the health care budget.

This government, besides giving away the hydro rate advantage, is now giving away the medicare advantage. As you give one economic advantage after another away, it's no surprise that these good jobs are going to disappear. I say there's no plan here, a lot of words but no plan from a government that's in fact making things worse.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. I think that many people

across the province will indeed find the economic statement today very disappointing in many respects. It's certainly a disappointment for the people of Burlington, where 300 people will be out of work by Christmas as Ball Packaging closes its doors. It's a disappointment for the 140 more Domtar employees, this time in Nairn Centre, who lost their jobs on October 13, 2006. It's a disappointment for the 300 employees at the Hamilton Community Care Access Centre who are facing the prospect of unemployment, and it's a disappointment to the 425 people I mentioned earlier at NRI Industries in Toronto, who found out just yesterday they're going to lose their jobs.

My question is this: Why didn't the Premier take this prime opportunity for an economic update to announce the comprehensive job strategy that all sides of this House voted for on December 8, 2005? Why didn't you do it?

1420

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

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I want to make this point really clear to the Leader of the Opposition, that our primary concern as we manage our way through this more modest period of growth is for the plight of individuals, workers and their families whose jobs are threatened or who might be laid off or are laid off. That's our primary concern. That's why in the statement I just made, the first initiative that we're going to take is additional assistance in that area.

I think it would be incumbent upon the Leader of the Opposition to actually read the documentation where outside economists, including people like David Dodge, say that not only are we continuing to grow in Ontario and continuing to create jobs, but the fundamentals in the Ontario economy are very strong indeed under the leadership of this Premier.

Mr. Tory: Mr. Dodge and many other people have talked about the punitive levels of taxation, for example, that discourage investment in this province. What we have here is the minister saying it's going to be his first investment, and that's after they use words like "bridge," "cycle" and "inevitability," and the Premier calls these job losses "a little bit of contraction."

But the fact of the matter is, this House had a debate on this subject about job losses probably 30,000 job losses ago. We passed a resolution, supported by all sides of the House, calling on the government in December 2005, almost a full year ago, to bring in a comprehensive strategy for people losing their jobs. Now we have you telling us today—it's like, "Trust me, I won't raise your taxes"—same thing.

Why has it taken you a year to stand here today and tell us that you're now going to bring it forward as your first initiative? You've had a year to do it. Your own people voted for it a year ago. Why isn't it done? When are we going to see the plan? What day specifically?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend the Leader of the Opposition knows as well as he knows his own name that

within this government, specifically the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, there are a number of broad programs to assist workers in these situations.

What I said today is, given this more moderate period of growth, we are going to add more energy, more resources and more influence in those programs because, for the time being, we're seeing some layoffs in manufacturing.

He should also know that the good news for this year is that this economy will actually create more jobs than were anticipated in the budget of last March. At that time, we were anticipating job creation of about 85,000. The new number is about 92,000, given the strength of the economy in a wide variety of its sectors.

Mr. Tory: I say to the minister, with respect, there just isn't the sense of urgency there. He talks about "some layoffs" that have taken place. "Some layoffs" is now approaching 100,000 jobs that have been lost, 100,000 families who are without a paycheque, who are without the kind of stable, long-term job they had for years and decades in many cases, and you talk about it as "some layoffs," and you talk about "cycles," "bridges," "inevitable" and things like this. The fact of the matter is, there is no plan. You say you're going to make some minor augmentation, or whatever the words were you used.

What this House voted for, including many members of the Liberal Party, was a comprehensive plan to help people who have lost jobs. If you can't bring yourself to bring in a plan like that, then why didn't you at least show some sense of recognition of the businesses that are struggling under your high-regulation, high-tax regime and are being discouraged from investing, or show consideration for the taxpayers who are getting it in the neck with the health tax brought in by your government? Why couldn't you help either of them if you couldn't see your way clear to bring in a plan to help people get their jobs. You didn't do anything for anybody in this—

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I guess one just need not look for consistency in the views of the leader of the Conservative Party in this province. He is the one who wants to cut taxes and remove \$2.5 billion from our budget. At the same time, he wants a comprehensive program. And then he'll go to the Albany Club or someplace else and talk about the fact that he's going to do all that and have marvellous surpluses.

I simply want to advise my friend that one of the things he's going to need as we come closer to a campaign is credibility in program, and right now my friend simply does not have that.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, in response to allegations made on the Fifth Estate and questions by our caucus, the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal

said he had written to Duncan Brown, head of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation, and asked for a "review and analysis." I think most people would think that's pretty vague. Today, the Ombudsman has announced that he's going to investigate the way in which the OLGC responds to complaints of fraud that were made on this television program.

Will the Premier commit today to hiring an outside agency to conduct a forensic audit of the fact that, against astronomical odds, more than 200 lottery insiders have won major prizes in excess of \$50,000? Together with the review and analysis, if you would commit to an outside agency doing a forensic audit, we can get to the bottom of the facts and determine if they're true or not, and then people out there can be assured by that. Will you do that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm certainly pleased to take the first question. First of all, I want to assure the leader of the official opposition, but more importantly the people of Ontario, that we take these allegations very seriously. The fact of the matter is that thousands, if not tens of thousands, of Ontarians regularly go and place their money down, and they have every reason to expect that the system run by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. is done with complete integrity and meets all security needs.

We've got a couple of things happening so far. Obviously, the minister has asked for a full report. He sent a letter to the chair of the board, Mr. Gough, and we're awaiting the outcome of that. We are pleased to learn that the Ombudsman has taken an active interest in this matter and is going to pursue it in his usual enthusiastic fashion. I think what would be appropriate in the circumstances is to await the outcome of both these particular investigations or reports, and then proceed further based on those recommendations.

Mr. Tory: You'll forgive us, on behalf of those who buy the tickets and who need to have that confidence you talked about, if we suggest that you should simply add to that list an outside agency to come in and conduct, together with the Ombudsman's investigation, where he doesn't have those resources—and the minister and the crown corporation isn't going to investigate itself. That's exactly what we're referring to here; we don't want them investigating themselves. We're asking for an outside agency to come in and conduct a forensic audit, so that the thousands and millions of people who buy those tickets—money we rely on as a province to help fund various important things—will know they can have confidence.

Yesterday, we also heard on this very same program that there is the matter of Mr. Bob Edmonds, who was defrauded of a winning lottery ticket. On the program itself and ever since—they settled a court case with Mr. Edmonds in 2005—the lottery corporation has refused, to this date, to take the opportunity to apologize to Mr. Edmonds for his ordeal. My question is, do you think this acceptable, and will you perhaps also ask the head of the

lottery corporation to not threaten to sue Mr. Edmonds and to issue an apology to him for what happened to him over a period of time?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I took the opportunity yesterday in this House to express my regrets at the ordeal Mr. Edmonds has gone through. I can report to the member and to this House that in fact the president and CEO is going to contact Mr. Edmonds, if he has not done so already, and issue that apology.

I should tell you that it is an unfortunate and rare event, and we take this matter extremely seriously.

Mr. Tory: It's good that the minister did that and that the president of the lottery corporation is in the process of doing it. It's the right thing to do.

The other right thing to do—and I commend the minister for doing the right thing—would be to add to the Ombudsman's investigation, where he doesn't have the resources to conduct a forensic audit, and the review that you wrote to the head of the lottery corporation and asked him to conduct, the requirement that a forensic audit by an outside agency be conducted, so that all of us will know. We won't just have a report from Mr. Brown investigating his own agency, and we won't just have the Ombudsman with his limited resources. We will have an outside agency that has conducted a forensic audit so the people of this province will know they can have the confidence that this either happened or didn't happen, and that there are adequate safeguards in place or not. Will you commit to that kind of outside review and forensic audit so people can have that confidence?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I hope the member will correct his own record, because I wrote the chair of OLG, Mr. Gough, and in no way ever indicated to the president and CEO that he investigate himself. I hope the member will correct his own record.

I should tell you that I welcome the Ombudsman initiating an investigation. I have full faith and confidence in an independent officer of this Legislature. I hope the leader of the official opposition is familiar with one of Canada's leading forensic audit companies, Ernst and Young, who on May 15, 2006, in fact did look into the security measures and issued an opinion. That, and all of the information that they gathered will be forwarded to the Ombudsman.

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I hope that the leader of the official opposition and all members of this Legislature, but more importantly, all Ontarians, will understand that this government, that I, as minister, take this matter extremely seriously and all necessary investigations and actions will take place.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Every day, the working women and men of this province do their best to make

ends meet. For a growing number of them, that means working two, three jobs just to put food on the table, pay the rent and look after their kids. In the last three years under the McGuinty government, 118,000 good manufacturing and forestry jobs have been destroyed.

Yesterday, in response to this manufacturing jobs crisis, what was your position? "I don't believe we should stand in the way of the inevitable." Premier, is that the McGuinty government's position? Is that your answer to 118,000 working women and men who have lost their jobs, that you think it's inevitable and you're not going to stand in the way?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Again, the leader of the NDP is nothing if not inventive. Obviously, I disagree strongly with his characterization of the action that we have taken. If we're talking about the auto sector, I don't call \$500 million standing in the way of the inevitable; I call it taking action to strengthen the auto sector. When it comes to the forestry sector, I don't call \$900 million standing in the way of the inevitable; I call it taking action to strengthen the forestry sector. When it comes to agriculture in Ontario, I don't call close to \$1 billion as standing in the way; I call it entering into a strong partnership with our farmers to help strengthen them. When it comes to advanced manufacturing, I don't call \$500 million—half a billion dollars—standing in the way of the inevitable; I call it partnering with advanced manufacturing to strengthen them so they can thrive in this new economy. So obviously, I disagree entirely with the characterization presented by the NDP.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, people in northern Ontario hear your announcement and reannouncement and reannouncement of \$900 million and they know it's never happened, and it's not going to happen. Farmers hear your once- or twice-a-year announcement and reannouncement of funding for agriculture and most of them recognize that for what it is too: a series of re-announcements that has virtually no effect.

St. Marys Paper in Sault Ste. Marie is the latest victim. Not too long ago, this was a very profitable paper mill. Yesterday, under the McGuinty government, it filed for protection from bankruptcy and 380 working families in Sault Ste. Marie who depend upon that for their work are now wondering where it's all headed.

Premier, do you plan to tell these workers in Thunder Bay, these working families in Thunder Bay, that bankruptcy and the loss of their jobs is inevitable?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I would say that the local member, David Oraziotti, and I have been working with St. Marys Paper for the last 30 days, when they gave us a heads-up about this. I met with the principals in my office last week, as did the local member. We've been discussing their challenges and how the Ontario government can help them. We have committed to helping them. We've talked with them and the rest of

the pulp and paper industry about some of the projects we're working on now. They have told us about their pension liability challenges and that they need the breathing time this particular protection gives them so they can reorganize their company and be sustainable in the future.

Mr. Hampton: It's no surprise to me that a Premier who describes it as inevitable—he doesn't want to stand in the way of something that's inevitable—doesn't want to answer these questions. This is the Hamilton Spectator. It refers to the situation that's happened around Hamilton: Levi Strauss, 460 jobs lost; Camco, 600 jobs lost; Rheem Canada, 150 jobs destroyed; Ball Packaging, 600 jobs destroyed. These aren't just numbers; these are working families, women and men who have to look after their kids and pay their mortgage. I believe they deserve a government that doesn't just shrug its shoulders and say, "It's inevitable." They deserve a government that has a plan to sustain these good jobs.

My question is this: When are you going to stop making the announcements and reannouncements that don't amount to anything, and come forward with a real plan to sustain the manufacturing jobs that are being lost: 10,000 a week in some cases? When are we going to see a real plan?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I'll refer the question to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Let me make it clear again to the leader of the third party that one of the primary initiatives in today's statement was precisely about additional assistance to deal with the plight of workers whose jobs are threatened or who have been laid off.

He might once consider putting on the record the rest of the information, the fact that this year we'll be creating some 92,000 new jobs in this economy, in a variety of sectors. In financial services, for example, we've created so far this year some 25,000 new jobs; in information, culture and recreation, almost 24,000 new jobs; in business, building and support services, some 17,000 new jobs; in science and technology, 16,000; in construction, 13,000; in retail trade, some 13,800 jobs.

The point is that this economy continues, even during this period of somewhat more modest growth, to create high-paying, good, full-time jobs for the people of this province, and we're very proud of that record.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Premier: The Premier ought to know that Ontario is a manufacturing province. That is the heart and the soul of Ontario's economy, and under the McGuinty government, a full 10% of our manufacturing jobs have been lost and more are going to be lost. What do we see as a response from your government? Well, we see tens of millions of dollars of taxpayer-paid-for ads that do nothing more than serve as self-promotion for your government. We see your comments saying, "Oh, I don't believe in standing in the way of the inevitable." We see you drive hydro rates through the roof and kill off more jobs.

Premier, leading economists and union and industrial leaders all agree: Ontario's jobs crisis is getting worse. New Democrats have suggested some solutions. We've suggested some things you ought to try. Given that you don't seem to have a plan today, why won't you try some of the solutions we've suggested? At least try something other than more television ads.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend the leader of the third party has a short memory. The province tried those solutions a few years ago and the results were absolutely disastrous. There were higher rates of unemployment during that period of NDP government in this province than at any time since the Depression; the highest deficits in this province at any time since the Depression. Thank you very much, I say to the leader of the third party; we are not going down that road any time soon.

What we are going to do is maintain the course we're on, because it has created strong fundamentals. We're going to continue to invest in manufacturing. The Premier just set out some of those areas. We're going to continue to support the increasing intelligence of our population through historic investments in post-secondary education. Every economist worth his or her salt says that's the road to be on, and that's the road that we're on.

Mr. Hampton: I think the Minister of Finance is complaining about the wannabe leader of the federal Liberal Party that he supports. I'm not talking about his solutions. He just told us the other day that some guy named Michael Ignatieff was his principal adviser.

I want to ask you about a jobs commissioner. A jobs commissioner is something that was put in place in British Columbia and is credited with sustaining 75,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs. Industry leaders in the forest sector have asked your government about regional hydro rates. The Premier said he was going to consider it. Since he said that he was going to consider it, thousands more jobs have been lost. We need tougher legislation so that companies can't just close up like that and leave town.

Why are you so opposed to trying solutions like that when you obviously don't have a plan of your own?

1440

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Just on the matter of electricity, would my friend the leader of the third party ever have the courage to stand in his place and acknowledge that hydro rates for large industrial users in this province are now lower than they were in 2002? I wonder if he would stand up and do that. I wonder if he would stand up and acknowledge that the notion of a jobs commissioner, of the kind that he proposed several months ago, is simply a recipe to try to scare industry into maintaining jobs.

The important investments are not in paying a job commissioner but making investments in the auto sector, making investments in manufacturing, making investments in research and technology, that give Ontarians the capacity to compete. That's what we're doing, and the fact is, economists say that's the road to be on and that's

the road to success; not some crazy NDP policy that says you can just stop the world from unfolding.

Mr. Hampton: The finance minister invites a debate about hydro rates. Look, nobody is falling for your pre-election fix on industrial hydro rates. You go out there and mention that to industry leaders, and they say they recognize it for what it is: It's a fix just before the election. After the election, it will go the same way as Dalton McGuinty's promise before the last election to freeze hydro rates—through the roof.

Here is the situation, Minister. In Sault Ste. Marie, St. Marys Paper was a profitable paper mill from 1995 until 2003. Since you've become the government, every year their situation has gotten worse. They said in their release yesterday that their problem is this: Their average hydro rate last year was 6.6 cents a kilowatt hour. They can't compete with other provinces where mills are paying three and a half cents a kilowatt hour.

The Premier said he was going to consider industrial hydro rates. Are you going to implement regional hydro rates for industry or not? What's the answer?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: If the leader of the third party would just spend a little time fairly characterizing the situation with the forest products industry right across North America and indeed right around the world, then the debate in this Legislature might provide some more effective solutions.

The fact is, he talks about hydro. Hydro rates in Manitoba and Quebec are the lowest in the country, yet there we see the closure of sawmills and pulp and paper facilities and the same kind of stress on the forest products industry. Why? Because we have a very high Canadian dollar and that makes it much more difficult for those industries to compete. Why? Because, over the course of the past while, we've had an excessive supply of product globally. We understand that, and we're taking measures. That's why we've prepared a \$900-million program to assist that industry. That's what's going to make Ontario forest products competitive again in the province.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): To the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal: With respect to the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., we know they've spent \$425,000 in legal costs to fight Bob Edmonds, a victim of fraud. They're willing to spend who knows how many thousands now, apparently, to sue Mr. Edmonds. They spent \$6 million to rebrand the corporation, a brand that has now been severely tarnished. They recently spent millions to open a new lottery prize centre for photo ops in the highest-cost real estate in Toronto. And throughout their operations, they reportedly have only the most expensive office furnishings money could buy.

Minister, are you still prepared to continue as an apologist for every activity of what increasingly appears to be

a rogue agency under the McGuinty government, and if not, what are you going to do about it?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): It's hard to comment on the overblown rhetoric of the member opposite. I will ask the leader of the official opposition—the member references the Edmonds case and the initiation of the defence in the lawsuit.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): When did that start?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: That started—my colleague asks—in 2001, carried through 2002, and it was eventually settled in 2005.

My request to the leader of the official opposition is, will he request that the member for Erie–Lincoln, who was the minister at the time, fully co-operate with the Ombudsman's investigation?

Mr. Runciman: I don't think there's any doubt about that. We wish you'd co-operate with the people of Ontario.

Minister, this is a \$6-billion enterprise that we're talking about. You have a CEO making close to \$400,000 a year, responsible for what appears to be lavish and unnecessary spending, inadequate oversight in terms of security and a seemingly callous approach to dealing with complaints.

The Ombudsman's investigation will be very narrow. We need answers, as well, on how this multi-billion dollar operation is being run, how money is being spent and the truth surrounding the allegations that a significant number of people were robbed of their winnings.

Minister, will you stop reading lines prepared by the agency under a cloud, show some intestinal fortitude and call in a forensic auditor or the Ontario Provincial Police?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The member would know, and I know he would want to acknowledge to this Legislature, that Ontario Lottery and Gaming was the subject of the standing committee on government agencies this summer, I believe chaired by one of the members of the member's caucus. In fact, that provides oversight by a legislative body of the business plan, of the spending practices and had comments and report writing by all members of the committee. It will be very interesting to see what that report is; as I read the Hansard, some very complimentary things, contrary to the member's comments right now.

I will say that the allegations that have been raised are very serious. We welcome the Ombudsman's investigation. I hope that all members will co-operate with that investigation, get to the bottom of the matter, and if the Ombudsman indicates that actions are necessary, they will be taken.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Premier: You're the one who went to Thunder Bay and said your government was considering regional hydro rates. This is some example of what else has hap-

pened in the last week: Nairn Centre, 140 workers lost their jobs; Nakina and Dubreuilville, hundreds more workers sent home from their jobs; Espanola, another 130 workers lost their jobs; and now St. Marys, 380 workers told that the company seeks bankruptcy protection.

Those workers at St. Marys already took a 20% pay cut trying to save the company. The company says in their press release they can't afford to pay 6.6 cents a kilowatt hour for electricity. They need 4.5 cents a kilowatt hour. Your Minister of Finance says this is a case of glut on the market. They say in their press release their order books are full. They just can't afford to pay 6.6 cents a kilowatt hour. When are you going to introduce regional hydro rates to a part of the province that produces the lowest-cost electricity—

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

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

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): This is another amazing turnaround by the leader of the third party here. We have quote after quote from even just a few years ago, saying how he is against regional hydro rates in any part of this province.

I would say to the member again that the local member, David Oraziotti, and myself have been working with the company. Last week we had a meeting on two things. We've been talking to them about some transitional assistance, how we can work with them to help them while they make investment in a cogeneration facility that'll get them sustainability with their electricity generation. That's where they need to go; that's where they know they need to go. They're working with us, and we're going to be helping them get there.

Mr. Hampton: Here's the situation in Thunder Bay: Until a few years ago, Thunder Bay was one of the largest paper producers in the world. Last Friday, for the first time in anyone's living memory, not one paper machine was operating in Thunder Bay, not one roll of paper was being produced. In 2003, there were eight functioning paper machines operating in that city. As we speak, only one today is currently operating. And today, Bowater announced that paper machine number three is shut down permanently—another 140 jobs.

1450

I say again to the Premier, it is the industry leaders, the union leaders, the municipal leaders who are saying to you, "Will you implement regional hydro rates to reflect the fact that northern Ontario produces the lowest-cost electricity in North America?" It was your speech, Premier. You were the one who told them you were considering it—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. The Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Ramsay: We're working with the companies in Thunder Bay. In fact, as you know, we are seeing a new set of investors who are looking at the

Cascades plant that was closed. We're working with them, and they're giving very serious consideration to reopening that plant. We've seen the Bowater machine back in operation this week and another machine coming back in operation next week. You've seen Terrace Bay come back. Terrace Bay was closed for six months; it is back in operation. We are starting to see a turnaround in that industry in that particular city and in that region. We're working with them, and that's starting to happen. That's going to be a success story. With the programs we have in place, the companies are taking up that assistance. We're seeing a turnaround and we're seeing more paper being produced in northwestern Ontario.

BROWNFIELD SITES

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, you may know that the Leader of the Opposition was in my riding to learn about brownfields. These brownfield sites did not pop up overnight. To their credit, this is an issue that the city of Brantford has been trying to resolve for many years, even during the previous government's time in power for eight long years. Now the Leader of the Opposition waltzes into Brantford, without a strategy, trying to find out what a brownfield looks like. Our government knows what it looks like. You know what it looks like, Minister. I know what it looks like: I've lived beside one, one block away, for 30 years. We rolled up our sleeves and we're working with our municipal partners, developers and other stakeholders to design and put necessary programs and policies in place to insure that more brownfields are put back into productive and safe use.

Minister, from the partnerships you have forged, will you please tell us what solution our government is committed to in order to stimulate brownfield redevelopment in cities like Brantford?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I'd like to compliment the member, first of all, for being so actively involved in the whole brownfields redevelopment issue. He has been very consistent on this.

One of the first things we did when we came into office was to appoint a brownfields coordinator, because of the lack of activity by all of the previous governments before that to deal with the brownfields issue. The main purpose of the brownfields coordinator is to coordinate all the activities that the various ministries are involved in surrounding the whole brownfields issue. We've changed the province's land use planning system, and we've also changed it in the proposed municipal legislation by giving municipalities an increase of the tools they could use to have access to brownfields redevelopment.

The number of municipalities that have filed with us and that have approved community improvement plans has more than doubled, to 21. Last year, our government introduced the brownfields financial incentive program,

which provides tax assistance to landowners in order to encourage brownfields rehabilitation—

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

Mr. Levac: Knowing what a brownfield is and the dangers they represent if left undeveloped, I believe they also represent a tremendous opportunity. You and I know that committing to fixing the brownfields is more than just a quick photo op and a bad cup of coffee. There are no quick fixes. These are complex and far-reaching potential developments.

I will say that the member across the aisle is always welcome to come and visit Brantford if it's going to help him learn, and get a good cup of coffee and a delicious sandwich. Maybe he can start teaching the members in his caucus what it's all about, since they didn't recognize a brownfield when they were in government. They couldn't solve the issue in a day, so they ignored it for eight long years.

But we need more than a bad cup of coffee, wallowing in an orgy of photo ops and learning opportunities. Minister, it's time for action. Will you tell me what action we are going to take to take advantage of these strategically placed pieces of property?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: First of all, I was pleased this morning that the Canadian Brownfields Network announced the fact that the Canada–Ontario affordable housing program will allocate a minimum of 300 additional affordable housing units to be built on brownfields. My ministry is working with public infrastructure renewal, with the Ministry of the Environment, the Ontario Realty Corp. and the Ontario centre for excellence to explore using potential lands as demonstration sites for testing new brownfields remediation technology. We will partner with the Canadian Brownfields Network on a series of training sessions for municipal staff, providing them with the latest information to encourage brownfield redevelopment projects in their individual communities.

A lot of work has been done; there's still much more work to do. But we are the first government to ever seriously take on these brownfield remediation projects, which are abundant in all our municipalities. They simply need to be cleaned up, and we're doing something about it.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): My question is for the Premier. I have a copy of an e-mail from Jack Wilson of Tottenham, which was sent to you and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. In it he explains how his wife, Mary, was diagnosed some five months ago with severe spinal stenosis, which is causing her a great deal of pain and numbness from the waist down. She's been told that she'll have to wait at least 10 more months for her first appointment with an orthopaedic surgeon, and then she'll have to wait again for treatment or surgery.

In his e-mail, Mr. Wilson writes, "It would seem to me that if these surgeons are being encouraged to do hips

and knees, then the time for operating rooms and surgical nurses [is] not available for surgeries such as the one required by my wife. One must not forget that there are other debilitating and painful conditions that require surgery, and it seems, because of the current governmental priorities, that these other surgeries are being delayed, sometimes risking permanent further injury to the patient."

Your selective health care system is hurting Mary Wilson. Why are you sending her to the back of the line while your government only focuses on five priority areas?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): First off, one thing that's really crucial to look at from the standpoint of the five target areas for the wait time strategy is that diagnostics, MRI and CT are one of those and cut across the whole landscape. So it's inappropriate to fail to acknowledge the necessity of having good access to diagnostics.

At the heart of the honourable member's question is the necessity to be able to appropriately capture wait times and respond to them. We've been working hard to build a system that didn't exist when we arrived. And we well identified—the honourable member knows this better than anyone, because he originated the decision to shrink the size of Ontario's medical schools. These are hardships that we're seeking to be able to address. I say, with respect, that we've made progress. We're building greater capacity, we're paying for it and we're also training more doctors. The reality is that the honourable member's record on both of those was the direct opposite of progress.

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Wilson anticipated this rather arrogant insult from the minister. He writes, "I'd appreciate an answer that is realistic and not full of political platitudes. Fifteen months to get an appointment with a surgeon while living in the GTA is absurd, and if the government is unable to supply the necessary procedure in a timely fashion, the government should send my wife and people like her to other provinces or the USA to get the surgery."

Premier and Minister, you've broken your promise to people like Mrs. Wilson and those in her situation. You've not improved health care for them. Why don't you stop the rhetoric and help Mrs. Wilson and others in this very painful situation?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member says—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I need the Minister of Natural Resources to move out of the way.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member seeks at the beginning of his question to lecture me, but the reality is, this honourable member hasn't once, as best I can tell, stood in his place and acknowledged the frightful circumstances that he created. He wants to

lecture me about these circumstances, but he has not on one day accepted an element of accountability.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): You're in charge.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The other long-serving health minister in the previous government says I'm in charge, and indeed I accept these responsibilities. But I can't help to make up the time that was lost when they sat on their hands and made sure that Ontario had too few doctors.

To the point, I want to say that we have enhanced dramatically the resource with respect to a wide variety of surgeries and services in Ontario hospitals. We have increased hospital funding beyond the \$600 million allocated to wait times and a significant part of the wait time is accelerated diagnostic capabilities; this is in service to everyone.

We have more work to do in health care; I acknowledge it. We will continue to move forward and make up the lost time the honourable member for Kitchener–Waterloo squandered on her watch.

1500

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): My question is for the Premier. We are privy again this afternoon to yet another Liberal promise to build affordable housing. We heard that promise for 20,000 units back a few years. Meanwhile, the reality is, your updated website says that 2,392 units of housing are now actually occupied in the rental and supportive home ownership and northern housing components of your so-called affordable housing program.

We want to know, during an expected economic downturn, how can you tell? Of the 122,000 households waiting for affordable housing, most of whom can only afford \$300 to \$400 a month in rent, how many of those 2,392 units of housing will they be able to afford at \$300 to \$400 a month? How many are actually occupied at \$300 to \$400 a month? Please tell me that, Mr. Premier.

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

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): We've certainly heard about this issue before, and I can tell you that a lot has been done and a lot more needs to be done.

We have started. In Toronto alone, 2,494 units are underway, occupied, under construction or with planning approval. In addition to that, we signed an agreement with the city of Toronto within the last couple of months whereby housing allowances, which total over \$37 million, will go to 1,800 different families in this city alone.

We are now working with our service managers to make sure that those vacant units will be occupied as quickly as possible so that we can provide the necessary housing for the vulnerable in our society. We're working on it. It had been long neglected for many years under the

previous government. We are working under the Canada-Ontario housing agreement. We're going to see it happen and those people are going to be housed.

Ms. DiNovo: Meanwhile, I had no answer to my question. The question was this: How many units are actually occupiable now, Mr. Gerretsen, to people who can afford \$300 to \$400 a month?

We don't want more promises. We've got 2,000 affordable units by your own reckoning. By that count, we'll be waiting another eight years until we get the 20,000, and even those won't be affordable at \$300 to \$400 a month. We know that only \$300 to \$400 is the budget for mainly women-and-children households who need affordable housing—122,000. So I ask again: What do you have to say to those 122,000 households on provincial waiting lists who can only afford, at most, \$300 to \$400 a month for rent?

Hon. John Gerretsen: As this member well knows, we have an agreement with the federal government whereby over \$600 million will be made available for affordable housing in this province. Over 15,000 new units will be built. There will be a minimum of 5,000 units for housing allowances.

This is a major problem. Yes, a number of the families she's talking about need good, adequate housing. For too many years nothing happened in this province. We're doing something about it. It's taken a little bit longer than we all would like to see because of the planning approvals that are required at the local levels. We want to make sure that those people who are in need of housing will be housed. We're doing something about it. They will be built, and those units will be occupied by people who need them.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, as you have said, in the short term, Ontario is in for a period of moderate economic growth because of external factors. In fact, yesterday, Bank of Canada governor David Dodge said Ontario should focus on skills development, post-secondary education and infrastructure. Minister, what is your plan to further boost jobs and economic renewal in light of these short-term, moderate restrictions on economic growth?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I want to say to my friend from Willowdale that I certainly would not disagree with the advice provided by the governor of the Bank of Canada, although any time he would want to consider lowering interest rates, that would be very welcome for manufacturers in Ontario.

In the interim, as I said in my statement, we're taking four steps that we think are going to be really positive for the working environments of this province: firstly, some assistance to workers whose jobs are threatened or who've been laid off; secondly, we're going to speed up some infrastructure projects, because those projects can

have an immediate benefit—economic activity and job creation; thirdly, we're going to put some more traffic on the economic highway between Alberta and Ontario, because there's tremendous growth in that oil-and-gas economy that we want to be participating in; and finally—I know you want me to finish—we're going to encourage Ontarians that a new program of visiting this great—

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

Mr. Zimmer: What's the role of the federal government in helping Ontario's economy in the short term? In fact, Prime Minister Harper does have a very important role in ensuring that all provinces, including Ontario, can withstand times of more moderate economic growth. Minister, where does the federal government stand on its commitment to honour the Canada-Ontario agreement?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I wish I knew. I've had talks with my predecessor, now the federal Minister of Finance, Mr. Flaherty, and we don't know. It's a mystery. I am mystified because I know that Jim Flaherty understands the economic disadvantage of Ontario because he used to sit in this very chair. So we're looking for some response.

The other point I want to make is that this is not a Conservative or a Liberal thing as far as federal governments are concerned. I want to give you one number that should be instructive: Since 1997, the federal government in this country has enjoyed surpluses of almost \$80 billion during Liberal and Conservative times. All we are saying is, let's have some fair treatment in Ontario. Let's begin by honouring the \$6.9-billion Canada-Ontario agreement that the Premier of this province negotiated with the federal government.

EDUCATION

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): To the education minister: Minister, the good ship Education is coming apart at the seams, it seems. Two weeks ago, the OSSTF exposed your government for having negotiated contracts worth about \$1.2 billion. You shorted them by \$800 million, forcing school boards to take money from other programs to pay for salaries. Now we find out that you allowed, through regulation, trustees' salaries to increase. Your predecessor committed to fund \$3.5 million to pay for those increases, yet today we find out you're not going to do that either, and you're saddling the boards with that additional funding.

Today, in public hearings, every single presenter who came forward challenged your government to withdraw Bill 52 because they're saying it's a bad bill. What's happening? You're losing support of stakeholders. Will you now step in as minister and commit to withdrawing Bill 52 in response to the OSSTF and every other teacher in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): Actually, I'm really happy to be able to answer a question today because this is a terrific day in this city and in this province for education.

The trustees at the Toronto District School Board deserve a great round of applause in terms of the work that they have done to balance their budget. Trustees like Gerri Gershon, Sheila Cary-Meagher, David Shory, Sheila Ward and Howard Goodman from all across the political spectrum came together, they worked hard, they came up with a budget that's going to balance, and that's exactly why they are the kind of people who run for office at the local level. That's why we changed the rules around trustee salaries. The previous government denigrated the role of trustee and pushed those salaries down to \$5,000 a year. We've given the trustees the opportunity to make a living at this.

Mr. Klees: They can make a living, except you are not willing to pay for it, and you're pushing more boards into more deficit positions because of your mismanagement of the portfolio.

The minister wants to ignore this question. I'd appreciate her answering the question.

Here is the OSSTF with regard to Bill 52: "The implementation of Bill 52 could lead to a devaluation of the Ontario secondary school diploma. No amendments are possible which would adequately prevent the harm caused by the introduction of this bill."

This is the OSSTF. They want you to withdraw the bill. Will you do that?

1510

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Since I have been in office, for five weeks, I have met twice with the OSSTF to have a conversation about Bill 52. I will continue to talk to them. What Bill 52 is about is providing opportunities for students in this province to graduate from high school, to have alternative programming, to have linkages with the community, with employers, so that they can get experience, so that they can graduate from high school and go on to be fully participatory citizens. I don't think even the member for Oak Ridges could argue against that. This is an extremely important piece of legislation.

I say to the member opposite, we are working with the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. I have asked them as recently as this morning to give me language that would put in place protections so that we guarantee that schools are issuing credits and we make sure that students get—

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

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches—East York): My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, across Ontario, many of the 118,000 people who have lost good jobs are increasingly forced onto the social safety net. That net is becoming very frayed, like never before.

You said yesterday, in terms of job loss, "I don't believe we should stand in the way of the inevitable." What is inevitable is that more families will need assistance in bad times. What is inevitable is that they will

need affordable housing and money to feed their kids. You as a government could easily do something by ending the clawback of the national child benefit supplement. You have failed to do that. You have broken your word. When will you end the clawback?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for franco-phone affairs): I would like to thank the member of the third party for his question. As a government, poverty is of concern to us, and since we have been elected, we have worked very hard to make sure that we corrected a situation where we came into power and we have seen what was done to the most vulnerable citizens of our community. So we have been removing barriers to help these parents go back to work, because we know that when there are parents who are poor, there are children who are also poor. So we are spending, every year, more than \$10.3 billion to help those in need, and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Prue: Your plan is not working, and certainly the good people of Hamilton know it's not working. Hamilton is one of the areas in the province hardest hit by job cuts. That city has limited resources, and you know that there are many, many poor people who live in the city of Hamilton, but they are finding a way to give back the national child benefit supplement that you claw back from Ontario's poorest families. In fact, the city of Hamilton knows that poverty affects the entire community, so they're going to both provide the community services and give back the money that these families need to survive. That city knows that the economy is not well served by making poor people even poorer and children even hungrier.

My question to you is quite simple. You promised to stop taking the money from poor children. Why are you forcing hard-hit communities like Hamilton to keep the promise that you will not?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Again, I wanted to remind the member of the opposite party that we have been investing more than \$10.3 billion annually for families on social assistance, and we are very, very proud to say that this fall, the most vulnerable are once again seeing a rate increase in their assistance. We raised the assistance by 3% with our first budget, and we have raised it a second time, 2%, for a total of 5%.

And we have made certain that the rate increase to the national child benefit supplement stays in the hands of the people who need it most. When we took office, we ended the clawback on the national child benefit supplement going forward. This means that every family—

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

HOME CARE

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister,

personal support workers are concerned about the pay raise that you announced in May of this year. The personal support workers in this province perform an invaluable service, providing assistance to some of the frailest of all Ontarians and assisting them to live with dignity. Minister, this is a service that we may all find ourselves in need of one day. I find that it's rather surprising—not too surprising—that the previous governments had not seen fit to ensure that they paid personal support workers properly, which reflects the import and the skill of the work that they do.

Minister, this government has indicated it understands the importance of Ontario's personal support workers and has promised to address this wage gap. Can you tell us—

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

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): When we think about our personal support workers, we like to say that they bring the love. We all have the opportunity to see them deployed across health care. In fact, last year they delivered 15 million hours of care to home care clients. In Elinor Caplan's report, she gave us a recommendation about enhancements to the compensation for people who are PSWs. We have flowed \$30 million of additional resources to community care access centres.

I want to say very clearly that because we've been working with the partners who employ PSWs, we've been slower than would be preferred in rolling those resources out. I want to reiterate the commitment to PSWs today, and tell them further that these will be retroactive to April 1, and that we will be able to move forward very, very soon with the payments that are sought after, to enhance the quality and recognition of the PSW workforce, in recognition of the love that they bring, alongside the care that they provide, to so many Ontarians.

Mrs. Mitchell: Minister, I know that personal support workers from my riding of Huron-Bruce will be very pleased to hear that, and all of the support that you give them. Personal support workers are providing a very much needed service, yet their working conditions can be challenging. This sector has a very high rate of turnover, which inevitably impacts patient care. The personal support workers who have visited my office feel that their contribution to the health care system is not being adequately recognized. Minister, what is this government prepared to do to assist personal support workers in this regard?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I agree with the sentiment that says that we haven't done well enough by our personal support workers. I would say that this is a pretty substantial piece of progress and there is, as always in health care, more opportunity. What we're seeking to do is create a model of care in home care where there's a stronger relationship—that is, that it lasts longer—between the client and the provider. To do that, we need a more stable environment for our personal support workers. Enhancing their compensation, giving greater

acknowledgement to benefits and to travel costs, is a very important step towards stabilizing that very important element of the workforce. That's why I'm proud to be associated with a government that's brought \$30 million of additional resource to the table for compensation for our PSWs.

I repeat one more time, I believe on behalf of all members of the House, the deep gratitude that we have for the role that's being provided there, and the recognition that these new resources, which will flow very soon, are overdue and a very necessary element of compensation for personal support workers, in gratitude for the extraordinary work that they're doing on behalf of the people of Ontario.

VISITORS

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm pleased to welcome to the Legislature today the students and teachers from grade 10 of Haliburton Highland Secondary School. Could we all welcome them.

PETITIONS

HIGHWAY 26

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

“Whereas the redevelopment of Highway 26 was approved by MPP Jim Wilson and the previous PC government in 2000; and

“Whereas a number of horrific fatalities and accidents have occurred on the old stretch of Highway 26; and

“Whereas the redevelopment of Highway 26 is critical to economic development and job creation in Simcoe–Grey;

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

“That the Liberal government stop the delay of the Highway 26 redevelopment and act immediately to ensure that the project is finished on schedule, to improve safety for area residents and provide economic development opportunities and job creation in Simcoe–Grey.”

I've signed that petition.

1520

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition signed by a number of residents of the city of Toronto. It was given to me by SEIU. It reads as follows:

“Whereas, in June 2003, Dalton McGuinty said Ontario Liberals are committed to ensuring that nursing home residents receive more personal care each day and will reinstate minimum standards, and inspectors will be required to audit the staff-to-resident ratios; and

“Whereas Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, in October 2004, said that the Ontario government will not set a specified number of care hours nursing home residents are to receive each day; and

“Whereas Ontario nursing home residents still receive the lowest number of care hours in the Western world; and

“Whereas studies have indicated nursing home residents should receive at least 4.1 hours of nursing care per day; and

“Whereas a coroner's jury in April 2005 recommended the Ontario government establish a minimum number of care hours nursing home residents must receive each day;

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

“That the government of Ontario immediately enact a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of nursing care for each nursing home resident per day.”

I agree with these petitioners. I have affixed my signature to this.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have a petition today from the clients of the Peel Multicultural Council of Mississauga, and they're very concerned about Bill 124.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

“Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

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

“That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families.”

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the people of the province of Ontario deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparents as is consistent with the best interests of the child.

“Subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant’s willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child.

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents.”

As I agree with this petition, I will sign it and deliver it to Patrick.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have more petitions. These are signed by residents of Lucknow. They have been sent to me by SEIU. It reads as follows:

“Whereas, in June 2003, Dalton McGuinty said Ontario Liberals are committed to ensuring that nursing home residents receive more personal care each day and will reinstate minimum standards, and inspectors will be required to audit the staff-to-resident ratios; and

“Whereas Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, in October 2004, said that the Ontario government will not set a specified number of care hours nursing home residents are to receive each day; and

“Whereas Ontario nursing home residents still receive the lowest number of care hours in the Western world; and

“Whereas studies have indicated nursing home residents should receive at least 4.1 hours of nursing care per day; and

“Whereas a coroner’s jury in April 2005 recommended the Ontario government establish a minimum

number of care hours nursing home residents must receive each day;

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

“That the government of Ontario immediately enact a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of nursing care for each nursing home resident per day.”

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

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): This is a petition on behalf of the parents and friends of the McGillivray Central School, and it is signed by 965 people.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the community of McGillivray Central School, are concerned with the intent of the Thames Valley District School Board to close our rural public school and disperse our children to other, out-of-our-community schools; and

“Whereas we perceive the Thames Valley District School Board is attempting to close our school to rationalize building and expanding schools in other communities; and

“Whereas bigger schools have inherent problems with busing children further, disrupting existing communities, and removing any incentive for younger families to stay or move into our community; and

“Whereas our school, McGillivray Central School, is in good repair, with both a gym and a library/computer lab; up-to-date community-funded and government-approved playground equipment; and a municipal water supply; and

“Whereas previous boundary changes in the village of Ailsa Craig have contributed to our school being starved of students;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to instruct the Thames Valley District School Board to adjust boundaries to redistribute the student population between the existing schools in our area to maintain a viable student population in each school.”

SPRING BEAR HUNT

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): “To the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources:

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources’ own data shows a clear and undeniable connection between the termination of the spring bear hunt and the increase in nuisance bears; and

“Whereas there has been an increase of almost 500% in the number of calls to the Ministry of Natural Resources about nuisance bears but no change in calls in Manitoba, where the spring hunt continues; and

“Whereas at least five people have been attacked by bears in 2005, and since 1978, bears have killed seven people in Ontario, six in provincial parks where hunting is not allowed, and all fatalities have occurred where there is little or no hunting pressure; and

“Whereas adult male bears are cannibals and highly aggressive; there are thousands more adult male bears in the population since the hunt was terminated and thousands more bear cubs are being orphaned or killed; unprecedented numbers of nuisance bears are being trapped, relocated or killed, but the problems persist; and

“Whereas the increase of nuisance bears since the spring hunt was cancelled has become a serious threat to public safety, and increasing interaction with humans from higher bear densities is likely to result in more bear attacks on humans; and

“Whereas, during a debate in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on November 17, 2005, members of all three official parties supported a return of the spring bear hunt;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we petition the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources:

“In the interests of public safety and scientific wildlife management, the government should immediately return a spring bear hunt to Ontario.”

It's signed by many people and brought to me by the Haliburton Highlands Outdoors Association. I thank Keith Hodgson.

LANDFILL

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Subject: Proposed expansion of the Navan Road landfill site in NDC

“I petition the Legislative Assembly to direct the Ministry of the Environment to defer finalizing the terms of reference for the Carp and Navan Road landfill expansions until the expedited review of the revised and comprehensive waste management master plan is completed and available to all the concerned parties.”

Approximately 250 people have put their signature to this petition, and I add mine.

1530

SCHOOL FACILITIES

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

“Whereas the parents of St. Paul’s elementary school in Alliston have raised many issues regarding the security, cleanliness and state of repair of their school; and

“Whereas a 2003 condition assessment completed by the Ontario government identified the need for \$1.8 million in repairs to St. Paul’s elementary school; and

“Whereas the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board has approached the Ministry of Education with the intention of having the school deemed pro-

hibitive to repair as they believe the school requires \$2.28 million in repairs, or 84% of the school replacement cost; and

“Whereas there are ongoing concerns with air quality, heating and ventilation, electrical, plumbing, lack of air conditioning and the overall structure of the building, including cracks from floor to ceiling, to name a few;

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

“That the Minister of Education immediately deem St. Paul’s elementary school prohibitive to repair, secure immediate funding and begin construction of a new facility so that the children of St. Paul’s can be educated in a facility that is secure and offers them the respect and dignity that they deserve.”

As I’ve said before in this House, I went to school from kindergarten to grade 8 at St. Paul’s. My mother taught there for over 30 years. I certainly support this petition.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest):

A petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Scarborough Southwest is a growing community dependent on public transit to move people around;

“Whereas the city of Toronto and the Toronto Transit Commission are calling for and predicting continued growth in Scarborough Southwest over the next 25 years;

“Whereas the Toronto Transit Commission, in its growth plan, has called for the expansion of subway service to cover more of Scarborough;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has traditionally assisted the city of Toronto in funding subway expansion as recently as the Sheppard subway expansion project;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to work in concert with the city of Toronto to come up with a funding arrangement to assist in expanding subway service to Scarborough.”

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature to it and give it to page Chad, who is here with me today.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge):

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is committed to establishing measures that will break down barriers for Ontario newcomers; and

“Whereas these measures will ensure that the 34 regulatory professions in Ontario have admissions and application practices that are fair, clear and open; and

“Whereas these measures will include the establishment of a fairness commissioner and an access centre for internationally trained individuals; and

“Whereas, through providing a fair and equitable system, newcomers will be able to apply their global

experience, which will not only be beneficial to their long-term career goals but also to the Ontario economy as a whole;

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

“That all members of the House support the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, Bill 124, and work to ensure its prompt passage in the Ontario Legislature.”

I’ll send this along with page Sarah.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SERVICES

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

“Whereas over one million Ontarians of all ages suffer from communication disorders relating to speech, language and/or hearing; and

“Whereas there is a growing need for awareness of the profound developmental, economic and social consequences that communication disorders have on people and their families; and

“Whereas persons with communication problems require access to the professional services of audiologists and speech-language pathologists who provide treatments to improve and enhance quality of life; and

“Whereas effective treatment of communication disorders benefits all of society by allowing otherwise disadvantaged persons to achieve their academic and vocational potentials; and

“Whereas investments in treatments for communication disorders pay economic dividends in reduced reliance on other social services,

“We, the undersigned, in conjunction with the Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to proclaim the month of May as Better Speech, Language and Hearing Month.”

I want to thank the Simcoe County Preschool speech and language program for sending me that petition, which I will sign.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): Pursuant to standing order 55, I rise to give the Legislature the business of the House for next week.

On Monday, October 30, 2006: in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 151, the Budget Measures Act (No. 2); in the evening, second reading of Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act.

On Tuesday, October 31, 2006: in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 151, the Budget Measures Act (No. 2); in the evening, third reading of Bill 148, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Seat Belts).

On Wednesday, November 1, 2006: in the afternoon, Conservative opposition day number two; in the evening,

second reading of Bill 151, the Budget Measures Act (No. 2).

On Thursday, November 2, 2006: in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES CONSUMER PROTECTION AND SERVICE MODERNIZATION ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 DU MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES GOUVERNEMENTAUX SUR LA MODERNISATION DES SERVICES ET DE LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR

Mr. Phillips moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 152, An Act to modernize various Acts administered by or affecting the Ministry of Government Services / Projet de loi 152, Loi visant à moderniser diverses lois qui relèvent du ministère des Services gouvernementaux ou qui le touchent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the minister.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I should, at the outset, acknowledge that I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the MPP for Brampton West–Mississauga, Mr. Vic Dhillon.

I am pleased to introduce for second reading Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act.

If you’ll permit me, I’d like to thank two former parliamentary assistants who did a tremendous amount of work on consultations across the province on this bill: my colleague the member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot, Mr. McMeekin, and my colleague Liz Sandals, the MPP for Guelph–Wellington. They travelled around the province getting input on this bill, and I really do appreciate their work.

What I’ve come to know is, and I think all members would appreciate this, is that there is a constant need for the Legislature to keep its consumer protection up to date, and we do face a constantly changing marketplace with constantly changing conditions. What this bill does is deal with a variety of areas where we have seen the need to update our legislation to respond to changing conditions in the marketplace. I will outline a few of those areas and the steps we’re taking.

First, I want to talk about something called real estate fraud. I think the public should recognize that there are really two parts to it: There’s title fraud, where individuals attempt to fraudulently get your title, and then there is mortgage fraud, which is in some respects the larger

part of this, where individuals will do things to fraudulently get access to mortgages.

The one thing I would say is that we are able to track title fraud somewhat. Just so the public is aware, each year over the last 10 years we've had, on average, about 10 claims of fraud against our land titles assurance fund. One claim is too many, but just so we know, in terms of actual numbers, we're looking at around 10. It's frankly a little more difficult to get the number for mortgage fraud, although we are working with our financial institution to get it. That one appears to be somewhat larger.

This legislation does several things. The most important one is—by the way, this provision is retroactive to the day we introduced the bill—that it ensures that the ownership of a property cannot be lost as a result of the registration of a falsified mortgage, fraudulent sale or counterfeit power of attorney; in other words, nobody is going to lose title to their property as a result of fraudulent activity, nor can a fraudulent document be registered against a title.

1540

We're also introducing in the bill some additional measures to allow us to suspend or indeed revoke accounts of suspected fraudsters who right now could be allowed to access the land title registry system. Fines will be going up, and it will also strengthen our authority for allowing notification to property owners.

We're making four significant moves in the bill. I would acknowledge—Mr. Speaker, you particularly have a significant interest in this area, as I think the public knows. We are also looking at a parallel to this, how we can modernize our land titles assurance fund, looking carefully at who has access to registering transfer changes against the land title, who has access to registering documents against the land title system. We're also looking at a notification system and, too, we'll be looking at some changes in the power of attorney.

The first area that's in this bill is some significant steps forward in the whole area of real estate fraud, particularly in the area of title fraud. I would say that we continue to work with a pretty good group of individuals, representing a cross-section of people who are involved in this, as we continue to look for other long-term solutions.

The second area I want to touch on briefly is gift cards. This is not a completely new phenomenon, but it's now a very large industry where individuals will go to a store and by a gift card for somebody; in other words, you say, "I want to get \$100 gift card. I'm going to give it to a friend or a family member."

The challenge right now is that in about 80% of the cases we've looked at, those cards expire, on average, in 24 months. Even though you have laid out, spent, \$100 to buy that for somebody, 24 months from now it can be worth nothing because the retailer says, "If you don't use it in 24 months, the balance will be eliminated." We don't think that's right. Dare I say that most members of the Legislature would not think that's appropriate.

It's an area that's grown rapidly in the last few years—really rapidly, I might add. It's actually changed

the way shopping patterns occur. January now is a growing sales month and December a somewhat declining sales month because gift cards are very much used and accepted out there. We want to move to give ourselves the authority to not permit expiry dates on gift cards. I look forward to working with our business community in the implementation of that.

The third area that's in this bill is amendments to our Liquor Licence Act. We've had very broad consultations over the last year and a few months right across the province. I can summarize the changes really in three areas. One is in terms of enhancing the ability of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario when they are granting licences or looking at renewing licences to do more due diligence on the person or persons applying for those licences than they've had the ability to do in the past. We are giving them enhanced powers, similar I might say to the powers they have for the gaming side of their regulatory role.

Superintendent Parrent, who is the chair of the alcohol and gaming committee of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police and who has been involved in this, said "The changes being brought forward as amendments to the Liquor Licence Act and its regulations are the culmination of proactive consultation by this government with police leaders throughout the province of Ontario for the safety of communities.... The OACP remains committed to working with and through the government to ensure that concerns of policing in Ontario are brought to the forefront."

These measures are designed to help make sure that, if you're going to get a liquor licence to operate a bar in the province of Ontario, we have done the necessary due diligence. I'm pleased with the proposals in our document for that.

There's also a significant policy change. Right now, we are not allowed to license washrooms. In other words, we're not allowed to permit a bar owner to allow someone to take their drink into the washroom. This legislation will change that. What we've found is that there is a significant problem of individuals putting in someone's drink a drug that has a very negative effect. We found in our consultations that many in the community, women in particular, said, "We would like to have the option of being able to take our drink into the washroom if we wanted to." This legislation will allow those bar owners who want to to apply to allow their washrooms to be licensed so that a woman could take her drink into the washroom. I must say, this has been very well received in our consultations. It's not unique; it does exist in British Columbia, so you can technically do this.

As another part of consumer service on this area, we also will be testing allowing bingo halls to sell alcohol. It's an adult entertainment, it's a contemporary thing, and we've been encouraged, particularly by the charities that benefit from these bingo halls, to look at that. So there are some very good parts of our legislation dealing with improving our oversight of bars to make sure that the criminal element doesn't get into them and to make sure

that the right people are allowed to license them, and then on the consumer choice, there are some good things.

Another area of intense interest to the consumer is, we are giving new powers to the Electrical Safety Authority, the ESA. It's an organization that, on behalf of all of us, is responsible for electrical safety in the province of Ontario. They're moving forward as we speak. By January 1—not related to this legislation—all electricians will have to be licensed in the province. But we are also giving added authority to the Electrical Safety Authority to, if they go into a retail outlet and find that there's an electrical product that's faulty, right now there is a risk—and this happened last year, where they found a faulty product. They had to go and get a warrant to deal with it from a justice of the peace. By the time they got back, the product had gone out of the store. This will allow them to immediately embargo that. It gives them good powers to deal with when they find faulty product in the retail outlet. It also gives them power, if a product gets out of the store, to require mandatory notification to people that they've got a faulty product on hand and mandatory fixing of that faulty product. There are enhanced safety things in here for our Electrical Safety Authority and for the consumer.

Another area in the bill: We try to make sure that we keep our business law up to date—we have Ontario Business Corporations Act responsibility, and there are several amendments in the bill to update that—heavily, I would say, to harmonize with the Canada Business Corporations Act, so that our businesses aren't dealing with two different sets of criteria. Many of the recommendations are to deal with harmonizing our business law.

I might say that with the support of all parties in the Legislature, actually, last December we completed our first phase of the business modernization update with something called the Securities Transfer Act, that had the support of all parties here, yourself included, Mr. Speaker. That little-known piece of legislation modernizes the way we deal with securities trading and what not. It will save our business community at least \$100 million a year nationally. When we're looking at being competitive and looking at a modern, contemporary economy here in Canada and in Ontario, the Legislature last December passed that Securities Transfer Act. This is the next phase. We're working on modernizing our business law. In talking to lawyers in the bar who look at this area, they are very supportive of the reforms we've got in this bill to update our corporations laws.

1550

Another part of the bill deals with the bereavement sector, bereavement being cemeteries, funeral homes, caskets, those things. It will help to modernize, strengthening consumer protection, improving disclosure notice and remedies for consumers. The legislation, if passed, will provide provisions to ensure consumers are aware of their rights with respect to bereavement purchases; ensure that only qualified, properly trained, properly licensed persons are permitted to sell bereavement supplies;

strengthen contract rights and cancellation rights. It's a few changes to help us move forward with a bereavement act that was actually passed many years ago but never proclaimed. This will help to allow us to do that.

Another part of this, which is within my ministry—I have responsibility, on behalf of the people of Ontario, for the Archives of Ontario. This will update the Archives Act. It has been 83 years since we've dealt with it and, as you might imagine, a lot has changed in 83 years. We're into the need for retention of electronic records, all of those sorts of things that have changed. So this is an opportunity to bring our Archives Act up to date and to deal with that.

Another area that the bill deals with is Internet gaming. This has created some interest. It came to my attention, I guess, first from our horseracing industry, a huge business for Ontario; 65,000 people in Ontario work in the horseracing industry. I think it's our second-largest agricultural industry, very successful. We're world-class in that area. But what they said to me is, "We're playing by all the rules"—"we" being the horse racing industry—"but we're competing against somebody who is not playing by all the rules: Internet gaming," which is illegal. So they've said to us, "What can you do about it?"

The one thing that we can do is amend the Consumer Protection Act to prohibit advertising or promotion of illegal Internet gaming sites. That's the one thing we can do, and that's what this bill does. As I say, when I talk to our very large and important horse racing industry, I have difficulty in defending not doing something. They're playing by all the rules and trying to sustain a very big industry for us and competing against people who aren't playing by all the rules. So that is part of the bill; not a huge part of the bill but an important part of the bill.

Another area that's in the bill, Mr. Speaker, is some measures to deal with identity theft, an issue of some interest to you. This proposal, if passed, would require our credit reporting agencies—if someone asked to put a flag on their credit report, the credit agency would be required to disclose that flag to anybody who's asking for the report, and anybody who has been informed of that would be required to take due diligence with that information. So it's a step in the area of identify theft, and I think a good step.

There are some housekeeping matters in the legislation dealing with privacy information. We have an organization within my ministry called Service Ontario. Its role is ultimately to be the one-stop shop for the public when they're looking for information or services from government. In order for that to happen, we need the legal authority to make sure they are able to offer a broad range of government information and services. There are also some other what I might regard as more housekeeping matters within the bill, including, for example, in the real estate area, making sure real estate brokers and salespersons maintain their insurance, and several other relatively very much housekeeping matters in the bill.

Overall, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, the challenge for us as a Legislature is to make sure that we keep our consumer protection laws current, that as new issues—I regard gift cards and real estate fraud as not new, but they need to be dealt with now. This bill, in a comprehensive way, attempts to make sure that we are keeping our consumer laws current.

I look forward to the debate, I look forward to the comments, and I would look forward to the support of the Legislature as we move forward on this bill.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Brampton West–Mississauga.

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): It's an honour for me to speak today with Minister Phillips and to lead off debate on this very important piece of legislation.

Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act, is part of the McGuinty government's continuing commitment to the people of this province. Through this legislation, our government is once again proving that we're on the side of Ontario families and Ontario business.

Last year, the McGuinty government put in place the most significant changes to Ontario's consumer protection laws in 30 years. Enacting the Consumer Protection Act was a major step forward for consumers, and made Ontario a leader in consumer protection. The act introduced many new and important requirements of businesses, such as delivering goods or services within 30 days of the specified contract; ensuring that final costs of home renovations or moving services do not exceed a written estimate by more than 10%; prohibiting negative option billing so that consumers aren't liable for goods or services they did not ask for; allowing a 10-day cooling-off period for agreements with fitness, dance and vacation clubs, time shares and most door-to-door contracts worth more than \$50.

At the time, the Consumer Protection Act updated Ontario's consumer laws to reflect a more complex and dynamic marketplace. However, what makes today's marketplace so complex and dynamic is its state of constant change. As the marketplace changes, so too must the protections that consumers need. That's why at the heart of Bill 152 is the introduction of new consumer protection and consumer safety measures.

Recently, we heard stories of individuals who have had fraudsters place mortgages against their homes, illegally and without their knowledge. While these cases may be limited in comparison to the more than two million land transactions that occur each year in Ontario, no amount of fraud is acceptable to this government. That's why this legislation is designed to ensure that ownership of a property cannot be lost as a result of the registration of a falsified mortgage, fraudulent sale or counterfeit power of attorney. An innocent owner's title will be restored to them, and a fraudulent document will now be nullified.

1600

As previously mentioned, the legislation will also introduce new safeguards for suspending and revoking

the accounts of suspected fraudsters so that they cannot register documents, raise fines for real estate fraud and related offences from \$1,000 to \$50,000, and strengthen our authority to allow for notification of property owners about any changes to their title in our land registration system.

Our ministry is continuing to work with the real estate fraud committee, comprised of law enforcement officials, land surveyors, lawyers and real estate professionals, on ways to combat real estate fraud. Currently, our government is looking at four key areas that will continue our fight against the effects of real estate fraud. We are looking into limiting access for certain aspects of the land registration system; making the land titles insurance fund easier to navigate and more responsive to victims of fraud; developing a system of notification for when dealings are registered against a property; and changing how powers of attorney are used in real estate transactions.

Real estate fraud is an important issue for Ontarians, and therefore an important issue for this government. We are committed to addressing it on a continuous basis, and the legislation in this bill is only one step in this ongoing process.

There are many other consumer protection elements of this bill, including legislation regarding gift cards. Recently, Ontarians have been increasingly interested in purchasing gift cards without worrying about such things as expiry dates or value reductions. People purchase these cards in good faith and rightly expect that their purchase will retain its full value until redeemed. We want to ensure that Ontario consumers purchasing gift cards get what they pay for. We have heard their complaints about expired cards, and this legislation will give us the power to work with the retail industry to put an end to this practice. That's why this legislation, if passed, will give the government regulatory powers to ban expiry dates on gift cards.

Another piece of proposed legislation will introduce reforms to Ontario's liquor laws, based on extensive consultations with the public and stakeholders, focusing on enhancing public safety, service delivery and consumer choice. This is part of our ongoing effort to ensure that our liquor laws are updated and continue to reflect current realities by providing sufficient protection for consumers. If passed, this legislation will give the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario more investigative and enforcement powers to ensure that owners and operators of licensed establishments will remain responsible. These powers will allow the AGCO to not only investigate applicants, but also others potentially associated with their business.

Additional changes we are proposing will allow bars and restaurants to expand their licences to allow patrons to carry their drinks with them to separate areas of an establishment, such as the washroom. This will allow consumers to monitor their drinks at all times, reducing the likelihood of an unknown substance, such as a date rape drug, to be used to contaminate their drinks.

Even more consumer protection measures included in the proposed legislation will grant new powers to the

Electrical Safety Authority, or ESA, to proactively protect Ontario families from unsafe electrical products. With the changes being proposed, dangerous or unsafe electrical products can be seized or ordered removed from store shelves by the ESA. If a product has already been sold and is being used in people's homes, the new legislation would allow the ESA to call for the manufacturer to notify consumers that the product is unsafe.

In addition to these updates, Bill 152 would allow us to target illegal Internet gaming advertising. The horse racing industry has been gravely impacted by illegal, online gaming. This industry is the second-largest agricultural industry in this province. That accounts for 40,000 full-time jobs and 25,000 part-time jobs, mostly in rural Ontario. By prohibiting the promotion of an illegal Internet gaming website, the government is taking responsible measures to protect businesses operating legitimately in Ontario from illegal online gaming.

This proposal is one of the several steps being taken to address illegal Internet gaming. Of course, the federal government also has to play a role in stopping these illegal practices. I'm aware that Minister Phillips has written to the federal Minister of Justice, who is responsible for the Criminal Code, to ask for support in a coordinated effort between the provinces and the federal government to combat this issue.

Our protection to consumers also extends to Ontarians victimized or concerned by identity theft. The people of this province work hard to achieve financial stability, and they deserve to know that their finances are secure. That's why this legislation will allow consumers to take an active role in preventing identity thieves from accessing and making use of innocent peoples' personal information.

If passed, this legislation would give consumers the right to place fraud alerts on their credit reports. Credit lenders and others that rely on credit reports would be required to take reasonable steps to verify and identify consumers with a fraud alert on their record.

Penalties would be imposed on organizations that do not meet these requirements. The new measures being introduced through Bill 152 protect Ontario and ensure that our government can deliver that protection in the most efficient way possible.

The people of this province deserve to be protected, and that's exactly what this legislation offers. If passed, this bill will offer significant consumer protection measures that rival the best of any jurisdiction in the world. For this reason, I call on all members to support this very important piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): This is an interesting bill. It's one of these omnibus bills, I suppose you'd say, that's got a dozen or more different categories in it, and some of them are excellent. Look at the drinking in the washroom, for instance. I think that's a good piece of legislation. It's going to protect people from getting their drinks contaminated with drugs and that sort of thing; it can be very, very supportive.

The Bailiffs Act, where no warrant is needed to enter properties: I haven't looked at the detail of the act, but whenever I see that in the explanation of a bill, I get very nervous. I get very nervous about people having access to a warrant without due course process. That's something that I think all people in this Legislature should look at very, very carefully.

The online gambling thing: Yes, it's a bad problem in the province of Ontario. It's siphoning off millions of dollars from the horse racing industry. The horse racing industry is very near and dear to my heart. I think there are more horses in my riding than any other riding in Ontario, so the horse racing business is very important to me.

I would like to see that—

Interjections

Mr. Chudleigh: Oh, I'm getting some objections to that, but I think the facts will prove that I have more horses than anybody else—on race day perhaps. That legislation should go much further than it goes. I don't understand how these things can be carried on our Internet systems. I don't think just banning the advertising of them goes far enough.

The gift card is another one that I would support. However, in the identity theft areas, again, I don't think this bill goes far enough. It's one of these bills that has a very mixed reaction as to whether the good outweighs the bad or whether we can support the bill or not. I'll look forward to the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Mario Sergio): The member for Hamilton East has two minutes.

1610

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm pleased to make a few comments about the debate on this bill, Bill 152. Interestingly enough, as the previous member mentioned, it is an omnibus bill, so there are many, many pieces to the bill, many of them that I'm actually quite interested in, having come from the municipal sector. Many of the issues actually hit the road at the municipal sector. I think particularly about the new kind of deal around bars, particularly licensing of areas where people can now take their drinks into washrooms. Again, coming from a woman's perspective, that's not necessarily a bad thing, although we have to acknowledge that the safety of women in bars and the problems with date rape drugs will not be solved by this particular bill. Having said that, I don't think it's harmful to actually undertake that kind of change.

There are a number of other issues. The one that I was a little bit concerned about, I have to admit, is the possibility of these pilot projects for bingo halls. I'm a little bit concerned about the licensing of bingo halls. I think there are some things that we need to be cautious about in that regard.

My understanding is that a number of the changes that are being recommended or brought forward under this bill will in fact not be detailed until regulations are developed, so therefore there are issues around the extent to which regulations get any public hearing, and of

course we all know that they don't. It's simply the letter of the bill that gets debated through committee. So certainly the committee process is going to be key in moving this legislation along. New Democrats are going to be watching for some of the details we would like to see to make sure that the issues outlined in this bill are in fact going to be helpful to the consumers of the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I wanted to say to the minister and to the parliamentary assistant, this is really good work, and it's fast too: first reading October 19, and here we are on October 26, already at second reading.

I don't know about other MPPs, but I've had a lot of people visit my constituency office in the last few months concerned about a number of issues involving identity theft, but especially when it comes to the Land Titles Act and to do with their properties. People have come to me and said, "What are you going to do? What is the government going to do to protect me and make sure that my house doesn't get transferred into someone else's name?" It's good to see right in front of me today that section 15 of this new bill amends the Land Titles Act. It states quite clearly, "fraudulent instrument"; it defines what that is and what a fraudulent person is. It also provides for penalties so that property owners can't lose their property because of falsified mortgages, a fraudulent sale or a counterfeit power of attorney. These are things that a lot of people in my riding, especially seniors, are extremely concerned about. So I'm very happy, and it's extremely pleasing to see how quickly the government has responded to that concern: seven days from first reading to today.

The other little thing that is interesting is the act itself is called An Act to modernize various Acts administered by or affecting the Ministry of Government Services. So you're modernizing a number of different acts, as the minister has pointed out, and others have as well. But one of the things that bothers me and bothers my wife too—I had to mention my wife because it happened to me. We went in to buy a gift card which gave us 20% off on goods that we would buy. But the gift card—and it was my own fault; I did not read the expiry date on it—expired only a few months after I had purchased it. This prevents that from happening. The person who sells the gift card has to let us know about it. So I'm pleased to see this and I support in this act very, very much.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member from Simcoe North.

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

The Acting Speaker: Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford indeed.

Mr. Tascona: I'm going to be speaking on this bill at quite some length shortly, but I want to offer my comments with respect to this bill. This bill is made up of changes to 53 statutes. It's an omnibus bill, which means that it's housekeeping in nature, but it's also dealing with

some substantive consumer reforms that make it very difficult to really debate this in a public forum in terms of public hearings, because there is so much in this bill. The bill is actually 201 pages.

I would say that in terms of what the government said they would do before the election, bringing more democracy and more transparency, when you bring forth an omnibus bill, that is not the case, because what is happening here is that there are a lot of different areas we are going to be touching on. It's not a situation where you're going to have full public hearings on the different issues that need to be dealt with, like liquor licensing, real estate fraud, Internet gambling, electrical products, just to name a few. So we're dealing with some substantive consumer issues here that are not going to be addressed in a proper manner in public hearings.

I'm going to speak at length on my views with respect to real estate mortgage fraud. I think the government has come up a little bit short here in terms of really addressing the problem. I'm going to be urging them in debate to go a little bit further in terms of addressing this problem, certainly looking at amendments to the bill as it currently stands, to bring about greater protection to homeowners in this province.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Government Services has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Mr. Phillips: I appreciate the comments of the members for Halton, Hamilton East, Scarborough Southwest and Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

I think the member for Halton suggested there are some areas where we may not have gone far enough. One of the challenges, I find—actually, the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford mentioned it—is that we are dealing with a broad range of issues. What I've found in this area is that there is a broad range of issues that needs to be addressed, almost on a regular basis. In the real estate fraud issue, we haven't found all the solutions yet. I have said many times that there's a process. I think the member from Hamilton East mentioned the date rape issue. This is not a solution to that. This is a part of it but not a solution to it.

I guess it highlights for me the need for the Legislature to find ways that we can keep our laws up to date in a broad range of areas, recognizing the reality of the legislative process, which is that it's not easy to find the legislative time to debate all the bills and the comprehensive nature of how the Legislature keeps up to date. This is my recommendation on how we can move forward on a broad range of contemporary issues, but I suspect this is the sort of thing on which the Legislature, for years to come, has to find ways to keep us moving quickly.

I did appreciate the comment from the member from Scarborough Southwest: Nothing seems to touch people like the fear of losing their home, nothing—maybe health first, but that's second. We do need to assure them that we have proper protections in place, which I believe we do.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, a wonderful riding.

Mr. Tascona: It is a wonderful riding. I just want to comment on the remarks made by the minister just a few moments ago that nothing is more fearful to homeowners than losing their home, and that's where this bill comes up dreadfully short, because if someone fraudulently takes title of your property, you have to go to court to protect your title, to make sure you get your title back. Case in point: Elizabeth Shepherd, whose house was taken from her when she had rented it. She was acting in New York at the time, and for a few months she rented out her house. Her tenants, with a fraudulent power of attorney, not only took title to her house when she was not there, but also slapped a significant mortgage in the hundreds of thousands of dollars on her property by representing themselves as her grandchildren, resulting in her being put in a situation where she has to go to court—she has a lawyer—to get her title back. She has no protection under this bill, because this bill doesn't come into effect until October 19, 2006, with respect to a fraudulent mortgage. So this bill does nothing for Elizabeth Shepherd.

1620

Case in point: Paul Reviczky, an 89-year-old gentleman who rented out his property to some individuals who represented themselves as his grandchildren, obtained a fraudulent power of attorney to provide to their legal counsel and proceeded to not only take title to the property from Mr. Reviczky but also slapped a fraudulent mortgage on that property. This bill does not protect Mr. Reviczky. He's going to have to go to court to get his title back because of a fraudulent transaction. And it doesn't protect him from mortgage fraud, because the bill doesn't come into effect until October 19, 2006.

So Mr. Reviczky, Ms. Shepherd and Ms. Lawrence have to go to court to protect their title and get the mortgage removed from their property, and if they're successful in that, then they can go to the land titles assurance fund and try to recoup some of their losses. That's not an acceptable solution for those three individuals and it's not an acceptable solution for other people in this province—the minister has acknowledged that the level of mortgage fraud is significant.

The bill I put forth in this Legislature, Bill 136, the Restore the Deed Act, which received second reading passage on September 28, 2006, and was referred to the general government committee, deals with the situation that has to be dealt with in this province with respect to land registry. In a situation that confronted Ms. Shepherd and Mr. Reviczky—I also referred to Susan Lawrence, who has a situation where she lost title to her house, which she lived in, and a mortgage was slapped on her property through a fraudulent transaction. She still has to deal with the bank, because the Court of Appeal, in 2005, ruled that even though it's a fraudulent mortgage, it's a legitimate document on title because it was registered. So she has to deal with the requirements of payment under a fraudulent mortgage, which she had no knowledge of until she found that the bank was giving her statements that she had to pay this mortgage on her property in excess of \$300,000.

The Restore the Deed Act would ensure that no individual would have to go to court to get their title back, and no individual would have to go to court to get a fraudulent mortgage removed from their property. Bill 136, the Restore the Deed Act, would make sure that no homeowner would lose their title, no homeowner would have a mortgage slapped on their property. What would happen would be that if there was an innocent purchaser or an innocent lender involved in transactions that led to their having title taken away or a mortgage slapped on their property, it would be the innocent purchaser or the innocent lender who would have to go to the land titles assurance fund. For the listening audience, that's a fund that is administered by the government of Ontario. It's a fund that comes out of general revenues to protect people from title fraud and mortgage fraud.

In the situation under Bill 136, an innocent purchaser or an innocent lender would go to the fund first. They wouldn't have to go to court, they wouldn't have to go through the delay and the expense of the system. The benefit of it is that you, the homeowner, would not have to go to court to get your title back. You wouldn't have to go to court to get a fraudulent mortgage taken off your property, because the innocent purchaser and the innocent mortgage lender would go to the land titles assurance fund. They wouldn't have to go to court; they would go to that fund as a first resort. That is what the law is in New Brunswick; that's what the law should be in Ontario: that the land titles assurance fund is the fund of first resort.

This bill protects the title—this is Bill 136, which is my bill, the Restore the Deed Act—by making sure that whether you live in the property physically or you have a substantial connection to the property—say, for example, it's your cottage or it's a property that you rent—nobody could scoop your property and take away your title. That's what's provided in Bill 136 and that's what's not provided in the government bill, Bill 152. Bill 152 does not protect your title. It doesn't protect individuals from fraudulent mortgages before October 19, 2006, at all.

The serious problem we have with respect to identity theft in this province deals with the real estate industry. I think my colleague the minister has been candid with respect to that, and there is a problem. I would suggest that it's a significant problem that requires more than what the government is doing—I would say much more. What we need to do is not only ensure that you will never lose your house, you will never have a fraudulent mortgage on your property; we need to make sure that nobody can get at your title. There are a number of ways that that can be done in my bill, Bill 136. There were a number of measures to protect the integrity of the land titles system in this province.

The first measure was ensuring that only registered, licensed real estate professionals could have the right and entitlement to register documents in the land registry or land titles system, and they would have to have personal liability insurance to do so. What that means is that individuals who are scoping your title by getting access

to the Teranet system by as easy and illegal means as a phony auto insurance licence—they can become a licence holder for a fee. They can get, through that phony and fraudulent automobile insurance licence, onto the system to scope your title. Also, they can register documents against your title, even though they fraudulently got on to the system.

What do they look for? Of course they look for houses where there is no mortgage against that property. Let's face it: In Toronto house prices are very high, they're very significant, and they're looking for homes where there's no equity that's been taken away through a charge or a mortgage. Those are the lucrative properties and that's where the action is happening. My information from title insurers is that we're talking in the tens of millions of dollars in claims that they're facing with respect to title insurance.

This is going to be a significant issue, obviously. The minister didn't really touch on it in his speech, but what he's going to make sure of in this bill, as I understand it from my briefing, is that title insurance companies would have no access to the land titles assurance fund. He'll have to comment when we get into debate further as to why he decided to do that.

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The fundamental point here when you're dealing with the land titles assurance fund is that it's slow, it's cumbersome, and I've suggested in my bill that it should not be dealt with through the government. It should be dealt with by a hands-off, third party board of directors made up of individuals selected from consumer groups, from the real estate industry and from law enforcement, to deal with this bill and with the land titles assurance fund so that it is properly administered and dealt with and understood by the people who understand the issues facing this problem.

Mortgage fraud and title theft are a serious problem in this province, whether you've got title insurance or not. All title insurance will do is give you money for your property, which has been fraudulently taken from you. People want their home; they don't necessarily want that money. This bill doesn't do that, because people who take the property fraudulently by getting on the Teranet system fraudulently—so what? What do they care if they're going to lose their licence? They've already used false identity. How are you going to take away the licence of somebody who already has fake identity? It makes no sense. What you have to make sure is that the people who can register documents, such as transfers of title or mortgages, are people who are licensed real estate professionals with personal liability insurance. That's one way to protect the consumer, which is not in the bill.

The other aspect, and the minister mentioned this but he didn't get into it too deeply, was notification. In Saskatchewan, they have specific legislation in place where, if someone is looking at your title or is trying to transact a transaction on your title or a mortgage on your property, you are given notification immediately, through e-mail or fax or whatever system you've chosen, to

notify you that someone has tampered with your title, either through taking your title or through trying to put a mortgage on your property.

That system has been in place in Saskatchewan for a number of years, and I think there's merit to that system to give people notice that someone is tinkering with your title. That allows the registrar—having communicated with the homeowner, who obviously would not be in agreement with that unless they had full knowledge that there was a transaction going on which they're consenting to—to freeze the registrar; in other words, to not allow any transaction like a fraudulent title change or a fraudulent mortgage to go against your property because of the identity theft problem that they have, not only in Saskatchewan but also in this province.

A notification system would go a long way towards alerting the consumer, the homeowner, that someone is trying to take their title, someone is trying to take the equity in their house by putting on a fraudulent mortgage against them. The registrar could freeze the registrar, which means you can't register a document on that particular property because the owner is not consenting to anything like that.

The other area that I've commented on is allowing landowners, homeowners, to mark their title through a personal identification system, a PIN system, not unlike when you get a card for a bank in terms of being able to take money out from your account. You have your own PIN, and you use that PIN to take money out of your own account. The PIN system with respect to real estate would ensure that if someone is involved in a transaction of your property, which would be the lawyer dealing with that, they would have to go to you and say, "I need your PIN because we need your consent to this transaction." If you don't have the PIN, obviously you're not the owner, but if you have the PIN, they have to go to you with respect to that PIN, and it has to match up, but also, they have to get your consent for the transaction. That's another protection for the unknowing consumer against fraudulent identity theft.

I would suspect and strongly believe that the individual trying to do a transaction on the property would not have that PIN. That PIN would be in the possession of the homeowner, and if they don't have the PIN for the property, which is in the records of the land registry system, no transaction's going to take place. There wouldn't be any consent towards going forward with that particular transaction, be it a transfer of title or a charge against title. So those are things the government's not putting in place in this bill.

This bill is really about—when I'm talking about the mortgage fraud aspect of Bill 152, one of the 53 bills that we're going to be dealing with—looking at preventing identity theft. It's not enough to say, "Oh, we're going to stop someone from putting a fraudulent mortgage against your title, because we're not going to allow it in terms of registering a document that's fraudulent." We need to stop identity theft in its tracks because it's a significant problem that is taking people's houses away from them,

taking away their equity in their homes. It's just not right, and it has to be stopped.

We're expecting the minister to be listening to this carefully, because I've provided him a copy of my bill. He's a very knowledgeable man, and a forward-thinking man too. I know he wants to get this bill forward, because he's got some other little treasures in this bill that I will comment on later. But let's get it right, because this is a problem, and everybody knows it's a problem.

One other aspect that the minister touched on, but that he really didn't get into any specifics on, is power of attorney. Power of attorney is a big problem, because with a lot of the power of attorney out there, there are no independent affidavits and they're not insisting on original documents. All they want is a copy of the power of attorney. That is not good enough. In the province of Alberta, they have recognized that the abuse of power of attorney has to be dealt with, and they insist on an original power of attorney supported by an affidavit of proof of your identity, so that the document is supported not only in its original context but by an affidavit.

What happened in Reviczky and Elizabeth Shepherd cases is that copies of a power of attorney from fraudulent individuals were being accepted as a legitimate authority to act on that property. The listening public has to know that with power of attorney, whatever that document says with respect to giving you authority to deal with a particular piece of property, because that will be in the document, the person directed and given the power to deal with your personal property or your home can deal with it, because that document is law; that document gives authority to the person who's going to do the transaction to follow the document.

We have to do better in this province. We cannot allow copies of a power of attorney to be accepted by the legal profession or financial institutions without the types of protections that they provide in the province of Alberta. I think the minister recognizes that, because home ownership is not going to be the only area of abuse. There's going to be an area of abuse with respect to seniors' financial property, and that's not the way we should go in this province. We've got to do better.

In my Bill 136, I provide that it not only be a fund of first resort and for it to be administered by an independent body, I also provide that victims of fraud, prior to the enactment of the Restore the Deed Act, would be eligible to apply for compensation under a reformed land titles assurance fund, which would include compensation for reasonable legal fees, like in New Brunswick. They provide for that, the compensation of reasonable legal fees. The fact of the matter is that the government did nothing for a number of years.

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The case that set the precedent in this province, the Lik Liu case, in which the court determined that a fraudulent mortgage registered on title is legal, happened in early 2004. The government did nothing. The Court of Appeal for Ontario heard the case in November, rendered its decision, and said that's the law: A fraudulent

mortgage registered on title is legitimate. Now, that's very scary—but nothing happened. What really moved the government to act was the astounding cases reported by the Toronto Star, in particular Harold Levy and Mr. Aaron in that paper about the Susan Lawrence case, the Elizabeth Shepherd case and the Paul Reviczky case, where innocent homeowners not only lost their title, they also lost all their equity in the property. So for the government to say, "You're going to be protected after October 19, 2006," is not good enough, because the law was changed fundamentally, to everybody's astonishment, in the early part of 2004. If the government should do anything, they should make it retroactive to that period of time to protect consumers and homeowners in this province. I urge the minister to look at it that way in terms of fairness.

It's not as if this government hasn't brought in and enacted retroactive legislation, because we know they have, and they've done it in a way that they feel brings things back to square one to make things fair. What I'm saying to the minister is, let's make things fair for Susan Lawrence, who's still in court trying to get her title back, who's still facing payments from a bank that wants their money from her. It does her no good that the government has intervened in her case, which perhaps will be heard in November, because by this bill, the government has admitted that she hasn't got a chance at all in terms of overturning that decision. I doubt very much that there will be leave given to go to the Supreme Court of Canada on this particular case, although who knows what will happen?

The bottom line is, the money that she's putting forth to protect her interests is coming out of her pocket. She wasn't the one who put a fraudulent mortgage on her property to take away all her equity. She wasn't the one who had a fraudulent title transaction where now she has had to go to court to get her house back.

The minister says there have only been about 10 cases of title theft in this province, and he's candid in saying one is too many. I look to him and I say, if that's the case, then why don't we protect the victims that unknowingly, in good faith, trusted the registry system and were left alone and basically were taken advantage of to the point where they're spending money to overturn a fraudulent title transaction and a fraudulent mortgage transaction? It just isn't right. I think everybody here knows it's not right. The minister is going to have to do a little bit better, with respect.

I don't know what his reluctance is to make the land title assurance fund a fund of first resort. They did it in New Brunswick. I don't know what the reluctance is to do it here. He's going to cut out the title insurance companies from getting at that fund. Why doesn't he protect the innocent homeowner that has been taken advantage of? Why does Mrs. Lawrence have to go through six to 10 years of litigation to prove to the land title assurance people, "I've done everything I can to catch this fictitious character. I spent tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees. Why couldn't you have made it a

fund of first resort, where the bank could have gone to the fund, got the funding? Leave me alone. I did nothing wrong.”

No, she's got to go to court to get her title back; she's got to go to court to get her mortgage discharged from that bank. They're not backing off, because they know that the law is that a registered mortgage fraudulently obtained is the law. This bill does nothing for Susan Lawrence, does nothing for Elizabeth Shepherd and does nothing for Paul Reviczky, and that's a shame, because I know the minister can do better and he should do better.

What I've spoken about with respect to the Restore the Deed Act—I have a petition on that which I am distributing across this province, because I want homeowners in this province to be aware that their home is at risk and the government isn't doing enough to protect their home. Bill 136 will not only protect their home from being taken from them; it will protect their equity from being taken from them, it will protect them from having any identity theft of their property, and it will also make sure that if anything does go bad, they're protected by the land titles assurance fund. After all, that is a government fund, funded by taxpayers. It's supposed to be for their protection. I don't know why the government's being such a tightwad on it, because the bottom line is, they protect the people in New Brunswick but they won't do it here. That's wrong.

I only have 52 more statutes to deal with, so I'm going to take my best shot at it as we progress through this debate. I know my good colleague from Niagara Centre is going to make the minister aware of his thoughts and his concerns. I'll do my best in the 32 minutes and 13 seconds that I have left there.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Let's talk about the Barrie Colts.

Mr. Tascona: I'm not going to talk about the Barrie Colts right now, although they are playing Mississauga tonight and I think it's going to be a good game. My daughter, Lauren, is taking my tickets tonight. It's her birthday, and they're going to announce her birthday at the Barrie Colts game. It's going to be an exciting moment as the Barrie Colts take on the Mississauga Ice Dogs.

Mr. Leal: What about Jordan Staal when he goes back to Peterborough?

Mr. Tascona: Well, Peterborough is another story. It's going to be a sad season for the Peterborough Petes fans, whom I have a lot of respect for.

Need I digress? I'm going to come back to Bill 152, because the Speaker is interested in this.

Now we're going to talk about unsafe electrical products. The minister, to his credit—because I believe he is a consumer advocate, but a few bullets short in the old casing right now in terms of what he can get in there. But we did have a press conference with respect to the unsafe electrical products. Quite frankly, it was not only astounding but it was very scary in terms of the types of products that one would expect, electrical cords burning up and melting the electrical distribution switch on the

bottom that we put our circuits into—not being protected from a shock when you put the plug into this circuit, from light bulbs that would explode, really unacceptable types of products. These products, by and large, the ones they were dealing with, are from manufacturers overseas. As the minister knows, you really can't do much to manufacturers that manufacture overseas. But the problem is that these products get here, and there were comments made in there by the press in terms of the dollar store and the types of products that they're distributing and selling to the public. The minister was pretty forthright with respect to the electrical supply group that was there.

There is indemnity with respect to safe products in the province. The problem is, there are 14 different markings in terms of what would be a safe product. My point was and is, why don't we just have one marking so everybody knows which electrical products are safe? It makes sense to me. Certainly, it would take a little bit of administrative work to do that, but I think it's well within the capability of the minister to bring 14 markings down to one. If there is an argument against that—I really can't understand why there would be one. But everybody should know, when they buy an electrical product, that this marking indicates, not necessarily that it's a made-in-Ontario product, but that it's a product the Ontario government, through the electrical association, stands behind. I think it's right that we have that, so that people can at least trust the product they have.

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But the other point I was making—the minister takes what I think is an old type of remedial approach and says, “We are going to do this so the enforcement agency can stop a sale or take a product.” That's the old style or type of remedial system in place, giving inspectors powers to do this and that. That's fine and dandy if you have enough inspectors out there, but the problem is, they don't.

We need to make sure that they get it at the source. Now, obviously you can go after an Ontario manufacturer with respect to a recall of product that has harmed the public. But my point is that the product should not get in the store, and we have the means to make sure that they don't get in the store. Barring fraud—people putting fraudulent stickers on the products saying that these are safe products—we can do better. We can make sure that the focus of the enforcement is at the distributor level, so that if there are products coming in from overseas—because that's where the products really are the problem, by and large—these products don't get out of the warehouse. They don't get out of the warehouse and into the stores so someone can buy them; they don't get into the stores so someone can sell them.

I think that's where the focus has to be, because one thing about this province, in terms of the way the distribution network has emerged: These are big distribution channels—the products that go into Costco, the products that go into Wal-Mart, the products that go into Canadian Tire and the products that go into the dollar stores. We

know who the big players are with respect to consumer products in the electrical product area. I don't think it's that difficult for the minister to focus his enforcement people on the particular area he wants to go after, because it is a serious problem. I took very seriously the message the minister was trying to portray, that these products can be deadly in the hands of people in their homes, resulting in fires or resulting in burns to the individual.

We have to do better in terms of this, because the way the minister is approaching this is, "Okay, if someone gets hurt, we'll look after it after they get hurt." Well, that's not the way we should be doing things. We should make sure that people don't get hurt, okay? We should make sure that we don't wait to deal with the problem until after the person gets hurt.

I'm saying to the minister, let's get one marking for safe electrical products in this province. Let's make sure you focus your attentions on distributors so that the product doesn't get into the store.

I want to make a comment about the date rape drugs that the minister was talking about. We had some discussion about that earlier on, and I questioned the minister on it, and I know the Attorney General had some interest in these date rape drugs. That is a significant problem. The minister has admitted that it is a significant problem.

So it's a significant problem. So what's the solution? The minister makes it optional for bar owners or licence holders to deal with this significant problem, to say, "We want to extend our liquor licence area to cover the wash-room areas."

I would say that I'm a little surprised that you have made it optional when it is such a significant problem, in terms of protecting women from date rape drugs. Why aren't you saying to the licence owner, the holders of the licences, "Listen, this is a problem. We think you're going to have to do what the government thinks is right"? God knows the Attorney General, when it came to pit bulls, basically passed a standard across the province saying, "This is what you are going to do." But when it comes to protecting women from being raped through these drugs, he makes it optional. That's not acceptable. This should be mandatory across the province if this is such a significant problem, as the minister says it is. We're talking about women being protected from date rape drugs—which is something we know is a significant problem—and it's something with which they would feel safer. If they're in a bar or whatever, they could go and take their drink into the washroom area and they wouldn't face that problem.

It's a significant problem. The minister recognizes that, yet he makes it optional for a liquor licence holder to bring that into their establishment. You've got to do better, Minister. This is a significant problem. You're willing to protect dogs across the province, but you're not prepared to protect women in a situation where they're facing this date rape drug. You're making it optional. It doesn't make any sense to me. You're going to have to change the legislation and bring it in.

I thought, when we were talking about this and you came out with the public hearings, that we were talking about making this something that was going to happen. I thought the Attorney General was behind that in saying, "Yes, this is a serious problem. It has to be stopped. Let's do it now." So you come out with "optional." There's no option about smoking in a liquor-licensed establishment—none. Why should there be an option about making sure that people don't get date rape drugs put in their drinks? To the minister: You better revisit this issue, because, quite frankly, it's a little light on dealing with the problem that you say is significant.

The other area that I want to comment on is liquor in bingo halls. Where did that come from? I know bingo halls in some areas are having a little bit of difficulty, mainly because they're competing with the slot machines at racetracks. A case in point: the city of Windsor. In my experience, a lot of volunteers from organizations—from hockey to lacrosse to different groups—come in there and volunteer their time, and kids are there mingling throughout the area. And now you want liquor to be sold in this place? For what reason? One reason only: to give more revenue to the bingo hall owners and create an environment that I wouldn't say would be conducive to what I call the family type atmosphere of bingo halls. So I don't understand where you're coming from there. It doesn't seem right to me that you would be introducing liquor into bingo halls, other than for the fact that you want to give them an opportunity to make more money. Is it all about money?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): They'd rather smoke than drink.

Mr. Tascona: That's right. They're smoking in there. Why are they smoking? That's supposed to be prohibited. You're trying to create an environment in there that is user-friendly. So now we're going to be drinking: "You can't smoke, but we'll let you drink."

Mr. Kormos: Imagine the mess they'd make with that dabber when they're all drunk up.

Mr. Tascona: That's right. That's a real dabba-do time, as you've had a couple of Jack Daniel's and you're trying to move through there: "Where's that 'B'? I thought it was a 'D.'" I don't know where this is taking us, but the minister will tell us why he decided to do that. I don't think there was a lot of thought put through that in terms of the overall scheme of things. It may just be a revenue-driven type of idea. And if it is, I think you're going to have to think about it again.

The other one was Internet gaming. This is really interesting. I know the harness racing industry is really interested in this. All you're going to stop from happening is people putting Internet gambling on billboards or on some other kind of printed media, because you can't stop the offshore signal. I spoke about this, and I have a lot of respect for the member from Peterborough—I should say the "Petes"—who brought this bill forth. I spoke against it because, I said, it doesn't do anything. You can't enforce it; it doesn't do anything to deal with the problem. I still believe that, because you can't stop offshore signals.

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I understand that part of the government's rationale for introducing this prohibition is that it will reduce youth gambling, but a recent survey contradicts that assertion. The government is claiming that they are doing this to protect against youth gambling online. However, the government's own study on problem gaming in March 2005 found that statistics from prevalent studies and from the Ontario problem gambling helpline indicate that fewer than 1% of gamblers refer to Internet wagering as the major source of their gambling problems. Care should be taken to ensure that information about problem gambling and responsible gaming practice reaches these gamblers as well.

The horse racing and gaming industries strongly support the proposal. They have strong concerns about the viability of their industries in the face of competition from illegal Internet gaming.

Stakeholders in the advertising industry have expressed strong reservations with respect to what exactly the legislation makes illegal, as well as whether or not the Ontario government is in fact currently in violation of this pending legislation.

Stakeholders in the horse racing industry have come out strongly in support of the legislation, which they feel levels the playing field that has recently tilted in favour of online, unregulated gaming at the expense of their legal bricks-and-mortar business.

Government hypocrisy—and I look at the member from Niagara Centre; he's in the middle of it. Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort is currently hosting various World Poker Tour events from October 22 to October 30, 2006. The primary sponsor of the event's website is www.worldpokertour.com, which would qualify as an illegal Internet gaming website under this proposed legislation.

"The only smart move—the only one—is to legalize all Internet gambling at the federal level, regulate it and tax it, the way they did in Great Britain. Anything short of that, including this stupid play by Ontario to protect its own faltering bookmaking industry, is a waste of time." Now, that's taken from an article in the *Toronto Star* by Dave Perkins, October 20, 2006.

The ambiguity of the legislation leaves the door open for confusion. Ottawa U law professor Michael Geist points out that there are many sites that allow Internet users to locate an Internet gaming business on the World Wide Web. Google, Yahoo and MSN come to mind. The legality of online gaming sites, usually run from servers based in foreign countries, is much less clear. This is a very grey area. There is very little case law on it. You need to get past fundamental issues like, where is the activity taking place and where are the servers located?

"Aside from any legal challenges to the proposed law, Bush predicted the ban would be nearly impossible to enforce." That's Daniel Bush, intellectual property lawyer and a partner at the Toronto firm of McCarthy Tétrault, which I know the Attorney General is quite familiar with. The bottom line is, that's what I said about

the member from Peterborough's bill in the first place. You couldn't enforce it, so why waste your time? But the minister listened to him, and he's a good man, listening to the member from Peterborough. But the bottom line is, what are we doing here? It's not enforceable, so why waste the resources and why go through the smoke and mirrors?

I'm going to talk about retail gift cards next. What is a retail gift card? Is it a gift certificate? Is there a retail gift card with something that you buy or something that you're given? The act includes prohibitions on expiry dates on future performance agreements, including gift card agreements and various administrative fees. The act proposes that it will increase the authority of bodies regulating in the consumer protection area. Now, this is an area that has been legislated to a great extent in the United States, and it's an area that I think the minister is very sincere about. I think there are some practicalities here that have to be dealt with. If you buy a gift card for a certain amount of money, which should buy you a certain product, there shouldn't be any time limitations on that—none whatsoever. It's totally different from when you're given these free—what do you want to call them?—Wendy's or Tim Hortons' food vouchers, which have a time expiry date. You didn't buy them. You can get a deal on them, but they have an expiry date. The minister is not dealing with that. That's probably more titled a gift certificate. What he's dealing with is gift cards.

My problem is—and he knows it's a problem—that even if he gets this legislation banged through by the end of this session, which is in December, he hasn't got anything done with respect to the regulations. He has to go to the industry and say, "Okay, how do we do this?" They don't have any regulations in this bill; we're just dealing with the bill. Even if he gets this thing through, he still will not be able to protect anyone at Christmas-time from this type of activity. And he's been pretty candid too. He says most of the shopping happens in November anyway. There's not a lot in December, as there used to be. Today is October 26. We're not going to have this bill through maybe even by December 14. So it's not going to protect anybody before Christmas. Let's get that straight.

What we have to deal with are the regulations. One of the problems in dealing with legislation in this place is that a lot of the work in terms of interpreting and administering the bill—and the minister, I have to admit, is quite clever at this. He loves dealing with regulations, and he does a good job at it. He makes sure that a lot of the different issues he has to deal with in the real estate industry and other consumer issues he can do by regulation. That way he doesn't have to come into the House and he can get things done fairly expeditiously. The problem with that is sort of a democratic problem, because none of us get to see it until it's in the order paper, printed in the official Ontario Gazette, and we find out about these regulations. That's part of the problem of democracy in this place, because the regulations will come out in the official Gazette and nobody will ever have seen them. By and large, we would hope they would

have consulted with the stakeholders before they put it out, but a lot of times they don't.

So the guts of the bill, in terms of how it's going to operate, are in the regs. They're not in front of us. We're not even debating these, so we don't even know what he's got in mind about how he's going to deal with gift cards, and he really doesn't either, because he has to go to the industry and deal with them on the regulations. To his credit, he said he will. That doesn't help the situation here, because we really don't know—other than their intent is that they want to regulate gift cards—how they're going to do it. Nobody knows, and we won't know until the regulations come out, and there won't be any review of that at all because that's just not the way this place works.

That's not an endorsement of the way we're doing things but it certainly leads us to believe that we can do a little bit better in terms of debating this bill, in terms of getting the true intentions of where we're going here.

There's one other area I want to talk about in addition to the other 48 statutes that I haven't touched on yet and that is this consumer credit rating proposal, dealing with the flag. My experience dealing with consumer credit rating organizations is that they are about as attentive and responsive as a brick wall. You might as well look at it and talk to it all day because nothing is going to happen. Even if they've got the information wrong on the consumer credit rating report, they don't listen to you, yet there's a statute dealing with consumer reporting agencies that gives a procedure for you to deal with these people. They don't respond; they don't even seem to care. So when the minister says, "Well, if you're going to deal with identity theft and there's a flag on title and everything," what good is that going to do if you raise a flag and they have to put the flag on your report when they don't even listen to you in the first place? The consumer protection branch can't do anything about it and they never do anything about it.

The minister is also doing one other thing in this bill: He is modernizing his new ministry, the government services ministry, because he's taken over the consumer part. One area he's had is the consumer protection branch which, by and large, have a lot of work to do. They do a lot of prosecutions across this province.

I have a complaint here that deals with the modernization aspect of what the minister is trying to do. It was written to me, and I think he also gave a copy to the minister. I got this letter October 23 from Robert and Diana Davidson of Burlington. It says:

"Please be advised that we are extremely disappointed by the complete ineffectiveness of the government's so-called consumer protection branch. Not only was contacting this government service a waste of time, but we lost five valuable months waiting for the consumer protection branch's response.

"Our complaint was finally validated by the consumer protection's consumer officer, a J. Kavanagh. However, Canadian Tire"—whom they were dealing with—"simply refused point-blank to respond to the consumer

protection branch's request for an explanation as to why Canadian Tire refused to meet the terms of its written contract and its own 90-day return policy. In effect, Canadian Tire treated the government's consumer protection branch with total contempt, understanding it to be a toothless non-entity."

Now that's interesting. They purchased an elliptical trainer from Canadian Tire in Burlington, a Proform 750 cardio cross-trainer for a price of \$344.99. I guess what happened here is they brought it back because it was a floor model and there were problems with respect to this particular product. Canadian Tire didn't take the product back because they said it was used goods.

Canadian Tire refused to accept the return of the equipment—that flies in the face of their 90-day return policy—and what's interesting here is the response. I'm just reciting the facts here. This is a letter from Joseph Kavanagh, consumer officer, consumer protection branch, Ministry of Government Services, to Mr. Davidson. He says:

"This will confirm receipt of your complaint concerning the above-noted company. We contacted Steve Voytek, manager of the store, regarding this matter. This resulted in an exchange of e-mails concerning the merits of the complaint.

"On September 7, 2006, Steve Voytek spoke to me and requested our recommendation concerning this matter. On September 8, after reviewing the matter again fully, I called and left a message that it was our recommendation that a refund should be issued." This is coming from the consumer officer towards Canadian Tire.

"On September 13, Mr. Voytek called and left a message"—this is the chap from Canadian Tire—"requesting the reasoning behind our recommendation." So government service is recommending that they refund the product and give them their money back.

"I called back and left a message for Mr. Voytek to contact me to discuss this matter. However, he has failed to return my calls." This is Mr. Kavanagh, the consumer officer, saying he's tried to reach him as to why he's saying they need to give a reason. He says:

"Our recommendation to refund was based on (1) the information contained on the receipt signed by Brad G. of the store; (2) the refund and exchange policy for Canadian Tire which is posted on the Web; (3) section 11 of the Consumer Protection Act which states 'ambiguities in agreements are to be interpreted in favour of the consumer.'" This is coming from Mr. Kavanagh, the consumer officer of the consumer protection branch of the Ministry of Government Services. He says:

"We are not able to resolve this matter and we are closing our file at this time but shall retain this information in our active database for future reference. You have the right"—this is talking to the consumer, Mr. Davidson, who bought the product from Canadian Tire—"to pursue this matter through the courts. In this case, we would refer you to your solicitor or to your local Small Claims Court office.

"Thanks for bringing this matter to our attention."

What is the point of having gone through that exercise? I want to bring that to the minister's attention, because he's a consumer advocate. I have to say to myself, why would you bother going to the consumer protection branch, which says, "Yes, you should get a refund," and the Canadian Tire store says, "So what?" Where's the enforcement? They go out and investigate and say, "Your policy says you've got to return it. Give this person a refund," and the store says, "So what?" And the enforcement person says, "I'm closing the file. Go see your lawyer." If that's teeth, you should be looking at amending this bill to make sure that your consumer protection—either they're not enforcing the act properly or you need some changes in the consumer protection bill, in this bill—because you've got 54 in it already—that gives these people the power. If they make a decision saying, "You should refund this product and give the money back to the consumer," and they say they're not going to do it, then you've got to have the right to prosecute them for not doing that. I don't understand why you wouldn't have the power to do that. Otherwise, why even have enforcement agency members on your staff? They have no power to do anything. Either that person doesn't know his job or he doesn't know that he can enforce things, or the legislation doesn't allow him to do anything. Certainly, in that situation, the consumer protection branch, which a lot of people look to to protect themselves, isn't working. So I put that to the minister, because I think that's a serious situation. What can they do to enforce things and to protect people?

I know in my area they've done good work with respect to construction contractors. I had one situation where there was an \$11,000 contract for a contractor to do renovations on someone's home. The contractor took a \$9,000 deposit but did nothing and the consumer protection branch prosecuted him. They did a good job. The contractor got jail time, plus the consumer got some money back.

When you go buy a product at a retail store that has a 90-day return policy, and you bring the product back, and your officer says, "You're wrong. Give the person their money back," and the store says, "Take a hike," it doesn't look too good for the consumer protection branch. Either they didn't know what they were doing in terms of what their enforcement powers are, or they have none, and if they have none, then why mislead the public that they're going to help them—because that's what's happening.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The member suggested that a member of this House and/or the government has misled the public. I know the member knows that's unparliamentary language and he'll want to withdraw that, although that's in your hands.

The Acting Speaker: Will the member indeed withdraw that?

Mr. Tascona: I never said anyone misled anyone. I'm saying, in terms of what their powers are—

The Acting Speaker: The word "misled" was used. *Interjections.*

The Acting Speaker: Please continue.

Mr. Tascona: Thank you, Speaker. A very wise decision.

I have 25 seconds to finish off my speech here, and all I want to say is that I want to engage the minister in further discussion—and I know he's listening—because we need some amendments to this bill. Home ownership is at risk in this province; we all know that. We have to do better in this bill to protect the homeowners of this province.

Mr. Kormos: I'm going to have a chance to begin my one-hour lead on this in around eight minutes' time. I'm looking forward to it—I really am.

First, I want to commend the member for his Bill 136, and that is Mr. Tascona, the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, who was first out of the gate. That's not the point as much as having dealt not just with the fraudulent documents and their impact on title but, far more importantly, having dealt with access to the assurance fund. That's something that, with all due respect, this bill does not address. I'm going to speak to that at greater length hopefully in the modest one hour allowed me. So I do commend the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford for his bill.

1720

I hope very much—because this bill has to go to committee. There's going to be broad interest in any number of facets, in any number of appendixes or schedules to the bill. The bill's to go to committee. There's going to be a significant debate around the appropriate response to the Chan decision, which is what the bill is responding to.

The other observation is that this issue has been lingering in Ontario for a number of years—not just months but years. I think it's remarkable, and I'm going to refer to a number of judgments that should have rung the alarm bells for the government in terms of responding to it.

Thirdly, I think there's an important issue around the impact of electronic registration on title fraud. That's one of the things we're going to have to be very serious about addressing in committee, in terms of whether or not electronic registration opens the doors wide open to fraud artists and its impact on title and victims.

Hon. Mr. Phillips: I appreciate the speech by my colleague. It was thoughtful, I might add. We will get a chance to address many of the points you've raised as we continue the debate.

I have just a few quick comments. On the date rape issue: I think we have 11,000 licensees across the province, and I was reluctant to make it mandatory. I wonder if we really need 11,000 of our businesses doing that. I think we've taken the right approach. I'm not sure that every Swiss Chalet, for example, needs to do it. That was the reason for not making it mandatory.

The bingo hall one: We did get some feedback, certainly, from the bingo hall industry, which is struggling, and the charities that benefit from those, that they are

adults. So it seems like a reasonable thing to allow that to happen.

On the real estate fraud issue, we're determined to find the best solutions. The bill addresses part of it; the federal government has some role in it. There are those three or four issues that the member raised: dealing with the power of attorney; dealing with who has access to registration; dealing with the land title assurance fund; and dealing with notice. I think those are the four things you identified, and I think I mentioned each of those in my remarks. So we have a significant part of the solution on real estate fraud within the bill, and there are other things we have to look at.

I look forward to continuing the debate. I think the members have raised some interesting observations on the bill, many of which we'll have answers for as we continue the debate.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to rise today and comment on my colleague from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford and Bill 152, the consumer protection and modernization act. The member for Niagara Centre was right: The member from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford was a leader, he was out of the gate first, when he brought in his Bill 136, the Restore the Deed Act, and I remember speaking in support of that. There's an escalating problem of title theft and mortgage fraud, and we don't have enough proper protection for consumers. We've read stories in the newspapers, and that is why he brought that bill forward. And it is a much better bill than the government bill we presently have in front of us, Bill 152. This bill is an omnibus bill. It affects 53 statutes? Obviously, I'm not going to touch on all of the topics in a couple of minutes, but the member for Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford did a good job of dissecting many parts of this.

In the news last week, all the big news was about date rape drugs: They're going to bring in legislation to protect women in bars. But when we delve into the legislation, it's really on a kind of voluntary basis. The bars have to apply for an extension to the liquor licence to allow for this, so they don't have to do it. So all the headlines, all the newspaper articles that said the present government was bringing in this big protection—it's really not doing what those newspaper headlines say. I have to say, the present government is pretty good at getting headlines, but not at following through on the actions. We've seen that time and time again. That's what's very concerning about this bill that's before us: It's not going to be enforced; it's not going to give women the extra protection that we thought it said in the newspaper headlines. So again, you've got to take back the layers of this government, have a look to see what is really there and—big surprise—you won't find a whole lot.

I want to wish Lauren, the daughter of my colleague the member from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford, a happy birthday.

Ms. Horwath: I too want to start by congratulating the member from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford, not only on

his leadoff speech on this particular bill, Bill 152, but also I was in the House when his private member's bill, 136, was being debated. He had brought some extremely important, of-the-day issues to the table in that regard, particularly in terms of title theft, mortgage fraud. Those kinds of issues are significant and frightening—darn frightening for people out there who just shudder to think that their home can be stolen from underneath them without them even knowing, by virtue of these lax systems that have come into play over the last several years as the way that we deal with documents and documentation has changed in the province of Ontario.

I think it's important that this kind of legislation comes forward, the bill that we're dealing with today. I think it's interesting as well that there are so many pieces of existing law that are going to be affected by this bill. New Democrats are looking forward to this bill going to a committee so that it gets the scrutiny that it needs and deserves.

I know that we will be hearing from my colleague from Niagara Centre, Peter Kormos. I understand he gave a great speech yesterday in this House; in fact; some would say it was classic Kormos. Unfortunately, I wasn't here to see it. Hopefully, he'll give us a good review of the bill, because he's a very bright person who understands very clearly the implications of many of the clauses that this bill before us will have on the way things are done in the province of Ontario.

I have to say, last time I spoke about a couple of the issues. I don't have much time left. The other things, I think, that we are going to have to take a real look at are the issue around gift cards, the extent to which that's going to even be effective, and the issue around flagging on consumer reports. I think that's an important issue as well. I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Tascona: I want to thank for their comments the member from Niagara Centre, the Minister of Government Services, the member from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock and the member from Hamilton East.

To respond to the minister about the date rape drug, we're not talking about Swiss Chalets here. We're talking about bars. I think that was the intent with respect to extending the date rape drug area. I think if you analyze the number of licences—you said there are 11,000, but I would think there would be a lot less if you're focusing on the problem where that's occurring, which is bars.

I have to go back to the point from the member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock. Quite frankly—and I certainly thought the Attorney General had committed to this—we were going to deal with this problem. We were going to make sure that it was going to be stamped out. To give the bar owners the option in terms of dealing with this issue, that's not acceptable. It's just not acceptable to allow this kind of activity to continue. You know, you've taken it one step and said you can't smoke in a place. Certainly people should be protected from having drugs put in their drinks, making sure that that activity stops.

I know the Attorney General agrees with me because he's a man of some vision. We have to look at it from the perspective that he knows it's a problem and he's got to enforce the law. So the minister has to take a look at it from a point of view that "This is a serious problem; let's stamp it out." There's no reason why we shouldn't, because if we put it to them to say, "Oh, we're not going to do this. We can't be bothered," they're not going to do it, and you know it. You just basically put in voluntary measures, and I don't think this problem is going to be extinguished at all—and it is a serious problem. I'm looking forward to the debate.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

1730

Mr. Kormos: I'm pleased, on behalf of the New Democrats, to engage in the commencement of this debate. I regret that while given a meagre 60 minutes to speak to this bill, I'm only going to be able to use some 28 of them because we're going to reach 6 o'clock, and, of course, people are going to want to go home. But I'll be back for the second half of my lead.

Right off the bat, I want to thank the minister's staff, both his political staff and the civil service staff, for their co-operation, certainly with me and I'm sure other opposition members, in briefings and in following up with materials that were requested of them in their briefings. I genuinely appreciate that. It makes it much easier for us to get right into the nitty-gritty of these things when ministerial staff demonstrate that level of, first of all, knowledge of the bill themselves; secondly, co-operation.

There is so much in the bill, and the bill is going to have to go to committee. Quite frankly, I have no idea what the demand for participation in the committee will be out there, but the bill covers—you know, this government has a problem in terms of committee time. The Attorney General is nodding. He's sympathetic to my argument, and I understand that. But the problem is not insurmountable. We're rising here on December 14. That's the final calendar day. We'll be back March 19, and I'm looking forward to that. We'll have a full spring session, I trust, through to late June, as the calendar provides. We've got all sorts of opportunities for committee during the months of January, February and March. New Democrats made it clear yesterday we don't expect people to be here January 1, January 2, but certainly within a few days following that, we could start getting committees up and running and deal with these matters—it's as simple as that—because there's going to be some strong public interest.

Let me deal with some of the issues that I'm not going to speak to at as much length as I will the land titles issue. It's something that I've had a strong interest in, that New Democrats have been concerned about, and, again, because of the assistance of some people who I'll identify when I get to that part of it, I've have been able to learn a fair amount about it.

Let's deal with the date rape drug problem, a serious problem; of course it is. I remember the press conference that the minister held. I was surprised to learn then that

it's a regulatory change, and that's fair enough in and of itself. So it's not really in the content of the bill. It's not an inappropriate thing, I suppose, for the government, through regulation, to contemplate a little more flexibility in saloons and taverns and drinking places. Heck, I remember Crowland Hotel down on Ontario Road. Pete and Irene Belasky used to own it back in the old days. I still remember the men's and women's entrances. Remember that? There was the men-only entrance and there was the ladies and escorts, I think was the sign above the door. Women literally couldn't attend—trust me, this wasn't that long ago—in a tavern unless they were accompanied. It was ladies and escorts, right?

Interjection.

Mr. Kormos: Well, down at the Crowland Hotel they said ladies and escorts, I guess so nobody could be mistaken. They wanted to make it very, very clear: ladies and escorts. I still remember that and I still remember some of the bizarre—that was back when draft was 10 cents a glass and when the glasses were real glasses. They weren't those miniature things, those little shot glasses. How dare they serve beer in shot glasses nowadays. They were glasses—

Interjection.

Mr. Kormos: At the Legion you get a decent beer.

Mr. Leal: Still do.

Mr. Kormos: That's right. At the Legion you get a decent beer. But there were days when you had limits on how many glasses you could have on your table at any given point in time, never mind you couldn't walk around with your glass of beer. You couldn't leave your table and go visit friends with a glass of draft in your hand.

Fair enough. But let's be clear here. First of all, you're telling women to take their drinks into the washrooms. Now, we're not talking about the Accents bar over at Sutton Place. I confess I've stopped in there. It's a unionized place. I've stopped in there from time to time—it's close by Queen's Park—for the occasional soft drink after work. The washroom facilities at Sutton Place are outstanding. But I'm sorry, the facilities in most beverage rooms, most saloons, most taverns, most so-called nightclubs—it's disgusting that you're asking people to take their drinks into those washrooms. What do they do with them? Where do they put them? Are you going to put them on the floor in the stall and then drink out of that glass again? It's a horrible proposition. It's foul. The proposition is more noxious than the date rape drug, never mind the great potential for spreading disease.

Besides, the real problem—and we've learned from what young women tell us—isn't when young women get up to use the washrooms, because if they're with a group of people, they're leaving their drink on the table presumably with their friends. Conceivably it could be somebody in that party who's putting the drug in their drink, but they're leaving the drink on the table. It's when people get up to dance, because the whole table clears and gets up to dance. That's just an observation that's been made publicly by any number of young people, including young women.

This provision is not going to have any meaningful deterrence to predators who would use date rape drugs, because, again, the information we get—and it's anecdotal, but contradict me if you can—is that when the date rape drug is used, it's when somebody gets up not to use the washroom, presuming they're with a group, but it's when a gang of them get up to dance. You may not remember this, Speaker—I vaguely recall it—but that's what young people do when they go to taverns.

So let's not be overly smug about what we're achieving here. It's a not inappropriate change to liquor licence standards in licensed drinking places, but in and of itself it's not much of an attack on the date rape drug phenomenon.

I'll tell you what—and again, there could be a response from the government saying that these educational programs are already taking place. Stronger and ongoing and intrusive educational programs are needed. Second, I'm going to tell you, we need to enhance the ranks of liquor inspectors in this province. At the end of the day, it's liquor inspectors out there visiting taverns and licensed drinking places who are going to be able to identify problem areas—for instance, areas wherein the patron is obscured from the view of the staff person. Because the education can't just be with respect to patrons; it's also got to be with staff in these places. Surely the staff in a tavern have some responsibility to protect women to the extent that they can against the date rape drug phenomenon.

The whole issue of overcrowding—when is this more likely to happen, to be used? It's not going to be at the bar when there are only three patrons and the bartender. Common sense tells you it's going to be more likely to happen when the bar is crowded and conceivably overcrowded.

So I put to you that a strong educational program, an intrusive one that focuses not just on patrons but also on tavern owners and staff in bars—because, look, the LLBO has done a great job, for instance, with training bartenders about when to cut people off by responsible serving. They've done a tremendous job. I think what we need are programs that talk about the role of a staff person, including a tavern owner, around the date rape drug and looking for ways to discourage it and/or prevent it. There, done.

Bingo and booze: Well, good grief, we know why bingo halls are having a hard time making money. The critics of casinos said so 14 years ago; the casinos and the slots. The proliferation of slot machines in this province is what has undermined—because it's about charities who use the bingo facilities, right? So the charities are the ones that suffer. Then, of course, the final straw was the no smoking. Again, everybody in this Legislature agrees with the proposition of creating a smoke-free Ontario. I don't know if any of you ever worked—I was on some boards of volunteer agencies back before I got here, so I worked, not too often, some of the bingos. Even as a smoker, I found the smoking environment foul. I simply couldn't handle it—and I was a smoker at the

time, a heavy one. So nobody is quarrelling with the no smoking.

1740

But I say to the minister, please, think about it. Are the bingos having a difficult time? Yes. Down where I come from, church bingos were a staple back in the 1950s and in the 1960s; again, pre-casino, when church bingos were a staple. Those are all but gone, because nobody is interested in the small prizes anymore. Remember the raffles? The Lions Club, the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides could buy a television set or get one donated and raffle it off. Nobody is going to buy a raffle ticket for a TV anymore. Well, they don't, because people want the 649s. They want the million dollars. They don't want them as much today as they did a couple of days ago, because they're worried about the integrity of the system. Look, critics, everything we said about the casino phenomenon and the slot phenomenon has come true in terms of it sucking the life out of the ability of not just churches but charities to raise money. It's true. The Trillium funding, a modest return of the money—and I quite frankly wish it were more. But the real problem is the addiction of governments to gambling, not just problem gamblers. Those revenues are important.

So I'm just putting to you, does it make good sense, is it good social policy to have bingo players—and do you want to know something? Bingo is probably a far more appropriate activity for, let's say, a senior citizen than a slot machine is, because bingos require you to think and watch and pay attention. You're doing some mental exercise, as compared to the mindlessness, the incredible mindlessness as well as joylessness, of playing slots. You don't even have to pull the arm on those bandits anymore—you don't. It's just automatic. It's sad.

So we've got bingo, which has an element of skill attached to it—it does; some of these women, these wonderful women—I've got to confess, I campaign in the bingo parlours. You've got to really be careful not to do it in the middle of a game, right? You've got to time it just between calls. From time to time I drop in at the Rose City Seniors Centre on a Friday afternoon and I call bingo for a couple of minutes just because it's fun, and the folks there are fun folks.

But now you're going to provide booze in bingo parlours, where there is a legitimate element of skill required. I'm sorry, I'm not aware of any huge demand from bingo players to be able to get all drunk up while they're playing bingo; I'm really not. If you've got petitions—well, maybe the petitions will be drummed up by you, sir, but I'm just not aware of any. I've not been approached by a single bingo player. I was at the Rose City Seniors Centre but two weeks ago, dropping in to the little bingo room, and nobody tugged on my sleeve and said, “By God, Kormos, I need a shot”—or maybe a vodka martini or a Molson Canadian. Nobody said that to me.

I said this the other day: I'm not a temperance person. My predecessor, Mel Swart, was, God bless him; still is. He still hasn't had a drink in his life, and he's 86 years old. At least he says he has never had a drink in his life.

Heck, he was in the air force during the war; I don't know.

But I'm not sure that's good social policy, and I don't know where the demand is. I think you may be creating—is there profit in it? Of course, there is. But I've got to tell you, I really would like to hear some strong proof. I'd be interested in hearing what groups like MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, probably one of the single most effective lobbyists that do their best to temper government's efforts to—because, let's face it, the government has some self-interest here too. The more booze that's sold, the more revenues there are for government. I'm expressing concern about that.

The consumer gift cards, the ones with those horrid expiry dates, just like yours from the LCBO—you won't clean up your own house first. Again, this is going to be done by regulation. The minister was very fair and clear about that. I wish the legislation were in the bill, because New Democrats say this very clearly and unequivocally: There should be no expiration date on those cards. You give your money to a retail store. They're making money off your money; they're earning interest on it. I'm looking forward to committee, because I'm going to ask legislative research to get us some figures in terms of how much our major retailers are holding at any given point in time. How much has the LCBO got as part of their bank account, cash that's in the form of out-there gift cards, some of which are going to expire?

These retailers or service providers are making money off it. There's just no rationale for it to expire at all. If the company goes out of business, goes bankrupt, well, it's gone out of business and gone bankrupt.

Canadian Tire money—I've got a stash of Canadian Tire money in Maxwell House coffee cans down in the basement, on the workshop desk, right? Don't even think of the basement. We've got pit bulls in the basement protecting that Canadian Tire money. Some of that Canadian Tire money is 15 years old, for Pete's sake, and it's as good now as when Canadian Tire issued it, as when Canadian Tire gave it to you. You even go to some small towns and you see pizzerias saying, "We accept Canadian Tire money." This is true; you've seen it. And why not? If Canadian Tire can do it, other retailers can do it too. Canadian Tire doesn't have an expiration date.

Now, I tell you, Heather Reisman from Indigo Books—you know the \$5 certificates you used to get for buying at Indigo Books? They had expiration dates on them. I accumulated a whack of those, walked into Indigo figuring I was going to buy myself some reading material, and they of course had expired. That's Heather Reisman. She should be ashamed of herself. As if she needed my money; she's got money coming out of her ears, amongst other places. Well, what are you laughing at, Mr. Takhar? What's the imagery you've got in your mind? Please. But Heather Reisman, of all the people who can afford to honour her \$5 certificates that you earn—shame on her. There's no reason.

Canadian Tire money is good 15, 20, 25, 30 years later. Gift certificates, bar none, should be as valid three

years down the road as they were the day after they were purchased. It's a rip-off. It's an outright scam. It's a shameful scam for any retailer or service provider not to honour a gift certificate when they got good money for it. It's also an incredible embarrassment, right? Your great aunt gives you a gift certificate, huh, and then two years later she's two years older, that much closer to her death because she's an old lady now, and she says, "What did you buy with the gift certificate?" What are you going to tell her? "It expired because I stashed"—you've got to lie and tell her you very much enjoyed the gift. No, it's a scam.

I'm hoping that we can count on you to ensure that the big retailers don't get to your policy people or, more importantly, to the Premier's office. If they're going to get to anybody, it's going to be to the Premier's office. It won't be you they'll get to. The marching orders will come out of the Premier's office. Oh, yeah, the mandarins in the Premier's office will have been leaned on. They will have been wined and dined in the course of it and they'll have been given some cock and bull about how accounting principles require us to have some sort of control on this outstanding gift card stuff. Canadian Tire has never had a penny that they've worried about. So there you go.

1750

Let me talk about the Internet gaming, and I want to congratulate Jeff Leal, the member for Peterborough, because he came forward with his Bill 60 that addressed this issue and it was incorporated into your legislation. We've had a chance to talk about this over the last couple of days, haven't we, Minister? Here the minister and his entourage and all the hangers-on and the groupies and the people who throw the rose petals down before he walks into the media room and who adjust the flags so they're draped just right behind that podium in the TV studio—here we go with the fanfare, the marching band, the cheerleaders, the pom-poms flashing in the air, and the minister talks about how it's necessary to control Internet gaming because we've got vulnerable people out there, people with gambling addictions, people who are under age, and the minister was motivated—the government, rather. The government was motivated by the welfare of these poor victims of the gambling proponents and of the anonymity of Internet gaming, and what do we discover?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): You owe me 10 bucks.

Mr. Kormos: Talk about the minister being obliged to clean up his own backyard first—give Mr. Flynn his 10, please. Thank you very much. What had happened is, yesterday Mr. Flynn had bought one of the Welland Professional Fire Fighters Feel the Heat 2007 calendars for \$10. I didn't have change for his 20. He gave it to the staff person, Lisetta, who has been delighted with the calendar. I saw her a couple of hours later; she still hadn't reached October. That's the calendar, as you know, that's available at www.wpffa.net, the Welland Professional Fire Fighters Association: \$10. It's the tremendous people, Welland fire fighters, down at King

Street fire hall, amongst others, who are raising money for muscular dystrophy, amongst other things. So I had no qualms about promoting the calendar here at Queen's Park and I encourage folks in Welland and Niagara and even beyond to go to that website of www.wpffa.net, and you can get one over the Internet.

The Internet gaming: What did we learn? Your very own Casino Fallsview was promoting Internet gaming on its website. Interestingly, Minister, I'm told that that little promotion was pulled off the website after question period yesterday. I find that an interesting thing, and some progress, quite frankly. But you don't have as much concern about the vulnerable people getting on to Internet gaming as you do about the impact that the alternative gaming venues are having on the province's gaming venue. Mr. Leal, to be quite fair to him, was far more accurate and to the point when he explained his bill; weren't you, sir?

Mr. Leal made it very clear that his bill banning advertising of Internet gaming was in the interests of the slots in his riding. I'm no fan of slots, and I'm not suggesting Mr. Leal is, but they've become a regrettable reality for, as I say, this government, along with a whole lot of other governments in other jurisdictions across North America. Mr. Leal was far more candid about his motivation. You see, if the government was really concerned about underage people, vulnerable people—you see, ideally in a casino, staff will observe somebody and, just like bartenders who won't serve somebody who is drunk, casino staff will presumably, although there's no incentive for them to do this, help control problem gamblers. We know it doesn't happen, because they simply aren't given the opportunity, the incentive.

The other thing is the ineffectiveness of it. We've got to look at far more meaningful ways—and the sad thing is the reality. It's like the discussions we've had about film classification. Remember that debate around film classification, and almost the futility of it—because the Internet has changed all of us. The fact is, it's going to be very difficult. Cuba, for instance: I was just reading some articles in the Miami Herald that Cuba has actually managed with technology to vet some of the stuff that's available through websites. I've been there; I don't go

there often. You can go to the hotel and access computers, but somehow if you access certain sites, they'll have a little sign that comes on saying, "This application is going to shut down in a few minutes." I'm not suggesting that that's what should happen here in Ontario by any stretch of the imagination.

Internet gambling and banning the advertising—mind you, which football team is going to be hard hit because one of their big sources of revenue was the advertising of this? Look, if it's not going to be controllable, if you're not going to make it illegal, if it's impossible to make it illegal for people to game on these things, then why are you even talking about illegalizing the advertising when even that's going to be an ineffective sort of thing? It's going to be symbolic, and that's all, because you aren't going to be able to illegalize or control the pop-up ads on Google, Yahoo, Ask Jeeves or whatever it is that appears on your screen at your computer. You're not going to be able to control the broadcast radio or television out of the United States. Now we've got the Sirius Radio, the pay-as-you-go radio, satellite radio. You're not going to be able to control that. You're not going to be able to control publications that are mailed into the country by magazines, newspapers or things like that.

So who are we kidding? Why don't we sort of come clean on this whole thing and not try to pretend that we're going to control it at all? You may shut down a couple of billboards, if there are any; I don't know if there are. You may be able to shut down a couple of ads, again, perhaps in some sports arenas, if anybody is doing advertising of that type in those places. But, at the end of the day, you're not even going to make a dent into Internet gaming. Quite frankly, we should be looking at far more dramatic and different approaches to protecting people from gambling addictions and gambling obsessions, which can be so—you know, Chair, if you don't see the clock, I can keep going. You know that, don't you?

We could look at—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday, October 30, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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