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Monday 20 November 2006

Lundi 20 novembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 20 November 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 20 novembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHILD DAY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): Since 1954, the UN and UNESCO have recognized November 20 as universal child day, which is “to be observed as a day of worldwide fraternity and understanding between children.” In Canada, it was initiated in 1993 by Canada’s first female Prime Minister, Kim Campbell, through the Child Day Act to ensure that we as legislators are aware of our duty to protect the basic human rights of children in our country and that we celebrate how children enrich our lives.

As I drafted my remarks today, I was assisted by my 20-month-old daughter, Victoria, who insisted she be able to bang on my computer while I wrote. Talk about enriching my life. Looking at her big blue eyes, I saw with absolute clarity why we as legislators have a very special obligation to care for our province’s children and, in particular, children in the most vulnerable of circumstances.

I point this out because it is important that when we as legislators make promises to children—whether it is to eradicate child poverty in 10 years or to fund autism treatment for children over the age of six or to appoint an independent children’s advocate—those promises must be kept. Impressionable children rely on us. We are their protectors. I urge all members of this assembly to think of how we can help better serve our province’s children.

If I may conclude by reading from the preamble of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child: “Mankind owes to the child the best it has to give.”

POLISH VETERANS

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I rise today to congratulate the members of Kitchener’s Royal Canadian Legion Polish Veterans’ Branch 412, which recently celebrated its 60th anniversary.

As members of this House are aware, veterans of the Polish armed forces, who had fought valiantly during the Second World War, came to Canada after 1945, and many chose to settle in my community of Kitchener–Waterloo. Members of the existing Royal Canadian

Legion at that time, Branch 50, welcomed these brave Polish veterans and assisted them in establishing their lives in the new community. Branch 50 also helped the Polish veterans open their own branch in downtown Kitchener.

Recently, I had the honour of attending a ceremony to mark the 60th anniversary of Branch 412. The contribution of these veterans was recognized through a photo retrospective as well as a celebration of Polish culture—a culture which continues to flourish in my community.

I want to offer congratulations to the Royal Canadian Legion Polish Veterans’ Branch 412 president, Wladyslaw Magier, and the executive officers. I’d also like to acknowledge Canadian Polish Congress president Maria Pruchnicka-Karczmarczyk, ladies’ auxiliary president Halina Jach, gala chair Krystyna Piotrowska-Freiburger and many others for their efforts in celebrating the past 60 years.

I must conclude with a special tribute to our local Polish veterans in Kitchener and across Waterloo region who sacrificed so much during World War II and continue to offer so much to our community today.

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): Two weeks ago, Eugene Kelly, a popular Hamilton musician and father of two, was planning to leave with his wife on a romantic getaway to Puerto Rico. Instead, he is on life support and hasn’t regained consciousness since he was swarmed by up to five teenagers outside a pizza store, brutally beaten and left in a pool of blood.

Media reports in the Hamilton Spectator indicate these same teens have been terrorizing neighbourhoods since Halloween. Youths too afraid to give their names have told the media, “Everyone knows these guys and knows not to say anything about them,” because of fear. Two young offenders charged in the vicious assault were granted bail; a third will get his hearing this Wednesday.

If the McGuinty government has any compassion for victims and any desire to send a message that violence, intimidation and threats to public safety are not acceptable, you send a message to all young offenders by setting a strict policy directive. All bail for vicious crimes should not only be opposed but should be appealed if granted.

The McGuinty Liberals closed the PC government’s successful youth strict discipline camp, and under this government we’ve seen a 68% decrease in young offenders being held in sentenced custody, at a time

when young offenders are increasingly involved in violent crime. While people worry about the safety of their neighbourhoods, this government is sending a message that they can't count on Mr. McGuinty and company to listen.

ARTS FUNDING

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): The March 2006 budget of the McGuinty government invested \$2.5 million in the arts facility for Orléans. On May 23, I had the pleasure of delivering these funds to Christine Tremblay, the executive director of Arts Ottawa East, and to the Mouvement d'implication francophone d'Orléans, at an event held in my riding. Friends and colleagues gathered to show their support for the arts and for a project that will give our community a venue in which we can celebrate our talents.

Orléans has been anticipating such a facility for more than 20 years. In October, Ottawa city council gave their final approval for an Orléans arts centre, paving the way for the construction of a \$36.8-million facility to begin next spring. The new facility will include a 500-seat performing arts theatre, space for the visual arts, a large municipal art gallery, a pottery school, rehearsal space, a second 100-seat theatre and administration space for Arts Ottawa East and MIFO. It will be a place to learn, to create and to share our achievements with the community.

Arts education contributes to success for students across the curriculum. It leads to measurable gains in student motivation, better attendance and reduced dropout rates. It enhances student engagement, fosters tolerance and respect for diversity, and builds self-confidence. Arts education also contributes to building a creative economy and creative communities.

I am proud that our government considers arts education to be a top priority. That is why the need for this facility was recognized in this year's budget, and now we are seeing this dream of the residents of Orléans become a reality.

FIREFIGHTERS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Firefighters across Ontario are receiving mixed messages from the McGuinty Liberal government. All the Liberals voted for my Bill 111 last month, and they are telling firefighters they are sympathetic to their call for presumptive legislation, which would guarantee firefighters and families are compensated if they develop an occupational disease like cancer. But firefighters don't want the McGuinty Liberals' sympathy; they want action on Bill 111. They want Ontario to have presumptive legislation like other provinces already have for their firefighters.

The McGuinty government could learn a thing or two from a young woman named Caleigh LeGrand, a student at the University of Western Ontario in London. Caleigh is working on a project in support of firefighters, Bill 111

and the fight against cancer. It's called Save Your Own Hero.

On November 27, from 2 p.m. till 3 p.m. on Western's main campus, Caleigh will be promoting awareness of these vital issues with the full support of the London fire department and the university's chief of fire prevention and emergency management. As well as mounting displays and launching an interactive website, Caleigh will be selling gift cards for \$10 donations to the Canadian Cancer Society in the name of a friend or loved one.

I urge members of the public in London and across Ontario and all MPPs to visit Caleigh's website as of November 24 and make a contribution. The website address is www.saveyourownhero.blogspot.com. For firefighters who risk their lives to keep us safe, I hope young Caleigh's passion and conviction will inspire the McGuinty Liberal government to move ahead with presumptive legislation as detailed in my Bill 111.

1340

FORMER PREMIERS' GRAVESITES

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): A few weeks ago, when I was in Kingston for a meeting of the Eastern Ontario Municipal Association, I took the time to visit the gravesite of Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. It was an impressive site, well marked and with the Canadian flag flying above it. There were visitors, both local and international, taking the opportunity to learn a bit about this historic leader.

Over the summer, I visited the gravesites of Ontario's former Premiers and, sadly, the same level of markings and such were not present. As presented on Global Television recently, there was nothing at the burial site of former Premier Thomas Laird Kennedy to indicate that he had served in the position of Premier. As well, during my visit to Mitchell Hepburn's gravesite at St. Thomas, I noted the lack of recognition of his contributions to Ontario.

Just as Canadians benefit from the proper markings of the gravesites of former Prime Ministers, both in terms of history and visitation, so can Ontarians benefit from the proper markings of the final resting places of Ontario's Premiers.

I would like to thank all my colleagues from both sides of this House who joined me on these tours this summer, and I would particularly like to thank my legislative assistant, Kerry Towndrow, for helping me to reach each of these sites throughout Ontario. I would encourage all members and indeed all Ontarians to go out and visit these gravesites and share in the rich history and leadership of these men who represented Ontario.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Today Ontario Progressive Conservative leader John Tory unveiled a prac-

tical plan to address the many challenges faced by our foreign-trained professional and skilled immigrants living in Ontario. The plan, A Time for Action, will make a measurable difference in the lives of skilled immigrants and of all Ontarians. The John Tory plan will, among other things, speed up the process of integrating skilled immigrants with new measures to begin the accreditation process in their countries of origin prior to arrival in Canada; better focus and increase provincial government support to help integrate them into our economy and our society; and remove the obstacles faced by newcomers when they enter the workforce, including establishing and expanding the various doctor assistant programs.

If we want newcomers to Ontario to have their expectations met and to fulfill their true potential, and if we want to meet our responsibilities to them, we must recognize that this must be a priority of the Ontario government. This is about skilled immigrants themselves, their families and the future of Ontario and its economy. We welcome this report tabled by John Tory and look forward to broad support by all Ontarians and all members of the Legislature for this plan.

LEADING WOMEN, BUILDING COMMUNITIES AWARD

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): This year Sandra Pupatello, the minister responsible for women's issues, created the Leading Women, Building Communities Award to recognize women who have made exceptional contributions in their communities.

Along with MPPs Chris Bentley, Khalil Ramal and Steve Peters, I was pleased to honour 38 dynamic women from London and Elgin and Middlesex counties with this award. These are women who have made an important and positive difference in the lives of women and girls in our communities.

This inaugural year's award winners include women like Helene Berman, Helen Connell and Anne Cummings, who promote women's and girls' health and well-being through education, community service and research; women like Joan Smith, Barbara Rankin and Erin-Rankin-Nash, who have actively supported women's political involvement; women like Nancy Miller and Betsy Reilly, who provide young girls with guidance, mentoring and opportunities for empowerment; women like Yasmin Hussain, Lorin McDonald, Afsaneh Azari and Huda Hussein, who work hard to promote social inclusion within our community; women like Susan McPhail, Darlene Ritchie, Leone Westby and Lorna Bruce, who help the most vulnerable women in our community find dignity and hope; and women like Mary Catherine Ann and Diehl Elkin, who work hard to make communities free from violence for women and children.

I would like to congratulate all of the award winners for working to make our community stronger. They inspire others to become leaders.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I rise today to speak about what the McGuinty government is doing to aid new Ontarians to help them grow and thrive in the new economy. Giving new Ontarians the tools and opportunities to succeed is why the McGuinty government has committed to investing an additional \$14 million into 24 new bridge training programs over the next three years to help over 3,000 new Ontarians get into their field of work sooner. This, teamed with the investments of over \$34 million since 2003 to help more than 6,000 newcomers to Ontario, shows that the McGuinty government is on the side of new Ontarians and is getting results.

The McGuinty government understands the obstacles that new Ontarians face, which is why these programs include an emphasis on the improvement of language skills, which help to prepare new Ontarians for their written and oral exams and, in turn, allow them to gain employment in their related fields more swiftly.

A quick glance at the previous government's record toward new Ontarians shows that they did nothing to remove barriers facing internationally trained professionals. They even cut adult education spaces by 80%. They also made apprenticeships more costly, putting up further barriers to the success of new Ontarians.

It has been our commitment to break down those barriers and show new Ontarians the respect that they deserve. There is always more to do—

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

VISITORS

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It's my honour today to introduce the Honourable Kevin Falcon, the Minister of Transportation for British Columbia, and his executive assistant, Rob MacKay-Dunn. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding evening sittings this week, that the question on this motion be put forthwith and without amendment or debate, and that if a recorded vote is requested by five members, the division bells shall be limited to five minutes.

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

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Monday, November 20, 2006, Tuesday, November 21, 2006, and Wednesday,

November 22, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business, and that at 9:30 p.m. on each of these days, the Speaker shall adjourn the House without motion until the next sessional day.

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

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells ran from 1349 to 1354.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Hardeman, Ernie	Racco, Mario G.
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Runciman, Robert W.
Brownell, Jim	Klees, Frank	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Scott, Laurie
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Chudleigh, Ted	Milloy, John	Tory, John
Colle, Mike	Mitchell, Carol	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	O'Toole, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dunlop, Garfield	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John
Elliott, Christine	Patten, Richard	Zimmer, David

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

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 48; the nays are 8.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

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

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that notwithstanding standing order 96(g), notice for ballot item 64 be waived.

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

VISITORS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm wondering if the House would

join me in giving a warm round of applause to the Craighurst Women's Institute, who are joining us in the east gallery today.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Today we've got in our presence Maureen Tourangeau from the great city of Ottawa. She's here today with the Canadian Cancer Society, Ottawa unit, of which I used to be a board member. Please welcome the Canadian Cancer Society from Ottawa.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

SKILLS TRAINING FOR ABUSED WOMEN

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): Almost two years ago, on December 13, 2004, our government introduced our four-year, \$68-million domestic violence action plan. In that plan, we committed to a new pilot training program to help abused women succeed in the workforce and gain economic independence.

Today I'm pleased to report that we've delivered on this commitment. It's another example of how our government is taking action to prevent domestic violence and better support women who have been abused.

I've heard from so many women who have made the difficult decision to leave an abusive relationship that one of their biggest concerns, after their personal safety and the safety of their children, is being able to provide for themselves and for their families.

1400

This morning, I visited George Brown College in Toronto to announce that our government is investing \$4 million over two years in 10 domestic violence employment training pilot projects in Ontario. This is very good news for women. This pilot program will assist hundreds of women who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, domestic violence to rebuild their lives and achieve economic independence. It will help women gain confidence, new skills and good jobs. These are positive changes that make a real difference. We're opening doors by helping women get the skills they need to work in the banking industry, retail, food service, hospitality and tourism.

The program offered at George Brown College will train women to be residential air-conditioning systems mechanics. It will offer a well-paying and much-in-demand skilled trade.

The projects are designed to help a wide range of women who have experienced abuse. Some will focus on reaching francophone, aboriginal, ethnocultural communities, rural, northern women and women with disabilities. They will benefit from a learning environment sensitive

to their needs as they recover from abuse. They will also have access to support services, such as counselling, to assist in their recovery.

One of the unique aspects of this pilot program is the three-way partnership between a violence-against-women group, training organization and the employer. So this morning, with George Brown College, we had Direct Energy, and the senior vice-president was there. They will actually be offering the placements for these people in this program. As well, we had Nellie's Shelter, a Toronto abuse centre. All of them were participating to provide the women who enter the program the supports required—in some cases, transportation, child care, counselling services—everything these women need to get their foot moving towards economic independence.

This partnership model reflects our government's vision that preventing domestic violence is a shared responsibility. This new pilot program is one of many initiatives to promote women's economic independence and prevent domestic violence. We are investing \$4.2 million to provide information technology and pre-apprenticeship training in the skilled trades for low-income women who are unemployed or underemployed.

We're also funding improvements to shelters and housing, enhancing counselling services and training professionals to recognize the signs of abuse earlier and give women the support they need.

Just last week, the government announced a very innovative public education campaign aimed at children and youth and the adults who influence them. The goal, again, is to change attitudes and break the cycle of violence.

These efforts reflect the government's commitment to ensure that women and their children can live free from violence and that they can rebuild their life with new-found skills and greater confidence.

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): On behalf of John Tory and the PC Party, I'm happy to respond to the minister's statement today regarding her announcement of a skills training program to enable vulnerable women by equipping them with the ability to develop and sustain economic independence.

As is understood by every member in this House, the safety and well-being of all women in the province of Ontario is at its core a non-partisan issue. We must work together to ensure that vulnerable women and their children are protected. One way to ensure that is to provide them with the tools they need to create and maintain a life independent from the men who seek to control them.

I am, therefore, happy to hear that this government has taken a step in that direction with this initiative, and I would encourage the minister to ensure that her government follows through on all the commitments they have made to help victims of domestic violence.

I should mention that under our previous government we introduced the women in skilled trades program, an initiative that is still in place today. This announcement

sounds like it is building on the fundamental ideas motivating our creation of that program—specifically, the idea that furthering women in the job force and affording them exciting opportunities in fields that have been historically less accessible should be a priority in government.

We also introduced the Domestic Violence Protection Act and increased spending in this area by 70%. We are proud of the women in the skilled trades program, and we are proud of our record on this domestic violence prevention file.

I will say in closing that we as public servants have a role to serve for all vulnerable people in the province of Ontario, and I would urge this government to remember many vulnerable communities that have been forgotten under their watch. Consider the 1.2 million Ontarians without a family doctor and autistic children and their families. I would encourage this government to move forward to honour the many, many promises that have simply gone unfulfilled since they took office.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): This announcement certainly constitutes another small piece in the file on violence against women. The problem, we know, of violence against women deserves our full attention, not piecemeal measures and pre-election announcements like this minister is bringing to us today. In fact, barely 50% of the commitment that this government made to stopping violence against women has even been invested in the province of Ontario. Of course training opportunities are crucial for women who have fled a cycle of violence in the home and who need gainful employment and financial security first and foremost after the safety of their family is taken care of, but the odd pilot project is just not going to cut it. We need to see full funding for these kinds of initiatives that women across the province can take advantage of, not piecemeal pilot projects here and there, not just websites where people can tune into the computer to find information. We need real, sustainable programs from one part of this province to the other, and that's what the minister needs to start working on.

Certainly the initiative announced today is not something that we're going to be critical of, except for saying that it's too little and too late. A program like this is not, obviously, going to stop the root causes of violence against women, but of course, for those few women who can access the announcement today, it will help a little bit.

There are many crucial recommendations from stakeholders, from experts and from coroners' juries that are missing from the Liberal strategy on violence against women. Women's groups want to see the government take real action on core issues, the bread-and-butter, bricks-and-mortar issues in violence against women. Housing and income supports must exist for women and children who flee for their safety. We need more second-stage housing and transitional housing. In my community alone, the minister will know that we lost an entire second-stage housing program. There's over half a mil-

lion people in the city of Hamilton, and now, as a result of family services going down the tubes, we've lost dozens—dozens—of second-stage housing units in the city of Hamilton, and they haven't been replaced by the minister.

I urge the members of this House and the minister to take a look at another program that's taking place right now in this country in the province of Alberta. It's called the Alberta flee fund, and it is a comprehensive program. It leaves nothing to chance when ensuring that women have the support and resources they need to turn their lives around. Without money and a place to live, women remain in violent relationships just so that their children will be housed and fed. That's not acceptable. Albertans in abusive situations can get 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week help through Alberta Works. All they need to do is call a toll-free number, and the fund will cover them as long as they're eligible. They can get to safety immediately, start their new life and set up a new household.

By comparison, Ontario is way behind on this file. Alberta shows how seriously it deals with the problem through a long list of items it will pay for to ensure that anyone can escape violence and rebuild one's life. Emergency transportation to a safe place such as a women's shelter is provided. If the shelters are full or if there isn't one available, then hotel accommodation is immediately arranged for the woman. A \$56 allowance is there to cover incidental expenses for the woman and her children as they flee. Emergency items such as prescription drugs, dental, optical services and child care are covered. Relocation costs are covered, even to other places in Canada if necessary if the woman is determined to have to be leaving the province of Alberta for her own safety and the safety of her children. There's a \$1,000 allowance used to help set up a new home. The damage deposit is provided to help to secure a rental apartment if necessary. Financial help provides for food, clothing, shelter and other basic needs that are going to help the woman and basically free her from the expectation to work initially so she can take care of the well-being of herself and her children before moving into employment. A \$50 monthly benefit is provided, recognizing that Albertans fleeing abuse are not necessarily ready to go to work. To start a new life, there's \$430 per month for telephone costs and \$60 per month for transportation costs to enable anybody to make a call for help or to travel for counselling and make legal appointments and any other issues that need to be covered off if women are actually going to successfully leave an abusive household.

So employment and training services are available for jobs as well, not dissimilar from the pilot project this minister is announcing today. But the bottom line is, there's a heck of a lot more that needs to be done on the violence-against-women file.

1410

I would ask the minister to put her mind to putting together some kind of comprehensive plan, not the plan she has announced and reannounced and not yet fully

funded in Ontario that women's groups have been critical of because they see it as piecemeal and ineffective. We need a real, sustainable program that every woman across the province can rely upon to successfully leave an abusive relationship.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery four US state legislators here on a legislative exchange of the Mid-western Legislative Conference. They are Senator Brad Burzynski, from Illinois; Senator Jay Emler, from Kansas; Representative Bill Huizenga, from Michigan; and Representative Karen May, from Illinois. They are joined by Susan Evans, from the Canadian consulate in Chicago, and Ilene Grossman, who is with the Mid-western Legislative Conference of the Council of State Governments.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Acting Premier, and our friends are about to see why they call this "question period" and not "answer period." The government's forestry announcement today is leaving an awful lot of people cold. Under your watch, more than 4,000 direct forestry industry jobs have been lost across northern Ontario due to high electricity prices and many other factors. For those who have lost their jobs and are struggling with the loss of a paycheque and with high energy rates, the Minister of Energy says to them, "Go and buy a blanket and drink some wine." For those struggling to keep their jobs, the government is paying only lip service to their concerns.

For example, after this, the third announcement this government has made in the last couple of years, not one of them being sufficient, Cec Makowski of the CEP, the paperworkers' union, says it's too little, too late. He says you've waited so long that employers are left with little choice but to accept a deal far below what is required.

Why won't this government come forward with a comprehensive plan on jobs for northern Ontario and for the forestry industry? When is it coming?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Energy, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): This initiative that the Premier announced today will help the forestry sector, which has been particularly hard hit by a range of variables, including the price of the dollar and the decreasing demand for newsprint throughout North America, to deal with a particularly difficult circumstance they have found themselves in to date. Today, the Premier announced \$140 million that will assist that

industry as it transitions itself to a future marketplace, upgrades its capital stock and generally makes investments in energy efficiency. Taken together, the government has invested over \$1 billion in the forestry sector, which is helping that industry deal with a very, very difficult set of circumstances.

This government remains committed to working with that industry and the people of northern Ontario as the industry transitions not only in Ontario but indeed across Canada and throughout North America.

Mr. Tory: Cec Makowski from the paperworkers' union says that it won't save a single job, and a professor from Lakehead, Livio Di Matteo, says that this program "won't make much of a difference," to quote him. The difficulty of ignoring these issues, as you have done, and leaving it to these piecemeal kinds of announcements is that everything you come up with is insufficient to deal with the real issues. Northern Ontario is in crisis and needs a real, comprehensive program to deal with this.

There are serious problems across the rest of the province as well. Eastern Ontario, for example has seen more than 4,000 jobs lost in the last year and a half: 910 jobs at Domtar, 1,290 at Cascades in Cornwall, 250 jobs at Masterbrand Cabinets in Peterborough. The announcement today does nothing for people in these communities who have lost their jobs.

Since December 8, 2005, we have been asking for a comprehensive jobs plan for the province. Where is it?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: There are challenges in the economy, but I would remind the member that since we took office we've had a net increase in employment in Ontario of 250,000 employees, something the Leader of the Opposition cannot ignore.

Not only has that occurred, but by the investments our government is making—for instance, \$500 million in the automotive sector, which has leveraged \$7 billion of new automotive investment—Ontario is now the leading jurisdiction in North America, with respect to our friend from Michigan. We have become the leading jurisdiction in North America—

Interjection: Don't tell the people of Michigan.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Ward's Automotive predicts we will.

I remind the member, you voted against that and your party voted against the budget provisions for that.

The forest sector has been buffeted by challenges that are meeting the sector throughout the world. This government has come to the table with more than \$1 billion that will help that industry—and, more importantly, the people who depend on it for their livelihoods—transition to a stronger and brighter future.

We're proud of our record. We'll defend that record.

Mr. Tory: The fact of the matter is that the paperworkers union says not one job will be saved. A professor from Lakehead says it's not going to make any difference. And the other fact of the matter is that you refuse to acknowledge and bring a plan forward on 130,000 manufacturing jobs that have been lost under the McGuinty Liberal government in the past year alone in

this province. It's a disgraceful record and you've brought forward no plan whatsoever to deal with it. You call it a cycle, you call it a little bit of contraction, the Premier says it's inevitable, but no comprehensive plan from you. The Premier, who says Ontario should never lead from the back of the pack, has presided over a government that has us 10th out of 10 in economic growth this year in this country.

To the Acting Premier again: 347 days ago this Legislature passed a resolution with all-party support calling on you to bring forward a comprehensive jobs plan. Where is it? We've seen no such plan. When is it coming at last?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Two hundred and fifty thousand net new jobs since we took office, in spite of a rising Canadian dollar—that's a record to be proud of. Let me remind the Leader of the Opposition, under your government 8,000 jobs were lost in the north alone. If you want to get quotes about what we announced today, let me give you a few.

Ron Stern, the president and CEO of St. Marys Paper: "I appreciate the province's effort to help our industry through these difficult times. This program will help us deal with our costs and move us toward greater energy efficiency."

David Paterson of Bowater: "The McGuinty government has acted decisively with programs to encourage critical new investment to make wood costs more competitive. Today's announcement is a significant step forward for the Thunder Bay operation and will support our ... initiatives designed to bring our assets to a more competitive position."

This government has responded proactively and positively to a tough situation. We will stand behind the people of northern Ontario. We will work for their jobs, unlike—

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

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I'm sure the 130,000 families who have lost the jobs will be very comforted to see you breaking your arm patting yourself on the back for all that you claim you've done. You've done nothing for them.

My question is for the Acting Premier. This morning, a water main breakage flooded Lake Shore Boulevard and snarled traffic for thousands and thousands of people during the morning rush hour. The main burst in as many as four places, according to the Toronto Star website. Staff sergeant Dan Cole said, "We're not sure where the breaks are. They keep popping up. There's mud all over the road."

As many as 2,000 pipes burst each year in the city of Toronto alone. My question to the Acting Premier is this: There is currently a \$19-billion infrastructure deficit, which your Premier said he would fix. That's more than double what it was when your party came to office. Your

Premier promised to fix the infrastructure deficit. It has doubled since he's been in office. When are you actually going to do something about it so people don't get caught in these nightmares on Lake Shore Boulevard or anywhere else? When are you going to act?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): It takes a lot of chutzpah from a member and a party that downloaded onto municipalities, large and small, around this province. You transferred your problems, sir, onto hard-working taxpayers from around this province, but this government stood up for local communities and local people and came out with a \$30-billion infrastructure investment plan which is making a difference right around this province. I can tell you, it's despite this member and this party opposing these kinds of measures. We've taken these kinds of actions, working collaboratively, providing a number of different investment tools for and with our municipal partners.

Now, the member could help. He could call his friend Steve Harper and make sure that the federal government honours its Canada-Ontario agreement to the tune of over \$1 billion so that we could invest even more. But I don't think this member has the gumption to stand up to his friend Steve.

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Mr. Tory: This government will get to \$30 billion on propaganda ads, hotel rooms and logo changes long before they invest a nickel in infrastructure. The fact is, the infrastructure deficit of this province that causes water main breaks like that has doubled since Dalton McGuinty has been Premier of Ontario. That's what is going on. Now, the expert water—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. I know it's Monday, but the rules are the same: I need to be able to hear the member placing the question. Order. The Minister of Economic Development will come to order. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: We had an expert water panel report released in July 2005, 486 days ago; 486 days of ignoring yet again another group of people hired to give us some advice on this kind of thing. This government sits and does nothing about our water infrastructure, and thousands of people in Ontario are interrupted in their drive to work today, they sit there for hours, and the water infrastructure sits untouched by a McGuinty government that has allowed the infrastructure deficit to double on their watch. When will the government keep its promise, and when will they respond formally to the expert water panel report? When is that going to happen?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Clearly, the member doesn't know what he's talking about. This is the first government to take serious action to address an infrastructure problem which you, sir, and your party tried to download onto municipal communities. This government has taken action.

We did seek advice from experts for water investment, and we are working with—and I know that this is a foreign concept to this member and his party—our partners at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. I myself have met with the executive of AMO to develop a water strategy for this province. We've shared with them the directions. We're talking with them about how we can respond, how we can deliver the kind of investment strategy that has been lacking under the previous government for the past eight years.

This government treats very seriously, amongst a number of things, the almost \$1-billion fund of the Canadian-Ontario municipal rural infrastructure fund, over \$1.3 billion through low-cost OSIFA loans, and much more—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: The minister comes here with these windy answers, and he talks all about a strategy that he himself has personally presided over. The only problem with this great strategy you've presided over is, you've done nothing; absolutely nothing. You've done nothing. The fact is—

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member for Ottawa Centre will come to order. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: The fact is, there are more than 5,000 kilometres of pipes in the city of Toronto, and half of those are more than 50 years old. Your government has yet to enact any of the regulations to Bill 175, the Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act, an act that was passed by our party that laid the groundwork for addressing the very deficit you talk about. When are you going to put through these regulations and get on with the job of renewing the water infrastructure of Ontario so that people can have proper infrastructure and not sit in traffic jams because pipe after pipe on street after street bursts on your watch? When are you going to do something about it?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: This member and his party download. This government provides much-needed dollars to municipalities for investment. I was able to give you a partial list, and I'd like to expand on that: \$81.5 million for water and waste water projects in COMRIF intake one; \$1.3 billion for investment in water and waste water right across the province of Ontario through the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority.

I'm sorry that the member opposite finds this amusing, but I've got to tell you, the approach that we've seen from the previous government compared to this one was one of downloading as opposed to action. It's with our municipal partners that we are indeed renewing Ontario to repair the legacy that unfortunately—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

HYDRO RATES

TARIFS D'ÉLECTRICITÉ

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question is to the Deputy Premier. Today we heard an

announcement on the part of the McGuinty government with regard to its new policy when it comes to electricity pricing for northern Ontario industry. I can tell you that, by most accounts, listening to the people of northeastern and northwestern Ontario, it's a complete letdown. You've continued down the path of driving hydro rates up. It has caused thousands of jobs to be lost, 45,000 jobs to be specific. And what have we got? We've basically got the government coming back and announcing something that is going to have almost a nil effect when it comes to saving those jobs that were lost up to now.

The northern mayors, industry—everybody was unanimous. Everybody in northern Ontario told you that what you needed to do was to get the price to \$45 per megawatt. You didn't do that. Our question to you is very simply this: Why didn't you? Why did you let the people of northern Ontario down?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think that before the honourable member chooses to speak for all the people of northern Ontario, he should take into consideration what some of them had to say today in response to the announcement. Everybody agrees that this is a challenging issue, but here's what Ken Buchanan said. He's the president of Buchanan Forest Products. I believe he resides in the north:

"This is great news for Ontario's forest sector. It helps us stay competitive. It will keep jobs in the north. This is good for our industry and a 'win' for the communities in our region. Our sawmills need pulp and paper operations to use the wood chips they produce, and this helps to ensure that."

We're very mindful of the challenges the forest industry is facing, and the Minister of Energy listed those. In addition to today's announcement: \$350 million in loan guarantees; \$150 million over three years for the forest sector prosperity fund; \$75 million annually for construction and maintenance costs of primary and secondary forest access roads; \$70 million in one-time stumpage fee reduction; \$10 million a year to enhance the forest resource inventory. The point is, we recognize the needs of this sector, and that's why we're responding in a comprehensive way. And it would be nice if, in supplementary, the honourable member could acknowledge that he is not the voice for every person in the north.

Mr. Bisson: I can tell you clearly that we speak for far more people in northern Ontario than the McGuinty government does. I want to share with you a couple of quotes from other northerners who happen to see things the same way. This particular one you might know: Jamie Lim, the president of the OFIA. She says, and this is an interesting quote: "Right now, Ontario companies are investing, but it's not in Ontario." That speaks volumes. It basically says that electricity prices have gone through the roof and, as an effect of that, companies are investing outside of Ontario.

I say again, we asked you specifically. The people of northern Ontario, the mayors, industry, unions—everybody was on side. Why didn't you deliver?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: For the purposes of debate, the honourable member is only able to bring in quotes that are not current from today's announcement. Why is that? He stands today and says that his party speaks for more people in the north. I think that's a little bit of an outrageous circumstance—giving the decision points of the people in the north—with respect to their democratic responsibilities.

Here's what Jim Lopez, the president and CEO of Tembec, said today: "The program announced today is a significant step both in terms of closing the gap on power rates with competing jurisdictions and helping companies generate the funds that will support investments to make their mills less dependent on purchased energy. We applaud and thank Premier McGuinty and Minister Ramsay for their leadership, their perseverance and their support."

The point is, everybody's right in acknowledging that the forest sector has real challenges, and it would be very much more fair if they acknowledged that today's announcement has met with agreeable response from many, an acknowledgement that responding in a comprehensive way is the best response to address the underlying challenges for Ontario's very prominent forest sector.

Mr. Bisson: It doesn't hide the reality that hydro prices continue to go through the roof. This announcement is going to do nothing to bring the workers back in the sawmill sector and in most of the paper sector across Ontario. We have seen thousands of layoffs across the north and in other places in Ontario when it comes to electricity prices, and your government is tinkering at the edges. I've spoken to some of the people that you talked to, and what they're saying is that this is akin to being in a river when you're about to go down and a twig comes by and you grab it. At the end of the day, you're still going to go down.

I say to you again, what are you going to do to respond to the very direct issue that was raised with you and asked of you by the people of northern Ontario when it comes to electricity prices, which is to match what they asked you for at 4.5 cents per kilowatt hour all in?

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Hon. Mr. Smitherman: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): The member opposite and his leader have more positions on this than the Kama Sutra.

Let me tell you what your leader said about regional pricing. Let me tell you what he said. He said it means that not only will the cost of electricity itself rapidly move up, but the cost of transmitting the electricity would increase as well.

The price of industrial electricity is lower today than it was two and a half years ago when we took office. The price is expected to go down. This government has invested more than \$1 billion in the forest sector industry.

Let me give you a couple of more quotes, further on that issue, from a number of the forest sector leaders.

Ken Buchanan has been quoted. John Weaver: “We applaud the efforts of the Premier and Minister Ramsay to find ways to improve forest industry competitiveness.” That’s John Weaver, president and CEO of Abitibi–Consolidated.

The industry has been challenged by everything from a higher dollar to a whole range of other factors. This government has—

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

Mr. Bisson: To the Deputy Premier—and imagine that: a Liberal accusing a New Democrat of taking multiple positions. How laughable. You’re the party that, when in opposition, was opposed to the Conservative Party policy on electricity. You campaigned against it, you said you were going to reverse it, and now what you’re doing is accelerating at 100 miles an hour.

To the Deputy Premier, I say it again in regards to what people in northern Ontario are saying. This is from Livio Di Matteo, who says, “My gut feeling is that most of the closures that have occurred are going to stay in place.”

It’s clear that this is not going to work. I ask you again, when are you going to do what the people of northern Ontario asked you to do, and that is to get an electricity price in at 4.5 cents per kilowatt hour, all-in?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: With all due respect to the honourable member, he relies on the advice of a professor who says that their gut instinct is this, that or the other. We’d rather rely on those who are involved in making independent investment decisions on a daily basis with respect to Ontario’s forestry sector. We acknowledge there are serious concerns there. That’s why we’ve had a comprehensive response over a period of several different initiatives.

I’d put the words of Ken Buchanan, a well-known figure in northern Ontario who runs Buchanan Forest Products, up against the gut instinct of a professor from a university. Here’s what Buchanan said, to remind the honourable member: “This is great news for Ontario’s forest sector. It helps us stay competitive. It will keep jobs in the north. This is good for our industry and a ‘win’ for communities in our region.”

Today’s announcement is an acknowledgment of our willingness to work alongside communities in the north and the forestry sector. We made important progress today and we acknowledge that this sector will require us to continue to work with them in strong partnership on behalf of Ontario.

M. Bisson: C’est clair que le ministre ne veut pas répondre à la question. On sait qu’il y a des milliers d’emplois qui ont été perdus au nord de l’Ontario à cause de votre politique faisant affaire avec l’électricité.

Si on regarde ce qui est arrivé à Weyerhaeuser, à Dryden, 385 emplois ont été perdus. Cette annonce ne va rien faire pour renverser ces pertes d’emplois. À Domtar, à Nairn Centre, où mon ami M. Charlie Angus et moi avons été jeudi passé, 255 employés ont perdu leur emploi. L’employeur dit que c’est à cause du prix de

l’électricité. Cette annonce ne fait absolument rien pour répondre aux besoins de cette industrie et de ramener ces travailleurs à l’ouvrage.

Je vous envoie cette liste de ceux qui ont perdu leur emploi à travers la province. Je vous demande encore, allez-vous changer d’idée et faire ce qu’on vous a demandé, d’amener le prix de l’électricité selon le 4,5 cents le kilowattheure qu’on a demandé au nord de l’Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I remind the member opposite that on his watch, 14 mills shut down under the NDP, and what did they do in response to that? They cancelled the forestry management agreement and road funding. And what else did they do? They raised industrial electricity prices 40% in three short years. Under our watch, industrial electricity prices have come down.

We are investing in conservation; we are investing in new technologies and renewable resources. As long as one person is looking for a job, as long as one family is hurting because of a layoff, this government won’t rest. That’s why we’ve invested \$1 billion, that’s why the announcement is well accepted by the industry, and that is why we will continue to pursue an aggressive approach to solving the problems of that industry for the working men and women of the north who depend on that industry for their livelihoods.

Mr. Bisson: I’ll tell you what’s resting in northern Ontario: the thousands of workers who have lost their jobs because of your hydroelectric policies. For you to come into this House today, as you did in northern Ontario, and announce a policy that falls short of what was asked for by the people of northern Ontario is a letdown to the people of northern Ontario. For three long years, while mills shut down, people lost their jobs and local economies got hammered—but you continue to duck the question. I ask the minister: Why didn’t you deliver the \$45-dollars-a-megawatt industrial rate to sustain jobs that was asked for by the people of northern Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government has responded in a multiplicity of ways to the challenge faced by the forest sector industry. Let me reiterate for the member opposite, who has acknowledged that the challenges in that industry go well beyond the price of electricity. Let me tell you, the \$1 billion—everything from roads through to energy efficiency for that industry, which is now well accepted by the industry, by communities in the north, recognizing the enormous challenge that that industry faces—has been the appropriate response in a timely fashion that is assisting this industry, an industry that is suffering in Quebec, Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, Texas, throughout North America. This is the appropriate response. It gives a competitive edge and prepares the north for a future that’s brighter in the pulp and paper industry because of that investment, because of this government working for the north in such a proactive fashion.

COAL-FIRED GENERATING STATIONS

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

My question is for the Minister of Energy. I noticed that the Acting Premier made comments saying that you guys only rely on real expert testimony and advice. Well, Minister, your Premier has had quite a time spinning a new tale every day about his coal shutdown policy and the expert advice he got on it.

This is about credibility and integrity. I'm going to read to you what you said to me and the members of the committee on estimates, Minister. I asked you, "You're talking about your coal promise. You said you consulted with a number of different people. I would like to know who those people were." Your reply was, "I'll provide you with the full list, but I can tell you, we had lots...."

Minister, is a promise made to a committee of this Legislature for you people the same as a promise made to the people of Ontario: one that you can break when you are out fishing for votes?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): This government remains committed to closing down coal-fired generation in Ontario, as I said last week, and I'll say it again. The Premier acknowledged, quite properly, that it has been a challenge to meet the timelines as originally outlined. That being said, we remain committed to the goal. Already there's a 17% reduction in the amount of time coal-fired generation is used in the province. We have seen a 28% decrease in SO₂, a 34% decrease in nitrous oxide and a 15% decrease in CO₂.

We remain committed to eliminating coal-fired generation in Ontario in a timely fashion, in a way that protects the reliability of the system in Ontario, recognizing the enormous health benefits we will achieve as a result of the policy commitment.

Mr. Yakabuski: Minister, I'd appreciate it if you'd just quit spewing out your own emissions and answer the question.

Your own colleagues in this House are having to answer questions in their own ridings about your Premier's integrity, about your Premier's commitment. He has said that he relied on the advice of experts. Then, Minister, I'm asking you: You committed to a committee of this Legislature to reveal those names so that people could make their own judgment. Minister, either give us the names now or admit that they never existed, that you and your Premier made the whole thing up, because you will say anything and you will do anything just to get a vote. Will you admit that or reveal those names now?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: What we acknowledge is that the coal-fired generation remains a major challenge to all governments and all parties, and the elimination of that coal-fired generation is in everyone's interests, from a health perspective, from an environmental perspective.

We remain committed and have asked the power authority for its independent advice on how best to achieve the shutdown of coal-fired generation. That has proven to be a most challenging goal but it is one that we remain firmly committed to in the interest of the health of all Ontarians and in the interest of a cleaner environment,

which serves the interest of all the people of this great province.

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ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Friday's quarterly OPG report demolishes the claims of your Chief Energy Conservation Officer, Peter Love. In his report, Mr. Love attributed a decline in power usage to your government's conservation efforts. But OPG president, Jim Hankinson, says that along with more moderate weather, "the decline in activity in some sectors of the economy also held down the overall demand for power." Your very weak efforts were not even mentioned.

Minister, will you admit that just about the only thing you've done to reduce demand for power is to eliminate 136,000 good-paying manufacturing and resource sector jobs? Will you admit that?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): This government has worked hard at bringing conservation in electricity to Ontario. I will remind the member: 57,000 megawatt hours saved annually with in-house conservation projects; 9,000 megawatt hours saved this summer with the industrial demand response program; 50,000 megawatt hours saved this summer through Hydro's summer challenge—that's the equivalent of 5,000 homes—12,000 megawatt hours saved exclusively through London Hydro's fridge retirement program.

There's been growth in our economy over the last few years, including the last year. It's the first time where there's been overall growth in the economy that we've seen decreases in the actual rate of growth in the electricity being used.

Conservation is an enormous challenge. We remain committed to it. That's why we created the conservation bureau. That's why we've invested \$2 billion in conservation. That's why we will continue on with this program. It's important for our health, environment and economy.

Mr. Tabuns: Minister, you can recite as many lists as you want. If you don't have impact, you don't have impact.

OPG is not the only energy body that takes issue with your chief conservation officer. According to the IESO's 18-month outlook—the report was released on October 2—"Despite the record peak demand set this summer, the reduced energy-intensive industrial load has led to lower energy demand in 2006 and throughout the forecast." In other words, your very weak efforts don't even hit the radar for the IESO.

Will you admit that your conservation plan is a failure, that the only thing you've done to reduce demand is devastate Ontario's manufacturing and resource-based regions?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This member, who prior to coming here wrote us a letter and applauded our pricing policy—

Interjection: I remember that.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I remember that. I've got the quote right here.

Let me tell you—you weren't here so I can't blame you—your friends who were here at the time all voted against Bill 21, our Energy Conservation Responsibility Act. Mr. Kormos, Mr. Marchese, Mr. Bisson were here in the early 1990s. Between 1993 and 1995, Ontario Hydro ended all conservation initiatives. For instance, the R-2000 homes, project cancelled; power saver month, project cancelled; refrigerator cashback, project cancelled; energy-efficient lighting, project cancelled; street lighting, project cancelled.

We have said that achieving a culture of conservation is an enormous undertaking. What we are doing today should have started in the early 1990s. Had it, we'd be much further along. That being said, we are going to proceed to aggressively pursue energy conservation in the interests of the economy and in—

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

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I'd like to bring to members' attention, in the members' west gallery we have Bob Frankford, who was the member from Scarborough East in the 35th Parliament.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a question today for the Minister of Education. On November 6, you came to Oakville to see the great staff and the students at Oakwood Public School. We were all pleased to see that you were able to visit the school, and we were all able to see that the McGuinty government is reaching every student in Oakville through the investments we've provided in my community. Oakwood Public School is in the heart of the Kerr area of Oakville. It offers a number of great initiatives, including the Breakfast for Learning program and the all-star reading program. It's got one of the best parent involvements in all of Oakville.

During your visit, you met with members of the Halton board and the Halton Catholic board. After the visit, I heard great positive feedback from those who met you. They feel that finally there is a government that is listening to what is happening in our community.

As you know, one of the topics you discussed was the issue of growth. Can you share with this House some of the investments that the McGuinty government has made to address the concern of growth?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): Thank you to the member for Oakville. It was a great pleasure to visit Oakwood, and I will always remember that little stair climber in the reading resource room; I think that is a brilliant idea for kids who need to blow off some steam.

We've made a number of investments in Halton, including about a 4% increase in transportation to both the public and the Catholic boards. But the Halton board

is a classic poster child for one of the problems with the funding formula when we were elected. In the way boards were able to expand and build new schools, the funding really was only generated for boards that were expanding evenly across their jurisdiction. There was a problem with boards that had pockets of growth. So one of the major changes we've made that has benefited Halton is that we've created a new grant in the funding formula called the growth schools grant. What we've done is, we've listened to the boards that were having this issue of one area growing and one area of declining enrolment, and we changed the way the funding mechanism works so that in this growth schools grant, this year we are going to provide \$10 million that will support \$137 million of new school construction that will specifically address boards like Halton.

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

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): The McGuinty government is clearly reaching every student across Ontario, from Oakville to my riding of Nipissing. You recently came to the great riding of Nipissing, and during that time we visited four different school boards, four different schools. We visited Almaguin Highlands Secondary School in Sundridge; we visited Saint-Thomas-D'Aquin in Astorville, St. Theresa's in Callander and l'Odyssee in North Bay. The tour was a tremendous success and the feedback has been great. All were so impressed by your commitment and your knowledge of the field. The investments the McGuinty government is making in my riding are certainly making a difference in boosting student achievement.

Minister, you will remember Almaguin Highlands Secondary School; it was one of the schools we visited. There's been much talk about Almaguin of late because it is, as you know, on the prohibitive-to-repair list. This school services the southern part of my riding. It offers many student success initiatives and has a strong focus on the technical field. Can you tell this House some of the investments that we're making with respect to new schools and what the process is for dealing with some of our older schools such as Almaguin?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: It's really easy to be enthusiastic about public education in this province when you see arts programs like Peter Camani's classroom and the cooking classroom of Kelly Maki. They are just fantastic teachers doing just a great job.

The issue of prohibitive-to-repair is the one I want to address, because it specifically speaks to the issue in Nipissing. The age of some of the facilities and the fact that some repairs haven't been done have meant that there are schools where it would cost more to replace the school than to build a new one. There is currently a list of schools that has been prepared across the province. What the ministry is doing right now is talking to the boards around the province to make sure that the schools that should be on that list are indeed on that list. What we'll do is, once that list has been vetted and we understand that the correct schools are on the list, the boards will be

able to apply for funding to retire schools on the list. They will be able to replace the school on the same site or nearby, replace several schools with one new school, or close the school and expand into new facilities. That process is underway now.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. Since the introduction of Bill 102, we have said that your drug reform bill was all about cost containment and not about improved access for patients to drugs. We are now hearing from hundreds of retired federal public servants who have been contacting us to express their shock that the provincial government is going to discriminate against them by denying them the same benefits under the ODB plan that apply to all other retirees. You are going to ask them to foot the bill for their drugs when they purchase them, and then they're going to have to seek reimbursement from the federal plan, which will only cover 80% of their costs.

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I ask you, today, Minister, in response to the hundreds of letters that we are receiving: Why are you discriminating against these federal pensioners while the others are still going to have full coverage?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like to take this opportunity just at the beginning of my response to welcome all those doctors who are here as part of the Ontario Medical Association's Doctor Day.

Indeed, we have sought to gain the same result from the federal government vis-à-vis their employees as the federal government employees enjoy in Quebec and Nova Scotia. This would be an equitable response for Ontario, where more of these costs would be borne by the government of Canada for their pensioners. I just want to reiterate that in seeking to gain that equitable access, we would want to ensure that all pensioners have the status quo—federal employees, that is—in terms of their current benefits and also costs. But I do acknowledge that we are working to try and obtain a greater degree of support from the federal government for the responsibility of providing drug benefits to their pensioners in line with what they're doing with respect to the provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia. Our motivation here entirely is equity for Ontarians, with equitable access for those pensioners, and we'll work to ensure that that is what occurs.

Mrs. Witmer: If it's equity you're looking for, if you look at the article in the Ottawa Citizen on November 1, yes, Nova Scotia and Quebec did take similar steps. However, they shifted the cost not just to the federal government; they shifted the cost to all employers, and they didn't single out just federal pensioners.

So I ask you again, Minister: What are you prepared to do in order to make sure that these federal pensioners are not made to feel like second-class citizens in the province

of Ontario and be forced to pick up part of their drug costs that are not going to be reimbursed by the federal plan?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: In the latter part of my answer, I already committed to that. But what I didn't hear from the honourable member was a commitment on her part to support an initiative that's designed to ensure that the people of the province of Ontario, all of them, are receiving the same degree of financial support vis-à-vis the federal government in its responsibilities to its pensioners. The matter at hand is a matter of tens of millions of dollars, and we seek here in Ontario to be able to use those resources to expand access to a broader range of drugs. I would say on this point that although Bill 102 has only very recently passed, we are already in a position in our province to bring in new drugs to the formulary.

But again, I tell the honourable member that it's completely our intention to ensure that federal pensioners are receiving exactly the same circumstances as we go forward, only we are seeking the federal government to play a bigger role in sharing those costs, consistent with what they're doing in other provinces, because we think this is important equity on behalf of all the people in Ontario.

INJURED WORKERS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Deputy Premier. Before the last election, Liberal MPPs promised workers that a Liberal government would restore cost-of-living indexing to workers' compensation cheques. Three years have come and gone since then and injured workers are still waiting for that promise to be kept. Deputy Premier, will the McGuinty government keep its promise to injured workers and introduce legislation to index the compensation payments that injured workers receive?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, perhaps she should look to her right and look down in front as to who started the downward spiral for injured worker benefits in this province. We can look with pride to the work that Bill Wrye and the Liberal government put in place, and then in 1994, the NDP introduced the Friedland formula. So judge not. That was further accelerated by the Conservative Party in 1998. So look at yourself in the mirror, I say to the honourable member, and look at who has caused this dilemma that the injured workers find themselves in.

We've been working very closely with the injured workers' groups and the WSIB. One of the first things that we did when we took office was to bring the affairs of the WSIB to order. I commend the WSIB for the efforts that they've made. We've seen increases that were put in place on January 1—

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

Ms. Horwath: The minister claims to be working closely with injured workers. What he would know is that injured workers don't want more finger pointing; they want their cheques protected from inflation. That's what they want.

Since your government has done nothing to address this issue, I'm going to be introducing a New Democratic Party private member's bill which is going to index WSIB for injured workers to the cost of living. Minister, why is the McGuinty government leaving it to a private member of the New Democratic Party to introduce indexing for injured workers through cost-of-living legislation, when you should and could have brought forward similar legislation yourself, which is exactly what injured workers want?

Hon. Mr. Peters: I just can't believe this member, that the party that really put it to the injured workers is now standing up and trying to be their biggest advocate. We have been working very closely with the WSIB. As an example, we've seen changes made to the rates for injured workers' expenses: a 10% increase in transportation allowance; a 2.6% increase in personal care and independent living; guide dog and support dog allowances; maximum clothing allowance increases from \$255 to \$500; elimination of a room and board allowance; and the removal of the \$600 cap. As well, we've moved forward on our initiative to bring the financial affairs of the WSIB in order, something that you had no handle on at all when you were in government. We're very conscious of it.

I would say to the honourable member that we do have a new chair in place at the WSIB. I've had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Mahoney, the new chair of the WSIB, and I've asked Mr. Mahoney to bring forward to me options as to how we can go forward to further improve benefits for injured workers.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Today is National Child Day. It's a day that marks the adoption in Canada of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993. This year's theme is "The Right to Be Heard!" and calls on all Canadians to listen to the voices and ideas of children and their participation in society.

The McGuinty government strongly supports children in Ontario. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services was created by the McGuinty government in 2003 to better coordinate that support. The Best Start plan is a good example of how this commitment is being turned into tangible action in our communities across the province. Minister, could you give us an update on the status of the Best Start plan?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'm very pleased to have this opportunity not just to recognize National Child Day but also to thank my colleague the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex not just for her advocacy but

also for her leadership for early learning and child care in rural areas. In fact, her success rate and the success being enjoyed by her communities is really quite admirable; it's outstanding. They are at almost 90% of their three-year target in the first year of the early learning and child care expansion initiative in this province. That is as a result of their commitment to their kids and my colleague's leadership. We will be expanding that program with more child care subsidies, more programs to engage communities in lower—

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

Mrs. Van Bommel: Thank you for your kind words. Certainly, as a grandmother and a parent in a rural community, trying to raise children in a rural community, I understand how very important the Best Start program has been to my riding and how appreciated it is by the parents of the communities in my riding. But also, Minister, Best Start is really only one example of what this government is doing in supporting children in Ontario. I was wondering if you could tell us what other programs and initiatives your ministry is pursuing to improve outcomes and success for Ontario's children.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: As an example, children are being diagnosed for hearing impairment at the age of four months now, not two and a half years, as it used to be. That's very significant. More than 4,800 more kids are receiving complex needs care and therapies through our children's treatment centres. Kids with autism are no longer being discharged from IBI services at age six, which is what the previous government had provided in terms of services for them. In fact, right now, approximately 60% of the kids receiving IBI services are aged six or over in this province. We have extended the powers of the provincial auditor to protect kids who are in the care of our children's aid societies. We have introduced and passed legislation which will be proclaimed at the end of this month, again, to provide more permanency for children in care, more accountability for children's aid societies and a more independent, transparent—

The Speaker: Thank you. New Question.

1500

COAL-FIRED GENERATING STATIONS

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, we're going to try this again. Your Premier used the shield of so-called expert testimony to justify a policy that has proven to be unattainable and ridiculous. What the people of Ontario are now asking is for you to follow through on your commitment to give the names of those so-called experts who led you to believe that this was a doable thing, because the change in energy policy as a result of your failed commitment has cost the people of Ontario billions of dollars.

Minister, you told a standing committee of this Legislature—you are quoted in Hansard—that you would provide the names of those people. Will you do as you

told the standing committee under testimony and provide those names, or admit that they were all made up, that they don't exist? What is it, Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): What the people of Ontario are calling for is an elimination of coal-fired generation, and we are moving in that direction. We acknowledge and accept responsibility for the fact that the dates we set out were difficult to achieve. We're moving forward in a fashion that will close the plants. We sought the assistance of the independent Ontario Power Authority. Our plan is clean air; their plan is coal forever. We've had enough of that. We're going to continue to work towards achieving the policy objective of eliminating coal-fired generation in Ontario.

Mr. Yakabuski: Minister, this question is not about policy; it is about honesty and integrity and respect for this Legislature. You told a standing committee on September 26—you're quoted in Hansard—that you as the Minister of Energy would undertake to provide those names. This is not about your energy policy. We can debate that another time, and I can assure you we will. This is about your honesty, your integrity and your respect for this Legislature. We have visitors from another country. Show them that when you make a commitment to members of this body, you will follow through. Provide those names or admit once and for all that you made the whole thing up, that you will say anything, that you will do anything if it means a vote for the Liberal Party here in the province of Ontario.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I can assure you that air quality is not made up. I can assure you that climate change is not made up. I can assure you, unlike the member opposite, that we will continue to pursue the challenge of elimination of coal-fired generation. We are bringing to bear all of the resources available to us to do that in a timely fashion that protects the integrity of Ontario's electricity system. It's time to keep moving forward. We've got a 17% reduction already, and we're going to continue to move in that direction. We believe that it's in the public interest from a health and environmental perspective, and we will continue to work to achieve that very noble goal.

CHILD ADVOCATE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Today is National Child Day. The McGuinty government pays lip service to the needs of Ontario children, but has yet to fulfill its promise of an independent child advocate. The McGuinty government promised this would happen as far back as 2004. So my question is very simple: Why has the McGuinty government broken its promise to children? Why doesn't Ontario have an independent child advocate?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I thank the member from Hamilton East for her question and for her genuine interest in this matter. I am going to be encouraging you to provide us with the support we will need for very

speedy passage of this legislation, which I am anticipating will be coming forward in the very, very near future.

Ms. Horwath: I appreciate the minister's desire to get the legislation forward, but that desire has not been fulfilled over the past several years, and I'm really wondering who it is that's holding up this legislation from coming forward. The reality is that children and youth in Ontario have no one independently overseeing their issues and concerns, no one to tell you to stop clawing back the national child benefit from low-income kids.

Your government promised independence for the children's advocate, but you didn't deliver. When—and I don't want to hear "in the near future"; let's have a detailed date—will you finally keep your promise and give the children's advocate full independence, as you promised?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'll not repeat my previous answer because my previous answer still stands. But I noticed with interest a member from the opposition applauding when, in fact, the primary reason why our government felt it was necessary to introduce this legislation is because her party, the Tories, were muzzling the advocate. That's not how we protect the interests of children in this province. But I can assure you that the member from Hamilton East has a genuine commitment, and, on my part, that we will see this legislation in the very near future.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Due to the fact that the Minister of Energy would not even address—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): That's not a point of order. We don't play games during—

Interjection.

The Speaker: Yes, and you may file for a late show at the table according to the standing orders any time you want before 5 o'clock.

New question.

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): My question is to the Minister of Labour. Last December, an historic bill, Bill 211, was passed in this Legislature. For those who don't remember, Bill 211 was all about putting an end to mandatory retirement in Ontario. It will come into effect in less than one month, on December 12, 2006, and will finally bring an end to discrimination against our older workers.

Minister, forcing people to retire when they reach an arbitrary age is wrong; 65 is not what it used to be, and by no means have we reached our expiration date by that time. Some of the most active volunteers in my riding are seniors over the age of 65. They still have a lot to give, and prove it with their contributions. When I talk to them at events in the riding, these men and women tell me that, while they enjoy the satisfaction of volunteering, many of them miss the joys and challenges of their old positions as teachers, civil servants and the like.

For many of us, work is more than a paycheck. It provides a sense of self worth, a purpose and, in the case of older, experienced workers, a chance to mentor and guide. Minister, as we approach December 12, please remind this House why our government chose to abolish mandatory retirement.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I want to thank the member from Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh for his question. It's a very simple answer: It is the right thing to do. We made a commitment to end the practice of discriminatory mandatory retirement in this province because it is wrong to force capable, experienced and knowledgeable citizens to stop working merely because they've reached a particular age. Somebody's skills or abilities do not stop once they turn age 65. Furthermore, society should not lose the benefit of skilled and experienced workers and those benefits that they can bring to workplaces.

Mandatory retirement is an outdated concept in our modern society, in which we live longer and healthier lives. Our government believes that all Ontarians deserve the right to choose when they want to retire, not just a few, such as politicians and the self-employed. As of December 12, 2006, Ontarians 65 years or older will have the choice to continue working if they so choose. Many will choose not to, as they do now. While the trend for early retirement is growing, we believe that all Ontarians should have that right to choose when to retire.

Mr. Brownell: Thank you, Minister, for reminding us of one more way in which our government has improved the lives of ordinary Ontarians. I know that my constituents are pleased that this government values the contributions of older, experienced workers. In fact, many of my constituents who are in this category, some of whom have been forced to retire, have a lot to say on this subject.

1510

I have been to a number of retirement parties where the honourees have indicated that they would like to stay around a bit longer, that they felt they still had something to contribute. It is even more difficult for those who have turned 65 since Bill 211 received royal assent last year. Were it not for the one-year transition period, these individuals may have been able to keep working, ensuring that there was one more much-needed nurse in a hospital or educator in a classroom.

Minister, the one-year transition period has been a great disappointment to the many workers who find themselves celebrating their 65th birthdays before December 12, 2006. Could you explain why you chose to impose a one-year transition period instead of allowing this legislation to take effect immediately last year?

Hon. Mr. Peters: I want to thank the member for the question. It is a good question. We chose a one-year transition because we had to give employers an opportunity to prepare for the date of December 12, 2006. We recognized that mandatory retirement would require a shift in attitude and a shift in practice. Some employers, for instance, may have had to adapt their human re-

sources policies and practices to comply with the new legislation; others needed to discuss changes to collective agreements. Our government thoroughly considered all of the issues and concerns before embarking on this legislation and we proceeded in a manner that was fair and reasonable. For this reason, the act was chosen to have the one-year transition for royal assent. I understand that some individuals are not happy, but we had to put the one-year transition in place to ensure that everything was in place.

I can assure the member that there's nothing stopping employers from voluntarily allowing their workers to continue working beyond the age of 65 prior to that December 12 date. The transition period was necessary in order for us to be adequately prepared—

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

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): My question is for the Attorney General. On April 26, 2006, during first reading of Bill 107, your proposed human rights reform legislation, you said, "We would ensure that, regardless of levels of income, abilities, disabilities or personal circumstances, all Ontarians would be entitled to share in receiving equal and effective protection of human rights, and all will receive that full legal representation."

Last week, in what was described by a presenter at the Bill 107 committee hearings as a public hearing by ambush, you announced certain amendments to be tabled by your government, including an amendment regarding a proposed human rights legal support centre. As taken from your website, the proposed amendment reads, "The minister would establish a Human Rights Legal Support Centre to provide a range of services including information, support, advice, assistance and legal representation."

Minister, the way this amendment is worded is vague at best. Will this amendment guarantee that all Ontarians will receive full legal representation by a lawyer, as promised?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): Michael, remind them about the bully bill.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): In the supplementary I'll remind them about the bully bill.

As members know, the rules applying to the submission of amendments require not that they be introduced on the first day of public hearings, but rather that they be introduced, subject to certain timelines, in advance of clause-by-clause. It was in the interest of being able to discuss and debate and have people appearing before the committee consider the amendments that we introduced those amendments in advance of clause-by-clause. It was for that very reason that we did something that, when the Conservatives were in power, they

never did, which was to put those amendments before the committee. Not only did the Conservative government not put amendments before the committee in advance, but they didn't even bother having any public hearings for any of their bills. So it is precisely because we did this that the member is able to ask her question right now and, to answer the member's question, yes, that's what I said when I introduced the bill and I stand beside those words.

VISITORS

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): I would just like to introduce some friends who are here in the gallery today: Gurminder Gill, Jujhar Mahal, Davinder Khanewala, Gural Singh, Pinky Boparai, Ravi and Gurpreet Chohan.

PETITIONS

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario.

“Whereas, according to the Department of National Defence, there are over 30,000 serving military personnel calling Ontario home; and

“Whereas, according to the most recent census data, there are more than 1.6 million senior citizens over the age of 65 living in Ontario; and

“Whereas the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario plans on eliminating this ... tax for all Ontarians after it forms the government in 2007; and

“Whereas, as an interim measure, the ... health tax should be removed from those who protect Canada and those who have built Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, call on the government of Ontario to immediately eliminate the ... health tax, beginning with serving military personnel and senior citizens.”

I've also signed this.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It comes from the Newcomer Women's Services of Toronto. I'd like to thank especially Gordon Crann and Libby Ackerman for their help in gathering the signatures. It reads as follows:

“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'm pleased to affix my signature in support of this petition and ask Page Or to carry it for me.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to present a petition today on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas prostate specific antigen (PSA) tests are frequently used to screen patients for prostate conditions, including cancer; and

“Whereas there is currently a double standard because men usually pay to have a PSA test as part of a routine medical examination, while women have all cancer screening tests covered by OHIP;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, urge the province of Ontario to review its policy on funding PSA testing for men with a view to including this as a service wholly covered by OHIP,” and therefore not discriminating in any way for access to health care in Ontario.

I'm pleased to sign and endorse this and present it to Daniel.

POVERTY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): I'm pleased to present this petition on behalf of Parkdale Collegiate Institute, the majority of whose students brought this to our attention. It says:

“Whereas Canada is one of the richest nations, and yet it has one of the worst records on poverty of all the developed nations. According to Statistics Canada, 14.4% of children in Ontario live in poverty. We want to know what you, as our government, will do to end poverty in Ontario; and

“We ask that you bring in the \$10 minimum wage now.”

Of course I agree with this petition, and I'm happy to affix my signature.

1520

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly in support of measures to preserve cross-border travel. I especially want to thank the clients and staff of Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services in Mississauga for having submitted this petition. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the United States government, through the western hemisphere travel initiative, is proposing that US citizens will require a passport or single-purpose travel card to cross the Canada-US border; and

“Whereas a passport or single-purpose travel card would be an added expense, and the inconvenience of having to apply for and carry a new document would be a barrier for many Canadian and US cross-border travellers; and

“Whereas the George Bush government proposal could mean the loss of as many as 3.5 million US visitors to Ontario, and place in peril as many as 7,000 jobs in the Ontario tourism industry by 2008, many of which are valuable entry-level jobs for youth and new Canadians; and

“Whereas many of the US states bordering Canada have expressed similar concerns regarding the punitive economic impact of this plan, and both states and provinces along the US-Canada border recognize the importance of the safe and efficient movement of people across that border is vital to the economies of both countries;

“Be it therefore resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the establishment of a bi-national group to establish an alternative to the proposed US border requirements, and inform Prime Minister Harper that his decision not to advocate on behalf of Ontarians is ill-advised, and contrary to the responsibilities of elected representatives in Canada.”

This is an excellent petition. I'm pleased to affix my signature and to ask page Andrew to carry it for me.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas age-related macular degeneration ... is the leading cause of blindness in the elderly and is present in some form in 25% to 33% of seniors over the age of 75. AMD has two forms: the more common ‘dry’ type and the ‘wet’ type. Although the wet type occurs in only 15% of AMD patients, these patients account for 90% of the legal blindness that occurs with AMD. The wet type is further subdivided into classic and occult subtypes, based on the appearance of the AMD on special testing.

Photodynamic therapy, a treatment where abnormal blood vessels are closed with a laser-activated chemical, has been shown to slow the progression of vision loss in both subtypes of wet AMD;

“Whereas OHIP has not extended coverage for photodynamic therapy to the occult subtype of wet AMD, despite there being substantial clinical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of this treatment in patients with either form of wet AMD. Untreated, these patients can expect a progression in their visual loss, with central blindness as the end result;

“Whereas affected patients are in a position where a proven treatment is available to help preserve their vision, but this treatment can only be accessed at their own personal expense. Treatment costs are between \$12,500 and \$18,000 over an 18-month period. Many patients resign themselves to a continued worsening of their vision, as for them the treatment is financially unattainable. The resultant blindness in these patients manifests itself as costs to society in other forms, such as an increased need for home care, missed time from work for family members providing care, and an increased rate of injuries such as hip fractures that can be directly attributable to their poor vision.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fund the treatment of the occult subtype of macular degeneration with photodynamic therapy for all patients awaiting this service.”

I'm pleased to sign my name to this and present it to Kelsea to give back to the table.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I have a petition:

“In Support of Skilled Immigrants—Bill 124

“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 agree with this petition and affix my signature.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

"We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Liberal government and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)."

This is presented in the context of Bill 140 on long-term care. I'm pleased to sign and support it, and I hand it to Sarah on their behalf.

COMMUNITY MEDIATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have another petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly in support of community mediation, and I especially want to thank Jennifer Leung for having organized these signatures. She's from Starwood Drive in Mississauga. It reads as follows:

"Whereas many types of civil disputes may be resolved through community mediation delivered by trained mediators, who are volunteers who work with the parties in the dispute; and

"Whereas Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services established the Peel Community Mediation Service in 1999 with support from the government of Ontario through the Trillium Foundation, the Rotary Club of Mississauga West and the United Way of Peel, and has proven the viability and success of community mediation; and

"Whereas the city of Mississauga and the town of Caledon have endorsed the Peel Community Mediation Service, and law enforcement bodies refer many cases to the Peel Community Mediation Service as an alternative to a court dispute; and

"Whereas court facilities and court time are both scarce and expensive, the cost of community mediation is very small and the extra expense incurred for lack of community mediation in Peel region would be much greater than the small annual cost of funding community mediation;

"Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, support and fund the ongoing service delivery of the Peel Community Mediation Service through Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services."

I support this petition and I'm pleased to affix my signature and to once again ask page Or to carry it for me.

LANDFILL

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): This is with regard to the Carp landfill site in west Ottawa.

"Whereas there is currently a proposal to more than double the size of the Carp landfill in west Ottawa; and

"Whereas this site has been in operation for ... 30 years and had been expected to close in 2010; and

"Whereas the surrounding community has grown rapidly for the past 10 years and is continuing to grow in the immediate area; and

"Whereas other options to an expanded landfill have yet to be considered; and

"Whereas the municipal councillors representing this area—Eli El-Chantiry ... and Peggy Feltmate—and the MPP, Norm Sterling, all oppose this expansion;

"We, the undersigned, support our local representatives and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure the Minister of the Environment does not approve the expansion of the Carp landfill and instead to find other waste management alternatives."

I have signed that because I agree with it.

TUITION

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I have a petition from hundreds of people, and it reads, "To Stop Tuition Fee Hikes and Improve Access and Quality In Post-Secondary Education...."

"Whereas the Ontario Liberal government cancelled the tuition fee freeze after only two years and approved fee increases of up to 36% over the next four years; and

"Whereas tuition fees in Ontario have increased by more than four times the rate of inflation over the past 15 years; and

"Whereas a majority of Ontarians oppose tuition fee increases and support greater public funding for colleges and universities; and

"Whereas improvements to student financial assistance are undermined by fee increases; and

"Whereas the Ontario government's recent increase to student loan limits is set to push student debt to approximately \$28,000 for a four-year program; and

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

"Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to stop tuition fee hikes and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"—reduce tuition fees to 2004 levels for all students in Ontario and implement an immediate tuition fee freeze;

"—increase public funding for post-secondary education to promote access and quality;

"—expand access to financial aid in Ontario, especially for part-time students; and

"—double the number of upfront, need-based grants for Ontario students."

I support this petition and I will sign it.

1530

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): I have a petition 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 support this petition, and I will sign it and have page Shannon deliver it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFERENDUM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE RÉFÉRENDUM RELATIF AU SYSTÈME ÉLECTORAL

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 16, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario’s electoral system / *Projet de loi 155, Loi prévoyant un référendum sur le système électoral de l’Ontario.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I believe I’m just wrapping up from where I left off when time ran out on me last week. In closing, what I want to say about this particular bill is that it might be premature to judge whether it’s going to propose this system or that system, or whether we agree with this method of selecting elected representatives or that method of selecting representatives. This is a bill not about the outcome. This is a bill that says, “This is how we’re going to go about doing something we haven’t done before,” which is, for the first time in many, many years, looking at how we choose our elected representatives.

Like many of the members here, I have very strong opinions, as an elected representative who’s had his

hands on the system and who I hope understands some of its strengths and weaknesses, on what some proposals will or won’t do and what some of their strengths and some of their drawbacks are. But I think this bill is a fair opportunity to put the debate out there and to say to people, “Bring out your best ideas. Lay them all out. Give them to the citizens’ panel,” and let us see non-judgmentally what they come up with. If it’s a good idea, maybe it’s something we should adopt. If they decide that what we’ve got is what many of us here feel is one of the best systems for choosing elected representatives in the world, and they choose to say, “Let well enough alone,” many of us here would support that. But I think at this point we’ve left it in the hands of the citizens’ assembly. I’m looking forward to their recommendations and to debating them in the House when we’ve actually seen those recommendations.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. John O’Toole (Durham): I’m here this afternoon primarily out of respect for the work our member for Lanark–Carleton, Norm Sterling, has put into this issue, and for his long service here and his broad understanding of the issues before us with respect to, I would say, the whole discussion on democratic renewal.

Everyone here would encourage and really strongly endorse stronger participation by all the citizens of Ontario. Indeed, the recent municipal election is good evidence that some of them suffer a shocking lack of turnout—the public participation rate. Then you look at demographic questions. The youth: We want to encourage the youth to carry their responsibilities and indeed their rights forward and encourage them to be engaged both in elected office and in participating in elections within their schools. I know some of the schools in my area will be having discussions on this topic.

Mr. Sterling brings a great deal of experience as a lawyer as well as an engineer, and as a long-time-service member here in the Legislature, he knows much of what he speaks. But I’m concerned about a couple of issues which have been repeatedly brought up, and I’m not sure—I think the government, Mrs. Bountrogianni, didn’t even take their entire hour for leadoff. I’m anxious to see if Mr. Sterling takes the hour. If he does, I probably won’t be here. But the issue I find the most difficult is that the results of the referendum—here’s the deal, here’s the trick to it all: If the recommendations are 60% approved—so the threshold has become the issue, that 60%-plus, when normally in democratic discussions, decisions are made on 50%-plus-one type of rules.

So I’m interested in the debate. We all should be interested in the debate. I don’t think there’s any magic answer here, but certainly democracy is something that our soldiers have fought for. At least the politicians could be prepared to listen to make sure that we get this system right. I’m looking forward to Mr. Sterling’s comments this afternoon.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I wonder whether the member from Mississauga West would like to comment on a similar point made by the member from

Durham, that the select committee on electoral reform submitted in November 2005 a report that recommended that the government set the threshold for a referendum at at least 50% plus one in 50% of the ridings, which seemed to me like a very reasonable conclusion that all three political parties came to and submitted to the government.

The other point we make is that, thanks to the current voting system, most majority governments in Canada gain power without winning a majority of votes. We had McGuinty Liberals win with 46.6% of the votes in 2003. The Harris government won 45% of the votes in 1995 and 1999. It would seem to me that a simple majority should be the norm, or at least what we accept, yet the government, by fiat, just a little while ago—"the referendum is binding if the recommended electoral system is selected in,

"(a) at least 60% of all the valid referendum ballots cast; and

"(b) more than 50% of the valid referendum ballots cast in" 60% of the ridings, which means at least 64 electoral districts.

I think that raising the threshold in the way that your government is doing makes it very difficult to arrive at the kind of conclusion—or at least to arrive at changes that so many, I think, are looking for. If that is true, why have you opted for this double super-majority threshold, where there aren't that many precedents for such a high threshold in provincial or federal referendums or plebiscites? If a simple majority was applied in referendums and the Charlottetown accord and Newfoundland joining Confederation, including the separation of Quebec, why wouldn't it be okay in this case? You might want to comment on that.

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): This is very exciting and very historic legislation. It is high time we took a good, hard look at the way we elect our representatives. The current system, in my opinion, was designed for a two-party system.

I live in the riding of London North Centre. We have got a federal by-election going on now where there are four strong contenders. I tell you, what's happening is that people are thinking about how to vote strategically. They're thinking about who they should vote for, not based on who they want to see elected but who they don't want to see elected. That kind of system I just don't think works in the multi-party system we currently have.

So I welcome this legislation. I think it's tremendously exciting. I think all members of this House should be proud that they are taking part in what is historic. I do say that it is essential that any changes to what is the true foundation of democracy in Ontario receive strong support from the public. I am fully supportive of the thresholds outlined in this bill, because I think that only by setting up a relatively high threshold will we have public buy-in, will we settle the issue for a long time—not once and for all, but for a long time.

While I think there's real support for the notion that we take a look at our voting system, I also do think that

the public will pay attention. If the citizens' assembly comes up with a proposal that is good and solid and fair, the public will rise to the challenge and endorse it.

I'm very proud to be part of a government that put this kind of change as a priority, and we'll certainly be supporting it.

1540

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to take part in the debate today. I have no problem, as an elected member, looking at legislation or looking into new or innovative ideas and how we might have some type of electoral reform. But I can tell you that in this House and in the province of Ontario, I believe we've had a very stable political system since the beginning of Confederation. The citizens of Ontario get an opportunity—I guess now it will be every four years with the changes in legislation that allows the set times for elections. The stability we've seen in the system is something that I don't really want to gamble with.

There's also an opportunity here to create a system which may cause some chaos down the road to a province that I believe has been run very well since the beginning of Confederation. Yes, we have had different parties over the years. The previous member talked about the current system being set for a two-party system; however, in the last 15 years in this House we've had three majority governments: the Progressive Conservative Party, the New Democratic Party and now the Liberal Party of Ontario. The people of Ontario had the opportunity to vote for that. They voted for change in each of those cases. We ended up with a government that in some cases did a good job and was re-elected, and at other times they were tossed out.

I'm afraid that although we look at this legislation and think these wonderful things are going to happen, we do risk the stability that we have in the system.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Mississauga West, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Delaney: I want to thank my colleague from Simcoe North. I personally echo many of his statements, but this isn't, at this stage, what we think about the outcome. This is a question now of the process.

The member for Durham asked about the lack of a turnout. He said, "Do you get better results if more people vote?" In the 1995 Quebec referendum, some 95% of people voted. We were glad of the result, but wouldn't you have been a little bit more comfortable with a super-majority threshold before you lost your country?

It is said in software, which is where I came from, that decisions are made by people who show up. If you show up and you cast your vote and you exercise your franchise in an election, this is about you. If you don't cast your vote, there isn't much in the way of a democratic measure that we could conceive of that's going to make a great deal of difference to you.

My colleagues from Trinity-Spadina and, to an extent, London North Centre talked about the benefits or perceived drawbacks of the first-past-the-post system. By way of commentary, I'll say this about the first-past-the-

post system: One should never lose track of its most breathtaking benefit, which is its ability to defeat incumbents and, in so doing, provide the renewal and the change that all Legislatures need from time to time. In the debate about what should or shouldn't be, we should be very careful not to institute a system that constitutes nothing but statism and the preservation of the status quo.

In commenting on the degree to which it should be passed by 50% plus one or a super-majority, again I point out to you that the first Quebec referendum was won by the no side with that super-majority of 60-40. Would you like to lose your democratic traditions or your country on the basis of less than 1% of the popular vote? I think not.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): For those people who are watching the debate today, we are debating the Electoral System Referendum Act, 2006. This act follows on Bill 62, which appointed a citizens' assembly to look into various ways of electing MPPs.

As you know, in the past, everyone in this assembly—all 103 of us—has been elected by a system known as first past the post, a system where the candidate who gets the most votes on election day, be that 51% of the vote or be it 45% of the vote, as long as that particular candidate has the largest number of votes, wins the day. The question comes, should the candidate have more than 50% of the votes, and what happens to the fact that more people voted against the candidate rather than for the candidate? That brings the debate here.

Now, this bill does essentially three things. It sets up the mechanism for the referendum by setting a threshold of 60% plus one. Plus, the fact that 50%—a little bit more than 50%: 64 of 107 ridings, which we will be having in 2007—must vote 60% in favour of this particular proposal that will be put forward.

The next most important part of it, and I will be talking about this later, is, what will the question be on the ballot? There will be a recommendation by this citizens' assembly as to what that question should be, or close to what that question should be. In this legislation, it clearly says that it won't be the Legislative Assembly that will be debating and voting on what that question for this very important referendum will be; it will be the 25 or 30 individuals who are in the cabinet of Ontario who will decide what that question will be. I know the member for Beaches-Woodbine, Mr. Prue, made reference to this last Thursday, that at the very least it should be confirmed in this Legislature what that question should be.

I'm going to make a few comments about the penchant for this government to move to democratic reform without proper consultation with this legislative chamber. This isn't the first time that they have undertaken that kind of approach, and I think that is dead wrong. I think that in order for democratic renewal or reform to go forward, there has to be some degree of consensus, not only from one political party, but there has to be some degree of consensus by all political parties that now represent the public of Ontario.

The last part that is important in this act is the question of funding the people who will be interested in this referendum, the yes and the no sides. We found through our experience, those of us who have read and who have talked to people who have been involved in the referendum in British Columbia, that one of the greatest failings of the referendum in British Columbia was the fact that there was very little debate, there was very little discussion, there was very little interest and there was very little funding for education of the yes and the no sides in the BC debate.

I want to go back to the origins of where this started. It started during the last election. Over three years ago, the election document of the Liberal Party talked about strengthening democracy, and it talked about the problem with the way we were electing our people, and it quoted Jeffrey Simpson about the fact that some of the election results get skewed with regard to the first-past-the-post system. The Liberal Party said this in their campaign document:

"The only way to reverse this trend is through engaging citizens in an open, honest debate about our democracy. After consulting with the public, we will hold a referendum on whether we should keep our winner-take-all voting system or replace it with another. Alternatives to our voting system could include some form of proportional representation, preferential ballots, or mixed systems. What matters most is that you will choose the electoral system that best represents our democratic values and diverse society."

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It's obvious from the statement that was made in the campaign document and everything that has followed, including the set-up of the citizens' assembly, that this government fully expects the citizens' assembly to come forward with a brand new way of electing members in the Legislature. There is zero chance, there is no chance that the citizens' assembly will come forward and say, "Keep the present system which has been working in the province of Ontario for over 130 years." So it's a bit of a set-up. And quite frankly, if I were a member of the citizens' committee, I would not invest a huge amount of my time—I believe it's 26 weekends or something like that, fairly intense time, a great learning process—and come out at the end and say, "No, I think what we've got is perfect." It's going to be pretty hard for any of those 103 representatives, sitting around, to come to that conclusion.

By the by, I do say that I'm not certain that the 103 citizens are wholly representative of the average citizens in this province. Yes, they were randomly chosen from across the province of Ontario. The province's chief electoral officer sent out 120,000 notices and said, "Who's interested in entering into this process?" Twelve thousand responded. It was cut down to 15 per riding for the 103 choices, and then there was some kind of a lottery process, a selection process, done after that. I'm not sure that people who would be interested in this kind of process—and I think Ian Urquhart made this point in

one of this columns—who are so interested in the mechanics of the process, really represent the public at large. I don't think that the public at large are very much interested in how this place functions, other than they want it to be productive, they want the debate to be good, and they want good legislation to result from that.

I might add as well, if you turn over two more pages in this wonderful document, Government that Works for You, that the Liberal Party said, "We will give your elected representative more power.

"Your MPP should be free to represent your views, not just parrot the views of his or her party. We will make sure all non-cabinet MPPs are free to criticize and vote against government legislation, with the exception of explicit campaign promises and confidence matters." The Liberal Party, the governing party, has had, I believe, probably approaching 1,000 votes now in the last three years, when you consider first, second and third reading on many bills. And there has only been one occasion where the government has said to three members from Brampton, "You can vote contrary to the government bill." That's how this government believes in true democratic reform.

The other part of it is, as we have progressed and gone through some of the legislation presented here in the House, there has not been a willingness on the part of the government to really consult with the opposition vis-à-vis any of the legislation. I would have thought that the minister responsible for democratic renewal and reform, with regard to the citizens' assembly and this piece of legislation, would have come with an open hand to the opposition parties and said, "Here's the kind of legislation that I am contemplating. Do you have any kinds of feelings about it prior to introduction?" To me, that would have shown that there was a real concern and a real generosity on the part of the majority government. They have 70-plus members who can vote in anything on any day. Given what I just said, every vote is whipped on that side, save and except the one out of a thousand votes that they've had so far. I would have thought that if there was a true, genuine desire to drive change and to get all Ontarians on side, including the opposition benches, there would have been some generosity in that regard.

This particular bill, for instance, Bill 155—we had advance notice that it was coming down the pipe. I had my staff phone the minister's office and say to them, "Could you provide us with a briefing prior to the introduction?" because to be very responsible in responding to this kind of legislation, you should not go off half-cocked and say you're going this way or that way until you've had the opportunity to read it and understand it. Of course, there was no generosity on the part of the minister to do that at that time.

I also note that on Bill 62, the bill with regard to setting up the citizens' assembly, we were here in second reading—most members don't know this, because they weren't in the Legislative Assembly when this happened. The bill came up for debate one evening at 6:45. As members of the public might not know, we adjourn here

at 6 o'clock and return at 6:45. Well, sometimes members, in trying to get a bite to eat in 45 minutes and make a couple of phone calls, don't make it back here right at 6:45. Because I was involved with Bill 62, as our critic for democratic renewal, I was almost on time, not right on time. I came in the back door and I was a little concerned because I was having a bite to eat with some of my colleagues who were on duty that night and they weren't coming down, so I thought I'd better skittle in here. As I walked in the back door here, I heard the Minister of Natural Resources get up on Bill 62, a bill for democratic reform, and try to cut off second and third reading debate without notice, without any further debate, and pass the whole thing lickety split on unanimous consent. That's because it happened at 6:45 that evening, and there was no New Democrat party member here to object, and I was the only one who was walking in the back door, and I yelled "No" from behind the benches. That is so indicative of this government's notion that democratic reform is not the public, it's not the Legislature that's involved, it's the Liberal Party of Ontario that knows all and wants to push their particular perspective of this whole thing.

Their handling of this issue, their handling of democratic reform in general, in my view, is very much lacking. As previous governments, we've known that when we're appointing officers of the Legislature—the Ombudsman, the privacy commissioner, the information commissioner, the auditor, the Clerk, those kinds of people—there is a great desire to get all-party consent for those appointments. There's a resolution in front of the Legislature in order to have the support of all parties with regard to that.

I believe that kind of attitude, those calls that the Premier should make to the leaders of the opposition, is also necessary when we're going through democratic reform. This should not be a partisan political issue. Yes, members will have different views on different parts of democratic reform, but it should not be a partisan political issue, which the Liberals seem intent on making it. Their disgraceful behaviour—the Minister of Natural Resources on Bill 62—points very, very much to their lack of regard for this place.

I guess another part of their lack of regard for what members or former members of this Legislature might think about how members should be elected—and quite frankly, those of us who have been elected to this place have some interesting perspectives with regard to how the system could or could not be changed. I believe it was only through, in large part, my badgering of the government that they finally succumbed and put forward a select committee to look at electoral reform. This included all three parties, and we came down with what was in most part a unanimous report which had 10 recommendations.

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One of those recommendations was to appoint three people who were former MPPs, not present MPPs, as ex officio members of the citizens' assembly. What we had

envisaged on the select committee was that these three former MPPs—one to be appointed by each party so there wouldn't be a lot of foofaraw as to how it was going to be done and all the rest of it—would provide a resource for the citizens' assembly committee to ask the important questions: How will this work once these people are elected to the institution? What will it mean in terms of balance of power? Will there be a better Parliament as a result of that? So that was one of a number of recommendations which the government has not followed in this particular legislation.

My feeling, and the feeling of Mr. Miller who was my cohort on this whole report—Mr. Miller and myself were representatives of the Progressive Conservative Party and we put forward a dissenting report to the select committee because we didn't agree with all of it. In fact, both Mr. Miller and I had some disagreement with regard to some of the other points that were recommendations, but the principal ones that we disagreed with related to this, and I'll read our overall attitude towards this, and I want to talk a little bit about this:

"We agree with the majority of the report—that is, electoral reform (as opposed to parliamentary reform) is unlikely to solve the problems facing our parliamentary system.

"In spite of this, we continue down a path which will be difficult if not impossible to reverse. We risk making a system badly in need of reform worse.

"With the present lack of trust by the public in their politicians, the temptation to seek change will be overwhelming. It will be difficult if not impossible for an objective assessment of the current system to be carried out due to the cynicism and distrust that has arisen towards politicians and the political process."

That distrust and cynicism have grown with this government of broken promises. Dalton McGuinty, in my view, has done more to damage the institution of Parliament than any other Premier who has ever served this province. That's a pretty tough statement to make, but I believe that with regard to the difference between what he promised in the election and what he is doing in this Legislative Assembly. That has encouraged a growth in this cynicism and distrust of the public.

"We believe it would be a mistake to assume that cynicism and distrust have as their principal cause a concern by the population about how their elected representatives are elected. We believe the cynicism and distrust have a lot more to do with what elected representatives actually do once elected and to some extent how well or how poorly the institution to which they are elected actually functions, as opposed to the method of election."

I believe that this institution of Parliament is badly in need of reform, and the basic reform that we need here is a ceding of power from the Premier and the executive council to this legislative chamber, primarily a ceding of power from the Premier of this province to the Legislative Assembly. In my view, the Premier of the province has been essentially put in the position of having almost

dictatorial powers in our parliamentary system, and that really is unfortunate. It's not only unfortunate for the present Parliament, it's unfortunate for future Parliaments, and we must address it at some point in time.

The focus of the Parliament is not on debate. Question period, quite frankly, is a joke. It's theatre only. It is not related to accountability and asking the Premier or his cabinet questions and giving responses, which the public are entitled to. It's theatre. It's, "Keep the pat line going forward, say anything, but don't answer the question." Consequently, what do you expect from the public but cynicism and distrust as a result of that?

The chief problem that we have in this place is the overwhelming power of the Premier's office and his staff. It will take a very strong leader to cede that power, to give up some of that power to the Legislature, to the committees of the Legislature, and to change dramatically how this place works. I believe it's possible and I believe that's what we should do first before embarking on a new system of electing our MPPs as we go forward.

There is no doubt in my mind that one of the models that will be put forward by the citizens' assembly will be some form of proportional representation. I know other members have said that's not part of the debate, but I think it is part of the debate. I think once you cross the line into a proportional representation system, you're effectively saying we are going to have coalition or minority Parliaments forever into the future, and I don't think that will be the question on the ballot, unless there is a very strong sense by the public as to what the vote is about.

I think we should talk about what these various systems produce. They produce minority governments. If you have 46% of the vote, as Dalton McGuinty had in the last election, he would not get a majority government; he would get 46% of the seats. That's the ultimate goal of a proportional system. In a mixed member proportional system, as we found out in visiting Germany and Scotland, which have that kind of a system, there's a great deal of angst. There's a great deal of competition between those members who are elected in the constituencies and those members who are elected on lists. The members who are voted in in the constituencies have to continually deal with those members who were elected on the list contradicting what they may be doing for their constituency, coming into their constituency and electioneering when in fact they don't have the same kind of responsibilities as a constituency representative. When you get into a mixed member proportional system, you have two kinds of MPPs: You have those who are accountable to their constituents and others who really don't have the burden of taking care of a constituency and representing a particular geographic area.

I guess the other part of proportional representation, which was explained to me about two or three weeks ago by a delegation that was here from South Africa, one of the provinces in South Africa—and their system was totally proportional—was that the party owned them. The party owns MPPs who would be elected from a list,

because the only way they can get elected is that the party puts down a list with number 1, number 2, number 3, number 4, number 5, number 6, number 7 etc. Should they step out of line with the party, in this South African province anyway, what happens is they ain't on the list next year or the next election.

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Our parties now, I would say, have some control—not a huge amount of control. I believe very much that the party system is inherent in the culture of our political dynamics in the province of Ontario and in Canada and is necessary and leads to, in my view, compromises in policies and does away with extremes in legislation and in going forward in terms of planning our province. So I'm very much in favour of that.

Mixed member proportional systems will also mean an increase, probably a substantial increase, in the number of MPPs in the Legislature of Ontario. It would be pretty hard, I think, to increase the size of the constituencies we already represent. We represent now about 100,000 people, and I think it would be very difficult to represent many more people than that. So if you have people who are chosen off lists, even if it was 25% of the House, you would be increasing the number of people in this place by 25 or 30 different MPPs. I think that people should know that when they vote or if they vote in a referendum on that particular issue.

I want to talk a little bit about the bill in terms of the lack of provision of funding for the yes and the no sides. I believe that the yes side will be very, very well represented should a mixed member proportional system or any kind of proportional representation idea float out. That is because it's in the interests of minority parties like the Green Party, the Family Coalition Party, the people who are in the anti-abortion party, the pro-choice party, the Lanark landowners party, all those kinds of people who represent what I would view as a smaller point of view in the province of Ontario. They will all be involved in the debate and say, "Yes, we want this." Their support may be wide, particularly in the case of the Green Party, which would have the most support in the province of Ontario, but it's rather thin across the whole province.

Our Legislatures and Parliaments have worked on the basis of compromise. We don't like all the legislation that is there, and I believe that we should be going even further in terms of our democratic processes to try to have more consensus-type legislation in this place. I believe it's possible, providing this place is restructured to allow the opposition more power in committees and that there is in fact more freedom on the part of back-benchers in the governing party to participate in debate and put forward constructive amendments to existing legislation.

But I do not believe that it's in the interests of the public of Ontario to have the balance of power—because we will be having one major party which will have to rely on a number of minor parties, and they will spring up if we go to the proportional representation system. I

do not believe that the government of Ontario should have to rely on people who are more interested in what I would term an extreme view rather than a holistic view of what government should or should not be in the province of Ontario. So I think that's the road we're going to head down.

With regard to some of those views and what happened in British Columbia, I think it's really instructive for members of the Legislature to read some of the Hansard which was involved and was taken when we were dealing with the select committee on this particular subject, on electoral reform.

I want to first of all talk about proportional representation, because that was a big topic. I believe this Bill 155 is going out to committee, and what we're going to see are groups that feel they're not represented in the Legislature to a large enough extent. That includes the minority kinds of parties that often have a more singular focus than an overall holistic focus of governing. It also includes people like Fair Vote Canada, I think it's called, where a group of women believe there are not enough women in this Legislature and by changing the voting system they will improve that, although we didn't find that on the select committee when we went to Scotland and talked to various people. That's more a function of what the parties would do.

I think one of the most instructive witnesses was Harry Neufeld. Harry Neufeld is the chief electoral officer of British Columbia. Mr. Neufeld came to the committee because we in the committee thought we would have him come and talk about the referendum that they had out there. You may recall that the citizens' assembly in British Columbia recommended a system called STV. It's a transferable vote. A single transferable vote is what STV stands for. It was interesting, Mr. Neufeld taking us through the referendum which occurred in 2005, I believe. What Mr. Neufeld said—and I believe him, because I think it's probably true here in Ontario—was that very few people in British Columbia were interested in this. They didn't care. They had no interest in changing the electoral system. It wasn't on their agenda.

As you know, I have been here a long time—probably too long, some people think—but I have never had anybody walk into my office and say, "We should elect you guys differently. We think the election system is unfair." Nobody has ever come in and said that. That's because I don't think people are engaged in this very much.

Part of his testimony related to the number of calls he was getting as the chief electoral officer for British Columbia on the referendum that was in place at that point in time. He was asked by—because we were all concerned about whether the public were actually engaged in the question of the referendum. Nobody could understand what the STV system was about, because it requires a fair bit of study, but in fact the public was going to vote on this. Mr. Neufeld said about their political education system that it was "highly ineffective."

For instance, “Having a website which has got a semi-academic discussion doesn’t work. Yes, the academics will go and highly motivated citizens will read through it, but it’s opaque to most people. At our 1-800 call centre ... I was answering questions at the same time that they were answering questions”—those people answering questions about the referendum—“and I was getting 5,000 calls a day, while they were getting 50” calls a day.

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People were interested in the election. At that time, you remember, the New Democratic Party was in power. They lost that election in 2005 to the Liberals, and they had the referendum in place.

What happened also in British Columbia was that no politicians took a stance on whether to vote yes or no in the debate because the politicians who were trying to get elected themselves saw no merit in putting themselves in the corner of one camp or the other camp. There were no marks for them, whether the person was going to mark—they got two ballots. When they mark “Norm Sterling,” why should “Norm Sterling” take a position on this ballot if it was going to influence them if they were going to choose “Norm Sterling” on that ballot?

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): The third person.

Mr. Sterling: That’s a third person.

At any rate, the politicians never took a position on it. The other part of it is, as I have had pointed out to me by Scott Reid, who is the deputy House leader for the federal Conservatives and has been involved in the democratic reform area for some time: What politician in this place is going to stand up and say, “No, keep the present system”? How will I stand up and say, “I won eight times under the present system; don’t change it”? Anyone who stands up for re-election in this place—and I imagine in most places the sitting member will be running—no one will be standing up and saying, “Vote no on the referendum.” No politician will put himself on that because it’s like feathering your own bed. The position is probably not tenable. So the choice they made in British Columbia was not to take a position at all.

Mr. Speaker, in British Columbia, as you know, they had a threshold of 60%. It’s interesting to note that what happened was that almost 58% voted for the referendum. But you know that what will happen is that if the electorate—which I predict they will be—are really, really mad at the government, they will pick up the second ballot and they will say, “Okay, I’m going to vote ’em out and I’m going to vote for a new system because these guys are really bad.” That’s what happened in British Columbia. If they want to get out and they want to vote against the government, the chances of the democratic reform referendum going through will be high, because most people were not interested in it, are not interested in it and will mix their two votes together in terms of what they’re doing there that day at the polling booth.

Even though the report said that we should have this coincident with the provincial election, I would rather

have it separate and apart from the election and have it saying that if not more than 40% of the people come out to vote, then the referendum won’t be any good—or 35% of the vote or whatever. Mr. Neufeld suggested that in British Columbia, for instance, if it had been a stand-alone referendum, they wouldn’t have gotten 25% of the vote out, because the people were just not interested.

So this debate about this bill is likely to engender different views, of course, with regard to what should or shouldn’t be done. But my feeling on Bill 155 is that it lacks in a lot of ways. I don’t know whether the threshold, or the people who are actually voting, are going to vote on the issue or are going to vote on the present government as to whether they want them or don’t want them. They will vote for a change, with the view that that will show the government that they’re really against them. Therefore, they’re not really thinking about the complicated issues that ensue as a result of their vote.

With that, I don’t have a lot more to say, other than that it’s unfortunate the government hasn’t tried to co-opt, in a lot of ways, the opposition with regard to all of their comments with regard to democratic reform. I really believe that this place could be much improved to gain the respect and the trust of the people of Ontario. That would require tremendously strong leadership, which I don’t think the present Premier has exhibited. I do believe that John Tory has that strength of leadership and that when Mr. Tory becomes the Premier in 2007 we will see real parliamentary reform, giving more power to committees, changing the roles of some committees. I’d like to see the estimates committee virtually done away with and something replace it where members would actually have a say as to what the benchmarks for Parliament shall be in the future. I’d like to see the Board of Internal Economy not controlled by government ministers as it presently is, and it would have equal representation by all parties, as we know it in the federal House. I’d like to see question period cut down to 45 minutes and the Speaker given much more discretion on allowing questions from the back bench of the government side as to whether or not they are real questions or more properly taken care of in ministerial statements. I think our question period, quite frankly, has deteriorated terribly during this Parliament. I’d like to see a number of committees have equal representation by all parties so that the government would not have a clear majority on committees, so that amendments would have to be considered in a responsible way by both the opposition and the governing party.

I believe that there is lots and lots of opportunity to improve this place. But again, first and foremost, it requires from the Premier of the day the willingness to give up some of the power, open that iron fist and allow the Legislature to come into its own.

So I think this exercise is somewhat academic in that the threshold has been set at 60%. I don’t think that threshold will be reached in the next election, regardless of the recommendations of the citizens’ assembly. Therefore, unfortunately, we’re spending a lot of time on a

matter which is not going to come to fruition and involving a lot of people in a bit of a wild goose chase, I might say. I would prefer much more to get on with real parliamentary reform so that the people will start to regain the trust that they have lost, particularly during this government.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

1630

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): I look forward to speaking at some length in a few minutes about this bill. But I have to say specifically that Bill 155 is really not about democracy—it's actually anti-democratic—and it's not about reform because it's not going to reform anything, and we all know that as we're speaking about it.

It really issues from cynicism and fear. It's a cynicism about the electorate and about the electoral process and also about its own committee and the citizens' assembly. It generates, of course, the kind of cynicism in the electorate that it speaks from. It also speaks from fear. It's a fear of a governing party, the governing party that has benefited from the system more than any other governing party. Here we have, on the federal level, the Liberal Party, where about 30,000 votes creates one Liberal seat, while it takes about 130,000 Progressive Conservative votes to produce one seat. Clearly, here's a party that benefits nationally from the first-past-the-post system that we have right now.

Of course, it benefits provincially as well, where we have 46.6% voting for what is a much greater majority government. Of course, were proportional representation brought in, both the Progressive Conservatives and the New Democrats would benefit, as would the Greens, who have half a million voters and not one seat. So one has to question the democracy of that, even though, obviously, I'm not a member of the Green Party.

I look forward to speaking about this bill at some length, about its inadequacies, about the history that led up to it, and really just the common sense notion that any five-year-old to 55-year-old would know that a majority is 50 plus one. It's not 60%; it's 50 plus one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to speaking more.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I'm really pleased to join this debate in the House on second reading of Bill 155. I can't believe I'm actually listening to what I'm hearing tonight, so I wanted to speak to the bill because I hear a lot of different arguments that don't even relate to what I thought we were discussing here.

I wanted to remind people that 1792 was when we elected our first Parliament. Some people think the way we vote in Ontario has stood the test of time. I guess we're going to find out. I have a lot of faith in a citizens' assembly. We heard earlier today an erroneous number that was brought forward about how many electors were sent letters. My understanding is that 124,000 Ontarians were asked if they would like to participate and, of that number, 12,000 said they wanted to. Twelve thousand people decided to give up all their time and to show that

they believed in democracy and that they were prepared to volunteer their weekends for months and to go across this province and ask people what they feel about this piece of legislation.

I think the referendum question will be clear. I think there is some nervousness about that in this House, but it's clearly going to be concise and impartial. We don't want any confusion. We want people to understand that the threshold is important. This is something that is going to be a foundational change. It's going to be something that deserves to have the support of the majority of Ontarians. There's nothing more important than having a say in your democracy and the people who lead you. It's time for us to have that conversation with Ontarians and ask them their opinion.

This past month, my youngest son got to vote for the first time. He is the last of three boys who got to vote. I can assure you that it was a big day, to go in and fill your ballot in for the first time. I believe that voting is fundamental democracy. It's always been encouraged in my house, and discussing those issues. I hope there isn't a feeling in this House that we're going to discourage that conversation.

I think democracy is one of those things that we—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments.

Mr. O'Toole: I'm pleased to respond to the member from Lanark–Carleton. The only comment that I'd ask him to reply to specifically in his response is the STV. The Harry Neufeld report or comments, with respect to what Mr. Sterling said—I listened to several documentaries on the issue, and no one actually understood the question, including academics. So it was a very ambivalent outcome of a very complex process.

If you look at the Quebec referendum, it was the clarity bill that came after that, because they fudged the question to provoke a certain type of response. So there's a lot of caution required here and certainly a lot of education.

More recently, at a local level, at the municipal level, one of the concerns I heard—I had no role in the municipal election but I have a great deal of interest, because I'm a citizen in the broadest sense. I really encourage people to participate by at least voting. I take time to read the pamphlets and to listen, because it's non-partisan, which is good, and I'd encourage municipalities, except the city of Toronto, of course; David Miller and all—but that being said, the biggest complaint I had was the mail-in ballot, the high rejection rate and the number of missed ballots, those persons who didn't get a ballot, or those who did, and a very complex procedure for persons who have for years voted a certain way. I, for one, don't approve of that. I would like to put on the record that that's a more current and immediate debate that could be dealt with without the politics involved.

What's most disappointing here is that McGuinty and his party could actually do something to enforce democracy. One thing would be just to keep their election promises. That would be simple enough. Respect the role

of individual MPPs. There's more to be done, but this bill won't do any of it.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): I'm pleased to get the chance to respond to the member from Lanark–Carleton. The member spoke a lot about many different issues. He started talking about government conduct in the House, how they can force bills without any discussion. I want to remind the member that they had the chance for eight years to govern Ontario and to have a lot of committees and a lot of discussion in the House. I'm wondering why he didn't come forward and change that atmosphere. Of course, he's a veteran in this place. He has a lot of experience. He was a minister of the crown in many different governments. Why didn't he make the changes back then when he had the power?

Interjection.

Mr. Ramal: I want to just make my comment and focus on his speech. I'm not going to go over the different members who have spoken on this issue.

It's very clear that this bill is not favouring one side against another side. It has opened the debate across the province of Ontario for many people to choose. This will be an asset in the election. Our Premier, our party, promised the people of Ontario to open it up. Hopefully, the people of Ontario will choose the same system we have. If they decide, with a majority, to change it, that's fine. This is a democratic process. As has been mentioned by my colleague, this system has not been touched for a long, long time. It's about time to open it up for discussion, to eliminate all the concerns brought by many different parties, like the Green Party, the NDP, the many people in favour of that system. But I certainly believe that we have a great system, and hopefully the people of Ontario will maintain what we have.

I want to go back to the member from Lanark–Carleton and tell him that this bill is about opening the debate, not about favouring one against the others. That's why I think it's part of the democratic process, and hopefully, all the people of Ontario will participate and show their interest.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Lanark–Carleton, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Sterling: I think the crux of the point—incidentally, we did change the process. We brought forward changes in the standing orders to allow ministers to put bills out after first reading. I'd say it's a technique that I wish more ministers would use on your side to get better debate. Whenever bills have been put out, they have engendered a lot more consensus-building in terms of the process. I brought forward a change in terms of introducing committee bills, where in fact committees can bring legislation forward to this place. Members haven't taken advantage of that, unfortunately. Part of the problem that we faced as a Conservative government was the strident opposition, the Liberals being the principal party that did not want to co-operate and make this place run better. They forced time allocation time after time on simple, straightforward pieces of legislation which in some cases they voted for in the end.

As I said in my speech, reform not only has to come from a willingness on the part of the government; it has to come from a willingness of all members of the Legislature, all parties, to understand that this place isn't working and that we have to do something together to make it work. I believe that I now have a leader, John Tory, who is willing to put that up even further than Mike Harris and Ernie Eves did. I have not seen one amendment to the way our parliamentary system institution here works by this government that is making this place work in any way better than it has before.

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The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. DiNovo: I look forward to starting up where I left off, but I wanted to start with a quote. This is from the committee on electoral reform, and this was their conclusion.

“Arguments for a super-majority (i.e., anything more than 50% plus one) tend largely to be about whether or not changing the electoral system is too important to be undertaken with the barest of margins. The committee heard of no other instance (other than in British Columbia) of an electoral reform referendum with a super-majority (i.e., not in Scotland, Wales, Italy, Ireland etc.), and although most of the advice the committee received was for a simple majority (50% plus one), there were dissenting opinions.” Clearly we're getting one in this bill. “At the same time, the committee was unhappy contemplating a situation such as that in BC where there is a ‘grey zone’ where the result is fairly conclusive,” that is, almost 58% in BC, “but is not binding. Other possible conditions were discussed, such as requiring support in specific regions, or in rural versus urban ridings, or setting a threshold for voter turnout that would have to be crossed in order to validate the result.”

Finally, in dark print, they say, “The committee recommends that the referendum be binding upon a vote of 50% plus one, and the support of 50% plus one in at least two-thirds ... of the ridings, or any other formula that ensures the result has support from northern, rural, and urban areas of the province.”

So I quote from there.

I'd also like to share a quote from Fair Vote. They say, “No government raises the bar for its own legislation, which often has far-reaching effect on the lives of Canadians. No politician has ever refused to accept a seat in Parliament or a provincial Legislature due to failure to win 60% of the votes—many gladly take their seats despite winning less than 50% or even less than 40% of the votes in their ridings. In fact, thanks to the current voting system, most ‘majority’ governments in Canada gain power without winning a majority of votes.”

Of course, we know this is true of the McGuinty Liberals, who won just over 46% of the vote; we know this is true of the Harris Conservatives, who won 45% of the vote. So according to Bill 155, neither of those votes should be considered legitimate.

What I also said in my two-minute hit was that this bill comes out of a sense of cynicism about the electorate,

that the electorate can make the right decision, which is really a cynicism about the democratic process itself; and it comes out of fear of a party that has benefited disproportionately from our current system.

Also, I wanted to mention that nine MPPs unanimously recommended this threshold, and that's the 50% plus one; six of them are Liberals and two are now in cabinet: Wayne Arthurs from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge; Caroline Di Cocco from Sarnia–Lambton; Kuldeep Kular from Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale; Norman Miller, PC, from Parry Sound–Muskoka; Richard Patten, going back to the Liberals, Ottawa Centre; and of course our own Michael Prue from Beaches–East York; but then to Monique Smith, another Liberal here, from Nipissing; Norm Sterling, PC, Lanark–Carleton—we've heard from Mr. Sterling; and Kathleen Wynne, Liberal, Don Valley–West. So we're not alone in the New Democratic Party in being concerned about this threshold.

The other problem with this threshold is that it denies—and we haven't heard this from any of the speakers today—a voice to not only the majority, 50% plus one, in any logical democracy, but it also denies a voice to aboriginals, to women, to people of colour. It's a very interesting circumstance that in places like Wales and Scotland, where they have at least in part a proportional representative system, women's representation in those governments went, in Wales, from 15% to 20% right up to 52% upon bringing that system in, and in Scotland from 10% right up to 48%. I wonder at a government and their fear of proportional representation, which is clearly what the citizens' assembly is moving toward and has been pre-empted by this bill, in a sense.

Another point: We're asking 103 citizens to spend 26 weeks—and you heard Mr. Sterling speak about that. To what end, I would ask? To what end when the foregone conclusion is that the threshold is going to be 60% and that, even if they decide they want to bring in 50% plus one, this is going to be denied to them? It seems to me a great waste of time.

The cynicism also that is so important to address here is that cynicism that I know every single member in this House has met at the door in campaigning and canvassing. It's a cynicism that says, "My vote doesn't make any difference. It doesn't matter who I vote for; that's not going to change the system." We've all heard this. We all combat it in our own ways. Yet here is a classic bill that builds upon that very cynicism—proportional representation—where they would have a say. Again, I speak about the Green Party, a classic example: half a million votes across the country and not one seat. Half a million voters disenfranchised—half a million—not to mention the other more splinter parties and not to mention the two parties that sit here before you: the Progressive Conservatives and the New Democratic Party, who would gain from some version of proportional representation.

I do agree, you know, that there are some advantages to our first-past-the-post system. There is that sense of riding representation, that we're closer to the people, that they know and they vote on a personality basis, in some

cases, for somebody who's going to represent their riding best. But we'll never even see a slight change. We'll never see a little bit of this and a little bit of that, as our friends in Scotland, for example, have in their electoral system, with this Bill 155 and this margin of 60%. We saw what happened with that in the British Columbia experiment. We saw how callously the vast majority of the voters were denied their rightful say and due process, where almost 58% of the voters were turned down.

There's the historical piece of logic that tells us that throughout our history in Canada we've gone on 50% plus one: 50% plus one brought to the people of Newfoundland into Confederation. Had they set it at 60%, we wouldn't have the Canada we know today. It was mentioned that World War I and World War II in conscription—50% plus one spoke to that issue. And 50% plus one spoke municipally to the fluoride issue. In Toronto, we wouldn't have fluoride in our water. The 50% plus one, I pointed out already, is—if you asked the majority of Canadians, which is what we are talking about here, "What does the majority of Canadians want?" most of them would say, "Yes, a majority is 50% plus one."

I pointed out the huge discrepancy, the huge problem, in our current system and the fact that it takes far fewer Liberals to elect a seat in this country than it does to elect, for example, a Conservative seat: 30,000 to 130,000 in a federal election. That's also represented here in this provincial government, where just over 46% voted Liberal, and yet we have far more than that represented in terms of seats; 34.6% voted for the Progressive Conservatives—again, far less seats there; and 14.7% voted for the New Democratic Party, again far less than are represented in the number of seats.

So it's very clear where the fear is. I said this bill comes out of a sense of cynicism and a sense of fear. The fear is that if we let this system go, what might happen to the representation of the Liberal Party in government, both provincially, and then maybe, if it catches on, even federally. Who knows? This is a problem. It's a problem of democracy and it's a problem in terms of what's going to happen once this bill goes through

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There are other problems with this bill, of course, as well. One of them is found in subsection 3(1). Again, this is a problem with this bill's sense of what is democratic and what is not. I quote from the subsection: "The referendum question, in both English and French, shall be established by an order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council."

Surely, this is contrary to what the all-party committee recommended. Mr. Prue spoke to this, and hoped that the members of the Legislature understood how serious this first provision is. It runs contrary to what was said by the all-party committee in recommendation 6, which read, "Responsibility for the referendum question(s)—including the wording and number of questions to be asked, and the number of referendums to be held—rest ultimately with the Legislature, acting on the advice of the citizens'

assembly, the select committee on electoral reform, and if required, Elections Ontario.” That’s from their own committee’s recommendation.

What will this mean? It will mean—I’m quoting from Mr. Prue’s comments now—that “there will be no debate in this House if the bill is passed. There will be no debate. Whatever the question that is put by the government at the time of the referendum, that will be the question. Will it be neutral? How do I know? Will it be fair or just? Will it purport to do one side versus the other?” Who knows. “There will be no debate on this. It will be decided by the minister and her friends in cabinet.” In and of itself, that’s hardly a democratic process.

He goes on to say, “The second issue: All of the lofty goals that were unanimous at the all-party committee have been ignored. Everything is now going to be done by regulation, by the government and by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. There will be no debate”—a serious problem with Bill 155.

Now I want to get into the solutions, because for those who are actually watching at home and interested—this bill speaks to that cynicism too, it really does, because if this bill is passed, nothing will change. If the referendum is held, if it manages to get past all of this, nothing will change. If the citizens’ assembly sits and decides they want 50% plus one, they’re not going to get it. No wonder the viewers of channel 70 at home are tuning in to Dr. Phil or Oprah instead of listening to what is going on in the House. Again, they’re feeling that selfsame cynicism, the cynicism that says, “Nothing will change.”

The New Democratic Party has some proposals for democratic renewal, and I want to spend my remaining minutes talking about what would go into democratic renewal if we were really serious about it, if we really wanted to see it. And remember, another part of this bill that we haven’t spoken about very much deals with donations.

First of all, a ban on corporate and union donations: The public power platform called for a ban on corporate and union donations. In 1999—let’s talk about that for a minute—the last election year for which there is data, corporations gave \$13,060,198 and unions contributed \$1,226,876. Money from corporations made up 40% of all contributions flowing to the three main political parties and candidates in Ontario between 1995 and 2000. This ban would mirror successful reforms in Quebec, Manitoba and federally.

Number two, a recommendation around public campaign—

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The government likes to sit [*inaudible*]. So I don’t believe there is a quorum.

The Deputy Speaker: Is a quorum present?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A little bit of excitement in the House.

I wanted to continue to speak about what would be involved in true democratic renewal, and why our public is cynical and why this bill breeds cynicism and comes from cynicism, as well as fear of losing power, of course, for our friends opposite.

The second point I wanted to make was about public campaign financing. Our current system of political tax credits and party audit subsidies means that the public is already subsidizing political parties to the tune of some \$12-million-odd, and almost 10% of that goes directly to corporations for donation write-offs. Again, this breeds cynicism and the person we meet at the door during campaign time who says, “Why should I vote? What difference does it make?”

The third recommendation: Bring back enumeration. A 2003 study by McGill University’s Jerome Black evaluating Canada’s registration methods concluded that the “permanent list approach” has contributed to diminishing voter turnout and has accentuated existing participation gaps across social groups. Elections Canada’s chief electoral officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, estimated that at least 500,000, and possibly 1.5 million, Canadians had to register at the polls in the 2004 federal election. That would help.

Finally, and I’ve already talked about this, of course, proportional representation: “The Ontario NDP has called for the implementation of proportional representation for some time. The report of the proportional representation committee will be a key part of our convention strategy,” and we’ll be bringing that forward.

I said a few of the reasons why proportional representation is so important because, contrary to what this bill does with its high threshold, proportional representation actually represents, proportionately, those who are out in our voting public and what their desires are. So we wouldn’t have the situation with proportional representation that we have now where half a million voters across Canada who want to vote for the Green Party have no say whatsoever, where other parties have no say whatsoever and where only the Liberal Party seems consistently, over and over again, to benefit from the first-past-the-post system.

We heard from some of our members, and I just wanted to comment a little bit about what we’ve heard today so far as well. Mr. Delaney used this quote: “This system is the best in the world.” He also said, “This system has breathtaking benefits,” and then goes on. And I’ve heard again from members opposite that there are no foregone conclusions. Well, these would seem foregone conclusions. If we have the best system in the world already, if we’re participating in breathtaking benefits from the first-past-the-post system, then why go through this exercise? Why have debate here? Why bring in this bill at all? Why have a citizens’ assembly? Why have this committee that the government struck? What was the

point? Is this just to waste taxpayers' dollars? Is this just to chew up airtime? If we have the best possible system, why in the world are we going through this exercise in the first place?

We should certainly tell our citizens' assembly—lord knows, we don't want them to come up with their own ideas. We should tell them, "Save your weekends; save those 26 weekends that you'd otherwise spend"—all 103 of them taking their time to come, for what reason?—when we already have the best system in the world, when this system gives us "breathtaking benefits." My goodness—

Mr. Murdoch: Where is he?

Ms. DiNovo: Mr. Delaney, who unfortunately isn't here to hear this—

The Deputy Speaker: I remind the member that we do not speak about the absence of other colleagues. Thank you.

Ms. DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I won't. I will go on to speak about the fact that by the Liberals' own threshold, which is 60%—we now hear that 60% constitutes a majority according to this bill, not 50% plus one. As I said at the outset, if you asked any five-year-old, any 10-year-old, any 55-year-old on the street, "What is a majority?" they would say 50% plus one, but no, we have a new definition here. The majority is 60%. Perhaps one should point to the fact that the majority of political parties in this country, by well over that 60% margin, are due to benefit from a system that's more proportional. So if they buy their own rhetoric and their own logic that 60% is this important threshold, then we have two out of three parties right here—two thirds, 66.6% of the political parties in this very House—that would like to see Bill 155 not only go to committee but, quite frankly, go under major revisions at that selfsame committee.

1700

I will just conclude with that, and say that even by their own threshold—which, again, they plucked out of the ether—this bill doesn't hold, this bill is not democratic, and it will not lead to reform. It definitely should go to committee, and let's hope that at committee it gets torn apart to the point that our poor citizens in that citizens' assembly actually have their democratic say.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Hon. Mr. Watson: I don't know how New Democrats sleep at night, because they're so negative all of the time—all negativity all of the time. What you just heard was such nonsense coming from a new member of this assembly. It was complete hyperbole. And talk about cynicism. We had 12,000 people—

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Watson: Mr. Speaker, I didn't heckle the member when she was speaking, and I ask for the same courtesy.

We had 12,000 people apply to sit on the citizens' assembly, and through that last 15 minutes of drabble the honourable member just dismissed those 12,000 people who wanted to make a better province. I want to thank

the members from my riding: Carl Berger, who is the representative from Ottawa West–Nepean, and our student representative, Shannan Harrington, a student from St Pius X High School, who I had the chance of meeting last week thanks to a reception Dr. Bountrogianni put on for all of the student reps. These two individuals don't share that sense of negativity that the New Democrats have. They're looking forward to contributing to the citizens' assembly because they believe this is a golden opportunity for us to listen to individuals in our community about how we can better improve the democratic system in our province.

I would encourage members in my community in Ottawa on January 11 to attend the University of Ottawa, room 140 of the New Residence, de 7 h à 10 h pour les francophones—c'est le 11 janvier à l'Université d'Ottawa—and on January 16, from 7 to 10 p.m. The place is still to be determined. It will be advertised, and it will be a bilingual session. I encourage people to come out and be positive about this process, because it's about our future and our province.

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): I appreciate the opportunity to comment briefly with respect to Bill 155, the purpose of which is to provide for the mechanisms of a referendum on electoral reform in the event that the citizens' assembly recommends a change in how our MPPs are elected.

Specifically with respect to the comments made by the member from Parkdale–High Park, I agree with her completely that it is really important that we address the cynicism of voters, the people we meet at the door who say to us, "Why should we even vote? Why should we bother? What kind of difference is it going to make? Do I really have a say in this whole process?" It's really critical in terms of restoring confidence in politics and politicians that we do something concrete in order to change that, and although this bill may go some way in terms of dealing with that, my submission would be that with respect to the issue of electoral reform, it's not going to be satisfactory and it's not going to do anything significant unless it's also accompanied by parliamentary reform. In my view, that's going to do a lot more to deal with the level of cynicism that we see in voters and make them feel that they can trust in the system again and that there is a reason for them to become involved.

Some of the things that we could take a look at doing, and these were mentioned by my colleague the member from Lanark–Carleton: improving the decorum in the House, particularly during question period, I would say; keeping campaign promises—doing what you say you're going to do and not turning your back on your promises after you're elected would go a long way in terms of dealing with the situation; respecting the role of individual MPPs as well in allowing MPPs to vote on important issues as they see fit, based on what their constituents are telling them, not what they're being told by someone else; and finally, improving the flow of information to the public so that they receive all of the information they need in order to make informed decisions.

That, I would submit, is the way we need to go, not just with this one piece on electoral reform. We need to consider the whole picture.

Mr. Marchese: Speaker, I have to tell you, I agree 100% with my colleague from Parkdale–High Park—101%. I was struck by how negatively received she was by the Minister of Health Promotion and other Liberals as I looked around. I just don't quite understand it. It's not as if the member from Parkdale–High Park said, "Look, we object to the fact that you put together 103 individuals across the province chosen at random." She didn't object to the fact that you chose them equally between men and women; not a problemo. She also says you're okay with using 26 weeks in terms of having the citizens' committee go out and debate. She didn't fight that.

Hon. Mr. Watson: Attacking the people.

Mr. Marchese: What she fought is the following—and let me tell you clearly, Minister of Health Promotion. What she said is that when she hears a number of Liberal members—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Marchese: Speaker, you've got to shut them down a little bit.

When she hears a number of Liberal members saying, "This is the best system in the world," she then begins to wonder, are they really for reform? How can this be the best system in the world with you at the same time saying, "But it could be improved"? When Liberal members speak, they don't say, "The system needs improvement or reform"; they say, "This is the best system in the world." So she, quite appropriately, says, "I don't know."

Then she says, "Why would you establish the following rule that says you need at least 60% of all the valid referendum ballots cast in order to have a binding referendum, and that you need more than 50% of the valid referendum ballots cast in 60% of the ridings?" If you really want change and reform, why don't you just simply adopt the 50%-plus-one model? Why would you undermine your intended purpose, which is to say, "We want the citizens over here that we selected to come up with a different model, whatever that may be"? Why not make it simpler, instead of creating a threshold that is difficult to achieve? That's what the member was saying. It's very clear to me.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): When we talk about voter cynicism, let's talk about member cynicism. I really have to say that I'm absolutely taken aback by the member from Parkdale–High Park. I had the opportunity last weekend to talk to one of the young minds that is coming forward as part of the students looking at the democratic system. What I heard was enthusiasm. What I heard was a willingness to come in and learn—really appreciative of the opportunity to come forward and talk about what she wants to see in an electoral system. When I hear members like that talk about the cynicism, is it any wonder that the voters feel that way? When one has the

opportunity and the honour and the privilege to sit in this House today and talk about what the people want for the province of Ontario, one should always be receptive to change. I find it—

Laughter.

Mrs. Mitchell: You may find it funny from across the House, but it isn't funny. We have a system where fewer and fewer voters are coming out in every election. We are looking at what the people of Ontario want—a citizens' jury, a students' jury—and what we get is laughter from the third party when we talk about electoral reform. They stand up and say, "Well, if it was our way, we'd be in favour of it, but if it's not our way, then we don't want any part of it." I say to you across the House, specifically the third party and specifically the member from Parkdale–High Park, I would encourage you to take the time and talk to the people and listen to what they want. Don't be so cynical.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Parkdale–High Park, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. DiNovo: It's exactly because we absolutely support democracy and absolutely support the citizens' assembly that we would like to hear them come to their own conclusions and not be fed the conclusion of the 60% threshold. Methinks thou doth protest too much. I mean, listen to this reaction. Why the reaction? So negative and so cynical about this poor citizens' assembly that hasn't even met yet. They've already decided for them. This citizens' assembly, after this bill, if this bill is passed, won't be able to decide 50% plus one. They can't decide that; this government has taken that decision away from them. And do you know what and why?

Interjections.

Ms. DiNovo: I appeal to the Liberals at home, the women at home, people of colour at home, the aboriginal members who are watching this at home, to listen to how a woman is shouted down again in the House. Again, a woman is shouted down in the House. It's becoming commonplace around here. Why is that? One reason is because we don't have 50%-plus-one proportional representation. If we did, we might have more women in the House—52% in Wales, 48% in Scotland—we might have more people of colour represented here instead of the same old, same old response on the other side.

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You know what? What we're looking for is, first of all, a chance to speak without being interrupted. Second of all, we're actually looking for democracy from a party that gains from a system that is clearly showing its age. This is a demonstration of exactly that.

I hope the citizens' assembly is listening. I hope they're listening to this diatribe.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr. Ramal: I guess many people on different sides of the House are getting excited about this bill, about the importance of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the chance to speak in support of Bill 155, the referendum act. It seems the debate is shifting a little bit. We are not debating in

this House today which side we have to take; we're debating about reform, about this act that will allow the people of Ontario to engage in the debate, to choose which system we want in the future. That's why we randomly selected a citizens' assembly from many different people in Ontario, in order to choose a system and to administer this act.

In 2007, during election time, the people of Ontario are going to choose which system they want. If the NDP or the Conservatives or the Liberal Party want to choose a certain system that can influence the people of Ontario, that's fine. That's part of the democratic process. That's why we're opening the system up.

I was listening to the member from Parkdale–High Park. She's pretending or assuming that all the people in this House are against a certain system. No, as a matter of fact, not. We're debating a different issue. We're debating the process that we can allow the people of Ontario to use in the election of 2007.

Many people in Ontario, many people of this province, are concerned about certain issues. We know that over the years, the people who cast a ballot, who participate in the election system, are getting fewer, year after year. That's why the idea came to engage the people of Ontario to participate in elections, to give the people of Ontario the chance to choose the system they want, in order to encourage them to vote and select the party and the government they want.

I listened to the member from Lanark–Carleton talk about democracy and the democratic process in this House. As you know, the member has been in this House for more than 25 years, more than anybody else. He's a veteran. He had the chance to be a minister many different times and he didn't change the system. He talked about the democratic process in the committee. We saw in the past how many bills came to this House that didn't go to committee, that were passed by time allocation, and finish the story. There was no debate. Talking about question period time, he's critical of question period time. I wonder why, in the past, he didn't change the system.

That's why we're open to debate, whether it's proportional representation or maintaining the current system. Whatever the people of Ontario choose in 2007 we're going to honour and respect.

When my colleague the member from Mississauga West is talking, of course he represents his own view. He doesn't represent the whole caucus of the Liberal Party. He, as a person, as a member of the caucus, as a member of this Legislature, is allowed also to present his view, and many others don't agree with him. So that's why we opened the debate not just among the NDP or the Conservatives or the Liberal Party, but among all the people of Ontario.

Last week I was listening to the member for Halton when he was talking about how people from outside this place cannot decide or determine the way that elections are going to be designed in the future. But a committee from both sides of the House—Conservative, NDP and

Liberal—travelled the world and examined many different systems. They came back and proposed to the government how they're supposed to establish a citizens' assembly. They advertised it and chose a big number from across the province of Ontario. Those members, I guess, came in goodwill to participate in the system, and they've worked very hard to establish and design a process.

I want to tell the member from the NDP and the member from the Conservatives that we're not choosing one system; we are debating the mechanism, the mentality which is going to govern our next election. So it's very important to allow all the people of Ontario to participate in a very important and very crucial issue to all. We all have to encourage and increase participation in elections.

I think it's a very good democratic exercise, and I don't want to mislead the public when we talk about this issue. We're not taking one side. As the government of Ontario, we're not telling people to vote in a certain way or bringing this bill forward just for show. No, it's not for show. We're not fooling anyone, because we promised before we got elected in 2003 to bring this issue forward, to open it for debate. That's what we're doing now in 2006. We're opening it for debate to engage people. That's a part of the process, that's a part of the democracy in which we believe on this side of the House.

I hope that many people in 2007 participate in the debate and come and choose the system they want. And if the NDP are right, if they think it is crucial to them to choose proportional representation and the people of Ontario support them, I'm willing to accept and respect that because of the democratic process, because it went through the democratic way. I'm willing, as a person in this House, to respect it and honour it and go through with it.

We're privileged in this province; we're privileged in this nation. We're debating about the way we vote, how we elect our people. Many different parts of the globe don't have that chance. They don't have a chance to have elections. We hear in many different countries that they have a dictatorship, that they have a government imposed on them by force or by the power of certain religions or ethnic groups or the power of a certain colour. But in this province of Ontario we are privileged and honoured to have a democratic process. We're debating a way to encourage people to have more participation in elections. We have to be happy about this; we have to feel privileged and talk about this opportunity which is being given to the province of Ontario.

After listening to many different speakers in this House, I think we are in a healthy debate in which every party, every group and every member has a different view and is trying to influence their constituents or their people, which is part of the democratic process too.

Hopefully all of the members elected to this House will continue to hold seminars and hold sessions in many different places in the community, in universities and colleges, to talk to the youth. The youth, as statistics and

studies show, participate in elections the least because they think that it doesn't matter what happens, that their voice is not going to get to the government. That's why not many youth are involved in the elections. So a part of the citizens' assembly is to engage students, engage youth. This is a very important step that tells them, "Whatever you choose today, whatever you select today is going to govern your life, is going to direct your life in the future. So you, as a youth, have the future. It's your time. It's your choice. If you participate, you can select the government, you can select the party, you can select the ideology which suits your future and which will paint your future."

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It's important, as I mentioned many different times, for all the members to participate, not just let it go, talking in debate: I'm with you, I'm against you. We have to eliminate the cynicism because people outside want to listen to us, listen to the parliamentary channel, and see some other members. They have doubt about what we're doing. They ask why we are debating this issue, why we are wasting our time. As a matter of fact, it's not wasting time. Nobody forced our government to bring it forward. As we heard the Conservatives, they're happy with the current system, the NDP is not happy with the current system, and the Liberal Party, some are for, some are against. I guess it's a healthy situation.

It's important for all of us to engage in that debate. I want to tell the member for Parkdale-High Park, when she was talking about this issue, we're not afraid of anyone, we're not afraid of anything. That's why we're bringing it forward. We're engaging the NDP, the Conservatives. We're sitting at the same table, asking people to come forward and participate with us—give us the ideas, give us the best possible system we can govern ourselves by in the future. We're always looking for modernization in this place. Modern life has to be progress, has to be change to adapt to and include all the changes going on around us.

I think this is a very important bill. I want to commend the minister and the government for promising and delivering on the promises. Hopefully all the members understand this position and vote with it and have good faith in the minister, in the government, in the future and changing the system which governs us, which allows us to go to election year after year. Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Elliott: I'd like to say at the outset that there are several things the member for London-Fanshawe said—I was listening very intently to his comments—that I specifically agree with, and one is that we're very fortunate to be living in a democracy when so many people in the world live under dictatorships and don't have the ability to have free elections such as we have here, such as the municipal election that we just had, where we, in my riding of Whitby-Ajax, elected a new mayor, Ms. Pat Perkins, and we're pleased to be able to work with her as time goes on.

But the other thing I would like to comment on is the fact of having students involved in the citizens' assembly as student members. I too think that's very important. I always look forward to receiving invitations from local schools, to go and visit grade 5 students and grade 10 students who are studying civics, because I think it's really important for them to have an opportunity to discuss issues involving democracy and our electoral system, our parliamentary system, so that as they get older and they reach the age when they are able to vote, they're knowledgeable about it, they feel they're part of the system and that there is something to be gained by their engaging not just in voting but also becoming involved in the political process either by working on a campaign or commenting on it, writing about it, something of that nature.

However, what I am concerned about is whether this particular bill is going to advance the cause of electoral reform and engage citizens in becoming more involved in the political process and getting them to be more confident about the process and making sure that it does represent them.

There are several things here. The threshold is extremely high. It's going to be hard for them, even if there is a willingness to make those changes, to reach that target level. Also, there is some concern that if people do vote in favour of a referendum, is it going to be because they truly want electoral reform or because they want a change in government.

So there are some concerns there with respect to the bill that I think need to be dealt with, but of course we all share the same goal in making sure that we hear from the citizens of Ontario and what they truly want in representation from their elected members.

Mr. Marchese: I've got to tell you, I'm worried about the intellectual integrity of the Liberal government, I really am. I'm not just worried about the member for London-Fanshawe; the entire caucus that's here worries me. They present a very paradoxical problem which they cannot see, from what I am able to gather from the argument they present.

Here is the problemo, as I see it: The member for London-Fanshawe says we're debating reform. Yes, he's right. We are going to give the citizens' assembly a chance to choose the system they want. He's quite right, that's what we're all here for. He says the committee the government established a while ago, in 2005, worked hard to establish a process. That's, indeed, true. The paradoxical problem I have got with the way the member is presenting this argument is the following. The select committee on electoral reform submitted in November 2005 a report that recommended that the government set the threshold for a referendum at 50% plus one in 50% of the ridings. That's what that hard-working committee recommended by way of a process. You, your government, your Premier, changed that process.

We are for reform and we're not instructing them what to decide, because they will do that on their own. We have no problem with that. You have changed the rules

and you have made the threshold a little bit complicated by requiring that the referendum is binding if the recommended electoral system is selected in (a) at least 60% of all the valid referendum ballots cast, and (b) more than 50% of the valid referendum ballots cast in 60% of the ridings.

Do you understand, member from London–Fanshawe, that your government has changed the rules to make reform a little more difficult? Do you understand that? That's why I worry about the intellectual integrity of the Liberal government.

Mrs. Jeffrey: I just want to thank the member from London–Fanshawe for his balanced approach to this bill. We've heard some really wild arguments tonight about voices being denied and fear of proportional representation and cynicism and a waste of time. I read the select committee's dissenting opinion. What I read, when I read the report, was that there was questioning of a lack of objectivity of citizens and people who didn't like the order that things were going to be addressed in.

It sounds like there's very little trust in Ontarians to engage in this deliberate exercise in, ultimately, the decision of electoral reform. Our party has enormous faith and respect for those members of the citizens' assembly who have dedicated their weekends and their time. If they recommend an alternative and this matter goes to a referendum, we trust and we respect the decision that Ontarians will make about the future of our electoral reform.

The citizens' assembly has made important strides in empowering and engaging Ontarians in our democracy, and especially students. We heard that earlier tonight. They have a meaningful voice in shaping our democracy. I trust the people of Ontario to approach this historic task thoughtfully and deliberately. I know that they're going to have a strong, vital choice in this democracy in the future.

Democracy is the thing we're asked to cherish and pay for and sometimes even to die to defend. Perhaps ordinary citizens should occasionally be allowed the opportunity to think about it and to deliberate on it. This is a very important issue. It's historic. And I trust that the citizens of Ontario are wise enough to see their way through all the drivel that they've heard tonight, the fear-mongering and the scaremongering that they're heard. They're going to have an opportunity to make a good decision. They'll be educated and they'll have time. We've given a year for this debate to occur. We haven't done it in a rush. We trust that citizens across Ontario will make the best decision possible.

Mr. O'Toole: I'm anxious to respond to the member from London–Fanshawe because I think he did raise a couple of issues. First of all, probably the most important thing is—

Mr. Marchese: The problemo.

Mr. O'Toole: Well, problemo—the integrity of his response. Quite honestly, if you look at the substantive public issue on this matter, it's the threshold issue. That's the standard they set. That's the standard that they should

be publicly defending, and it's indefensible. The member for Parkdale–High Park I thought made a very impassioned plea for doing the right thing. If you're going to do it, like you said—this is what is suspicious here. It's another Liberal promise. They promised during the election and now they've brought something in that's not doable.

I'm privileged because in the next few minutes I may get a chance to speak, and I've been waiting. I'm on the list to speak on this bill.

Mr. Marchese: You're next, aren't you?

Mr. O'Toole: I'm hoping I will be.

It's in that vein, that the member from London–Fanshawe didn't even use his 20 minutes, like the minister when she spoke. She didn't use even half of her time, and her parliamentary assistant didn't. So this raises great concern about their passion for the project ahead of us on Bill 155. They could start—fundamentally and quite simply, to improve democracy is to put out a platform and the promises and the commitments that you intend to keep. It's that simple. The cynicism in the public today is based on the type of governance we've seen federally from the Liberal Party. Now we're seeing it provincially in the Liberal Party. You can't actually believe a thing they say. Is that a parliamentary comment? I don't know. But it's in that term.

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I listened to the member from Whitby–Ajax, who is new here, who practised law and deliberates on these things. She is a great spokesperson on Bill 107, human rights issues, she brings voice and experience to these things, and that's what's important—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The member for London–Fanshawe, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ramal: I want to thank the member from Whitby–Ajax and the members from Trinity–Spadina, Brampton Centre and Durham for speaking and commenting on the bill.

I want to start with the member from Whitby–Ajax. She was talking about how people will get upset with the government and will vote against or with the bill, that it depends on how they love or they hate the government. That's not going to be the issue. Also, I agree with the member from Durham. Yes, it's not fair. We are 71 members here and you are 24. You get equal time for debate. It's not good; it's not fair. That's why I spoke 10 minutes and I didn't speak for 20 minutes. So it's very important. And I hope the member from the NDP caucus agrees with me. He's a great advocate of proportional representation. We didn't get proportional representation in terms of timing. I'd like to speak on this issue. It's a very important issue for all of us.

But at least on this side of the House we didn't have a decision before we went to the ballot on whether we supported this side or were against this side. We opened it up for debate. We opened it up for the people of Ontario, and the people of Ontario will decide and will determine in October 2007 whether they like the proportional representation or they don't, whether they like this

current system or they don't. That's why we opened it up. We're not afraid. If the majority of the people, as has been mentioned, wants a change, let's go for change. That's why we believe in democracy, the only government for so many different years to practise democracy in the House. We allow all the bills to go through debate and go to committee and listen to stakeholders before we pass any bills.

I'm proud to be a part of the government. I'm proud to have a leader like Dalton McGuinty, who believes in engaging all the caucus members on every issue and engaging the people of Ontario in any details and on such an important issue as is today before us, democratic reform, engaging the people of Ontario on electoral reform. It's very important. This issue is crucial to all of us, because if this bill goes forward, it's going to decide the fate in a democratic way for the government of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Further debate.

Mr. O'Toole: It's a privilege to have the opportunity to speak, to be a parliamentarian. The French translation is "to speak." That's the intention this afternoon.

I'd like to go to the basics and the fundamentals of this particular bill. There has been much deliberation. The member from Lanark-Carleton is our esteemed senator here and has participated in this debate for over 20 years. Many of his comments are worth reading. I'd encourage people to listen up, because he does pay attention to this issue, the nuances of governance.

But how you would start this debate, and it's something that has been said in politics, is that all politics is local. I believe it was the House leader in the federal House in the States, Tip O'Neill, who said, "All politics is local." I believe that's true, and so if you really want to start the debate here, you'd have to look at—we just came through a municipal election, and in my area, the people spoke. In fact, they spoke loudly and long. The percentage of participation was, I think, a remarkably high number: 40%, or around that participation.

I see the Chair has changed. Nice to see Mr. Hoy in the chair; he does a great job.

I would say that if you look at it from the point of view of most members here, in one way or another they began their public life, if you will, locally. The member from Whitby-Ajax: There's no better person than she, serving her community in a number of capacities on the children's treatment centre and other public engagements. She saw the necessity and the personal responsibility not just for her family but for her community, for her province, for her country. I think all members who are here do have a passion to serve the public.

What becomes the problem is that politicians are given to saying things they don't mean, or saying yes at the door to something that's asked of them: "Yes, I'll do that." That's where the integrity starts to erode, the confidence in the political process, the public service process.

That being said, each of us here should pay close attention to this debate. The broader discussion is on

democratic renewal, and while I could speak at length on Bill 155, I'm going to start, sort of off topic a bit, where all politics—I served, first of all, on a parent council and in other areas of the community as well, because we had five children and they were all involved in school and sports, so you participated in those things. People ask you to be chair of a committee or to be the secretary, and all these things are as a volunteer. I've been on the library board. In fact, I was on a regional library board. These are unpaid positions, but they're areas where I'm making a contribution as a citizen—no particular expertise essentially, but you do learn a lot from the process. Over time, I was a school trustee and served as a director on a provincial body.

I'm not going through it in a personal sense to ingratiate any experience I've had since 1982, but to say that this principle of "All politics is local,"—we bring that experience with us. Quite frankly, where I see it in most trouble is at the municipal level. At the municipal level, by and large, there's a very poor voter turnout. I think it's difficult for members who are seeking election or re-election to office to get their message out, because people's wishes, desires and hopes change as society itself changes, but the process you end up with is that you get the government you deserve. "Deserve" means that if nobody votes, you get perhaps some elected members who aren't properly endorsed.

For the record—and I want to put this on the record because I have some time to do it—first of all, I respect all persons in the past municipal election of November 13, of all ideological persuasions. I congratulate them for putting their name forward. Some of them obviously weren't successful. Some were incumbents who were elected by acclamation; that is, no one challenged them. Some were challenged and re-elected. Some were challenged and defeated, and there were new persons elected. So there's a renewal process going on.

Those subtleties, over time, change slightly the direction of a municipal government, a regional government. Indeed, provincial governments have been challenged over the last decade and a half, since I've been paying close attention, by having three different parties—well, three and a half different parties technically, because you had the coalition of the NDP and the Liberal government. Then you had the Liberal government. Mr. Hoy, you were a member of that government as well. Then you had the NDP government, and they got caught with a serious recession and couldn't complete some of their stakeholders' wishes and hopes. Then you got the Harris government and the Eves government, and now you have another Liberal government.

I would say locally—and this is what I want to get to when I have the time, in the very limited time I'm given to speak on this. I've had the privilege, as I said, Mr. Speaker—they've changed. Mr. Hoy is no longer in the chair; Mr. Crozier is now in the chair. It's a pleasure to see you back, sir.

On the record, I want to first of all recognize three mayors in the Durham region who were defeated. I want

to thank them for their service. I would start with Marcel Brunelle, who was the mayor of Whitby. I had served with Marcel. He was defeated, surprisingly, perhaps being less attentive to the general constituents' wishes, perhaps thinking his plan was perfect. I don't know what the cause was. I liked Marcel. I worked with Marcel, both in and out of government. He was replaced by, as the member from Whitby—Ajax said, Pat Perkins, who has served as a regional councillor. I served with her, actually, for some time, and I'm sure she'll bring a fresh new approach, a citizen's perspective.

It's a humbling process to represent the public, especially when you're just starting, because on the one side you have the public service, who really know what the challenges are and will offer suggestions, but at the end of the day, the publicly elected people make those decisions. The civil service, by and large, whether it's municipal or, as I've found here, provincial, deliberately does its very best to try to make those processes, choices and options work. Because really, if any ideology had it right, we'd be in paradise already, after a couple of thousand years. There is no right, perfect answer. If the economy goes soft, the Dalton McGuinty government will be in serious—and I repeat, serious—trouble, because right now almost all hospitals are in deficit, either real-time or stall-time. Their line of credit in many cases has been maxed out.

We see their issues challenging them on a number of fronts and we see the economy in the US going south, softening in the housing market and some of the fundamental sectors attached to that sector. Most economists see—in fact, David Dodge, the head of the Bank of Canada, said recently that there's going to be some softening in the economy.

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So ultimately, this debate about democratic renewal is about the integrity of keeping your promise. Don't promise something you can't deliver. I'm not trying to turn it into the "Dalton McGuinty's 200 broken promises debate." I'm trying to say that that's the difficulty. To the people listening tonight, you should recognize that when someone's wish list is longer than yours, you should perhaps question them intensely on the integrity of their promises.

Gerri Lynn O'Connor, who was the mayor of Uxbridge for many, many years and served, I think, almost 30 years in municipal government, chose not to run. She was actually replaced by Bob Shepherd, who's the new incoming mayor-elect in Uxbridge, and I look forward to working with all of the council there as well.

Another mayor who was not re-elected was John Mutton, who was the mayor of Clarington. John did serve for two terms and I think brought the municipality forward very thoughtfully and aggressively, and was certainly doing a very, very strong job in the community. Again, it's always our duty to be as objective and neutral in these issues as possible. He was replaced in the last election. John Mutton had been chair of the finance committee at the region of Durham, so he had a very

good grasp of such issues as ambulance, public health, public housing, long-term care and Durham transit. He had a lot of understanding of those issues.

I'm going to read from my list here thanking Gerri Lynn O'Connor, who has been replaced by Bob Shepherd.

The regional councillor of the area is a person who I think brings a lot to the table: Howie Herrema. His father was the chair of Durham region. He is a young fellow with a young family, and from a very strong family with lots of roots in the community.

Ward 1 is Bev Northeast. Ward 2 is Ted Eng, another strong voice of the agricultural community, former head of the Durham Region Federation of Agriculture. Ward 3 is Pat Mikuse. I'm not as familiar with her, but she was strongly re-elected. Ward 4 is Jack Ballinger, who is new. Ward 5 is Gordon Highet.

In the board of education in Durham—again, I'm only going to be speaking to the public and separate boards; there's the whole French-language panel, which is public and separate, as well. The incumbents were acclaimed, I believe, or there was no challenge. On the public board of education is Joe Allin. Kathy LeFort is on the separate board; that's the Durham Region Roman Catholic Separate School Board. Joe Allin is with the Durham region public board.

I should mention at this time that in my particular riding we also have some meaningful contact and partnership working with the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. There we have a brand new trustee, Steve Cooke. We also have Cathy Abraham who is re-elected there, and they'll serve very well.

I just want to go on and make sure I stay with the councillors. Mayor Marilyn Pearce was re-elected in Scugog township: a strong, well-respected woman in public office who I think has given and will continue to give strongly to her community. Jim McMillen is a regional councillor; he was acclaimed. Cec Lamrock was elected, and he was elected over Larry Corrigan. I thank Larry for his service. He has done a great job, brought a fresh voice to his one term.

Bobbie Drew was, I believe, acclaimed. Lynn Philip Hodgson was acclaimed. Blair Martyn was challenged. Blair has some health concerns, but his passion is without question, without fault. Georgia Brock was re-elected or acclaimed as well. Also, in Clarington, I want to extend my congratulations to Mayor-Elect Jim Abernethy.

Quite an interesting number of changes. Again, the politics of this debate here are about starting that relationship with the elected person and the people. How do we change this format? That is really the question.

Mary Novak is a regional councillor. She had that position before and was defeated, and now she's back. Charlie Trim was re-elected as regional councillor, Gord Robinson as local councillor, Adrian Foster as local councillor. Ron Hooper is brand new. They have a well-known family business in town, and I'm sure he'll bring a great deal—he has served in almost every volunteer position in the community. The board of trade—he was business person of the year, and has given freely of his

time. Willy Woo is new as well, and he will be a local councillor, and, as I said, Cathy Abraham. In the separate school board are Maureen Day and Granville Anderson. Steve Martin is the public school trustee with the Durham public board of education.

What I'm trying to establish here, Mr. Speaker—thank you for the indulgence for putting that on the record—is that they were elected by the traditional rules of 50% plus one, and that's how it has been, for better or worse, for richer or poorer and all of these things—in some cases they'll be poorer.

I just have a couple of things that I wanted to make sure that I didn't forget. Another person who served the community well—he ran for mayor this last time in Clarington—is Jim Schell. He brought a lot to the table, is very widely respected, and I think he's an ordained Anglican minister. He was not re-elected, and I wish him and his wife, Pat, well.

Another person who chose not to run this time was Pat Pingle, who is a professional nurse and brought a lot of concerns for those issues around the table. She chose not to run again and to have a life. But for some time she served the public in many ways. As I said, the other person who ran for election and had been a regional councillor and didn't get elected as mayor was Susan Self. I served with Susan at the region of Durham in the time I was there. Susan, I commend you. She should continue to be engaged in the community, because she has a lot to offer. She will be missed there, but I know Bob Shepherd, the new mayor, will certainly work with his council, as all of us try to work here collectively.

What I'm most concerned about, to bring us back to Bill 155: Here's a bill—and we heard it from the member from London–Fanshawe. He said that this is an election promise. Yes, you could say that with this bill, they've kept their promise. But what they've done is they've built in a default system here; they've set the threshold so high it'll never complete. So how obsequious can you actually be with the public?

Mr. Marchese: Obsequious?

Mr. O'Toole: Well, actually, you've got to interject the odd inflammatory word.

That discourages me when—the whole debate here, that's their standard. Their standard is 60%. It's no longer “good enough is good enough.” It's 60%. In other words, it's designed to fail. So they can say on the one hand that they kept their promise that they'd look at democratic renewal; on the other hand, they designed a system that's designed to fail. How disheartening. How disingenuous. It really makes me stop and ask the viewers tonight and those who will read Hansard in the future to realize that governments have magical ways of avoiding doing what they said they'd do.

As I said, all politics are local, so you've got to look at—each member here tonight who has spoken or not spoken, including the minister, the parliamentary assistant, the member for London–Fanshawe and everyone who spoke hasn't even used their time, and I hardly have enough time to speak on this. I've hardly even gotten to the main point.

1750

I think the most content that I've heard is from Norm Sterling. I'll be quite frank. I know I'm using a name, but his name is well known. He brought up one substantive debate. There are two points that I want to make in the remaining brief time that I have. One point is that they had the STV, the strategic transferred vote, in BC. They failed to get the 60% threshold there. Quite frankly, Newsworld and other commenting media outlets tried to review, but no one understood the question. Now, I'm going to put to you that cabinet and, in regulation, the government will set the question. That becomes what I'd call the acid test for this whole process. The question itself, what is the question? Shall we have proportional representation? Should we have some other new form of electing or having representation from all faces and all peoples and all types of values? That's a valid question. It's a very valid question. You'd want to make sure that you allow that liberty within the democratic renewal debate and those volunteers from every riding in the province, all 103, to spend their weekends reviewing and contemplating some very, very important questions on our future.

So the STV, the strategic transferred vote process: I challenge people in their rebuttal to tell me what it means. You could have a priority ballot, a preferential ballot, which would say, “I put O'Toole first, Christine Elliott second and Bruce Crozier third” in the event that there's—your vote, my vote, their vote. If I had more numbers than someone else, then it would be a preferential ballot where you could vote for more than one person. There are all kinds of different approaches to this.

The other question, the second point in the very brief time I've got left, was the unity question in Quebec. We all know that they had to have a federal bill after that referendum. It was called the clarity bill, and that clarity bill was really about the question. So this debate is substantively about some of the purpose intentions and the draft outline in the regulations of the 60% plus the 50% of all valid ballots in the referendum in 64% of electoral districts. Another condition to qualify is: What's the question? If the question is going to be, “Should we have proportional representation or some other method?”—and even if I look at the governance model of proportional representation, what's the power of the leader of the party? There's a lot that could be said, and I'm sad to say that in the Liberals' case, neither the minister, the parliamentary assistant nor the speakers have used their time.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr. Marchese: The member from Durham makes a point about the British Columbia attempt to reform the system with a single transferable vote, and he made reference to the member from Lanark–Carleton saying that it was a very complex question to ask. I'm not quite sure about that. Some 57% of the people who voted there voted in favour of reform, so it couldn't have been that obtuse or that abstruse that people just didn't quite understand it. Clearly, they understood it. The problem there, as it is here, is the threshold; that's the problem.

The reason why they didn't get reform in British Columbia is because they established a threshold that could not be reached by the electorate, and the Ontario government is doing the same. That's the problem and the paradox that I was speaking to earlier. That's why I say I'm worried about the intellectual integrity of the Liberal government, including intellectual slippage.

I wonder whether the member could comment on the following in terms of what the government is doing. The member from London–Fanshawe says the electoral reform committee worked hard to establish a process, and they said the referendum question—not them; the government says, “The referendum question in both English and French shall be established by an order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council.” That's what the government proposed, but the committee recommended something different. They said, “Responsibility for the referendum questions, including the wording and the number of questions to be asked and the number of referendums to be held, rests ultimately with the Legislature, acting on the advice of the citizens' assembly and the select committee on electoral reform and, if required, Elections Ontario.”

So when the member for London–Fanshawe says, “We are doing what the electoral reform committee recommended,” it is not true. What I just pointed out is yet another element of the government manipulating the recommendations in a way that suits them. Maybe you might want to comment on that.

Ms. Matthews: I have only two minutes but I have so much to say, so bear with me. The first thing I'd like to do is introduce a couple of friends I have in the gallery. One happens to be my daughter, Christie Nash, who worked on electoral reform over the summer, and Cooper Van Grol from Orange county, California. Welcome. They've been here listening to the debates, and I'm glad they are.

I'm supposed to be responding to the member from Durham. I have to say I find it very curious that he criticized members for not using the full amount of time yet he spent his time reciting the results of the municipal elections. I guess any of us could fill our time if we read from election results from a past election.

The other comment I want to make is that we keep hearing about how the NDP are the ones who are so hard done by under the current system, but let's remember 1990. Some of us will remember that election in 1990. The NDP got 38% of the votes—that's good; that's good for you—and 57% of the seats. So the point is that this current system cuts every way.

Mr. Marchese: It's not working.

Ms. Matthews: It's not working. I believe it's time for a change.

There have been issues raised about the question: Will it be a biased question? The question will come directly

from the citizens' assembly. They've already illustrated what a terrific job they are doing, their commitment to the cause. They will set the question.

Finally, I want to talk about something that I think is just spectacular. The citizens' assembly is hosting a series of consultations across the province: 38 different meetings across the province, two of them in London—January 9 and January 11, I believe—where they're inviting the public to get informed, come to the meeting, understand what the—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

There being no further, the member for Durham, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. O'Toole: In the limited time, I respectfully respond to the member from Trinity–Spadina, who mentioned the issue of this single transferable vote. Quite frankly, the issue there is that there was money for one side and not the other. This was one of the issues. The education process—it demonstrates how important it is to engage the public in a dialogue. I'm anxious to see whether the citizens' advisory committee that we have is at the students' level or at the citizens' level.

He pointed out one very important thing, that the question which I raised is the question. All of the technical thresholds, 60% and all these things, are indeed that—they're out there, and that's what the citizens' assembly will be told to do.

The member from London North Centre in fact was inaccurate in her comment. If you read the bill—I'm not trying to be smug with you; I know you're an intelligent person—the question is going to be decided by cabinet, by the Lieutenant Governor. They're going to issue it. The citizens' assembly will do all this hard work and it'll get massaged and come out looking like a duck instead of a horse. It's not going to be a true reflection.

I would only say in conclusion that one other remark—I'm not trying to be argumentative here, but the member from London North Centre took exception to the fact that I spent a few moments respecting the people who've served the public at the local level by reviewing the results and the participation rate in the municipal level. This is so important. This is the genesis of public service. I say that almost every person here in some capacity—Ms. Mitchell, as others—I could look around the room, and almost all have served locally. That serves as a great and important entry point and learning point, and maybe a final point for some members. But this question will remain unanswered as of tonight.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1800.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown
Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman
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Bramalea-Gore-Malton- Springdale	Kular, Kuldip (L)	Hamilton West / Hamilton-Ouest	Marsales, Judy (L)
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Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Van Bommel, Maria (L)
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Eglington-Lawrence	Colle, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (L) Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration	London-Fanshawe	Ramal, Khalil (L)
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Erie-Lincoln Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Mississauga East / Mississauga-Est	Fonseca, Peter (L)
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Guelph-Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)	Niagara Falls	Craitor, Kim (L)
Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)	Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)
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		Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)

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Ottawa–Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
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Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	Markham	Vacant
Scarborough–Agincourt	Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L) Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Vacant
Scarborough–Rouge River	Balkissoon, Bas (L)		
Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)		
Simcoe–Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
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St. Paul's	Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L) Attorney General / procureur général		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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

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