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Jeudi 7 décembre 2006

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Honourable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 7 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 7 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

RAW MILK

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should immediately form an all-party task force to examine the issues surrounding raw milk and that the all-party task force report its findings to the House before the end of the spring session.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Murdoch has moved private member's notice of motion number 32. Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Murdoch, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Murdoch: This resolution does not choose sides. It does not say, "Drink raw milk." It does not say, "Don't drink raw milk." This resolution has only one aim: to debate. Debate is the foundation of our democratic system. We were elected to this House to discuss important issues. So today I put before you an opportunity to discuss a subject that has stirred up a lot of questions in our constituencies, in the media, on the street and even at home, but that has not yet been debated among us here in the legislative chamber.

The reason we need to look at this issue of raw milk is because (a) there is a thriving underground market in every constituency of Ontario; people—families, children—are consuming this product; (b) the issue of public health is in question, and it is our duty to examine that concern; and (c) none of us here is an expert on food choices, including myself. In fact, I don't even drink milk. Maybe the odd chocolate milk, but that's about it for me. So we should allow an all-party task force to examine the issues related to raw milk.

In Ontario, non-pasteurized milk is illegal for sale; the law is clear. But it is a 70-year-old rule made during the industrialization of farming in Ontario when undeniably some of the milk supply was dirty and deadly. To quote an editorial from the Owen Sound Sun Times—and the Sun Times, which I don't always agree with, have agreed that this is a good resolution and should be debated in the House—"The 'science' of producing hygienic raw milk has progressed greatly since the days when our grandmothers milked cows by hand into an old tin bucket and

asked us if we wanted a taste." Today's farms are equipped with modern, stainless steel tanks, refrigerated trucks and inspection methods. Today's farming has been made safer with access to these new tools.

But with that safety comes automation and over-processing, and I think you'll agree that more people are, for that reason, turning to organic or all-natural food. Non-pasteurized milk is one of the new consumer choices.

According to a government document, a quarter of a million Canadians drink non-pasteurized milk. I don't have the statistics on how many consumers eat raw fish, buy organic vegetables, organic bread, organic cheese or juices, prefer their steak raw, or even wear hemp clothing, but I imagine the number could be on the rise, because consumers today want choice and control of the product they consume. Some will argue that provincial and federal laws that require pasteurization of milk violate the constitutional rights of individuals to make their own food choices. You decide.

In America, although federal law bans interstate commerce in raw milk, a patchwork of state laws apply, with sales of raw milk legal in about 28 states. A certified system for selling raw milk exists in nearly half of the United States. Depending on the state, Americans can purchase and farmers can sell raw milk. It's a system raw milk activists here are now fighting for. Should Ontarians have the right to choose whether they want to drink raw milk or pasteurized milk? Should we counter the thriving underground market by instituting a certified process that would allow the government to monitor which local farms are producing raw milk safely? It could certainly address the issue of public health. You decide.

I say this, and you will agree: It is essential to make milk, all milk, safe to consume, because raw milk could, like any other food we consume—meat, water, chocolate, and vegetables like spinach and carrots, all of which were recalled over the past few months—pose a risk of bacterial outbreak.

I want to discuss why we're here today. Why is this such a big topic?

As you know, Speaker, and a lot of other people know, in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound we had an incident about a month ago where 20 armed officers of the Ministry of Natural Resources raided a farm near Durham. The farm was owned by Michael Schmidt, who happens to be sitting here in the balcony today listening to the debate. I'm sure he's interested in how people vote on this. But anyway, they raided his farm—again, about 20 officers carrying firearms. It was a shock when I read

in the paper that this happened, because in Bruce and Grey we have a hard time finding a conservation officer when we need one. You probably know yourself, Mr. Speaker, that we're short around 80 conservation officers right across Ontario. Yet somewhere, somehow, they found 20 of them and raided Mr. Schmidt's farm. Now they have charged him—I don't know what the actual charges are—and he'll have to go to court and face that music, whether he's guilty of the charge or not. That's another whole item. But what it has done is it has sparked a debate. What it has shown us, if you read the media and watch television and things like that, is that there are a lot of people in Ontario drinking raw milk, whether it's legal or whether it's not.

I understand a lot of dairy farmers themselves actually drink their own milk, but that's not illegal. They can do that and that's fine. But maybe we should look at this whole situation surrounding raw milk. I'm not saying, again, as I started off, that people should drink raw milk or they shouldn't. I think that's what we have to decide here in the House. That's why we get elected. When there is a problem in your constituency or in your riding or in Ontario, I think it's up to us as politicians to bring that problem here, bring it to where we debate it and look at it. Maybe we have to make some laws; maybe we leave it alone. I don't know. But if we don't debate it and if we don't look at the situation, then things carry on. As we know, a lot of people seem to want to drink raw milk or are drinking raw milk. So if it's as bad as the doctors have said—there have been many editorials that say it's really bad for you and it could carry disease. We know in the past it did. Before they brought in pasteurization, we know there were problems, but that was 70 years ago. So I think it's time for a debate in this House on this.

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All I'm asking for is that we have a committee drawn up between all three parties and we go and look at the issue and we come back here in the spring. Why not bring our results, whatever they may be, back to this House, back for more debate, and then we look at that? What we come up with, I have no idea. I have no idea what we may come up with, but I think it deserves looking at. Because if there are many people out there drinking this now and we in this House do nothing as legislators and somebody gets sick and dies, then it is our responsibility because we did nothing and stood by and knew there were things going on that may have been a problem.

So I think it is up to us to look at the situation. That's what we do when we have problems like this, or we have in the past: We have looked at other problems. I can't see what would be wrong with a task force made up of one from each party and maybe an alternate or something. We will adjourn this House next week and we'll come back in the spring. We have time to go and look at the issues around raw milk. I'm sure there are going to be lots of people lining up to tell us pro or con. But then it's up to us here in this House to make laws. That's what we

do. We do it every day. We debate a bill here every day and it either passes or is defeated, and it's a law for the people of Ontario.

I think we have a problem. I think it's my job as a politician to bring it to the House. All I'm asking for is that we sit down and look at it in a non-partisan way, because this is not a partisan issue. I'm sure people from all three parties may be drinking this milk; I don't know. Let's go out and look. But if we do it in a non-partisan way, then I think we can come up with some ideas of what we should do. As I say, I have no preconceived ideas of what should be done. I just think this House should do this, and this is the way we do it. This is our democratic process. This is private members' time, and I have a private member's resolution. We will vote for this resolution at noon. We won't vote till noon; we'll have a chance to debate it around here until 11 o'clock and then we'll vote at noon. Then, hopefully it will pass and the government in its wisdom will set up a task force for this winter so we can go across Ontario and look at the issue of raw milk. That's all I want; nothing more, nothing less. I would hope that when the time comes all three parties can support this, because I don't have any preconceived ideas. I just know there are people out there saying, "We want this choice." So it's up to us to look at it. I appreciate it, and I will be here for the wrap-up.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to get some words on the record today. I'd just like to start off by looking at the science behind pasteurized milk. It was Louis Pasteur, a French chemist and microbiologist, who published a paper in 1861. He was credited with the process of pasteurization, which bears his name. While researching the causes of spoilage for the wine industry, he conducted experiments with fermentation and spoilage. He discovered that the cause of the spoilage was bacteria floating in the air. This led to pasteurization, or the gentle heating and cooling of the product. He discovered that pasteurization killed pathogenic bacteria. His work saved the wine and beer industry in France, and milk producers adopted his methods and applied them to their industry.

We know that raw milk is heated to a temperature of 63 degrees Celsius for a maximum of 30 minutes and then cooled to 40 degrees Fahrenheit or four degrees Celsius, and then it becomes pasteurized milk.

I want to get on the record some of the experts who have conducted extensive scientific research in this area. Health Canada, in its annual update of August 1, 2006, reminds Canadians about the risks of drinking raw milk:

"Raw (unpasteurized) milk ... could contain bacteria that can make you seriously ill.

"Several different kinds of bacteria that could be found in raw milk, such as salmonella, E. coli and listeria, have been linked to food-borne illness. These bacteria can lead to very serious health conditions ranging from fever, vomiting and diarrhea to life-threatening kidney failure, miscarriage and death.

“Because of these health concerns, food and drug regulations require that all milk available for sale in Canada be pasteurized.”

Another expert, Doug Powell, who is the scientific director of the food safety network for the University of Guelph:

“Powell has observed that raw milk drinkers often tout the benefits of better nutrition or taste, but there is no scientific evidence to support these ideas. The risks of serious infection are often downplayed by the farmers who sell raw milk. They often declare that they have been drinking raw milk their whole life. In fact, when an outbreak is traced back to a particular farm, it is often found that the farm family has been drinking the unpasteurized milk without developing symptoms. This is because repeated exposure to micro-organisms can lead to a level of immunity, generally following several potentially life-threatening bouts of illness. But this farm family immunity can be misleading. It may provide a level of protection, yet no one’s immune system can protect against all micro-organisms found in raw milk. Powell cautions that people with weak immune systems,” particularly the elderly and children, “are particularly at risk.”

Pasteurization came about in 1938. It came about when the then Premier of Ontario, Mitchell Hepburn, visited two hospitals in Toronto. He visited Sick Kids Hospital and Toronto General Hospital, and he viewed row upon row upon row of cots of children who had been impacted by the effects of drinking raw milk and the disease tuberculosis, which they had contracted. So in the throne speech of 1938, with his government, he brought in pasteurization to make sure that all Ontario would be protected.

Indeed, the medical officer of health in Durham region, Dr. Murray McQuigge, who became quite famous through the Walkerton tragedy, has cautioned about unpasteurized milk.

The scientific evidence is there to support the pasteurization of milk, and I don’t believe there’s any need for an all-party committee to study it at this time.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I want to rise in support of my colleague’s resolution. The reason I believe it’s appropriate that we should move forward with this is that, as Mr. Murdoch indicated to the House, that’s our responsibility. It’s so typical of the Liberal government to say, “Let’s not study it. We know enough and we know better. Government knows best.” I think the people of Ontario are sick and tired of hearing from a government that tells them what to do and the basis on which to do it because it is they, the government of the day, that tells them how to do it.

I believe that we’re not doing our job as legislators if we don’t do what Mr. Murdoch is asking us to do, and that’s simply to form an all-party committee to study the matter and to get the facts. I disagree with the member opposite who suggests you already have all of the facts, because I don’t believe that you do. Why not have an open mind? Why not behave as a legislator with an open

mind, get the facts, study them, and then come back and report to the House? That really is all that is being asked.

I feel that as a member of this Legislature, I have a responsibility to respond to my constituents. I have a number of petitions. I have received a number of letters from constituents who say, “As my member of provincial Parliament, I’m asking you to support this resolution, to look into the matter, and to report back because at issue here is a principle.”

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That’s why I think it’s important that we study the matter, and the principle is an individual citizen’s freedom of choice as to the kind of food that they consume and to determine where that food should be produced and how it should be produced. Surely, in the province of Ontario today, we want our citizens to at least have that freedom to make a decision, an informed decision, about what they consume. What we don’t want is more government telling us what to eat, how to eat it and at what time. That’s next: This government is going to tell us when we can consume our food. I think it’s time that we simply agreed to take this forward.

I want to read from a letter from one of my constituents; I think they have it right. Here’s what they say: “What we would like is this issue to be investigated, for regulations and a system of inspections to be established, and for people to be allowed to make an informed choice.” They also say this—and I want the members of the government to please listen to this: “Approximately 30 states, including the state of California where they do have mass distribution of raw milk, and numerous countries in Europe did not legalize the sale of raw milk because they were blindly ‘jumping off of a bridge.’ They studied the issue and decided to support their citizens’ right to make their own health choices. So is looking to these others to attempt to learn what they learned the same as ‘jumping off a bridge’? Okay, then let us study it ourselves, and learn our own lessons, but at least let us have an open mind and study the issue, and not ignore it because some people in industry and government would rather not.”

Another very important aspect of this is the fact that we have heard over the last number of weeks over and over again—and just this morning, we heard a report that green onions are being eliminated from Taco Bells across North America. Now, this government would say, “We’ll eliminate green onions forever because there’s a problem.” You see, it’s not the green onions; it’s how they’re being handled. And I would suggest that that may well be what we find as we open our minds and investigate this. It’s not the raw milk that causes the problem. When there’s a problem, I suggest it may be how it’s being handled or mishandled. So perhaps what this government should be doing is ensuring that we have the appropriate regulations in place to ensure the proper handling, so that people can in fact make their individual personal choices rather than have government once again move, now into our kitchen. They’re everywhere else, and now they’re going to move into the kitchen and tell us how to conduct our lives.

I think it's fundamentally wrong. I support this resolution because it's open-minded. It simply is saying to the Legislature, "Let's get the facts and then behave responsibly and ensure that the people of Ontario are protected, while allowing them their freedom of choice."

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): Well, after listening to that speech and after hearing those arguments, I know I'm on the right side not being on that side. My Lord.

Just to the points that the previous speaker raised—first of all, I'm a New Democrat. I'm not here to defend the government. I have a lot of arguments with the government. But to suggest that any government, including this government, has a jackboots approach to telling people how they are to live, I think, is a little bit beyond the pale. I listen to those things and it sounds to me quite inflammatory, in the opposite direction. I am actually kind of upset, thinking about it. But the point he makes is that government is trying to tell people what to do. Well, governments are here to make sure there is public safety. If you take a look at what we've done over the years, governments have decided some things in the common good of the people.

For example, this House, including the Conservatives, voted in favour in order to ban smoking in public buildings. Is that not telling people how to live their lifestyles? We did that for a reason: because we recognize that, first of all, smoking for individuals and second-hand smoke is a public health issue. We said as a Legislature, and rightfully so—as a former smoker from 15 years ago and 60 pounds later—that smoking is bad for you and we've got to get people off that habit. We recognized that it has been an allowed substance for years and years and that people have been hooked and addicted to it with the consent of government. We needed to find a way to give people incentives to stop smoking, and one of the ways of doing that was to limit their ability to smoke in public places and other areas. As a result, there are far fewer people smoking today than there were, let's say, 10 years ago. As a health issue, that's a good thing.

So for the member from the Conservative Party to argue that somehow it's bad for government to put policies and laws in place that are in the public good when it comes to health and safety or other issues is way beyond the pale and I've really got to disagree. If I had an inkling to support this, just on the basis of that speech I've got to vote against the motion.

I do want to say, however, that there is an issue here, and that is that there is a growing movement, and rightfully so, of people who want to go back to organic products. People want to go to their farmers' markets and buy foods, vegetables or meats or whatever it might be, that were not chemically altered by the processes of huge farms trying to push growth in cattle to a higher yield in terms of the overall time it takes for an animal to be brought to market, or on the issue of vegetables, the same. Yes, we need to do something to make that easier for people, and that is a whole other issue. But to somehow or other equate, in this debate, that raw milk is the

same thing as organic milk—let's be clear. Organic milk has to be pasteurized. Let's not forget that. I look at some of the people up there who support this particular motion. Even if a person wants organic milk, we need to pasteurize it. It's something we do. It's a standard. To somehow try to mix into the debate that this is an "anti" movement, that because government says pasteurization has to happen and has been doing so for many years, it's somehow against the idea of allowing people to buy organic products—let's not lose the baby with the bathwater. We still pasteurize organic milk, and let's remember that.

Now to the debate. I understand what the member is trying to do here. I commend him to a great degree. Mr. Murdoch is one of the members in the House who always speaks his mind and, quite frankly, tries to do what is right. I accept much of his argument in regard to what he brings forward, but the problem I have is that it does fly in the face of what we already know from past practice and by way of science. We know, for example, that in the United States, where states have allowed raw milk to be sold on the open market, there's a much higher level of disease. We don't have to go out and study it in Ontario to know what is happening already in other parts of the world. The stats are there already. After a conversation with my good friend Mr. Murdoch last night at the Trillium Foundation event, I went back to my apartment in the evening and did a bit of looking up on the Internet to check this out. One of the interesting things I found in the debate on blogs and other places is that if you go back and correlate what is happening in states where raw milk is allowed to be sold and used, there's a higher degree of disease, things like tuberculosis, E. coli and others. People have actually died. For us in Ontario to say we want to look at that—I understand that we should always look at things, but you also have to look at what is already happening in other jurisdictions and what is happening with science. We know, for example, that prior to pasteurization here in Ontario, tuberculosis was a huge issue. Of all tuberculosis cases that were diagnosed in children, in those that died 10% came from milk. After pasteurization, that went to zero. It's a public health issue. That's how we have to look at this particular issue.

I say to my honourable colleague that I understand what he is trying to do, but we also have to look at what science and other jurisdictions have to say on this particular issue. Where we know raw milk has been allowed to be used, it has not been what people think it is. It's not entirely safe. If people are talking about organic milk, fine, you pasteurize it, but it's a very different issue.

The other issue, and this is one of the things I want to raise for the people in the farm community, is the whole issue of the supply management system. Supply management for dairy farmers is hugely important. Quite frankly, it is the only way those farmers are able to survive and know they can make the kinds of investments they have to make in their farms to be able to stay afloat.

Part of what this debate represents—if we were to say, "Let's go to raw milk," it's a backdoor approach to opening up or destroying the supply management system. This

is part of the problem I had when I listened to Mr. Klees. Some of those guys are so far right that they would go as far as saying, "Get rid of supply management." I, for one, don't want to be a party to anything that is going to destroy the supply management system in the dairy industry, because doing that will kill all the family farms. We don't need the mega-farms run by the large industries that want to get into it; we need the family farm out there, and supply management is one of those things that allows that to happen. Without supply management, in many of our ridings across Ontario, even in my riding in north-eastern Ontario where we do have dairy farming, it would mean the death of the small family farm.

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I heard the previous member in the Conservative caucus talk about choice and about the freedom of choice. Those are just buzzwords to say, "Let's open up the market and do what the heck we want." We do put some conditions on the market to make sure the little guy doesn't get walked on by the big guy every now and then. I know that; I come from the forest industry in northern Ontario. The large forest companies now control everything. Look what's going on. We're being decimated in northern Ontario, greatly because of what this government does, but also because those companies have gotten so big that they're a virtual monopoly and they get to decide what's going to happen. If they can operate with three mills and make more money than they did with five mills, they're going to drop down to three. I'm all for competition, and one of the things that allows that to happen is the supply management system.

It was interesting. I was going through the Internet last night and I just happened to pick up the papers this morning, and there was an interesting article, which was referred to earlier. One of the things I heard about, but I think it needs to be said for the record, is that we do know of some cases—in Barrie there have been at least four cases where children have been taken to hospital because they've become sick from drinking raw milk. It brings me to the point the member makes. He says he wants to go back and study this. I think there's already enough evidence out there that it's not something we really want to do. We would only be kidding ourselves and raising expectations falsely if we were to allow this to happen.

My last point, which I want to make to those people who are either watching this, reading Hansard later or who are here, is let's not be confused about this process. I will say this outright: If this motion were to pass today, you wouldn't get a committee. It wouldn't happen. Many motions have been passed in this House during private members' hour that the government ignores anyway. The government, at the end of the day, decides what's going to be called before a committee. This would be one of many issues that a committee would have to deal with. Committees now have government bills before them. It's the last session before an election. We're going to have another session in the spring and we're going to be into an election next fall. There are government bills and plenty

more private members' bills ahead of this particular motion. To give people the expectation that "If only this motion had passed we would have got our fair say"—it would never have come to the light of day. This motion today could be voted for with 100% acceptance by this Legislature and it wouldn't get a committee hearing, because there's far more committee business in front of those committees—

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): No, it's a new all-party committee. You missed the whole point.

Mr. Bisson: If you think an all-party committee is going to be created for this, you're sadly mistaken. I've been here as long as you, sir, since 1990, and I know that all-party committees happen very rarely in this place, and all-party committees are normally to deal with fairly large issues, such as the constitutional committee back in the early 1990s. I think we've only had one since. I just say to the people watching this—

Mr. Wilson: We had one on electricity.

Mr. Bisson: That's what I'm saying: We had another one afterwards, and it was during your term. But they're normally for very, very large issues. So I don't think this thing would even get there, should we vote for it in the affirmative. Thank you.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): I certainly am very pleased to get involved in this debate. I want to speak from some experiences I've had in my own riding.

In April 1986, a kindergarten class in Lambton county had an outbreak of E. coli 0157:H7 after the class had been on a field trip to a dairy farm where the children had been given samples of raw milk. Several of the children got sick. They had gastrointestinal problems; quite frankly, they had bloody diarrhea, which, as any parent knows, is extremely dangerous. Four of the adults who accompanied the children also had a problem. Three of the children were hospitalized, with one ending up in the ICU, and one of the children has permanent damage as a result.

The families of these children suffered, but so did the entire farm community. First there was the real worry that one or more of the children would die. Then, once that concern had passed, there was the worry about liability. Suddenly, farmers were reluctant to participate in a program we had in the area called Agriculture in the Classroom, which included field trips to farms. And of course the dairy farmers in the community were very concerned about the public perception of milk. They wanted to make sure the image of milk hadn't been changed, that the image stayed as being safe and wholesome. One of the things that happened in the community was that farmers were very reluctant to offer any kinds of raw products to anybody who visited their farms.

These weren't isolated incidents. This was in 1986, but as recently as April 2005, there was a similar outbreak in the Barrie area.

Some people will tell you that there is no harm in drinking raw milk. The media speaks of how clean farm operations are, especially those operations that use the

process of people buying shares in a cow to access the raw milk. I have no doubt that these are clean farms; of course they're clean farms. My parents were Dutch immigrants and they prided themselves on their cleanliness. I can remember, as a child, my sisters and I being handed broad brushes and a pail of whitewash and told to go and whitewash the stone walls in the interior of our dairy barn. My mom would don a scarf over her head and would go chasing cobwebs with a broom. They kept that barn very, very clean. But the fact is that I also remember my dad using a pail and a stool to do the milking. It depended a great deal on the disposition of the cow. Some cows were calm, but some would get impatient with the milking process and would start to swat their tails or kick their hind feet up, and every so often something would fall into the pail. It could be straw or another contaminant that lies on the floor of barns, but it would get there. It makes me wonder, what happens now? My mother boiled that milk. She understood that that milk could be contaminated. She understood all the perils that were around it and she made sure she boiled that milk.

Ontario has a very good history in food safety. In 1896, Adelaide Hoodless lost her 14-month-old son to a disease he contracted as a result of drinking raw milk. Ms. Hoodless became the founder of the largest rural farm women's organization in the world. Ms. Hoodless is the founder of the Women's Institute. The Women's Institute, as everyone knows, started their years by teaching women how to prepare foods properly and safely for their children. As a result of that, Premier Mitch Hepburn in 1938 legislated the pasteurization of milk. That's how we came to that point. That's what brought it about: Adelaide Hoodless. She made sure that everyone understood the dangers of raw milk.

As the member from Timmins-James Bay has said, there is a clear difference between raw milk and organic milk, and we need to remember that. I understand the movement to go back to drinking and eating natural foods, but we need to understand that safety also needs to be attached to this. I want to say for the people in this Legislature, I have had no calls at my constituency office from constituents on this issue. I think they all remember 1986 and those kindergarten children in Lambton county.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on this debate this morning on raw milk. As agriculture critic, I want to start by stating very clearly that John Tory and our entire PC caucus unequivocally support supply management. Dairy farmers were here recently and they made their position very clear yet again. Supply management, in contrast to what some members opposite have said, is untouchable, from our perspective. Every PC MPP signed the Farm-Gate5 supply management petition and will continue to defend supply management whenever necessary. I don't know whether this issue would have relevance for that or not. That's something that may well come out if this Legislature decides to strike a task force.

1040

Again, we are debating whether the government of Ontario should create an all-party task force to examine

the issues around raw milk and then table its findings to the House prior to the spring session of this Parliament. Just to clarify, there are a number of things we're not debating today. We're not debating the health merits of raw milk necessarily; we're not debating whether we should allow raw milk in stores; we're not debating whether Ontario should allow for mass distribution of raw milk. We're simply debating whether or not this Legislative Assembly would like to learn more about the issues surrounding raw milk through an all-party committee. From what I can see, we've got nothing to fear and essentially everything to gain by learning more about this—or any other issue, for that matter.

Recently, we saw in this Legislature that the current government doesn't like to hear input. I think of Bill 107; we saw a case there where people who wanted to testify before that committee were not allowed to do so. On the contrary, I support the idea that we as legislators owe it to our constituents to make informed decisions on their behalf, at least to do the best we can with the evidence presented. Studying the issues around raw milk is not a policy decision; it's essentially giving us an opportunity to do a bit of homework. It's entirely possible the all-party task force would return to the Legislature and confirm that people were right back in 1938. That's when the Ontario health act made it illegal to sell or give away raw milk.

I suspect many MPPs have received e-mails, communications on raw milk; I certainly have. I've read e-mails supporting the issue; I've read e-mails opposing it. I am aware of some of the health aspects. We hear about salmonella. There are certainly instances of children dying from E. coli, perhaps contracted through raw milk. Today's debate does not deny the existence of those health concerns. If anything, it would give us an opportunity, and a task force would give us an opportunity, to learn more about some of these disease and bacterial concerns. It gives the health officials a platform to reinforce their concerns about raw milk. It would give consumers—I know consumers are probably present here today—an opportunity to make their case, if they so choose, with respect to the regulated delivery of milk.

Other visitors here today—dairy farmers, landowners. The task force would give farmers an access point to MPPs and an opportunity to explain how the raw milk debate would fit into issues like supply management. Again, how can we defend farmers and supply management if we don't give them an opportunity to present their case in a forum?

I don't drink raw milk; I don't intend to start. We also milked cows. I remember the pasteurization, the milk thermometer. We always pasteurized our milk on the stove—we drank the milk from our own cows. So other than insight, I don't have anything to gain by studying this issue around raw milk. Neither myself nor my wife, Cari, have invested money in a raw milk co-operative. I have given this debate a lot of thought, however, and I do intend to vote in favour of this resolution from MPP Bill Murdoch. If it's passed, if the government decides to

respect the will of the Legislative Assembly, I really would look forward to learning more about milk. If the task force recommends maintaining the status quo, that's acceptable to me. If anything, it would provide an extra layer of legitimacy to a system that has been in place since 1938.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): It's my privilege to speak about this issue today. I think there are several parts to the discussion; one, I would say, is the treatment of Mr. Schmidt himself. That's a discussion in itself. I come from a district in Parkdale–High Park where, even with increased police presence, we can't keep our streets safe for our seniors to come out of their homes at night. I wonder about this incredible deployment of force over this issue, and I decry it. That's number one.

Number two is the validity of the cause itself. Of course, I hear from my colleagues to the right of me, and that's symbolic as well as actual, "It's only about opening up the discussion," but the reality is that this House has limited time. You heard my colleague Mr. Bisson speak about this issue and talk about how limited the time is. There are a number of issues before this House. There are issues like my private member's bill for a \$10-an-hour living wage. There are issues like why we don't have housing for 120,000 households in this province. There are issues like why 13,500 children who use food banks have the right to eat at all, never mind drink raw milk versus pasteurized milk. I consider all of those issues to take precedence over this one. On that basis alone, I wouldn't support this motion. Again, we're only sitting for another five days and then in the spring we're only sitting for how many weeks, and even over the winter months to try to get hearings around here on some of these issues is like pulling teeth. Again, it's nothing against Mr. Murdoch. I understand him to be a fine member speaking up for the constituency here, but we just don't have time to look at this. This isn't an issue of precedence.

I also understand that science is a variable art form, let's say, in some instances. When I was pregnant with my daughter, who is now 29, I read a book by Benjamin Spock that said drinking wine during pregnancy is fine. There was a noted medical authority. By the time I had my son, five years later, of course it was anathema, and we know now that it's a very dangerous practice. Science changes and scientific answers change. I am a great supporter of organic foods and making the pledge to be vegetarian in the new year and trying to support my health food stores and health food providers.

I did some very careful research. I spent many hours last night and all of this week. I've received e-mails from my constituents on both sides of the issue as well and looked at what's happening and where it's happening. One of the things I noticed—because certainly Mr. Schmidt and his supporters have drawn my attention to what is happening in the States, so I looked at what was happening there and this is what I found. I found that almost all of the states that do allow raw milk production

and distribution, certainly more than we do here in Ontario, are now considering outright bans. I quote from the *Columbian*, from Washington state:

"The 2007 Legislature is certain to take a fresh look at banning raw milk sales in Washington because of two outbreaks this year that have been linked to unpasteurized milk.

"Last month, a 5-year-old Issaquah boy and an 8-year-old girl from Snohomish county contracted *E. coli* bacteria by drinking raw milk...."

This is in Washington state, but it isn't only Washington state. Then I looked at some of the other states that, again, are looser, more lax about this than we are and I see that California has just—well, this is not just; this is going on a year—quarantined the state's largest raw milk producer, and also legislators there are looking at bans or something approximating bans. I don't know that bans are the answer either, really. Obviously, this is an issue that needs to be looked at in terms of how one regulates and polices, and there's a discussion to be had there, not here, but certainly a discussion, again, going back to the treatment of Mr. Schmidt and how we enforce our rules and regulations.

That we need our rules and regulations I think really is uncontested. And here is the ultimate reason that we need rules and regulations: Wherever one child is at risk, wherever one child suffers, wherever one child could potentially lose kidney function, then surely as humane individuals, as parents ourselves, we have to act. I don't think, for a variety of reasons, that it's worth reopening this question. I think the answer has been settled. I wouldn't go so far as to say, as Dr. McQuigge does, that this is equivalent to manslaughter, but personally I am satisfied. Nothing has stopped it—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Further debate?

1050

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): Once again, I commend the member opposite for bringing this resolution forward, because I know he is thinking of the better interests for all. I think you've heard most of the debates, the pros and cons, from both sides. But I'm going to speak about—I guess the best way is to tell a story about some personal experiences, because it brings it home. Probably most of you in this House know that I am an immigrant to this country, and back where I was born, in Italy, we did have our own cows, our own chickens, our own eggs and those kinds of things, and I used to drink milk. But even my mother would boil the milk on the wood stove or over the wood fireplace. Back in 1960, when I first immigrated to Canada, I had my very first taste of homo milk at my uncle's house, on the very first day I landed. That's the day I stopped drinking milk. It was like water. It was too much. I guess the point I'm making is that even back in Italy, although I don't think pasteurization was across the board there, we recognized that it was something we had to do.

The other piece that I want to talk about briefly is that, back in 2005, in the town that I represent—I happen to live in Brighton, just east of Toronto in the county of

Northumberland. We have a really huge fall festival, Applefest. We used to be known for orchards and so forth, although we don't have that many any more, but we still celebrate the apple product. A number of vendors were selling unpasteurized apple cider. The health unit officer visited the vendors, and all the apple cider was removed from the vendors' stands. I can tell you that on Monday morning when I came to my office, a lot of these folks who had those stands selling apple cider were really upset. My phone was swarmed with about half a dozen of them and their supporters and their staff, saying that they'd been doing this for years, and all of a sudden the health unit comes in with, let's say, a heavy hand.

As I was working through the process for my constituents to try to see how we could—they'd been doing this for years, and all of a sudden they've got this restriction. About a month later in Durham—and this is going back not even two years—I don't remember the fruit stand, but they were selling unpasteurized apple cider and somebody got E. coli. I can tell you that I got back to every one of those folks who phoned me about the apple cider. These are folks I know. They're my neighbours. They're the farmers or processors that I meet. We're a month, a month and a half apart, and here's what happened: The subject just died because they understood.

I guess the point I'm trying to make is that we live in a society where people depend on governments to put rules and regulations in place, although we may not like them, for the safety of the community. We've heard pros and cons today. We have a lot of evidence. But to go through this and have politicians make those decisions, I'm not so sure it's the right direction. So as much as I appreciate what the member's trying to do, I think the evidence is pretty clear, and I can't support this.

Mr. Wilson: It's my pleasure to support this resolution brought forward by my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Mr. Murdoch.

As my colleague from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant pointed out, we're not debating supply management today. I was one of the first caucus members to sign Farm-Gate 5, the umbrella group that covers our supply-managed commodities. All members of the PC caucus have done that, even our newest members who came in in recent by-elections. So we're not debating that.

I'm very proud that my predecessor was George McCague and that his father was Jack McCague, who was one of the first chairmen—I think the first—of the Ontario Milk Marketing Board, which started in my home community of Alliston. But that's not what we're debating. We're really debating freedom.

As my colleague Mr. Klees said, James Wallace of the Barrie Examiner points out in an article that there's a considerable underground movement going on right now, whether we like it or not, of people using and drinking raw milk. We've seen, through Mr. Schmidt and some of his friends and colleagues, some world-class chefs that like to use the product. The fact that we're having disagreements today about whether or not we should even form an all-party committee—a new committee, not a

busy committee; it just needs a couple of members from each party to examine this issue—and the fact that we're having differences, to me, speaks volumes that it's an issue we should look at. It's appropriate, and it's our duty, as Mr. Murdoch said, to do such things when called upon by the people of Ontario.

In the two minutes I have, I just want to read a letter that I received. I actually have five constituents who live at RR 3 Tottenham who wrote to me on December 5 indicating that they're shareholders in Glencolton Farms and would very much like to see this issue debated:

“Dear Mr. Wilson:

“We are writing to you to inform about a regrettable event that took place on Tuesday November 21, 2006 at the Glencolton Farms, near Durham. We are writing to you to defend our rights as citizens and to defend farmer Michael Schmidt.

“We are part of a larger group of about 150 families who are cow shareowners at the Glencolton Farms: The cow share program enables us to obtain our own fresh milk from the farm while Glencolton provides shelter, feed and care for our animals.

“On November 21, Glencolton Farms was raided as part of an 18-month investigation triggered by an incident not connected to this farm and not connected to farm fresh milk, the details of which were suspected but never proven. All milk products, processing equipment, documents and other items were confiscated from the farm leaving us, the shareholders, who have relied on the farm to deliver us lab quality-controlled biodynamic milk and cheese every week since the mid 1990s, deprived of essential nourishing.

“For a better understanding related to this matter please visit the farm's website at www.glencoltonfarms.com, where you can find Michael Schmidt's statement and continuous updates with regards to press conferences, signed petitions and the incredible support offered by other people in the community.

“Following up on his statement made at the press conference on November 23, 2006, farmer Michael Schmidt has begun a hunger strike.

“On December 7 there will be a private member's bill introduced at Queen's Park by Bill Murdoch, MPP from the Grey-Bruce area, that asks to examine the issue around the availability of real milk to the citizens of Ontario.

“We ask you to please support Bill Murdoch's private member's bill so a task force can be set up to proactively deal with the larger raw milk issue.

“Thanking you in advance for consideration and support.”

That's from Olga Shibanova, George Davydenko, Vera Chibanova, George Shibanov and Alexei Davydenko. I apologize if I've mispronounced those names, but those are the five constituents.

It's my duty to bring these matters forward, and I support the resolution. I just don't understand. When I was energy minister, we had an all-party committee examine issues in the electricity and energy sector. It has

happened around here. It doesn't take a lot of our resources, and I think people want to be heard on this issue.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Milk is Mother Nature's perfect food, but only pasteurized milk is guaranteed to be safe.

If people came to this House and said, "We should have a review of whether or not it's a good idea to put your tongue on a frozen fence post," I would say, "We don't have to spend any time on that." If someone said, "We should have a review about whether or not you should take metal objects and put them into live electrical outlets," I would say, "We don't have to spend time reviewing that." If someone came to me and said, "Let's review exactly how closely aligned some members of the Conservative caucus are with the Ontario Landowners Association," I'd say, "We don't have to review that either." If people say to me, "Should we review whether or not unpasteurized milk should be in the food supply?" I'd say, "No, we don't have to review that."

I stand with the Premier of Ontario. I stand with the medical officers of health of Ontario and with the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in the great province of Ontario. I stand with them to say that it's a crazy idea that we should actually spend time in this House debating something that was settled 68 years ago. When the Progressive Conservative Party was in power for 42 years subsequent, did they think this was a good idea to review? No. Did the NDP government think it was a good idea? Does our government? No.

It's very, very clear: We do not now allow unsafe milk to be in the food supply. Our children are depending on us.

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

Mr. Murdoch: I'd like to just thank everybody who took part in this debate. At least we had a bit of a debate. Obviously, the government of the day is going to turn this down and doesn't want to debate it any longer.

It's strange that our member from Perth over there tries to grandstand on an issue that somebody may just die over, but he wants to grandstand because he knows everything. He just thinks he knows everything, and that's unfortunate.

1100

I am a little shocked at the NDP's position on this, but they have the right to do that if they want. I just want to tell you that the issue is not what we're debating here today. The issue is whether we should look at the issues around raw milk. Obviously with the number of people who are here today—and normally in private members' hour we don't see a lot of people here—there is an issue out there. If the government of the day doesn't want to look at it, I can't make them. I can only ask them to do that. They've decided in their wisdom they don't want to look at this issue. All I can say is that if somebody dies because they drank raw milk, it's on their heads, on the government's head, on the Liberals' heads, on McGuinty's head, because he doesn't even want to look at the issue. He thinks this has all been solved because 70 years ago

we made a decision. Maybe something's changed in 70 years, maybe not. All I'm asking is that we look at it—not taking any position at all, but just look at it. But we have a government that's closed, doesn't want to do anything, and that's unfortunate.

I want to tell you, though, that the National Farmers Union supported the resolution, the Christian Farmers supported the resolution, and lots of media. On CFOS last week, we had a debate where 20-some people phoned in, and most of them thought the resolution was fine. They didn't have opinions. All those other groups don't have opinions. They want to look at it. That's all we're here for as politicians: to look at these issues. Unfortunately, it seems the government doesn't want to.

PROTECTING VULNERABLE WORKERS ACT (EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES), 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LA PROTECTION DES TRAVAILLEURS VULNÉRABLES (AGENCES DE PLACEMENT)

Mr. Dhillon moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 161, An Act respecting employment agencies /
Projet de loi 161, Loi concernant les agences de placement.

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

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): I rise today to discuss a matter that is very near and dear to me, as it affects many people in my riding and, as I've learned, in Ontario as well.

I want to begin, first of all, by thanking Mr. Ravinder Panu, who is the owner of the Sur Sagar Radio program. It's the only 24-hour Punjabi channel in Ontario. He's doing a wonderful job. He's taken on many issues in the Indian community which in turn have helped the community. He's also taken this issue on and he's provided me a great amount of assistance. As a matter of fact, a couple of weeks ago I went on the show and my bill was the topic of the show. We got many, many calls. I'm sure if we had gone on for another hour or two, the calls would have kept coming. Again, I want to thank Mr. Panu, who is a pioneer of broadcasting in the Sikh community, the Indian community.

As I begin debate on my private member's bill, Bill 161, Protecting Vulnerable Workers Act (Employment Agencies), I hope I can count on members' support, as it affects some of the most vulnerable in our society: women, immigrants and visible minorities. They're excessively represented in the lowest-paying and in the most insecure forms of work. I believe this bill would help provide much-needed oversight in this, as of the present, unregulated industry.

The purpose of the bill is to establish a licensing scheme for the control and regulation of businesses that operate as employment agencies. An employment agency

means both businesses that bring together employees seeking jobs and potential employers, and temporary help agencies that contract out persons to organizations.

Bill 161 would set out requirements for employment agencies to obtain an operating licence from the Ministry of Labour. A licence may be refused if the company's past conduct suggests that the company will not carry on its business in accordance with the law and with honesty and integrity or if there's some question about the financial viability of the company.

There's currently no legislation specific to employment agencies, as they are subject to regulations that apply to any business operating in Ontario. While there used to be legislation specific to employment agencies in the past—the Employment Agencies Act, 1990—it was repealed by the Employment Standards Act, 2000. Reasons for its repeal are outlined in the Ministry of Labour's 2000 consultation paper *Time for Change: Ontario's Employment Standards Legislation*. I quote from the recommendations:

"The Employment Agencies Act was enacted to prevent the exploitation of individuals seeking jobs."

I continue the same quote: "The Ministry of Labour has rarely received complaints under the EAA."

"Changes in this industry, such as the shift toward greater use of the Internet to assist in job searches, and the enactment of legislation to address discrimination, have largely eliminated the need for this act."

"Accordingly, the government intends to repeal the Employment Agencies Act."

The ministry at that time may not have received complaints, but I certainly have, and many of them. Over the past several years I've received many complaints of fraudulent, fly-by-night employment agencies and situations where employees are not paid for work, wages are below the legal minimum wage, there's no public holiday pay, no overtime pay, and their health and safety are jeopardized.

It is difficult to estimate the size of the temporary agency workforce, but there is an estimate of about 1,300 employment agencies that operate in Ontario, and the size of this industry continues to grow. Moreover, an increasing number of employers use temporary agency workers on a long-term basis. It is absolutely imperative that Ontario get back into the business of regulating this industry. Many provinces, such as Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, and many US jurisdictions, including California, Maryland, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Massachusetts and New York, have detailed laws on the books that strictly regulate employment agencies.

The law was adopted many years ago to curb abuses associated with temporary job placement firms. The approach we have now is a complaints-based system through the Ministry of Labour. This issue is one of the most important to me and my riding. In light of this, shortly after becoming an MPP I attended my first cabinet committee meeting, which involved the Ministry of Labour. I brought this issue up immediately with a per-

son named Adam McDonald, who is employed by the ministry. I wanted to do something about the abuse that's being suffered by my constituents and many other people in Ontario.

I received a letter back which gave an explanation of what people can do: It had a 1-800 number, a website and other information. But that simply is not enough, because many of the people who work in these employment agencies are new immigrants. They're not used to the system. They don't have a computer. Some of them cannot speak English, so it's very difficult for these people to just have a 1-800 number to complain to. So they end up with the status quo and continue to suffer the abuse because they have to provide for their family. They're often too proud to go on social assistance and would rather do two jobs instead of one to provide for their families.

Again, I received a lot of complaints. As evidence of this, as I stated before, I went on a live TV call-in show, and the calls were flooding in. I'm sure that we could have gone on for several hours after the show to hear about the horror stories that people had to tell as a result of the questionable practices of these fly-by-night, fraudulent employment agencies.

As recently as two nights ago I met Steve Webster, who lives in a town near Windsor. He told me of people being brought in as temp help from the GTA who were working on farms. The conditions, the circumstances that he described to me, were simply horrendous. People were being asked to work long hours, being paid as little as \$4 an hour. This is simply not acceptable. This goes beyond providing somebody a minimum wage and beyond employment standards, the rules and regulations. We have to really think about what this means for Ontario and Canada. Is this what we want to portray to the world about who we are? We always complain about child labour and other issues in China and other countries. We always complain about that. I think it's a really important issue that needs to be looked into further than just the rules. Just to actually see people working in these farms, in those conditions, for one second, is quite disturbing. Most of these people are seniors, and they're being asked to work long hours with no health benefits, which seniors need as they grow older.

1110

Newcomers come to this country for an opportunity. Do we want to start turning away people because of stories that might come out of this type of situation? People don't want to come to Canada to work in the type of conditions that they left in their own countries. Most often, vulnerable workers are not aware of where they can turn to to make a grievance because they're so fearful of the repercussions if they do so. Again I state that Ontario should get back into regulating the industry.

That all being said, employment agencies that follow the Employment Standards Act do play a useful role in our economy. So the good agencies do warrant consideration. They're doing a great job.

I want to quote from Ms. Sylvie Hyndman, the co-owner of Dynamic Employment Services Inc. I think she

made a really good point. This industry “has diluted a valuable industry, an industry that is more than ready and capable of providing a value-adding service to both clients and candidates in need. It is with great anticipation that myself as an employment service owner would welcome some form of regulation.”

In the end, I just want to thank the ministry. They have been doing a great deal of good work, and I thank everyone else who has helped with this. I certainly hope that I can count on everyone’s support.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I’m pleased to participate in this debate. At the outset, I would say that I will be supporting this bill because I do believe that there’s an important consumer protection element contained in the bill. I also would say to the member that, in reading the bill, I’m disappointed that there is not more in the bill to speak to consequences and empowering the government of Ontario to move with some serious consequences for infractions.

Essentially what we’re talking about here is a fraud that is being perpetrated on the most vulnerable in our society. Often, as the member indicated, it’s newcomers that we’re talking about who come to this country as immigrants. They may well be very well qualified, but are having a difficult time accessing the job market, so they see often in agencies like this a way or a promise to bridge that gap between searching and finding a job, and often are willing to even put significant dollars on the table in the hopes of getting that much-needed job.

In the process now, we’re conducting hearings on Bill 124, which the government has brought forward. It deals with the issue of providing better access to newcomers to this province to the regulatory professions. We will, of course, be supporting that bill—the PC caucus will. We’re in the process of providing and advancing some amendments that we believe would have improved the bill. It’s unfortunate that the government, to this point in time—we’re going into the second day of clause-by-clause hearings and not one of our amendments has been accepted by the government, which is really very unfortunate and speaks to the lack of democratic process in this place. But that’s a debate for another time.

I want to speak specifically to Mr. Dhillon’s bill. One of the reasons that I am supporting this is because, as a member of the Legislature, I too have had examples in my constituency of incredible hardship that is endured by people as a result of their dealings with some of these employment agencies. It’s not just labourers, and it’s not just people who are at the entry level of jobs who are finding this. In this particular case that I’m going to share with my colleagues, this involved an individual who is highly qualified, is a newcomer—

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): —tell people what to do. Let them do what they want.

Mr. Klees: Speaker, if you would ask the member to kindly keep his words to himself—

Mr. Bisson: I will.

Mr. Klees: —because I will respect him when it’s time for him to speak.

Mr. Bisson: I apologize.

Mr. Klees: Thank you.

I am going to share with you an example from my constituency; in this particular case, Mr. Janevski, who met with me on behalf of his wife, Mrs. Marijana Janevski, regarding her experience with an employment assistance agency. I am going to read into the record the name of the agency because I think it’s important that people know who is, and has been, dealing in this province and is not dealing in a straightforward manner with the public. The name of the agency is Bernard Haldane Associates. Mrs. Janevski paid \$4,900, plus GST, to this company for services that they said would guarantee her a job. They said, they represented to this woman, that for \$4,900, plus GST, they would assist in the preparation of a CV, they would access certain potential employers who, they represented, aren’t in the full job market. This is another approach that many of these agencies take. They’ll say, “We’re so well connected; 80% of the real job market is never posted, and, because of our relationship with these employers, we can gain access to those people and make the introductions.”

This individual was so convinced by their story that she paid them the \$4,900. To this day, she has yet to get an interview. Not only that, but the company is no longer in business.

Here is the problem—and this is something for the Ministry of Consumer Affairs in this government. After dealing with this, I contacted the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Business Services on her behalf. I said, “Look, this is fraudulent. This is a time for government to step in. Let’s get after these people.” I received a letter back from Minister Watson at the time, acknowledging my inquiry and indicating that he has asked the manager in the consumer business service bureau to look into the complaint file.

Here’s the problem: That’s where it ended, because the next contact that we had with the ministry of consumer services was: “Well, the company has now gone out of business. Because the owners of the company don’t live in Ontario, they are from the US, it’s very difficult to do anything about it.” Essentially, what happened was that they closed the books on it. So now we have a resident of Ontario defrauded, and our ministry tells us we can’t do anything about it.

1120

Here’s the other problem: These people resurface time and time again under different corporate structures. I did some research, and it turned out that this company has had similar experiences in numerous states in the United States; that they have lawsuits filed against them in numerous jurisdictions; that they keep popping up, being reincarnated in different forms. I put the question to the ministry here in Ontario to say, “Look, when a company applies for letters of incorporation here, do we not look into whether or not the principals of the company have a track record of fraud? Do we not deny people to incorporate in the province of Ontario if there is an evident track record?” Do you know what the answer is? “No, we

don't. It would be too costly to do that, and we're going to presume that most people are honest."

Well, the fact of the matter is that I believe the ministry of business services has a responsibility to ensure that business is being done in this province in a way that is not going to defraud—how can we simply blindly say, "Go ahead and open up a corporation so you can defraud Ontario citizens"? That doesn't make any sense.

And so I am supporting this bill, because on the one hand I believe that, yes, we do need to have some standards in place. There should be regulations. I am concerned that the bill has not gone far enough. I think there's much more that needs to be done. I would like to see this bill then go into committee so we can deal with those issues and have some witnesses come forward on the record.

Mr. Dhillon talked about a number of people that he spoke to on the air, in terms of sharing their concerns. I would love nothing better than to have this bill in committee. Let's travel with that committee and let's allow people to come forward and tell us about their experiences, and let's get some of the names of these agencies on the record. Let's embarrass them into doing business the right way, because today there are no consequences.

I will be supporting this. I look forward to the rest of the debate. In the final analysis, it is in the interest of protecting very innocent people whose only crime is that they are looking for gainful employment, and we as a Legislature should be doing everything we can to protect them.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): It's my pleasure and privilege to speak about this bill, first and foremost because I used to own a consulting firm. I worked for many years in the employment agency business, and then started my own employment agency and consulting firm, and dealt with many of the major corporations in the city. I did so, I feel, on behalf of those who came and registered with us.

First and foremost, I want to say that there are many, many employment agencies in the city that operate entirely ethically. In fact, back in the late 1980s when I was in business, I paid \$10 an hour, minimum wage, to all of my contract employees. I would like to see the government support that today. Here we are, almost 2007. So I will support this bill.

What do I think about this bill? I think it is a tiny step where a great leap is required, an absolutely tiny step where a great leap is required. Why would I say that? Well, first of all, I would say that because there are no teeth to this bill. This is really just a bill calling for the licensing of an industry. Well, we license all sorts of industries. What does it actually mean? It doesn't mean much if there are no teeth, if there is no enforcement and there is no money behind the enforcement put alongside this bill.

When I hear the story that was described by Mr. Klees, I wonder how this bill would help as it currently stands, how it would help that individual who was taken for \$4,900. Well, the answer is that it probably wouldn't

help her much at all, because there is no money, there is no enforcement, and there is no way she could ever even begin to attempt to get that money back.

I want to step back for a minute, though, and look at the background and a little bit of what's led up to this bill, because I think it is extremely important. I turn to the Star here, which did a major piece about what they call "second-class" workers, workers in the temporary field. They said—and this is an article going back to October 14—that "about 13%—or close to 1.7 million—of Canadian workers are temporary, performing contract, seasonal, casual or agency work. But whereas one in 10 new hires was a temporary worker in 1989"—when I was in business—"that ratio has risen to one in five, according to Statistics Canada."

I continue on with the same article where it talks about agencies: "Agencies range from large and corporate to small and fly-by-night. Several agencies that owed wages to workers were found by the Workers' Action Centre"—a group that does tremendous work—"to be operating out of apartments and basements." These are businesses operating out of apartments and basements. We should be outraged by this. It goes on to say, "The labour ministry receives 15,000 to 20,000 employment standards complaints each year, but Peters said the Liberal government is determined to reduce that by targeting bad employers, including temp agencies." How does it do that? It does that by employing, "144 employment standards inspectors, 20 of whom are on a ... team targeting 2,500 Ontario firms last year...."

Just to give you an indication of how minuscule that response is, again I go to the Star, an editorial this time on Wednesday, the 18th. It says here, "While the McGuinty government has sensibly increased random inspections and prosecutions.... Every year, fewer than 1% of workplaces are inspected." Now, with that kind of track record, how can we possibly expect that anyone who has a complaint about their treatment by an agency—or an employer, for that matter—can ever get justice and their just day? Certainly, unless there are teeth in this bill again it will do very little if nothing at all to address that.

Then we look at the broader picture, if we kind of draw the lens back and look at the big picture, against which this bill is set. We're talking here about Bill 161 that's going to license employment agencies. This is a government bringing in this bill, albeit a private member's bill—a member of the majority government—that will not raise the minimum wage to a living wage. That's the poverty line; that's \$10 an hour. That means that many women, for example, who are the heads of households and who are single parents can't afford to go to work at all. They cannot afford to go to work. They'll lose drug benefits. You heard Mr. Dhillon speak about the lack of benefits that most temporary workers get. These women won't be allowed to get those drug benefits if they go back to work at all, whether through an agency or permanently. They'll lose money and, of course, their children will have to go into day care, questionable day

care, perhaps, because they can't afford the best of day care. So here, this is the background against which we set this bill, that people working at minimum wage can't pay the rent and feed their children. That's number one.

This bill is set against a background of this government where only 30% of all of our labour force is covered by employment insurance. That's the background against which this bill is set—only 30%. We should be outraged and ashamed at that. I know it's federal, but we should be doing everything in our power to change that ratio. That's appalling.

Again, this bill is set against a background of other temporary and contract workers. I think here of our brothers and sisters in OPSEU who are currently engaged in a huge struggle to get contract teachers in community colleges and other places covered by union legislation. It's against the law for part-time workers in colleges to be part of unions. That's the background against which this bill is set. So when I say baby step, I'm talking a very tiny, tiny baby step.

My husband works at a community college. He's a contract worker. I hope he's covered by a \$10-an-hour minimum wage because right now at home he's marking dozens and dozens of papers. He teaches five courses. And, do you know what? He doesn't make nearly as much as a full-time worker, even though he works full-time. This is a huge, black mark against this government. If this government was really concerned about the rights of temporary and part-time workers, it would be doing something about that. These are people with doctorates, these are people with masters, and they're working for government-run, supposedly, community colleges etc., where, again, they're not really making a fair wage, not even close. That has nothing to do with employment agencies whatsoever. That is directly something that this government could do, it could make a move on. I know my colleague Mr. Marchese has a bill before the House dealing with that situation right now.

1130

Again, this bill is set against a background where we don't have status-of-the-artist legislation. I heard some discussion coming from Mr. Dhillon about children. With no status-of-the-artist legislation, artists, anyone who's working in the arts, are some of the poorest people in our community, with an average salary of around \$26,000 to \$27,000 a year, many of whom are going to lose their jobs because there's no income averaging for them. If they have a good year, the next year the government taxes them based on last year—no status-of-the-artist legislation, and, in that, no child protection act at all about children who work in the arts.

This bill, this baby step, aimed at one small sliver of the employment spectrum does nothing about the rights of children who work in the arts, does nothing about the rights of artists who work in the arts, does nothing for that at all. When we take out all of these groups of people and look at this small, little baby step, all it does, even for employment agencies, is expect them to get a licence.

When I opened my agency, I had to get a licence too. Everybody who opens a business has to get a licence.

What does it mean in reality? It means probably about as much as the paper it's written on. It means nothing. What does it mean? Nothing.

Again, and I go back to the original point, there are no teeth. There's no enforcement in this bill. There's no way, shape or form to this bill that will actually do anything that we hope for. The concerns we heard from Mr. Dhillon and the concerns of Mr. Klees will do nothing to address any of those concerns if we pass this bill.

I'll support the bill. We'll support the bill as New Democrats because even a baby step is better than no step at all. But boy oh boy, when we get to committee, wouldn't we like to see—how many pages in this bill? Six pages. It should be a bill of about 60 pages. It should be a bill that covers the works of artists. It should be a bill that covers the rights to protection of children. It should be a bill that supports those who are not covered by employment insurance or health benefits. It should be a bill to cover part-time labourers in our community colleges, a bill that OPSEU would like to see passed. It should be a bill that brings into place a \$10-an-hour living wage—the poverty line. That's what this bill should do, and that's not what this bill does.

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): I'm happy to support this private member's bill. I thought what I would do is take a few minutes and try and put a human face on just what we're talking about, because we've had statistics and so on and have some theoretical appreciation of what the bill is designed to do.

I'm quoting from an article that appeared in the Toronto Star, Saturday, October 14, 2006, by Rita Daly. I want to read parts of it into the record because I think it puts a human face on this problem and, at the end of the day, we have to remind ourselves that there are human beings, human faces, men and women behind this issue.

I'm quoting from Rita Daly's article:

"To understand the 'temp' industry today is to hear the story of eight Somali women whose experience has left them without jobs, references and, in their estimation, much to fear.

"Five days a week—some for months, others for as long as two years—they clocked into work at the UPS package delivery plant off Jane St. in the north end of the city. Their jobs involved standing for hours high on a platform flipping boxes on a conveyor belt.

"It was mundane work. But worse, it was work that denied them job security, basic employment rights and branded them second-class compared with permanently employed co-workers performing similar tasks on the warehouse floor.

"Considered fringe labour for decades, so-called temps have become the nation's homegrown version of offshore labour. Temporary workers are rapidly replacing permanent workers in almost every sector, often through employment agencies that pay up to 40% less than permanent wages, offer few benefits and make a profit marketing labour to factories, warehouses, retail outlets, nursing homes and offices throughout the country.

"Currently about 13%—or close to 1.7 million—of Canadian workers are temporary, performing contract,

seasonal, casual or agency work. But whereas one in 10 new hires was a temporary worker in 1989, that ratio has now risen to one in five, according to Statistics Canada.

“Temporary agencies have flourished as companies opt to hire cheaper labour from an unregulated industry and under what critics call outdated employment standards legislation. Temp agencies say their biggest challenge is trying to pay workers a decent wage when client companies don’t want to—or won’t—“bear the burden of higher costs.

“The Somali women worked 22 hours a week at the United Postal Service plant. But their employer was actually a large North American employment agency called Spherion. In a business arrangement with UPS, Spherion Canada placed temporary workers in the plant and paid their wages.

“The women earned about \$1 an hour less than other unskilled unionized package handlers in the plant. They received no statutory holiday pay. And there was no opportunity for them to benefit from UPS health, dental and pension benefits.

“Last summer, they were abruptly let go, allegedly due to a lack of safety over their traditional Muslim attire while on the job. Up until then, the women say they wore their ankle-length skirts without it being a problem. But after a union drive resulted in the company hiring them on permanently, UPS told them they needed to roll up their skirts for safety reasons, they said in an interview.

“After telling company officials that, because of religious reasons, they could not do so, they were let go.

“Only when the women were being hired on as permanent workers did UPS then start to look at issues of health and safety.” That was according to an employee of the Workers’ Action Centre, a grassroots advocacy centre that has taken an interest in protecting the rights of temps.

“The women were devastated.” They claimed that “neither UPS nor Spherion gave them any health or safety training. And, as other temp workers typically find, they received no termination pay.”

I just wanted to highlight that, because that’s an example of a vulnerable group that the member opposite’s private member’s bill is trying to address. I think this Legislature, all of us here, owes a duty to protect these kinds of temp workers. That’s what the legislation is designed to do. I’m happy to support it.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I appreciate this opportunity to join in on the private members’ business, Bill 161, brought forward by the member from Brampton West–Mississauga. It’s An Act respecting employment agencies, which is licensing employment agencies. I’ve listened to all the comments. We all represent very different ridings and have very different problems within them, and the member from Brampton West–Mississauga has brought this to our attention. He has heard a lot in his riding.

I represent the predominantly rural riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, with agriculture being the third-largest employer. As many of you in the room know, it’s seasonal, in a sense, as we need more employees within

that—when the sun shines, you have to make hay, as they say. That’s when the jobs come. We have within that riding 9,600 full-time jobs connected with the agriculture sector but we have 5,800 part-time and seasonal jobs.

Another large industry in my riding is tourism. In Haliburton county alone, our population goes from 16,000 to 40,000 during that peak tourism time. So we have a lot of fluctuations and need temporary employment for those times of year.

When we listen to the stories of the new immigrants coming to the country, wanting to find employment, and the difficulties and challenges, and the advantage taken of them by some of these agencies, we want to bring in legislation that certainly can give them more protections. So the principle of the bill is very good and I support it, because we’ve heard the stories, from the newspapers and from members, of the fly-by-night operations that can get involved.

There are certainly some concerns in the bill. I know the member from Parkdale–High Park has brought forward, “Where are the teeth? How are we going to do this?” That’s why I think we need to send this through to committee, because we have to hear from these people. It would be a great education for all of us to hear from both the agencies that are set up, that are legitimate, and from the employees who are being taken advantage of.

1140

The bill, as I say, as it currently exists, is another layer of bureaucracy. How can we implement the principle that this bill contains? How can we implement it? Could we simply piggyback it with the Ministry of Labour’s already existing employment standards acts? We’ve talked about professionally run, ethically based agencies that could certainly be considered as best practices. Can we learn from them? Let’s not reinvent the wheel. Let’s make things better.

There should be more in the legislation to ensure that responsibility for this act does not fall on the backs of municipalities. What roles do they play within that?

Section 3 of the bill mentions items such as the fees, forms required, and prescribed securities for agencies. The bill in sections 13, 14 and 15 further discusses those, but leaves a lot to be determined by the Ministry of Labour at the time.

Like I said, we agree with the bill. We have details that we need to iron out, and that’s the purpose of sending this to committee, because we do have to protect vulnerable workers at all levels, and I mentioned the various ridings that we all represent and the examples from each of them. The regulation of the employment agencies needs to be established and balanced with what’s required by businesses and industries that use them.

I commend the member for bringing this bill forward: baby steps, as they say. It’s a start. As in politics, legislation sometimes doesn’t move as fast as we want, and other times it moves too fast for us. But at least this is taking us a step forward. We need to protect the interests of vulnerable people.

We have employment peaks in different areas of our ridings, and there are different countries that come for-

ward—the very real stories that were brought forward today by some of the members and that have been written up in the newspapers.

I think this bill is timely. It is a private member's bill brought forward by a government member, so it's up to the government when this is going to be sent to committee. It's in their hands now, and I support the bill.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): The member from Brampton West–Mississauga has introduced Bill 161 protecting vulnerable workers, the agency act. Mr. Dhillon indicates, in fact, that we're not very good right now at protecting vulnerable workers. He indicates that there are many provinces that are actually doing a better job. The provinces of Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Yukon, and even the Northwest Territories have legislation in place that is doing a better job, and that's why he's identified this as a hole that needs to be filled. He indicates that California, Maryland, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York and other jurisdictions have similar legislation already on the books. We did, but there were changes made, probably as an oversight.

We're right now ready to vote on Bill 161. I'm sure, from what I'm hearing from all parties, that Mr. Dhillon's bill will be successful today. So I want to say to you, congratulations. It's a great step in the right direction. We will support this.

Almost every Saturday, I want you to know, I'm in my constituency office on the corner of Davenport and Dufferin. At 9 o'clock in the morning you'll see me there. I would say that twice a month at least two people come to complain to me about the kinds of issues we're debating today: inadequacies, unfairness, unjust treatment in terms of employment agencies.

One person came in and she said to me, "I just paid what's called a placement fee in order to get a job." A placement fee means that if you want to be considered for employment, you've got to pay ahead before you even get paid. What kind of employment agency asks you for money up front?

I was shocked today to hear an even bigger price from the member from Oak Ridges, who said that there was a tremendous amount of money wanted; he talked about over \$5,000. Now, he said \$4,900, and if you added GST that comes to over \$5,000. Imagine paying over \$5,000 before you can get employment, before you get a first paycheque. This kind of a situation cannot persist. Consequently, we're certainly in favour of filling this hole today with Bill 161.

Another person comes in and he says it to me, "I have to pay what's called a registration fee." That was in the amount of \$120. A registration fee means you have to register before you can get employment and pay money upfront before you can get employment. Wow. I wonder how many of us would pay money upfront before we get a job as an MPP. Wait a minute—

Interjection.

Mr. Ruprecht: I suppose we all paid money upfront. Well, no. The NDP and the Conservatives are getting

paid before they get the job, because they get support from the party, and the Liberals probably don't. I never got any support from my party, but I know that you did and I know that you did. In any case, let's not talk about that.

Another person comes in and she says to me—this is very important—"I was not paid for the last two weeks before this company went bankrupt, and I want to be compensated." There was some talk here earlier saying that the ministry is not doing a good job. I want to tell you, I differ on this analysis. I have a letter here from Minister Peters, who is the Minister of Labour. He says, "Our government is taking a strong, proactive approach to protecting the rights of temporary ... workers. We're committed to ensuring these rights, and believe the most effective way of protecting temporary workers is to enforce our laws...."

Just two quick points: "We've made a big difference"—yes. "We have set and surpassed targets. Between 2003 and 2004, there were only 151 proactive inspections." In 2004 to 2005, guess how many? Our team, he says, "conducted 2,355 proactive inspections"—not bad. "Since 2004, we helped recover \$3.2 million in wages...."

Thank you, Mr. Peters, and congratulations to the member from Brampton West–Mississauga for Bill 161.

Mr. Bisson: I'm going to support this bill, in the sense that it's a step in the right direction. But my problem is, I read the bill and all it really does is say that employment agencies are going to have to have a licence. It doesn't do anything about making sure that the Employment Standards Act is followed. It doesn't do anything about prescribing what the employment agency can and can't do when it comes to how they treat the temporary employees who are getting jobs through their agency. It doesn't deal with anything having to do with the fees that are charged. There is a whole litany of issues that aren't dealt with.

I want to put on the record upfront that we're going to give this bill support at second reading on condition that should it ever actually get to a committee—well, it will get to a committee if it passes this House—that is going to deal with it, we need to take a look at a whole bunch of other issues. I think there are certain practices—not with all, because there are some good employment agencies out there that do good work and treat the people that they work with fairly, but there are a lot of examples where they don't.

The member across the way talked about people having to pay upfront fees when it comes to being able to even get the job, and sometimes those fees are quite heavy. There are others, in most cases, where the employee is not paid directly by the employer they're going to work for but rather by the agency that got them the work. Are there situations where people are having deducted off of their paycheque some sort of administrative fee or whatever it might be, as far as the employment agency basically skimming off the top of the wages money that should actually be going to the employees? You've got to look at all of those issues. To say that this bill is monumental in moving something forward I think is just a bit beyond the pale.

I also want to put on the record—and this is somewhat related—something that came to my attention recently from Mike Aiken from Thunder Bay. If you can allow me to digress a little bit, he wrote of the fine work that the Kinsmen and Kinettes have been doing for years when it comes to dealing with cystic fibrosis. He sent an e-mail in, and I wanted an opportunity somewhere in the debate to raise this.

1150

He pointed out that in 1963 Dr. Crozier, the director of the CF clinic at the Hospital for Sick Children, had gotten together with Bill Skelly, just by a chance meeting at one point. Through that conversation, Bill Skelly, through his particular Kinsmen organization, started championing the issue of cystic fibrosis. As a result, the Kinsmen have gone far and beyond to become the champions of cystic fibrosis. Now, some 40 years later, they've managed to raise \$32 million for that particular cause. I just want to say to them, that is work really well done. As to how it relates to this debate, I would just say that many of the people within organizations such as the Kinsmen and others may know somebody who is actually involved through an employment agency, and I want to make sure that whatever we do with this bill, we end up doing what is right.

The other point that I want to raise very quickly is that in this particular bill there is really no enforcement mechanism other than an enforcement mechanism to make sure that there is a licence posted and that the operator has a current licence. Well, the licence has no requirements to it. So again I go back and say to the member, Mr. Dhillon, who brings this bill forward, it's great to have a licence, but it's a little bit akin to all of a sudden saying that we're going to issue somebody a driver's licence but at the end of the day there's no requirement as to what the driver needs to know when it comes to training to be able to get that licence in the first place and then having to follow the rules of the road. You don't just issue a licence in isolation of everything else; you've got to make sure that in the end there is some rhyme or reason as to how those organizations have to work and what rules they have to follow.

Employment agencies are becoming more and more a big part of the economy, not only in Ontario, I would argue, but across North America and elsewhere. We need to make sure that workers who work through employment agencies are protected against some of the bad practices that we know occur now. We need to make sure that those who are out there legitimately trying to do the right thing are regulated in some way to make sure that there is confidence in the system, unlike, unfortunately, what we see at times now.

Again, I want to say that we need to make sure that workers are properly protected through this particular bill. We will give this bill support at second reading, with the understanding that when it gets to committee, if it does get to committee and it's dealt with, at the end of the day we need to make some amendments to make sure that there is enforcement, make sure that there are

standards and make sure that we properly set up this bill to do what the member is trying to do.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): First, I want to stand up this morning to congratulate my colleague from Brampton West–Mississauga for bringing such an important issue to this House. Temporary agencies across the province of Ontario have been around for many years, and I know that some of them do an excellent job. But some others don't do any job; as a matter of fact, they mess with the lives of many, many different workers who are badly looking for jobs. They want to work, and they cannot find a job on their own. They go to those agencies, and they give them a job at almost 40% less than what they're supposed to earn in the regular time and regular places. It's a very important bill, a very important issue. We should be supporting it, and we should talk about it many different times.

I was happy to see both opposition parties supporting and talking about this bill. I know every party talks from a different point of view, and they don't think it's going far enough, but as a matter of fact, it's a very important step toward a bigger step. When we go into the details of this bill, we can fill it up and make it strong and able to serve the people of Ontario.

I'm honoured and privileged today, and especially yesterday when we were debating Bill 124, fair access to regulated professions in the province of Ontario, to see the support of the people of Ontario for our bill and how much our government pays attention to the people who come to this province from different parts of the globe, gives them the ability to utilize their skills and their potential, to help us continue building this province of Ontario. This is our approach in this province: to assist everyone who wants to be an Ontarian, female and male, from wherever, to get a good job and fair treatment in this province.

I heard the member for Oak Ridges talking about this bill, and also the member for Parkdale–High Park. She said, "Not strong enough; doesn't mean anything." As a matter of fact, I want to congratulate the Minister of Labour and also his assistants—my colleague here, Mario Racco—for the great job they do on behalf of all of us to make sure of safety and the regular and legal conduct by many employers in the province of Ontario—how they do their business on a daily basis, to make sure fairness and accountability are being applied on any site, in any work in the province of Ontario.

When our government got elected in 2003-04, we appointed more than 150 inspectors to make sure all of the jobs were being inspected and run according to the law and the legal process.

Also, he mentioned a name of the person who went to temporary employment agencies and after a while, he didn't get the job or she didn't get the job, and the agency went bankrupt, and the person who, from the United States—and he wrote to the minister of business and consumer affairs back then and didn't get any answer.

I want to tell the member from across the way that our government invested more than \$3.2 million in lost

income for many people who have been defrauded by temporary agencies across the province of Ontario. This is an important issue for us. We don't take it lightly. It's important because we believe strongly that everyone who wants to work and contribute to this economy should be protected and should be looked after very well.

The member for Brampton West brought this issue before us here today to raise it. Hopefully, this bill will go to second stage and third stage and will be implemented to help the people of Ontario. I think it is important and it fits with our direction as a government that wants to protect anyone who wants to contribute to our economy.

Again, I want to congratulate the member, congratulate our Minister of Labour and congratulate our government, who paid attention to all of the details concerning all of the people of the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Dhillon: First of all, I want to thank the members for Oak Ridges, Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, Parkdale–High Park, Davenport, Willowdale and London–Fanshawe for their contribution to Bill 161. The member for Parkdale–High Park raised some issues, and I just would want to briefly respond to those. Our ministry has done a lot in terms of hiring inspectors, and the inspections have been going up since we got elected in 2003.

Obviously, just as in a lot of things, there is a lot more work to do. This bill is part of it. This bill is part of improving the conditions that temp workers work in with employment agencies and temporary help agencies. There are a lot of legitimate employment agencies out there, ones we need, ones we need to look to in order to set examples for the other ones that are not so good. So again, I want to thank everybody.

The other point made by the member for Parkdale–High Park was about foreign-trained workers. I just want to mention briefly that we have made record-breaking investments in this area to create a level playing field for the educated new immigrants that come in so they can find jobs in their field, because it is important. These are a large segment of the people who get trapped by these new agencies, because they come into Canada, they need a job to provide for their family and oftentimes they have no choice but to accept a job they might not like or one that doesn't pay them as they should get paid.

So once again, I want to thank everybody for contributing to my bill, and I hope that together we can make further progress.

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

RAW MILK

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We'll deal first with ballot item number 65, standing in the name of Mr. Murdoch.

Mr. Murdoch has moved private member's notice of motion number 32. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will call in the members after dealing with the next ballot item.

PROTECTING VULNERABLE WORKERS ACT (EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES), 2006 LOI DE 2006 SUR LA PROTECTION DES TRAVAILLEURS VULNÉRABLES (AGENCES DE PLACEMENT)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 66, standing in the name of Mr. Dhillon.

Mr. Dhillon has moved second reading of Bill 161. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to refer that to the standing committee on general government.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

We will now call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

RAW MILK

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Murdoch has moved private members' notice of motion number 32. All those in favour, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Barrett, Toby	Martiniuk, Gerry	Wilson, Jim
Chudleigh, Ted	Murdoch, Bill	
Klees, Frank	Runciman, Robert W.	

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Peters, Steve
Bisson, Gilles	Jeffrey, Linda	Racco, Mario G.
Brotten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Bryant, Michael	Marsales, Judy	Ruprecht, Tony
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Sandals, Liz
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Scott, Laurie
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Smith, Monique
Dombrowsky, Leona	Miller, Norm	Smitherman, George
Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Fonseca, Peter	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wilkinson, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Patten, Richard	

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): The ayes are 7; the nays are 35.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

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

The House recessed from 1208 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): This has been a terrible and devastating week for over 300 million insulin users worldwide who are alive today because of the work of Sir Frederick Banting. To everyone's shock and dismay, the Ontario Historical Society has shown pure greed by selling to a developer the 100-acre farm where Sir Frederick performed some of his earliest experiments. Because of the inaction of this government, the birthplace of Sir Frederick Banting is on its way to becoming a subdivision. Dalton McGuinty and his Minister of Culture should be ashamed of themselves for failing to preserve the legacy of Dr. Banting.

Everyone except the Liberal government and the Ontario Historical Society has been working hard towards turning the property into a camp for diabetic youth and children, while this government chose to abdicate its responsibility to protect the historical significance of this property. Dalton McGuinty and his government have betrayed the trust of Sir Frederick Banting when they could have, at the stroke of a pen, saved this homestead and been international heroes. But they have failed miserably and let the whole world down.

I've introduced petitions containing tens of thousands of signatures in this House over the past two years and I've tabled a private member's bill that could have saved this homestead. It's time for every one of you in the Liberal caucus to stand up and tell Dalton McGuinty to get off the fence, get to work, and save the Banting homestead before it's too late. The ball is in your court.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Nothing changes, and in fact things are getting worse. That's the best way to describe the ongoing crisis for patients, health care professionals and emergency room staff at the Sudbury Regional Hospital.

Yesterday, at least six surgeries were cancelled because there were no beds available at the hospital for recovering patients. Indeed, the night before, post-operative patients stayed in the recovery room all night because there was no bed for them to go to. In October, 15 surgeries were cancelled. Two weeks ago, two full operating days were lost, with 20 surgeries cancelled, because of the bed shortage. The cancellations yesterday were particularly frustrating for everyone, as two extra hours of operating time had been set aside for hip and knee replacements as per the government's wait time strategy.

The bed shortage at the Sudbury Regional Hospital continues because patients who could be discharged have no community services or beds to go to. Yesterday, there were 92 alternate-level-of-care patients waiting for discharge. This is not new. In fact, this crisis has gone on

for over two and a half years now, and the number of patients waiting in the hospital has grown over that time. Surgery cancellations are becoming more frequent, and backups in the emergency room—19 people on stretchers in the ER by yesterday afternoon—are getting worse too.

When will the McGuinty Liberal government finally deal with this crisis? When will a concentrated effort be made to solve this serious ongoing problem? How many more patients will be stuck in the hospital while surgeries are cancelled and patients are backlogged in the ER before a permanent solution is found?

WATER QUALITY

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): This week I was extremely excited and proud to learn of a partnership between the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning and the region of Peel. In November, I learned that Peel and Sheridan began offering a water and waste water education program for municipal operators who work on waste distribution and waste water collection systems. The development of this program is a proactive response to our government's passage of the Safe Drinking Water Act in December 2002. Justice O'Connor's recommendations will protect human health through the control and regulation of drinking water systems and drinking water testing.

The Peel-Sheridan partnership is the first of its kind in this province and will set a new standard in training for programs in the water industry. This partnership will not only ensure that the region of Peel maintains its high quality of water purification and distribution but also will bear fruit elsewhere because they have held discussions with other municipalities to offer their learning and development programs to employees at their locations.

The signature of a great community is leadership, and I feel it's very important that we acknowledge those in our community who lead by example. I commend and applaud the vision and foresight of all those at the Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning and the region of Peel for creating a program that will set the standard for safe drinking water around this province.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my sad duty to report that once again another mill will be closing permanently. The Tembec mill in Smooth Rock Falls, idled in July, will shut down permanently, leaving more than 280 employees without jobs, this despite the Premier's assurances that his northern energy rebate for large pulp and paper operations is just what the doctor ordered; this despite the Minister of Natural Resources' proclamation that all the recommendations of his forestry sector council have been fulfilled; this despite the minister's assurances that Ontario's forestry sector got off virtually scot-free in relation to the US housing slump. How many more jobs will be lost before the McGuinty government takes action?

This government is only interested in parroting orchestrated quotes from forest companies that fear retaliation from this government. I have a few different quotes, like the executive who told the *Globe and Mail*, “The government’s response has been somewhat sporadic....”

“What we don’t have is the grand master plan yet.... It’s taken a long time to get serious attention for this issue and for people to realize this isn’t just a cyclical swing.”

Here is another quote, from the Composite Panel Association: “We are ... respectfully voicing our disappointment and astonishment that particleboard and medium-density fibreboard plants were not included in your electricity rebate program....”

“We fail to understand that, given our similarities both in energy consumption, processes and competitiveness, why we are not a full beneficiary of the rebate program.”

Time and time again, the McGuinty government shows that it has no plan and no vision.

MURRAY BARKLEY

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): It gives me pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize a great Ontarian, Murray Barkley.

Murray is a third-generation proprietor of Barkley’s Store in Avonmore, as well as the author of the recently published book titled *Speaking of Avonmore: History, Heroes, Happenings and Humour in the Life of a (not very) Typical Ontario Village*.

I was honoured to join with others from my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh in the Avonmore community centre for the launch of Murray’s book. It is a collection of speeches and articles that affectionately capture the spirit and history of the community of Avonmore. The great character and characters of Avonmore come to life in Murray’s words, and readers quickly learn what makes Avonmore such a magical place in which to live.

Murray has not only written a book that captures the essence of Avonmore; he is donating \$5 from the sale of each book sold before Christmas to the fundraising campaign to replace the Avonmore community centre. This is the sort of commitment to communities so prevalent in my riding and so ably embodied by Murray Barkley himself. It was Murray’s advocacy back in the 1980s and 1990s that kept the Avonmore post office, Roxmore Public School and the Avonmore Library from closing.

I am proud of the work Murray Barkley has done and of the way he continues to help preserve the essence of his community, while using his words to let people know how special Avonmore is in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): One thing you can say about Dalton McGuinty is that he sure leads by example.

This week, the Auditor General’s report cited the wasteful and gluttonous spending of our taxpayer dollars. This week we have witnessed that many government agencies are closely following on the footsteps of Dalton McGuinty and his cabinet minister. This is the Premier who travels with the largest entourage of staffers, hangers-on and wannabes in the history of Ontario. Who can forget when they paid \$800 to ship ice from Toronto down to Niagara and booked more hotel rooms, even more than McGuinty’s giant entourage?

This is a Premier who spent \$6 million to drop the “C” from the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., spent \$120,000 to redesign the trillium and gave a \$20-million raise to his Liberal appointees in various government agencies, boards and commissions, let alone all those ministers spending millions of dollars on hotel rooms for meetings when government space in Macdonald Block is sitting empty. No doubt, Dalton McGuinty is leading by example. Easy-money McGuinty is spending your money like it’s going out of style. To hear Dalton McGuinty say, “You’ve got to be careful with tax dollars”—oh, come on. Horse feathers. Dalton McGuinty is simply saying, “Don’t do as I say; do as I do.” He’s the one with the helicopter and he’s the one setting the example.

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DANA ROBBINS

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): Today I want to celebrate a Hamilton champion. Dana Robbins was the editor-in-chief for the *Hamilton Spectator* and is leaving our wonderful city to accept a new position as the publisher of the *Record of Waterloo region* and the *Guelph Mercury*.

Dana has received many tributes for his distinguished work and is known as one of Canada’s brightest young editors. Hamilton is affectionately called a “large small town” where we feel we all know each other personally. In this instance, Hamiltonians have responded by sending e-mails, letters and gifts to Dana wishing him continued success.

He started his career at the *Hamilton Spectator* as an intern in 1982. He then went on to return as the *Hamilton Spectator*’s reporter in 1984 and was named editor-in-chief in the year 2000: 24 years of stellar service to Hamilton.

At a time when newspaper readership was said to be in steady decline, Dana Robbins took the challenge and in October 2003 took a six-section newspaper and changed it into four sections.

Recently, Mr. Robbins was a guest speaker at the 50th anniversary of Mission Services. He spoke elegantly and eloquently about each of our responsibilities to those in need. Michael Josephson wrote a piece entitled, “What Will Matter.” One line reads, “Strive to ensure that the outcomes of your actions have benefits that extend well beyond yourself.” Dana has achieved that lofty goal, and in 2005 he received the Excellence in Journalism Award, which is known as the most prestigious media honour.

He is also recognized as being emotionally involved with Hamilton's community, and initiated a poverty project.

Please wish Dana Robbins our very best success for the future.

HOLIDAY SEASON

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): I rise in this House today to speak about the wonderful holiday season which is fast approaching. As we all know, throughout December and January, Ontarians from many different ethnic and religious backgrounds will be celebrating special holidays with friends and loved ones. London welcomes people from 130 different countries who speak many different languages, and we practise every belief on earth and enjoy peace and tranquillity. That's why we enjoy being Ontarians and Canadians.

I would like to take this time to wish each and every Ontarian across this great province a happy and safe holiday season and all the very best in the new year. Mr. Speaker, I will thank you, and I wish you and I wish all my colleagues in the House from both sides a happy season, and hopefully they'll have a great and safe season.

DOCTORS' SERVICES

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): I rise today to talk about the extraordinary success the McGuinty government is having with regard to our commitment to have more doctors practising in Ontario. Our government took up the challenge that was left behind by the previous two governments and is aggressively addressing this serious lack of health care professionals in the province.

Under the leadership of George Smitherman, we're working tirelessly to ensure that all communities across the province get the access to health care they deserve. Not only is the McGuinty government focused on initiatives that will see new spaces for medical students open up in Ontario—many in my riding—we're also committed to helping foreign-trained health care professionals receive the accreditation they need to practise here. They have the skills, Ontarians have the need and the McGuinty government is making sure the two are put together for the benefit of everyone.

We've been able to go above and beyond projected targets this year by offering 218 new positions for training and assessments of international medical graduates. Ontario communities are seeing 750 new internationally trained medical graduates practising since 2003, and there are another 470 internationally trained medical graduates currently enrolled in training and assessment programs.

Unlike the members opposite, we want to invest in the health care of Ontarians, not strip away valuable resources and funding. We know there's more to do, but we're committed to ensuring—

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

REPORT, OFFICE OF THE INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the report of the Integrity Commissioner made pursuant to the MPP Compensation Reform Act, 2001.

MOTIONS

WITHDRAWAL OF BILLS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I have the following motion. I move that the order for second reading of Bill 83, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and the Coroners Act to better protect the children of Ontario, standing in the name of Mr. Jackson, be discharged and the bill be withdrawn; and

That the order referring Bill 96, An Act to amend the Education Act, to the standing committee on regulations and private bills, standing in the name of Ms. Wynne, be discharged and the bill be withdrawn; and

That the order referring Bill 71, An Act to promote the use of automated external heart defibrillators, to the standing committee on social policy, standing in the name of Mr. Crozier, be discharged and the bill be withdrawn.

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

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting times, the standing committee on regulations and private bills be authorized to meet after routine proceedings this afternoon for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 124, An Act to provide for fair registration practices in Ontario's regulated professions.

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

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, His Honour awaits.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the chamber and took his seat upon the throne.

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NATIVE YOUTH

Hon. James K. Bartleman (Lieutenant Governor): Pray be seated.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, here assembled, has resolved to receive Your Honour's gracious address.

Hon. Mr. Bartleman: Premier McGuinty, Mr. Tory, Mr. Hampton, members of the Legislative Assembly, I should like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to provide the Legislature with a story of hope before everyone departs for the holiday season.

In addition to their normal constitutional and ceremonial duties, Lieutenant Governors traditionally embrace non-partisan causes that are important to the people of their provinces. In 2002, when I was sworn in, I selected mental health, anti-racism and the welfare of native youth as my priorities. I have been asked to speak to you today on what I have been doing for native youth.

I chose this issue as a result of my own experiences growing up as a member of a mixed white-aboriginal family in the Ontario of the 1940s and early 1950s. During these formative years, I witnessed first-hand the terrible poverty of native people, their lack of political rights and the racism to which they were subjected.

In the years that followed, I watched the condition of native people improve. They received the vote in 1960. A small but well-educated middle class has come into being. It was not, however, until I became Lieutenant Governor and began to travel to northern Ontario, in particular to the 50 communities of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation located in the vast northern two thirds of our province, that I saw how far we still had to go as a society.

Twenty-six of these communities have access to the outside world only by air. Poverty is deep and endemic. Unemployment is over 70%. A container of three bags of milk costs \$13, a carton of juice \$9 and a case of pop \$29.

My first trip was a revelation. As my aircraft landed and taxied down the runway to park, another aircraft waited for clearance to take off. The distraught chief told me that the outgoing aircraft was carrying out to Thunder Bay for an autopsy the body of a 14-year-old girl who had killed herself. "Why?" I asked the chief. "She had no hope," he told me.

Last year, three young people, including a 12-year-old girl who hanged herself on a tree in front of her school just as her classmates arrived to start their day, killed themselves at Wunnumin Lake First Nation. "Why did they do it?" I asked the chief, teachers and parents. "Because they lacked hope," they said.

Why do these children lack hope? They lack hope because they have few job prospects. They lack hope because they often do not know how to read and write. They lack hope because they live in poverty. They lack hope because they see on television the relative wealth of their fellow Canadians that they sense they will never share. They lack hope because they hear stories of racism from their friends and relatives who visit the outside world. They lack hope because they lack self-esteem. They lack hope because they believe that no one cares about them. They thus kill themselves at rates 10 times the national average, out of sight and out of mind of their fellow Ontarians.

Suicide in Canada is actually a phenomenon which affects middle-aged people, but among the native population it is the young people, often children.

I turned to Grand Chief Stan Beardy, who is with us today in the gallery, to seek his advice on what to do. I would ask the Grand Chief to stand.

The Grand Chief told me that we had to give the children hope and to show them that other Ontarians cared about them. Hope and caring, he emphasized, were the keys. We have worked closely together to achieve those objectives ever since.

Our starting point was our conviction that people and organizations of goodwill could make a difference. We found that we had to mobilize civil society. We found that all we had to do was to ask and Ontarians in the thousands were ready to help. And the government of Ontario and the Ontario Trillium Foundation stepped in to assist. We then had a marriage of civil society and government, a potent combination.

The Grand Chief and I agreed that the keys to giving hope were literacy and building bridges of understanding and mutual respect between native and non-native children.

I for one will never forget the impact my encounter with books had on me when I was growing up in Muskoka in the 1940s. They transformed my life, allowed me to dream, and prepared me for a life other than that of an unskilled labourer, which would have otherwise been my fate.

I also never forgot the casual racism of that period. The lesson I learned was how important it was for people, especially children, to respect the cultures of others.

The Grand Chief and I decided to be highly focused and practical and to stay away from the issues of who was to blame, who should feel guilty and who had entitlements.

In 2004, the library shelves were bare in the native schools in the NAN territory. We thus appealed to Ontarians to donate gently used books and hoped to collect 60,000; 1.2 million poured in. The OPP opened its detachments as book collection sites and the Canadian Forces offered a hangar at Downsview for storage. Volunteers sorted them down to 850,000 and, with the help of the Canadian Forces, Wasaya Airways and trucking companies such as Manitoulin Transport, we established libraries in schools not just in the north but in native communities that wanted them across Ontario, plus 26 of the 28 friendship centres of the province. Some time later, when the children of Attawapiskat were tested, their reading levels had gone up by 30% just by having books to read.

In our second initiative, with the support of the chiefs of the province, the Ontario Principals' Council, the Toronto Catholic District School Board and the Toronto District School Board, we twinned 100 native schools with non-native schools in the province and all the schools of Nunavut with schools in Toronto. This was to promote cross-cultural awareness and to break down barriers between kids.

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The results have been heart-warming. Just two weeks ago, for example, I hosted a get-together in my suite with the students of the Mary Jane Naveau Memorial School from Mattagami, who had come to Toronto and bunked down with students from the St. Francis De Sales elementary school in North York. The Toronto Catholic District School Board even held arctic games last spring with students from twinned schools in Toronto and Nunavut.

In our third initiative we established summer camps, run by Frontier College, in all fly-in communities in Ontario's north. Nine universities, four colleges, three teachers' federations, De Beers Canada, the Canadian Auto Workers Union, the Power Workers' Union and Ontario's power companies provided the bulk of the funding for the camps to run for five years. The Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and the Ministries of Citizenship, Health Promotion, Children and Youth Services and Training, Colleges and Universities complemented their efforts.

The Canadian Tire Foundation stepped in with baseball gear, and Jan Industries of Montreal donated guitars to give sports and music components. Although not part of the summer camp program, the Toronto Maple Leafs and the NHL Players' Association provided hockey gear to equip 25 teams, in collaboration with the Daniel Beardsley Memorial Hockey Fund, to fight violence and suicide. The Grand Chief has told me that the impact of this donation on the troubled youth in his communities has been absolutely enormous, a perfect marriage, therefore, of civil society and government.

Last summer I visited the camps to see how the children were doing. In North Spirit Lake, the principal pulled me aside to point out three youngsters who had just learned to read. The same thing happened to me in my visits to other communities.

Our fourth initiative is a young readers' club called Club Amick, run by the Southern Ontario Library Service. Banks, churches, the Trillium Foundation, but above all hundreds, if not thousands, of individual Ontarians have provided the money to give new children's books and a children's newspaper on a regular basis over the next five years to all 3,500 children, from kindergarten to grade 6, in every one of the fly-in communities. The teachers' federations and individual teachers' chapters and individual teachers have taken a major role in all of this. My dream is that some day the children in other native communities across Ontario's north will be able to become members of Club Amick, so that they too will develop a love of reading.

I am announcing today that I will be launching another province-wide book drive for the month of January. This time, in addition to topping up the libraries we established in 2004, I am hoping to provide surplus books to native communities elsewhere in the Canadian north, including Nunavut. The OPP has generously agreed to make its detachments across the province available as book collection sites once again. I thank Commissioner

Fantino for his support. He's currently stuck in a traffic jam south of Orillia. The Canadian Forces, through the Land Force Central Area, will also make available a hangar once again at Downsview and will help to deliver the books. I thank Colonel Lawrence and Brigadier-General Thibault for their support.

The Governor-General has agreed to be honorary patron, and has indicated that she would like to work with me and the other Lieutenant Governors to introduce these initiatives to other parts of Canada. Alberta is already onside, and the Crees of northern Quebec have come to see me and said that they would like to twin their schools with schools in Ontario.

I would like to thank the press gallery here at Queen's Park and the media everywhere. Members of the print and broadcast media have travelled with the Grand Chief and me extensively. The media's compelling stories and powerful photos have done much to increase awareness of a region and a people who are often overlooked.

Finally, I would like to thank, through you, their elected representatives, the many thousands of Ontarians, for their support. Their acts of caring, generosity and, most importantly, their passion ensure that the native children and their families know that their fellow Ontarians care about them and want them to hope again. What a wonderful good-news story as we begin the holiday season.

Thank you very much for the privilege of being able to address you today.

His Honour was then pleased to retire.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PUBLIC SECTOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is to the Premier. Since last week, we have been raising in this House issues arising out of the Auditor General's report. So much of that report, regrettably, detailed government waste, whether it was half a million dollars in spending on credit cards each and every day for 365 straight days or expenses hidden under the names of other employees or all-inclusive stays at luxury resorts and \$60,000 SUVs. This is in addition to the examples of waste that we have been raising for weeks as part of our waste-busters campaign.

Premier, you have brushed off and you have defended this misuse of taxpayers' dollars, and then yesterday you said you were going to find "the people who are misusing the taxpayers' dollars."

My question to you is, based on the fact that we've already found the people who have misused the taxpayers' dollars, what steps are you going to take to deal with these identified misuse-of-public-money situations at children's aid and at Hydro One?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I don't think it will come as

a surprise for you to learn that I disagree with the characterization of what has unfolded in recent days in Ontario.

I think that Ontarians can, first of all, take heart in the fact that we have changed the law in Ontario to allow the Auditor General to get behind doors that had, in the past, been locked by the previous government. The previous government did not want the Auditor General to take a look at what was happening inside our children's aid societies, OPG, Hydro One, colleges, universities, hospitals and the like. We think it's important for the auditor to have access to those places. Almost half of the taxpayers' money that we spend in Ontario goes into our transfer partners. So we think we've taken an important step.

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The member opposite is right: We do have a responsibility to find a way to address these. We've launched a specific plan to address the challenges we've encountered in our children's aid societies. I know that the Minister of Energy is also contemplating what he is going to do now in his regard.

Mrs. Witmer: We indicated yesterday that we do believe it is important that the Auditor General investigate these agencies. But the information that you have received is only good if the government intends to act on it, and so far, we haven't seen that. We've seen the defence of the misspending. Then, when the temperature got a little high, we've heard you say that we need to find these people. Well, that has already been done. The only thing that has not been done is for you to take action.

So my questions to you are as follows: Have you issued a directive to limit the number of corporate credit cards? Have you issued a directive to tighten the rules of the use of those cards? Have you indicated what disciplinary measures are going to be implemented? Is anybody going to be dismissed?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Of course I categorically and unequivocally reject the member's assertion that somehow we are going to defend the indefensible. We welcome the information that was brought into the light of day and made available to all Ontarians. In terms of what we intend to do—we've done some and there's more to be done; there's no doubt about that. But I'll gladly put our record up against the former Conservative government's record. I'll remind the member opposite what the Auditor General said about the former Conservative government.

The Auditor General said: "It was apparent to us ... that there were far too many areas where prior-year concerns—often going back four, five, six, or even 10 years—had not been satisfactorily addressed.... There is no excuse for a lack of effective action after so many years have passed."

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): How long have you been in office?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: One of the members opposite asks, "How long have you been in office?"

Let's hear what the Auditor General has said about what we've done in office. The Auditor General said: "I

have seen an improvement over the past three years.... Of particular interest is the number of audits where the progress made to date is not only satisfactory but significant—action is being taken on all recommendations, with a number already having been substantially implemented."

We are listening to—

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

Mrs. Witmer: It was this Premier who said that action is eloquence. Well, now is the time for him to make that a reality. So far, we're seeing that these words are totally meaningless. We have a Minister of Energy who said he'd provide the names of advisers; he hasn't done so. We have a Premier who said we'd get a report on how Tom Parkinson got a \$500,000 bonus; it's eight months later, and we have not seen anything.

So I ask you today, why should we believe you when you say you're going to take action? You have been in this office for almost four years. You've broken many promises and many commitments. Why should people believe you today when you say you're going to take action on this report?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I want to repeat what the Auditor General said about our record in government. He said: "I have seen an improvement over the past three years.... Of particular interest is the number of audits where the progress made to date is not only satisfactory but significant—action is being taken on all recommendations, with a number already having been substantially implemented."

I can understand the Conservative Party's impatience, but we are going to move forward thoughtfully and effectively and ensure that all Ontarians, but especially those employed in the broader public sector, understand that we have now in place today in our province a higher standard, to which we must all adhere.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I'm again going to ask the Premier a question. This time, I want to remind you that there are many Ontarians who are waiting for diagnostic tests. They often wait in fear and in pain, and many of them are unable to work. You told Ontarians that they could rely on the information posted on your wait times website. In fact, you boasted about it, and you ran a \$2-million ad campaign that makes claims that we now know are not supported by the facts. The Auditor General this week said that the information on the website is, and I quote him, "misleading" and that it should be "taken with a grain of salt."

My question for the Premier is this. We know that wait times were going to be central to your election campaign. My question for the Premier is, are you now going to correct your data and methodology prior to that, or will you focus your campaign for re-election on data that the Auditor General calls "misleading"?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): First of all, let me say that

we treat everything the Auditor General says very seriously. He has told us that he has some real concerns about the way that information has been presented. Coincidentally, late yesterday afternoon the Minister of Health and I had a meeting with Dr. Alan Hudson. He's the individual who has taken responsibility for the collection and presentation of that data. We're going to ensure that we take the necessary steps to gain the Auditor General's support in terms of how we present that information.

But I will ask the member opposite to take note of the fact that it was the same Auditor General who approved the particular ad in question. That same Auditor General has never said that wait times have not gone down. What he said is that it could be confusing to Ontarians when we deal with this average data that is presented. He has a point, and we will carefully consider the best way to move forward, given his good advice to us.

Mrs. Witmer: Again to the Premier: We have many people in this province who have discovered they can't trust the data on the website. One such individual is Millie Downing. She says that the government—and her experience bears this out—obviously can't be trusted. She's a nurse. She's been unable to work for the last year due to a severe spinal condition. Her specialist ordered a diagnostic scan.

She took your advice and called around looking for the shortest wait time at hospitals in her area. She contacted them in August. Barrie said she'd have to wait until after Christmas—more than four months—even though the website claimed a wait of 95 days. Sudbury told her she'd have to wait two to three months just to get on the waiting list, but your website said she should only wait 81 days to have the MRI completed.

Her experience is proof that your website does need to be taken with a grain of salt. It's misleading. How can anyone have confidence in what your government is saying when their own experiences tell them otherwise?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The website presents data in three ways. Without unduly complicating it, I believe we present median wait times, average wait times and 90th percentile wait times. By any objective measure—and I know the Auditor General would not argue with this—wait times are coming down in the province of Ontario; there's no doubt about that.

I'm also proud to say that Ontario has been a pioneer in this regard. No other Ontario government tried to wrap its arms around this particular cactus before. We're doing it. It does call for pioneering on our part, and that's exactly what we've been doing. We've got some good advice now from the Auditor General. He says there's got to be a better way to present that kind of data. We agree with him, and we're going to find a way to make sure we do that.

I can also say that we have had a 78% increase in the volumes of those procedures—diagnostic tests, surgeries and the like—that we have funded. So again, by any objective measure, wait times in Ontario are coming down.

Mrs. Witmer: The reality is that people in the province, many of whom have gone to the website, don't

believe you. In fact, people are starting to lose confidence in your government, because this is the government that raised taxes when you said you wouldn't, this is the government that privatized health care when you said you wouldn't, and this is the government that said you were going to reduce wait times, but you have now been found out by the auditor, who calls the wait times “misleading.”

People like Ms. Downing and others just want to go back to work. They trusted you. They thought the information on the website was accurate and up to date. I ask you today, are you prepared to acknowledge and apologize to people like Ms. Downing who have been misled?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: What I will undertake to the individual referenced by my colleague, and what I will undertake on behalf of all Ontarians, is that we will continue to work as hard as we can, whether in the collection of this data or the presentation of this data, to ensure that it is absolutely accurate and in keeping with the standards set by the Auditor General, and to do whatever we can to work with our nurses and doctors and hospital administrators and volunteers. We will do whatever we can to continue to get wait times down in the province of Ontario and to ensure that Ontarians have all the confidence they need in their health care system.

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HYDRO ONE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Premier. Premier, hard-working Ontarians who have watched their hydro bills double in the last three years are disgusted with the greed now on display at Hydro One under the McGuinty government. Hydro One chief executive officer Tom Parkinson spent \$45,000 of public money on personal expenses and tried to hide it on his secretary's credit card. Now we find out that these so-called personal expenses include vacation flights to Australia.

Premier, this contempt for basic standards of accountability must end. The question is this: When will the McGuinty government export Mr. Parkinson out of Hydro One?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The leader of the NDP raises good issues. We don't enjoy the luxury of acting recklessly or precipitously and without some constraint. I know that the leader of the NDP recognizes that from his days in government.

There are things that have happened there which are unacceptable, to reduce it to one word. They're unacceptable and not in keeping with the higher standard that we want to set for all Ontarians who have the privilege of working in the broader public sector. So I say to the leader of the NDP that we will take the necessary time—no more time than absolutely necessary, though—to ensure that we carefully consider our options and act in the greater public interest.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, yesterday you said that those who abuse public money will be found out. Well, more

than a year ago, we found out that Mr. Parkinson was using the Hydro One helicopter for personal joyrides. You did nothing. Last year, we found out about Mr. Parkinson's outrageous \$1.6-million pay package, which was bundled rather delicately. You not only did nothing, you concurred with it; in fact, you said, "This is justified."

Well, Premier, Mr. Parkinson has been found out again. The question is, when is the McGuinty government going to stop uttering excuses and platitudes? When are you going to fire Mr. Parkinson and set an example?

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

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): I would reiterate what the Premier said with respect to how we respond to the auditor: The government wants to ensure that we do so in a prudent and timely fashion in the best interest of the ratepayers.

All these matters are serious matters. I'd remind the member opposite that those salary considerations would not be known had it not been for this government shining light on that. The issue of freedom of information would not be known had this government not brought in legislation to allow for that. Finally, the Auditor General himself would not have been in Hydro One looking at these issues. We brought that in.

We welcome the Auditor General's report. As I indicated yesterday, and will stress today, we are responding in both a responsible and timely fashion to all of the recommendations. We take the recommendations very, very seriously.

Mr. Hampton: The Minister of Energy is wrong. You can find, through any securities and exchange filing in the United States, what Mr. Parkinson is paid. That's where much of this information emanated from.

Here is the history of the McGuinty government: You defended Mr. Parkinson's outrageous pay package, you defended his personal joyrides on the Hydro One company helicopter, and now what we hear is, "Well, maybe we might do something" and "Gee, we're concerned." It sounds like more platitudes, more speeches from the McGuinty government, and no action.

Let's be clear. This is the fourth year of the McGuinty government. The McGuinty government is responsible for the culture of contempt and greed that we see over at Hydro One and no one else. The question is this: When will the McGuinty government give Mr. Parkinson the note "You're fired"?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The McGuinty government has restored OPG to profitability. It has seen the repeated increase in Hydro One's credit ratings. It has allowed the Auditor General to go in and do value-for-money audits at both entities. It has accepted the report from the Auditor General. It is reviewing its options with respect to next steps and is doing so in what I would call a prudent and timely fashion. The government will respond in a way that will protect, first and foremost, the integrity of Hydro One in a way that will give consumers confidence that their public utility is well run.

These are never easy choices, but again, we've made tough decisions in the past on these matters and we will

take the decisions necessary to ensure consumer confidence in their public utilities.

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

Mr. Hampton: To the Premier: While Mr. Parkinson spends literally tens of thousands of dollars on personal perks, over 136,000 Ontario women and men have lost their manufacturing jobs; just this past November, 4,000 manufacturing jobs destroyed. Now, the sky-high electricity rates are one of the contributing factors to this loss of jobs, electricity rates that help to subsidize Mr. Parkinson's lavish lifestyle.

My question is this: Why does the McGuinty government pander to Mr. Parkinson's greed while doing next to nothing in terms of reducing hydro rates and helping communities that are losing thousands and tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs?

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

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I would remind the House that this government has brought on 3,000 megawatts of new electricity. I would remind the House that this government has restored OPG to profitability, paid \$1.1 billion down on the stranded debt. I would remind the House again and again and again that the spot market price of electricity is now lower than when we took office.

We acknowledge the challenge that is faced by industries and those who have found themselves out of work for a variety of reasons, not necessarily related to the price of electricity, and we will continue to work with those communities—witness the \$1-billion investment in the forestry sector; witness the automotive investment strategy that this government has undertaken. These are challenging tests.

What you can't do is pretend that you can continue to shelter—which the leader pretends, that there's no cost to the price of electricity. Ontarians understand that—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: What Ontarians understand is that the McGuinty government has been defending this person's greed, defending this person's outrageous pay package and defending this person's misuse of public money. Meanwhile, thousands of workers across Ontario are losing their jobs, particularly in the forest sector, because hydro rates have escalated so quickly that they cannot afford to continue to work in Ontario. They're moving their investment and their jobs to other provinces.

You know, Mr. Parkinson spends more on vacations and renovations—more public money on vacations and renovations—than most of the workers will get in a year, and you've been defending that. So I ask again: Why has the McGuinty government, year after year now, defended the greed of Mr. Parkinson while hundreds of thousands of manufacturing workers and forest sector workers have lost their jobs as a result of sky-high electricity rates?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government has invested in the forestry sector. It has invested in the automotive sector, recognizing the challenges. What the McGuinty

government has seen on its watch is an increase in net new jobs in this province.

We acknowledge the challenges faced in those industries. We particularly acknowledge the challenges faced by families that cope with unemployment. We want to continue to work for them. I will remind you that just this year we provided \$100 million to low-income families for electricity price relief to help them cope with the challenge. I'd remind the member opposite that he voted against that package.

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It is simply not accurate to pretend that you can lower prices the way the member opposite suggests you can. The sooner we come to terms with that reality, the sooner we respond in the way this government has to the forestry sector, the manufacturing sector, the sooner we'll be able to get them out of the current difficulties they're experiencing resultant from a variety of factors, including the value of the Canadian dollar.

Mr. Hampton: I'm shocked. This is the McGuinty government that promised they were going to freeze hydro rates for over three years. This is the McGuinty government that says they've invested millions in the forest sector and the forest sector has turned the corner. Tell that to the workers in Smooth Rock Falls, who were told that their layoff notice this week is permanent, a shutdown, termination. Tell that to the 800 workers at the Freightliner plant in St. Thomas. Tell that to the 700 jobs lost at Navistar in Chatham. There have been 136,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs destroyed under the McGuinty government while you defend the kind of greed that Mr. Parkinson has exemplified at Hydro One. The very workers who are laid off have been subsidizing his lavish lifestyle under the McGuinty government.

My question is simply this: Premier, when will you give Mr. Parkinson—the Mr. Parkinson you've been defending now for two and a half years—the pink slip and set an example?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: As long as one family in this province experiences unemployment, as long as one child is not eating well, not being properly educated, this government will not rest.

I would remind the member that there's a net increase in new jobs in this province since we took office. Understanding the enormous challenge faced by the manufacturing sector and the forestry sector: \$1 billion in investment in the forestry sector; \$500 million, which has leveraged almost \$7 billion in the automotive sector. Those are investments in people that will serve the people of this province well into the future in terms of new job opportunities as we deal with these difficult circumstances.

There are no easy answers to the price of electricity. We have dealt with them in an open and transparent way, just as we've dealt with the situations at OPG and Hydro One. This government will respond in an appropriate and timely fashion to the Auditor General's recommendation and will do so in a way that protects the interests of all Ontario consumers.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I notice she's stepped out.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Get somebody else to ask another question.

Ms. MacLeod: No. We'll wait for her, if you could get her. We've been waiting all week for an answer and we'll get one now, hopefully.

Yesterday, the minister refused to inform this House of who is responsible for her department, who was held responsible for the excessive mismanagement of tax dollars at children's aid societies and who, if anyone, in her department was fired for grossly mishandling tax dollars meant for kids at risk.

Instead, she has professed to have an accountability office in place by January and thinks that's enough. Ironically, this is the same minister who lowered accountability standards in her department. She cancelled financial reviews, ignored quarterly reports and of course abandoned risk assessments.

The auditor outlined three specific mechanisms by which the minister should have been made aware. She missed all three.

Children at risk in this province deserve better. Why should we believe that the minister will start taking her job seriously now, after displaying such gross incompetence in her department?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'm happy to speak about what my ministry is doing.

First, I should say that I am very, very proud to be a member of a government that has the courage to look to see what's happening in the broader public sector in transfer payment agencies that we fund to care for our children.

We are, for example, accepting and implementing all of the recommendations of the auditor. In fact, some of them have already been done. In addition to the recommendations, we are creating a new accountability office that will monitor whether children's aid societies are meeting their legislated requirements for the care and protection of children and ensure that corrective action is taken as needed; assess and report on agency performance; and provide my ministry staff with the training and tools they need to provide better oversight and create a new culture of continuous improvement for CASs. We are also requiring children's aid societies to meet higher standards, as non-discretionary as those of the Ontario public service, for their own employees and programs in such areas as—

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

Ms. MacLeod: That's what I call beggar's remorse. She can continue to pass the buck and play down her responsibility in the mess before the auditor's report was tabled, but she still has a lot to answer for. The Auditor

General said that while trips were being taken, kids were not being looked after.

The children's aid society disputes what the Auditor General said. Today, CBC is reporting that Carolyn Buck, the executive director of Toronto's children's aid society, says that the Auditor General's report is misleading. To quote the story, "Buck said the Auditor General erred most when he alleged that many children were not getting proper care." This is after we learned that in one third of the cases, the children who needed to be helped the most were being seen an average of three weeks late if they were seen at all.

In light of this, I have to ask the minister: Does she agree with the Auditor General or does she agree with the children's aid society?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I am pleased and proud to be a member of a government that has the courage to have the Auditor General look at what's happening in our agencies. We are implementing every single recommendation of the Auditor General and more.

But let me speak about some of the responses to the Auditor General's recommendations. They're tightening controls on travel reimbursement policies—and this is what the four CASs have already been directed to do by my ministry and are already moving forward on—to ensure detailed and accurate receipts accompany all reimbursement claims; reporting back to their boards of directors to track improvements in areas identified by the auditor; introducing new policies and reporting requirements for overtime, after-hours, on-call service and mileage claims, which have already resulted in savings that are being redirected to front-line services; reviewing staffing structure in the context of the intake process to ensure adequate resources are available to respond to referrals in order to ensure children at risk are seen with—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): To the Minister of Labour: The Brock Smith report of November 2003 recommends that Ontario expand workers' compensation coverage to the 1.3 million workers who are currently excluded. Minister, you buried that report and refused my request for a copy, but I did manage to obtain one through the FOI process. Thirty-five per cent of Ontario's workforce has no workers' compensation coverage whatsoever. Minister, why have you ignored this important report for more than three years?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): The honourable member writes a letter on October 4, 2006, and then files an FOI on October 6, 2006—so give us a break.

I think a bit of a history lesson is important. The Brock Smith report began with consultations in the spring of 2002. That report was completed in 2003. It was made available to the previous Minister of Labour and to myself as the Minister of Labour. I had the opportunity to

review that report in September 2005. I would say to the honourable member that we demonstrated that no, we're not considering universal coverage at this time, but in the spring of last year, we embarked on a process to look at mandatory coverage within the construction sector where the underground economy is most prevalent. Those discussions are ongoing—

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

Ms. Horwath: Minister, Maryam Nazemi is here today in the gallery. She was with me in the press studio earlier today. She severely hurt herself at work as a Montessori schoolteacher but she could not claim compensation for the injury.

There are 1.3 million workers in workplaces like private schools, nursing homes, banks and insurance companies who can't make a WSIB claim if they are injured on the job. Many of them, like Maryam, end up relying on food banks, with no job, no income and no help from the McGuinty government.

Minister, when that report recommends as its primary recommendation that you expand workers' compensation to every single worker in this province—to the 1.5 million workers, 35% of Ontario workers who are not covered by WSIB—what is your excuse for not expanding that coverage?

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Hon. Mr. Peters: I repeat that we are not considering universal coverage at this time.

It never ceases to amaze me how the NDP thinks they have a monopoly on the concerns of vulnerable workers in this province. It's the NDP that created the Friedland formula, which undermined benefits for injured workers in 1994.

We moved forward with an independent audit of the WSIB. That independent audit brought forth the 64 recommendations. All but two of those recommendations have been implemented. We're working hard to get the financial affairs of the WSIB in order. We're working hard to make sure we hold the line on premiums within the WSIB. As well, we have separated the positions of CEO, president and chair, and have appointed an independent chair who has been out consulting with injured workers, employers and business groups across this province.

We believe that, in order to move forward, to help improve benefits for injured workers and help protect businesses in this province, we have to start on a firm financial footing. That's what we are going to do.

EDUCATION

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): My question is to the Minister of Education. I want to thank you for coming to my riding of Chatham-Kent Essex last month to meet with parents in Chatham. I know the parents were very appreciative that you came to listen to their concerns. They know that the McGuinty government is a

government that listens, and we want to encourage all parents to have a strong voice.

Gayle Stucke, director of education of Lambton Kent District School Board, was also in attendance and said it was an honour to have you in the area. Paul Wubben, director of St. Clair Catholic District School Board, was also grateful, and encouraged those parents to attend. If we want to measure how we are doing in education, all we have to do is speak with those parents.

Although they acknowledge that our investments are going a long way to boost student achievement, they did raise concerns about rural funding and transportation in our communities. Would you please inform my constituents what progress the McGuinty government is making in addressing these issues?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education):

Thank you to the member for Chatham–Kent Essex for the question. It was a great pleasure to meet with his parents—

Interjection.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: —the parents in his community, and it's a great pleasure to be able to go on a Saturday, when parents can actually attend meetings. As a parent myself, I know how important it is for parents to be involved in their kids' education.

There are three things we're doing that I want to talk about, in terms of rural issues. First, we have continued to invest in rural and declining enrolment, because declining enrolment is one of the issues facing small schools in our rural communities: \$125 million this year alone in rural funding. The Lambton Kent District School Board has received \$3 million since 2003, and the St. Clair Catholic board received \$2 million since 2003 for declining enrolment.

The second issue is school closures. We've recently put out school accommodation guidelines which ask boards to look at the value of a school to the whole community before they consider closing that school, and that's very important in small communities.

The third thing is that we are reviewing the transportation funding formula. Lambton Kent and St. Clair Catholic have been leaders. They are in a consortium, and they are demonstrating how we can find efficiencies in the transportation formula. We continue to review that.

Mr. Hoy: Minister, you've taken an active role in making sure that parents across the province understand they have a significant role to play in ensuring that their children have the best education possible. Working together with parents, teachers and our educational partners is essential for us if we are going to achieve results in education.

After years of demoralization of our education system by the previous government, we've made a commitment to improve education and improve the public's confidence in our publicly funded system. Minister, how has the McGuinty government tried to encourage parental engagement in this province?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: One of the things I'm proudest of that we have done in a very concrete way to engage

parents—there's been lip service paid to parent engagement for years, but we've actually invested in parent engagement. As a result of the Parent Voice in Education project, in December 2005 we announced a policy, we set up a parent engagement office and we have invested \$5 million annually in actually getting parents involved. So there's \$5,000 per school board and 17 cents per student that is going to our system so that parents can connect with each other and engage in projects locally. We've given \$500 per school across the province for parents to be able to run their affairs.

We've also set up two funds: \$1 million available to school councils for parent engagement projects, and \$750,000 in Parents Reaching Out grants so that parents can apply and develop projects regionally and provincially that will actually get at what the needs are, to help parents who wouldn't normally be involved to become involved in the lives of their children at school.

These are very concrete things that we've done, and they're already showing results in the regional parent groups that are being set up around the province in all of our boards. I think we should be very proud of our ability to get parents involved in the system.

HYDRO ONE

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

My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, you promised to disclose to us the justification for the \$500,000 bonus paid to the CEO of Hydro One. You promised to reveal the names of your coal shutdown advisers. Now you are promising to look into the concerns surrounding why the CEO of Hydro One would spend over \$50,000 using his secretary's credit card, thereby avoiding the scrutiny of the board and in essence approving his own expenses.

You are telling us that you are going to look into it, but nobody in this province, based on your record, believes a single word that you say about anything, let alone this. We need specific answers as to what specific steps you are going to take to bring the CEO of Hydro One on the carpet and get specific answers on that issue.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): As the Premier indicated earlier and I indicated earlier, and I will reiterate to the House today, we take the Auditor General's recommendations very seriously. We are responding to those recommendations in what I would call a very responsible and timely fashion, not just with the issues around the expenses the member referenced, but there were a variety of other recommendations that the auditor brought to our attention that require work on the part of the board of Hydro One itself. So we will be responding in what I would again characterize as a responsible and timely fashion, as we have in the past.

This government takes these issues very seriously. This government believes in transparency. That's why we gave the Auditor General the ability to look at organizations like Hydro One and OPG, and this government will be acting on the recommendations of the Auditor General.

Mr. Yakabuski: Minister, of course we got no answer on that. Perhaps we can ask you this question: Mr. Parkinson's appointment to the board of directors of Hydro One expires on December 30. Have you already indicated that you are going to reappoint Mr. Parkinson? If not, are you planning to reappoint him to the board after December 30, 2006? Will you tell us that now, Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Didn't the Tories appoint him in the first place?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Yes. I would remind the member that it was your government that appointed him and signed his original contract, so I would be careful going down that path right today.

I can assure you that the government is dealing with the recommendations of the auditor in what I would call a responsible and timely fashion. The issues raised by the auditor go well beyond those that the member has raised, to a range of issues. We welcome the Auditor General's advice. We are responding in what I would term a responsible and timely fashion in order to give consumers the opportunity to have confidence in their public utilities.

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): My question is for the Premier. With the ink barely dry on your government's so-called Clean Water Act, your cabinet has thrown environmental protection to the winds with the rubber-stamping of the Dufferin Aggregates Milton quarry expansion. It's one of the most serious environmental crimes against source water and environmental protection in this province in decades.

The Niagara Escarpment is the backbone of the greenbelt. It's an internationally recognized UNESCO world biosphere reserve. Why is your government putting it on the chopping block?

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

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I tell you that we are a government that has proudly taken steps to protect our natural environment, our air, our land and our water for the benefit of all Ontarians today and for future generations.

I would remind my friends across the House that we have taken steps to protect the greenbelt—1.8 million acres of land. The Clean Water Act—historic legislation to protect our sources of drinking water in the province for this generation and the next. You voted against that act, which you proclaim today, as we do, a historic piece of legislation. It's precautionary in nature, ensuring that we protect our sources of drinking water, with historic changes to the "You spill, you pay" legislation—changes which you did not support.

Mr. Tabuns: There are times when you can see the minister is reading too many of her own press releases. She should be paying attention to what others are saying: "McGuinty Trashes The Greenbelt." That's the joint release today by the Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment and Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources, POWER, the two groups that appealed this quarry expansion to cabinet. And the Greenbelt Alliance states, "The people of Milton, Halton Hills and all of Ontario need to know that the greenbelt is under attack and that cabinet lacks the resolve to follow its own legislation"—not a new story.

So Minister, why is your government bent on turning the greenbelt into a gravel belt?

Hon. Ms. Broten: I can tell my friends in this House and Ontarians near this community in Dufferin that cabinet carefully considered a very complex application—an application that had been heard by experts at the Environmental Review Tribunal and the Ontario Municipal Board, with experts before them for more than 11 months. A public hearing was pursued, and cabinet took many months to examine this most serious and complex issue. In reaching our determination, we concluded that the decision of the Environmental Review Tribunal and the Ontario Municipal Board was one that protected the public interest and protected the environment. At the same time, the decision of cabinet was done to strengthen that very decision-making process that had examined those critical factors for more than 11 months. We protected endangered species, we protected the wetlands, and we will ensure going forward, under the conservation role of the local conservation group, that the land is protected, that the wetland is protected, and that endangered species in and around that aggregate, which has been there for many, many years, will be protected.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a question today for the Minister of Finance. My community of Oakville is doing quite well economically, but I know that some areas of the province have been particularly hard hit in the last year with job losses. It's one of the hardest things as a representative when I hear from someone who has lost their job, has a family to support and is facing the holidays.

Minister, you yourself have said in this House that the Ontario economy is facing a period of more moderate growth. Specifically, what is this government doing to help individuals who have lost their jobs, and what are you doing for the province as a whole as we move through this period of more moderate growth?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I appreciate the question from my friend from Oakville. It gives me an opportunity to reiterate firstly that wherever it is in the province, when there's a plant closing and when there's job loss, we all feel that pain. Indeed, in the economic stimulus package that was announced in the fall eco-

conomic statement, one of the top priorities was to give the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities additional resources for early intervention. One of the things that we're doing is providing the resources to intervene early to help with job retraining, to help with relocation, to help apprentices complete their apprenticeship even if the job they're in is no longer available. I'm very proud of that initiative.

We are also doing a number of things in the area of infrastructure, moving up infrastructure projects so that that provides work in communities, communities that are most hard hit with this slight downturn in the economy.

Mr. Flynn: Not only you, but other ministers as well often talk about the steps this government is taking and the significant investments we've made to strengthen this province's economic prosperity. But in regard to this economic stimulus package that you're proposing, I have some specific questions that I know Ontarians are eager to have answered. Can you tell us how the measures you've announced today will build on your economic plan? How will you be choosing the projects and the initiatives? More specifically, are there any areas of the province that won't benefit directly from the initiatives you've just told us about?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I just want to make two points in response. First of all, my friend will recall that we announced in the fall economic statement strengthening the initiatives between Ontario and Alberta because of the industrial demand there and the industrial capacity here. If you talk to our friend the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, she will tell you that there has been great progress already in linking up job opportunities and industrial demand.

On the infrastructure matter, we've made the difficult decision of not approving projects in the greater Toronto area, in the area of Kitchener-Waterloo and in the area of Ottawa, and we've done that because these resources are very important and they're going to communities most in need. We're proud of that very difficult decision.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Interestingly enough, almost a year to the day of the passing of our party's motion in this Legislature calling for a comprehensive jobs plan, the Minister of Finance puts out a news release with a bunch of fluff about what they might do to address the downturn in our economy. This government is finally acknowledging that their policies have put Ontario in last place among the provinces of Canada. Our economy has been showing signs of weakness for over two years now, yet this government waits until the eve of an election year to put something forward, proving yet again that this government will do anything to get re-elected. Meanwhile, the list of job losses continues to grow: Stanley Tools in Smiths Falls—64 jobs gone; Freightliner, St. Thomas—800 jobs gone; Navistar, Chatham—700 jobs gone; Siegwark, Prescott—32 jobs gone; Alcoa, Colling-

wood—330 jobs gone; and Tembec in Smooth Rock Falls—280 jobs gone.

Minister, when are you going to stop saying anything to get elected and actually get down to the business of strengthening Ontario's employment and the opportunity for investment in this province?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): It's a great question. My friend talks about a comprehensive job plan. Talk to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade about the auto strategy, which represents \$7 billion in investment and thousands and thousands of jobs in the auto sector. Have him talk about the investment that we made a year and a half ago in Stelco: \$150 million, and an entire facility in Hamilton saved from closure. Talk to my friend the Minister of Natural Resources about a \$1-billion job strategy in the forestry sector. Talk to my friend the Minister of Colleges and Universities about the \$6.2 billion that we have invested in our post-secondary sector so that this economy can have the trained people it needs to continue to grow. That's a strategy for jobs.

Mr. Chudleigh: Minister, why should we believe you? You talk about the auto sector, and the auto parts sector has been cut in half. They're falling like flies. The manufacturing sector in this province is failing. It lost yet another 4,400 jobs last month, bringing the total to over 136,000 lost jobs under your term. Minister, your record in this sector is dismal, to say the least.

You talk about how 270,000 jobs have been created under your watch. Let's look at that: 123,000 of those were created in the public sector, leaving 147,000 jobs created by the private sector under your watch. That is half the number, almost half the number, that were created in the first three years of the previous government.

Minister, I ask you again, when are you going to stop saying anything to get re-elected and implement a real, comprehensive plan for jobs in this economy?

1500

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend talks about jobs being created in the broader public sector. You can be absolutely sure, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I need to be able to hear the Minister of Finance answer the question. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend somehow criticizes jobs that have been created in the broader public sector. I understand that. Their government was about firing nurses. Their government was about going to war with teachers. Their government was about firing water inspectors. They did not believe in strong public services. I will not apologize for having reached a new level of working relationship with tens of thousands of teachers around the province, with doctors, with nurses. I think that is right at the centre of the record of this government, and we are very, very proud of it.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is to the Premier. The McGuinty government has cut funding to the fetal alcohol syndrome disorder clinic in northwestern Ontario. This is a terrible blow to vulnerable children, most of whom are aboriginal children.

When I raised this issue with the Minister of Health, this is what he said: "It should be noted that upon project termination, patients were provided with a letter referring them to the most appropriate provider for their respective health needs (St. Michael's Hospital, Hospital for Sick Children—in Toronto—"or the Clinic for Alcohol and Drug Exposed Children in Winnipeg)."

Premier, sending these vulnerable kids from northwestern Ontario to Toronto for treatment is a 3,700-kilometre round trip. It would cost more than adequate funding for the clinic. Sending them to Winnipeg would mean doing time, a long time, on a waiting list.

My question is this: Will the McGuinty government do the right thing and fund the fetal alcohol syndrome disorder clinic for children in northwestern Ontario?

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

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): Whereas the question was addressed to my colleague, I would like to actually speak about what my ministry, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, is doing to expand services, mental health type services, for children such as the ones the member has referenced in his question.

We know that children in rural and remote areas would benefit from improved access to mental health services. That's why I was very, very pleased recently to announce an expansion of the telepsychiatry program funded through the Hospital for Sick Children but delivered through several communities throughout the province. As a result of that expansion, more than double the number of children receiving telepsychiatry services will benefit from that new investment.

Mr. Hampton: What the McGuinty government holds out here will not help these children at all. The Minister of Health said, if you need these services, put these kids on a bus and ship them 1,800 kilometres to Toronto and back, or send them to Winnipeg, where there is already a waiting list of children from Manitoba who need these services.

Premier, this clinic did some excellent work, some absolutely first-rate work in terms of kids who are suffering as a result of nothing they have done but as a result of many social issues. I'm simply asking: Will the McGuinty government do the right thing? Instead of paying the cost of sending these kids to Toronto or having them languish on a waiting list in Winnipeg, will you provide adequate funding for this clinic?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: In 2004-05, administration of the aboriginal fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and child

nutrition program was transferred to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. This program provides \$4.4 million in funding for health promotion, prevention, education, and family support services related to fetal alcohol syndrome effects and child nutrition through service contracts with 19 aboriginal service providers and First Nations. Funding for this program has been renewed for an additional five-year term, effective April 1, 2006.

INJURED WORKERS

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): My question is for the Minister of Labour. Today, injured workers in our province are holding a day of action to protest what they see is a lack of action in dealing with their concerns. I know that, earlier today, the minister spoke to a group of injured workers assembled in front of the office on University Avenue. I know that the minister has never shied away from meeting with injured workers. He has met injured workers in my riding, and I thank him for that. So I have no doubt that you take these concerns seriously; however, Minister, these days of action sadly are still necessary because they don't feel that they're getting enough action out of our government yet.

Our colleague Mike Gravelle has introduced a private member's bill on the indexation of injured workers' benefits. You and I have discussed other issues like deeming and the 72-month lock-in. I've spoken to many injured workers in my riding. I've worked with them and I've listened to the tragic stories of their broken bodies, their broken spirits, and I need to have some indication from you to help them, because they're starting to lose faith. I know you're working with the WSIB, but we need to show them our interest.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I want to thank the member from Stoney Creek for her strong advocacy on behalf of injured workers. I think it's important to note that there are members on all sides of this House who are concerned about the plight of injured workers.

We recognize that the issues facing the WSIB and the plight of injured workers are not new, but they are complex. After five years of NDP chaos and nine years of Tory neglect, it is our government that's taking action to create a brighter future for injured workers.

A financially stable WSIB is not just in our best interests but is essential for the survival of that very institution. We embarked on a comprehensive audit. We've moved forward with the hiring of an independent chair. We have taken action, and we're going to continue to take action.

I want to thank the member for her advocacy. I want to thank the members from the injured worker community who stood in the cold today at 400 University Avenue to have the opportunity to speak to Chairman Mahoney, who presented me with options. Those options are being considered as to how we can go forward and improve benefits for injured workers and take away the

severe damage that was done to injured workers' benefits by the NDP and the Tory governments. We're going to get it right—

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

PETITIONS

LAND TITLES

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

“Whereas, in the current environment of an escalating problem of title theft and mortgage fraud, proper protections for homeowners are warranted and real measures are necessary to address real estate fraud; and

“Whereas MPP Joe Tascona's Restore the Deed Act, Bill 136, has passed second reading in the Legislature and has been referred to the standing committee on general government; and

“Whereas, among others, the Restore the Deed Act has four primary benefits:

“—Reduce the harm by ensuring that the person who is the rightful owner of the property keeps the property. The innocent buyer or the innocent lender must seek compensation from the land titles assurance fund, as is New Brunswick law;

“—Prevent the fraud by restricting access to registration of documents to licensed real estate professionals who carry liability insurance, by requiring notification statements and the freezing of the register, as is Saskatchewan law, and by establishing a system of ‘no dealings’ where landowners can mark their title, which can only be removed by them using a personal identification number prior to the property being transferred or mortgaged;

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“—Access to the land titles assurance fund be reformed as a ‘fund of first resort’ and be operated by an arm's-length board of directors appointed by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, composed of a broad representation of consumer, real estate industry and law enforcement groups;

“—Victims of fraud prior to the enactment of the Restore the Deed Act will be eligible to apply for compensation under the reformed land titles assurance fund; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government's proposed legislation will not get the job done;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to enact the measures to protect homeowners from having their homes stolen, as contained in MPP Joe Tascona's Restore the Deed Act.”

I support the bill, and the Liberals still have done nothing on this.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads:

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

“Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

“Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

“Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people's complaints about children's aid societies' decisions; and

“Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman's office;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies.”

I agree with this petition. I have signed it and I send it down to the table by virtue of page Or.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): I want to thank Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services of Mississauga for this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

“That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to

review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

I agree with this petition and I will sign it accordingly.

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have more petitions arriving daily to do with the Mary Lake dam in Port Sydney.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

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

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition.

GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): I have a petition signed by a number of members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premiers of Ontario have made enormous contributions over the years in shaping the Ontario of today; and

"Whereas, as a result, the final resting places of the 18 deceased Premiers are among the most historically significant sites in the province, but have yet to be officially recognized; and

"Whereas, were these gravesites to be properly maintained and marked with an historical plaque and a flag of Ontario, these locations would be a source of pride to the communities where these former Premiers lie buried, and provide potential points of interest for visitors;

"Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Enact Bill 25, an Act that will preserve the gravesites of the former Premiers of Ontario."

I support this petition and affix my signature.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): "Whereas Longfields and Davidson Heights in south Nepean are some of the fastest-growing communities in Ottawa and Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board has voted to authorize the final design phases for a grade 7 to 12 school to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario has lifted a three-year moratorium on school closings in order to make way for new educational facilities;

"We, residents of Nepean–Carleton, petition the Parliament of Ontario to ensure that the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board continues with plans to build a new grade 7 to 12 school no later than autumn of 2008 to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities."

I went door to door for these petition names myself. I'm so very happy to sign my name, affix my signature and support the petition.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

I am pleased to affix my name.

HIGHWAY 35

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): "Highway 35 Four-Laning

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas modern highways are economic lifelines to communities across Ontario and crucial to the growth of Ontario's economy; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been planning the expansion of Highway 35, and that expansion has been put on hold by the McGuinty government; and

"Whereas Highway 35 provides an important economic link in the overall transportation system—carrying

commuter, commercial and high tourist volumes to and from the Kawartha Lakes area and Haliburton; and

“Whereas the final round of public consultation has just been rescheduled;

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

“That the Liberal government move swiftly to complete the four-laning of Highway 35 after the completion of the final public consultation.”

Signed by many members from my chambers of commerce. I affix my signature.

GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): I have another petition here signed by some members of the Cornwall Township Historical Society in my riding. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Premiers of Ontario have made enormous contributions over the years in shaping the Ontario of today; and

“Whereas, as a result, the final resting places of the 18 deceased Premiers are among the most historically significant sites in the province, but have yet to be officially recognized; and

“Whereas, were these gravesites to be properly maintained and marked with an historical plaque and a flag of Ontario, these locations would be a source of pride to the communities where these former Premiers lie buried, and provide potential points of interest for visitors;

“Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Enact Bill 25, an Act that will preserve the gravesites of the former Premiers of Ontario.”

Since I agree with this petition, I shall affix my signature.

NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition to do with cutbacks in the Ministry of Natural Resources. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources ... plays a vital role in the protection and management of the natural resources that belong to all Ontarians; and

“Whereas MNR’s budget for 2006-07 is 24% less, in real terms, than it was in 1992-93; and

“Whereas vital programs relating to fish and wildlife, provincial parks, forestry, and other MNR activities continue to be cut back; and

“Whereas the aesthetic, economic, educational, environmental, recreational, and social value of our natural resources far exceeds the cost of protecting and managing them;

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

“That funding of the Ministry of Natural Resources be increased to a level that will enable it to stop cutting existing programs and provide full funding to all existing programs as well as any new programs that may be required to ensure the effective protection and management of Ontario’s natural resources.”

I affix my signature to this petition.

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FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): I have a petition that has been supplied by the Peel Multicultural Council of Meadowvale, I believe. It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

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

I concur with the petitioners, and I will affix my signature to it.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have more petitions coming in to do with Hydro One and line work.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Hydro One Networks Inc. provides hydro to many communities in the region of Parry Sound–Muskoka; and

“Whereas there have recently been several lengthy power outages in this region affecting both private residences, schools and businesses; and

“Whereas rural customers pay among the highest distribution and delivery charges for electricity;

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

“That the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Energy Board require Hydro One Networks Inc. to make improvements in line maintenance and forestry management in the region of Parry Sound–Muskoka to ensure reliable energy for its customers.”

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Further petitions? Seeing none—oh, the Chair recognizes the member for Nepean–Carleton.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): I appreciate your taking the time to recognize me.

“Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

“Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

“Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

“We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement.”

This comes to me by way of the Canadian Federation of University Women Ontario Council throughout the eastern Ontario region, and I affix my signature.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): My favourite part of the week.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: This is my favourite part of the day, I've got to tell you.

On Monday, December 11, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act; in the evening, third reading of Bill 52, the Education Amendment Act (Learning to Age 18).

On Tuesday, December 12, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act; in the evening, third reading of Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act.

On Wednesday, December 13, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 130, the Municipal Statute Law Amendment Act.

On Thursday, December 14, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 130, the Municipal Statute Law Amendment Act, and second reading of Bill 155, the Electoral System Referendum Act.

I'm going to ask page Allan to come on over here and hand this to the table. Sorry: Julian. My apologies. It's so far away, Speaker. Thank you, page Julian.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MANDATORY BLOOD TESTING ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE DÉPISTAGE OBLIGATOIRE PAR TEST SANGUIN

Mr. Kwinter moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 28, An Act to require the taking and analysing of blood samples to protect victims of crime, emergency service workers, good Samaritans and other persons and to make consequential amendments to the Health Care Consent Act, 1996 and the Health Protection and Promotion Act / Projet de loi 28, Loi exigeant le prélèvement et l'analyse d'échantillons de sang afin de protéger les victimes d'actes criminels, le personnel des services d'urgence, les bons samaritains et d'autres personnes et apportant des modifications corrélatives à la Loi de 1996 sur le consentement aux soins de santé et à la Loi sur la protection et la promotion de la santé.

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

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): In November of last year, I introduced Bill 28, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this legislation again on third reading. I'll be sharing my time today with my parliamentary assistant for community safety, the member from Scarborough–Rouge River, Bas Balkissoon.

Permit me to recognize Mr. Bruce Miller of the Police Association of Ontario. He was instrumental in assisting us with this legislation, and we thank him for all his efforts. I'd also like to recognize Mr. Fred LeBlanc, of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, for his continued support of this bill. Both are in the gallery today for the debate, and both of these gentlemen represent the interests of the men and women at the front lines of the police and fire services in this province. They have been steadfast defenders of the members of their associations and have made valuable presentations to my ministry and to the committee on this bill. I thank them for their support and guidance through all of the stages of this legislative effort.

Bill 28 is about securing the health and safety and the peace of mind of those whom we rely on for our own

protection, of victims of crime and of those who provide emergency health care services or emergency first aid.

The McGuinty government is on the side of families concerned about crime and safety and recognizes the need to safeguard community safety personnel by ensuring that they are protected while they protect the citizens of Ontario. Every effort must be made to support those who protect us as they go about the challenging tasks in communities across Ontario. That concern is particularly pressing for emergency workers and victims of crime. Every day across Ontario, thousands of men and women in a variety of occupations—police, paramedics and firefighters, for example—work to keep our communities safe. In the process, they face the risk of being infected by communicable diseases—HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B or hepatitis C—through contact with members of the public. Bill 28, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act, could help make Ontarians safer and provide greater peace of mind for those who may be exposed to the risk of infection through their work.

This proposed legislation would give exposed individuals and their doctors more timely information to help them decide on the best way to reduce the risk of illness. If passed, this bill will help to protect our community safety workers as they put themselves at risk to help the people of Ontario. This bill would also apply to victims of crime and good Samaritans.

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The current provisions for mandatory blood sampling date from 2003, when a private member's bill, Bill 105, came into effect. It amended the Health Protection and Promotion Act to help victims of crime and first aid responders who may have been exposed to HIV/AIDS or hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Ontario was the first province to adopt such legislation.

Several other provinces have since introduced similar legislation. Nova Scotia's legislation, though not yet proclaimed, received royal assent on October 18, 2004; Saskatchewan proclaimed its legislation on October 17, 2005; and in Alberta, the legislation received royal assent on May 24, 2006, and is awaiting proclamation.

The need to create a mechanism for the mandatory testing of blood in the specific circumstances contemplated by this proposed legislation is now well established in Ontario as well as in other jurisdictions. It is an important community safety issue and I'm sure all members of the House appreciate that. The issue now is, how can we best reassure those providing emergency health care services and emergency first aid, and victims of crime, about their risk of infection in a timely and efficient way while protecting the privacy of respondents at the same time?

Bill 105 amended the Health Protection and Promotion Act to require the taking of blood samples to protect victims of crime, emergency service workers, good Samaritans and others. The amendment, which is found in section 22.1 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, enables persons who have come in contact with the bodily substance of another person while pro-

viding emergency health care services, emergency first aid, or as a result of being the victim of crime to apply to a medical officer of health to determine the HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B and hepatitis C status of the source of the exposure.

Premier McGuinty was approached by our emergency first responders to make this blood-testing regime more efficient and effective so that it would provide those exposed the much-needed peace of mind sooner. We listened to those concerns and introduced Bill 28 to address them. The Mandatory Blood Testing Act, 2006, would, if passed, replace section 22.1 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act with new community safety legislation for mandatory blood sampling.

The government views this proposed legislation as an important community safety issue. The mental stress and lifestyle changes experienced by a person who may have been exposed to infection while protecting us, or as the victim of crime, should not be underestimated. That person is often placed in a cruel limbo caused by the uncertainty of not knowing whether they have or may become infected. That limbo often means submitting to a potent precautionary drug regimen with serious side effects to reduce the risk and severity of infection. Mandatory blood testing is a means to reduce this anxiety and provide a measure of certainty and peace of mind for emergency service personnel and for victims of crime.

It is no wonder, then, that the legislation has had the benefit of extensive input from stakeholders most likely to be affected by its provisions. Since the bill was first introduced, through second reading and at committee, we've had the benefit of very thoughtful contributions from members of this Legislature. Key stakeholders have also weighed in on the debate surrounding Bill 28 with very poignant and reasoned presentations on the potential impacts of the bill on their own work and lives.

Members of this House could not be unmoved by the testimony of Constable Natalie Hiltz of the Peel Regional Police Service. Constable Hiltz told the committee that while attempting to arrest a known prostitute, a heavy intravenous drug user and street person thought to be HIV-positive, she was bitten on the hand, causing the skin to break. She immediately went to hospital where she was prescribed a drug cocktail to stave off contraction. The person who bit her refused to be tested.

Constable Hiltz suffered severe side effects, including chronic fatigue and nausea, from the drugs she was obliged to take. The emotional effects were worse. She had been warned that the drugs could cause cancer or birth defects, and Constable Hiltz was only 26 at the time.

She was able to get through the ordeal with the help of family, friends and colleagues. Fortunately, her story had a happy ending. She has been given a clean bill of health; her fiancé is now her husband and they are now the parents of two wonderful children. Her account of her experience was a stirring reminder of why we need to act to protect those who protect us. Through her presentation, members of the committee were made aware in very vivid terms of the real impact of our actions on the real lives of the people in this province. We were left in

no doubt of the need for this legislation. To Constable Hiltz, I say thank you for sharing and bringing home to us a reality that most of us can only imagine.

I also want to express thanks on behalf of the government to all the stakeholders whose input has helped us craft this bill. I also want to acknowledge the contributions of other groups who have been valuable in assisting us in drafting the bill, such as the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the Information and Privacy Commissioner and many other health professionals. While the government cannot support some of the suggestions made by participants in the process, we have made a number of significant amendments to the original draft in response to stakeholder input. My parliamentary assistant will address these in his presentation.

Essentially, the existing legislative provisions of section 22.1 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act prescribe that if a person who is the source of a possible infection does not voluntarily provide a blood sample, a medical officer of health can order the required sampling and testing. After two years of experience with that legislation, we heard from our partners about the challenges faced by those involved in the process. We heard the concerns of the medical community, the policing community and the public safety community about the ways in which the existing legislation could be made more responsive to the needs of stakeholders. Medical officers of health expressed serious reservations about having the responsibility to order persons to provide blood samples. They believe that it would be better to move responsibility for ordering a person to provide a blood sample from the health system to an independent body. And we responded. Decisions on whether to grant an application for mandatory blood sampling would, if the proposed legislation were passed, be made by the Consent and Capacity Board. Medical officers of health would continue to be responsible for screening initial applications and seeking voluntary samples, but they would be removed from the responsibility to act as adjudicators.

Stakeholders in the policing community also presented their positions on the existing legislation. They are concerned at the length of time it takes at present to complete the process of mandatory blood testing. The police also want to see the categories of person who can apply for mandatory blood samples broadened to specifically include police officers and persons in certain high-risk occupations and environments. We've heard the concerns of the policing community that the process be simplified, that timelines be shortened and that police be specifically designated in the eligibility criteria. The legislation I'm proposing would authorize the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to make regulations specifying eligible occupations.

We've also heard from community safety workers that they want, among other things, faster resolution of applications. If passed, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act would streamline the process and achieve faster decisions. The period for voluntary compliance would be re-

duced from seven days to two days. The current process has taken up to 69 days to complete. Should the proposed legislation be passed, this process will be reduced to 19 days. That's a big improvement. This means significant reductions in the time for processing these applications and a significant reduction in anxiety for our public safety workers. By streamlining the process for applications, as proposed in this bill, we would ensure that applications are dealt with in an efficient, effective and timely manner for all concerned.

We are also keenly aware of the privacy issues for those responding to an order for a blood sample. To that end, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act, if passed, would restrict the use of any blood samples taken to the purposes set out in the legislation and its regulations. It would be an offence to use the samples for any other purpose. This proposed approach resolves many of the issues that concern our community safety workers, while at the same time respecting the interests of the applicant, respondent and health care workers.

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The proposed Mandatory Blood Testing Act captures the intent and spirit of the original legislation and seeks to respond to the concerns raised by our partners in community safety. This bill is the outcome of the productive working relationship between the McGuinty government and many stakeholders. It addresses the need of our emergency service personnel and of victims of crime to find out quickly whether they risk infection from a blood-borne virus.

This bill reflects our government's plan to strengthen our province by strengthening our most important competitive advantage: our people. If passed, the bill would resolve many of the issues that concern our community safety workers and give them the peace of mind to go about their work with greater confidence, and that means greater safety and security for all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough—Rouge River): I want to thank the minister for sharing his time and allowing me an opportunity to make a contribution to Bill 28, mandatory blood testing, third reading.

I'm pleased to speak in support of Bill 28, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act, 2006. If passed, the bill will repeal the existing provisions on mandatory blood sampling in section 22.1 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act and replace them with stand-alone legislation that better meets the needs of our emergency workers. I want to emphasize that the aims and objectives of Bill 28 are exactly the same as those of the legislation it proposes to replace. It differs from the existing legislation only in relation to the processes employed to achieve the same results. These process improvements arise out of the government's consideration of the reasonable concerns and recommendations of the stakeholders most affected by or involved with the application of the provisions of the bill.

They also reflect this government's concern for victims of crime and our support for our police partners and

other community safety workers. Their safety is a priority for us.

The current legislation provides that a local medical officer of health may issue an order for a blood sample upon application by an individual who has come into contact with a bodily substance of another individual as a result of being a victim of crime, or while providing emergency services or first aid, or while performing a function set out in regulation. The blood sample would be tested for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B, hepatitis C or other communicable diseases set out in regulation.

The current process has taken anywhere from five days to 69 days, depending on a variety of factors. During this period, affected persons would undergo the stress of not knowing whether they had been infected with a serious disease and, in many cases, may be advised to undergo precautionary treatment with its attendant side effects, which may result in personal lifestyle changes until the results are known.

The current legislation came into effect in September 2003, before the McGuinty government took office. Since then, we've heard from stakeholders about their concerns and their recommendations for improving the process.

Police and emergency personnel have expressed concerns about lengthy delays in the application and hearing process. They are also concerned that the breadth of the circumstances in which they may come into contact with bodily substances is not captured by the wording of the current legislation, which refers to a victim of crime or emergency health care. The policing community felt that exposure from an accident or during the lawful performance of duties may not adequately be dealt with.

Medical officers of health have told us that they are uncomfortable with their quasi-judicial role as adjudicators under the existing scheme, a role that they contend is inconsistent with their role as physicians.

Many stakeholders expressed the need to move responsibility for obtaining an order from the health system.

Bill 28 aims to address these stakeholders' concerns by proposing the following: streamlining the process to achieve quicker resolution of applications; ensuring that applications are dealt with in an efficient, effective and timely manner for all concerned; and balancing the interests of the applicant, respondent and those involved in administering the process by transferring responsibility for deciding on applications from medical officers of health to the Consent and Capacity Board.

The proposed changes include time frames that would shorten the process from application to order. In particular, the period for voluntary compliance would be shortened to two days from seven days, and shorter time frames for the hearing process would be set out in this legislation.

If passed, Bill 28 would provide that a person who came into contact with a bodily substance of another person while providing emergency first aid, as a victim of crime or in other prescribed circumstances, may apply to a medical officer of health to have the blood of the other

person analyzed for HIV/AIDS and/or hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

If, within two days, the medical officer of health fails to get the other person to voluntarily provide a blood sample, the medical officer of health would refer the applicant to the Consent and Capacity Board. The Consent and Capacity Board would be required to hold and conclude a hearing into the application within seven days after the application is referred to it and would be empowered to order the person to provide a blood sample for analysis. Medical officers of health would no longer be involved in the decision or in a supervisory capacity after an order is issued. The Consent and Capacity Board would have to give its decision one day after concluding a hearing. A maximum time frame would be prescribed in regulation. Physicians and other legally qualified health care practitioners would be protected from liability for complying with an order to take or analyze a blood sample.

Bill 28 proposes that the Consent and Capacity Board have responsibility for making an order for mandatory blood samples. The Consent and Capacity Board is an independent provincial tribunal that has been in existence since 1968. Its mission is to ensure the fair and accessible adjudication of consent and capacity issues, balancing the rights of vulnerable individuals with public safety.

The board's key areas of activity are the adjudication of matters of capacity, consent, civil committal and substitute decision-making. It conducts hearings under the Mental Health Act, the Personal Health Information Protection Act and the Substitute Decisions Act. The Consent and Capacity Board has a strong education and outreach program designed to bring about shorter, more focused hearings; it is accustomed to dealing with hearings with a short turnaround time.

If passed, Bill 28 would also respond to the concerns raised by police and others about the uncertainty in the present legislation as to the circumstances that could permit an application for mandatory blood sample. In addition to victims of crime and persons providing emergency health care services or emergency first aid, the bill would make eligible to apply a person who came into contact with the bodily substance of another person in the course of his or her duties, if the person belongs to a prescribed class, and/or while being involved in a prescribed circumstance or while carrying out a prescribed activity.

Under the proposed bill, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services would be authorized to make regulations defining the prescribed classes and the circumstances and activities that could give rise to an application for an order. By having a provision to spell out the classes and the circumstances in the regulations, the legislation would retain the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances.

Through a process of consultation and consensus-building with stakeholders and the public, we can assure that the regulations remain up to date, practical and practicable, while respecting the objectives of the proposed legislation.

1550

In closing, let me summarize the benefits of this proposed legislation. The Mandatory Blood Testing Act, if passed, would speed up the application and hearing process for obtaining a blood sample. It would also transfer the power to make an order from a medical officer of health to the Consent and Capacity Board. If passed, this bill will protect our community safety workers and provide the peace of mind to allow them to do their work with greater confidence as they put themselves at risk to help the people of Ontario.

We have to do all we can to support those who protect us as they go about their challenging tasks in communities across Ontario. If passed, Bill 28 would be an important step in achieving this objective.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): It's an honour to have an opportunity to honour all of those who give their time for our safety. Certainly, I recognize our guests in the members' gallery and also all those in my own riding of Parkdale–High Park. In Parkdale–High Park, we have a problem with drug use, petty crime and prostitution, and our firefighters, our police, our paramedics and our nursing staff all put themselves in harm's way for us.

I also speak personally. My husband was a police officer for a couple of years before he went into even more dangerous intellectual work in academia. He has a great deal of respect for all of those officers on the force as well.

The last time I spoke about this bill I mentioned the wonderful story that our general, Roméo Dallaire, told about Canadian troops, some of the bravest in the world, who went into places that other troops wouldn't go. One of them was to help some women who had been attacked, who had been raped and mutilated, and who had been left for dead. The soldiers, without hesitation, went in to help when other troops would not, risking injury, risking exactly the kind of situation that this bill addresses.

Of course, as New Democrats, we would support a move like Bill 28. There's no question that we will support this. I think there's a sense of irony, though, with which we do support it—and, trust me, after a couple of months of being in this House, my sense of irony is well honed—because of the fact that this government brought in this bill on November 15, 2005. This government has a majority. This government can do basically anything it wants, yet it's taken this long to get to this point in time with this bill. One has to ask how many people have been infected in that length of time while this government has been—doing what, one can ask—working this bill very slowly through the system.

This certainly is something that should have been passed a long time ago. In a sense, it's a kind of large amendment to Mr. Dunlop's Bill 105 that came in again a while ago—and thanks be to that member for doing that piece of work. It speaks to the inefficiencies and it speaks to the lack of regard, I think, of the McGuinty government for exactly those people whom this bill addresses: those people who put their lives on the line for us every day.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? Response? No. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On behalf of New Democrats, I'm pleased to indicate our support for this bill and our pleasure that the bill is now before this chamber for third reading. I tell interested people that the vote on third reading will indeed occur today.

I, like my colleague Ms. DiNovo from Parkdale–High Park, want to acknowledge the incredible work that Garfield Dunlop, the member from Simcoe North, put into this proposition. He was the author of the seminal bill that brought this matter forward, and he pursued the matter with great tenacity. The bill was voted through second reading, went into committee—I remember serving on committee with him—and then became law.

Bill 28 is an effort to fine-tune the bill as it was originally passed. One of the big issues, of course, was a concern about inordinate delays, and the bill has gone some way to addressing that. I'm not sure it's gone as far as we could have. That remains to be seen.

One of the problems we have, I say to the minister—and his parliamentary assistant will know this full well from having stewarded this bill through committee—is the lack of hard data. We tried to get information about the total number of applications made pursuant to the existing legislation and how they were resolved. We got a rough sense, because there's rough data out there. Approximately 50% of all requests are dealt with through voluntary compliance by the person whose blood had the capacity or potential to infect the correctional officer, police officer or paramedic—or good Samaritan, for that matter. That's by and large a good thing. The purpose of the bill should be to ensure that for all persons who have put themselves, in good faith and with a sense of altruism, into a position where their health is at risk, there is sufficient participation in the analytical process, blood testing and so on, to give that person some comfort level about whether or not they might have contracted a disease. If they haven't contracted a disease, God bless; if they have, they can immediately begin the medications and treatment responses necessary.

Of course, I acknowledge the presence and participation in this process by Fred LeBlanc from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, as well as Bruce Miller from the Police Association of Ontario. I know that Mr. Miller was speaking with some of my colleagues, Mr. Runciman and others, last night about the bill and its course through the Legislature. I know that Mr. Runciman indicated to Mr. Miller his own personal—Mr. Runciman's—enthusiasm about the bill's progress. I'm pleased that they had an opportunity to discuss this matter. I'm pleased that they had a chance to get together to talk about Bill 28. I'm sorry I couldn't be there, but I trust that there will be other occasions when we can talk about things that go on here at Queen's Park as they impact on police officers.

I also want you to note, Speaker, the presence today in the members' gallery of two workers from Welland: Tom Napper, president of CAW Local 523, and Rick Alakas, president of CAW Local 275 in Welland. Rick Alakas is

also a newly elected city councillor for the city of Welland. I'm very proud of him having returned to municipal politics. He had a brief hiatus, but he's back now. I know it takes a tremendous toll on people and their families, and I know Mr. Alakas's family. I know their incredible support for him. It's interesting, because Mr. Napper is here, and his son, Tom Napper Jr., is a firefighter in St. Catharines. So Mr. Napper understands full well the speed with which firefighters put themselves into situations of high danger and great risk. Situations that others are fleeing from, firefighters run to.

You should also know that Tom Napper represents those workers at Haun Drop Forge who were told today that that historic drop forge in Welland is shutting down. Of course, that has been a significant blow to them and their families. Retrain them? We're talking about guys who for 30 and 35 years have operated hammers in the forge. I've been through that forge. Have you ever seen work like that? That's dangerous work too, hammer operator. You see, nowadays they're chained to their machine, literally, with restraints. It's a safety device so they can't move their hand far enough to get it under the hammer. But you can tell who the old-timers are, because they're the ones who literally do have to take their socks off to count to 20. It's dangerous work—hard-working men and women in that industry in Welland.

I recall earlier today the Minister of Finance saying in response to a query about the huge job loss across Ontario that, oh, well, the province is going to retrain them. To do what? Like Rosario Marchese says, are you going to take a hammer operator from the forge and train them to be a barista at Starbuck's? Don't tell me you're going to teach them how to deal blackjack and send them to the casino, because the casino is laying off workers, the same workers who were trained two years ago to be casino workers. There is a serious problem in this province around job losses—huge, huge job losses and the prospect of many more.

1600

I understand that the Premier is leading a junket to India in January. You know what happens then: a big entourage of hangers-on, wannabes and backbench MPPs—an entourage, a junket to India, what, to find markets for Canadian or Ontario products? Not likely. The only market in India is for Ontario jobs. Maybe the Premier can help some call centres relocate while he's there, huh?—from Ontario to India. Maybe the Premier can assist some of these drop forges that are dropping like flies in Ontario as the owners job their work out to Asian manufacturing locations, huh?

That's embarrassing and shameful. How much more do we have to hear about Tom Parkinson and his trips to Australia being paid for on the corporate tab? Or the public corporate tab, because it's the people of Ontario who pay for it. How much do we have to hear about Tom Parkinson and 45 Gs charged back to his secretary's credit card? Tom Parkinson, who was held in such high esteem by the Liberals that he gets a \$500,000 bonus, gets a little pat on the wrist for the joyrides in the com-

pany helicopter. A good friend of the Liberals—Tom Parkinson. He's a million-dollar friend, he's a Conrad Black friend, he's a Barbara Amiel friend. Hell, he shouldn't just be losing his job; he should be going to jail. Well, think about it. It's called stealing corporate funds, and the corporate owners happen to be the people of Ontario: you, you and you—your families, your constituents, your kids and their friends.

This has become a province of high rollers and jet-setters; junkets to India are the rule of the day; jobs are going to hell in a handbasket in our own backyards; and the Premier is off touring South Asia.

I do want to speak more to Bill 28, of course, because New Democrats are absolutely committed to worker safety. I say to this chamber, as I've had occasion to say to oh-so-many workers in oh-so-many venues, that it's never wrong to fight for good jobs, to keep good jobs in your community and your province; it's never wrong to fight for safer workplaces, to fight for the right—and I believe it's a right—to come home, maybe a little more tired than when you went out in the morning but as healthy as you were when you went to work at 6 a.m. And that applies to firefighters, police officers; it applies to industrial workers too.

I suppose Haun Drop Forge employees won't have to worry about coming home safe from work, will they? They won't have any jobs; they won't be coming home from work. Do you know what that means? Once EI is over, it means welfare. Middle-class, hard-working—and it's hard work. It is hard work, I tell you. No Gucci loafers from Queen's Park ever set foot in any drop forge in this province, I'll tell you that. It's hard, dirty work; dangerous. From a middle-class lifestyle, paying taxes, lots of them—income taxes, property taxes, sales taxes—one year or less of EI, employment insurance, to welfare. What that means is that marriages break down, that kids who were enrolled in college and university drop out. What that means is that social issues, personal problems like alcoholism and drug abuse increase—because those are the sorts of things that are nurtured by that instant joblessness and the despair that's created. That means that a community loses yet even more of its property tax base, so Councillor Rick Alakas is going to be faced with that problem, that dilemma, as well.

This government takes junkets to south Asia. What's that going to cost? Two hundred, 300 grand? Maybe half a million? What do you think, Speaker? Or are they just putting it on the secretary's credit card, like Tom Parkinson does, hoping that they're going to hide the expense?

We're pleased that Bill 28 has come to third reading, pleased that it's going to become law. I do want to compliment Bas Balkissoon, the parliamentary assistant, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River. I believe this is his first bill as PA to the Minister of Community Safety—it was his second one, but it's the first one I noticed. The parliamentary assistant did an outstanding job of stewarding this through committee. He was a pleasure to work with. He really was, because there were issues raised, for instance, by medical officers of health

about them being the person responsible for enforcing the order. I know I talked to those same people the parliamentary assistant did. He, the parliamentary assistant, was responsive. He went back and sold the proposition to policy people and was successful in doing that, so I compliment him.

Applause.

Mr. Kormos: That's Mr. Berardinetti applauding, not Mr. Balkissoon. Mind you, Mr. Fonseca sat silent through the whole opportunity to applaud his colleague, Mr. Balkissoon. For the life of me, I haven't the slightest idea of what Mr. Fonseca has against his colleague. Perhaps it's a personal thing. Perhaps they simply don't like each other.

I was proud to be able to work on this committee with the Conservative members and with Mr. Balkissoon as the parliamentary assistant, pleased to be able to make some progress around increasing the effectiveness of this legislation. I do regret that there was a lost opportunity. I was an advocate of using justices of the peace as the persons to whom one applied for, effectively, a warrant to get the blood. JPs are out there. They should be out there all over the place 24/7 in all parts of the province. They're accessible via videocam. Again, the program isn't particularly successful yet, but ideally they would be accessible by videocam, so that even in the most remote parts of the province you'd have relatively instant access. JPs are used to giving search warrants. They provide search warrants now for intrusive searches, for instance. I thought they were an eminently logical body to have performed that role. Others—Liberals—indicated that they didn't think JPs were competent enough to do that. I found that an unfortunate observation, especially as there's a concerted government effort, as we're told, to improve the quality of justice of the peace performance here in the province of Ontario.

Here we are: The bill will go to a vote. I trust it will pass. I look forward to the ministry being able to provide precise data over the course of the months and years to come so we can assess the effectiveness of the amendments that are contained in this bill and consider the need for yet more changes, should they be required.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Ms. DiNovo: Again, it's a pleasure to rise and to speak about Bill 28. It will pass today, and we're pleased about that. We're pleased for the work it's going to achieve in making the workplace safer for all of those who put their lives on the line.

I want to take a bit of an opportunity as well to talk about another way in which we can make safety first and foremost, and that is, I hope, by passing another bill. That's Bill 30, which is bringing in safety-engineered sharps as law.

Just to go over a little of what that's about, many of the injuries we've been talking about in debate on this bill are injuries caused by hypodermic needles. These are needless and senseless injuries, especially in light of the fact that we have a bill before the House, Ms. Martel's

bill, that would make that redundant, in that we wouldn't have hypodermic needles. We would have, in fact, safety-engineered sharps.

1610

I wanted to share with the House a few of the statistics around that: 33,000, for example, is the estimated annual number of needle-stick injuries in the health care sector; 17,000 is the estimated annual number of needle-stick injuries in acute care alone; \$64 million is the estimated annual cost of testing and treating needle-stick injuries in the health care sector, and that does not even account for additional needle-stick injuries outside of the health care sector; \$32 million is the estimated annual cost of testing and treating needle-stick injuries in acute care alone; \$22 million is the estimated cost to completely convert all acute care workplaces in Ontario to safety-engineered devices—far, far less; \$4 million is the estimated amount the Ontario government will save by replacing conventional needles in acute care after realizing an 82% drop in injuries.

Just to continue along with some of the statistics which I think we should take to heart if we were really serious about workplace safety and worker safety and that we would put into effect: \$2,000, the minimum cost of testing and providing preventive treatment for each worker who suffers a needle-stick injury; 190, the estimated number of needle-stick injuries every day—this is in Canada; a frightening statistic, I think, and we know that many of our front-line workers in the safety field are those needle-stick injury statistics; 69,719, the estimated number of needle-stick injuries every year; 750,000, the estimated number of workers in health care across the country who are susceptible to these injuries; and \$140 million, the estimated minimum cost of testing and preventive treatment for needle-stick injuries alone.

I draw the Speaker's attention also to the fact that we're falling behind the curve as a province that doesn't have legislation in this regard. April 30, 2004, was the date Alberta implemented safety sharps regulation. January 1, 2006, was the date Manitoba's and Saskatchewan's regulations took effect, and January 1, 2007, is the date Nova Scotia's regulation will take effect. January 1, 2008, is the date British Columbia's regulation will take effect. Of course, there are coalitions active that want this legislation in Ontario, Newfoundland and also New Brunswick. This kind of legislation has been in place in the States for quite a while now: 1997 was when California mandated the use of its safety-engineered sharps devices.

I call upon the McGuinty government, if they're really serious about protecting our workers from injuries involving blood products, to really move quickly, certainly a lot more quickly than they have on their own Bill 28, to bring in Bill 30, which is Shelley Martel's bill.

Again, I point this House's and the attention of all of those viewers who are at home to the ineffectiveness of this government in fact doing much at all to protect workers. I draw this House's attention and the attention all of those viewers at home to the Auditor General's

report and what it points out about the ineffectiveness of this government in terms of protecting its most vulnerable. It's very interesting, the response that we've received from all of the ministers about their ministries in light of the Auditor General's report, looking around, behind them, looking down, looking at their colleagues, looking everywhere else but in the mirror as to who is responsible for what goes on in their ministries.

My background is in part in business, and I know that in business if you are the chief executive officer of a company, you don't wait for Revenue Canada to come in and audit your books to know what's actually going on in your company, that you actually take an active interest every day, every week about what's going on in your company, and you are liable to the shareholders for what goes on in your company. I'd like to see some liability on behalf of our ministers to what goes on in their ministries. I'd like to know what they've been doing for these four years in terms of doing their own audits of what goes on.

Who has taken up the cause of children and youth and child services? Who is taking up the cause of the workers whom you have heard Mr. Kormos speak about losing their jobs because of what amounts to nothing more than lining one's own pockets at Hydro One and the OPG and, of course, the list goes on. What about those children who have had unnecessary CT scans under Mr. Smitherman's health watch? Who looks out for them? Surely this is the place where the buck does stop and this is the place where we have to answer not only to those in our ministries, as the cabinet ministers do, but to the entire electorate of Ontario. So I draw attention to that. Who else is suffering, what other front-line workers are suffering under the watch of the McGuinty government? Certainly, we have 120,000 households in Ontario waiting for housing. We have 65,000 households in Toronto alone and in the GTA waiting for housing—no housing comes. We've asked over and over again questions of Mr. Gerretsen about housing. We've received few answers.

One of the questions that's on the order paper right now that I still haven't got an answer for is how many \$300- to \$400-units he has provided for our most vulnerable. I suspect the answer is none, because I haven't received it yet. That's pretty sad, because \$300 to \$400 a month is exactly what one can afford if one is earning minimum wage or OW or ODSP, that is, the poorest and most vulnerable front-line folk in our society.

What about small business owners? My constituency office in Parkdale—High Park is on Dundas Street West, a street where many storefronts are empty. Who's looking out for those front-line workers? Who's looking out for those who pay an inordinate amount of commercial property tax in comparison to other jurisdictions? Who's looking out for the artists, many of them who make minimum wage? Who's looking out for those artists who are in fear right now, many of them, of losing not only their livelihood but their houses because of this unfair taxation system? Who's looking out for the children? We

have no status-of-the-artist legislation in this province. We have no protection for child artists who work in the arts. Who's looking out for those front-line workers as well? Who's looking out for the 13,500 children who use our food banks in the GTA, who don't have enough to eat? Many of them come from working families. Who's looking out for the front-line workers who line up at the food banks, many of them women who head single-parent families and who work at minimum wage? Imagine how safe your life is if you earn minimum wage, which is a mere \$7.75. Sad—nobody is looking out for those front-line workers.

Back in 1972, it used to be \$2 an hour, and if you use the Bank of Canada's inflation calculator, that's just under \$10 a day. So we're not asking for a raise in the minimum wage; we're asking for catch-up for some of our most vulnerable workers. Who's looking out for those women and children? I see them, because I volunteer at a food bank and I volunteer at a breakfast program in my riding—a wonderful one, by the way, at Masaryk-Cowan, run by Ram. Who do you see at the breakfast program? You see children and their families, many of them immigrants, many of them workers. Who's looking out for those workers? Who's looking out for those children? This is a government that says it's safety conscious, but safety for whom? For a very small proportion of people. Again, it's taken them over a year to just get to this point, even for them.

So we don't hold out a lot of hope, do we, Mr. Speaker, for the McGuinty government? We don't hold out hope that they really do care for the vulnerable in their midst and that they really do care for front-line workers and they really do care for all of those who put their lives on the line every day in one way, shape or form.

So of course, yes, I do support, as do all New Democrats, the passage of this bill, Bill 28. We support this. Our Christmas wish, if we have one, is that the same kind of compassion that goes into this bill for these workers can go into compassion for all the workers of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Time for questions and comments. Seeing none, further debate?

Seeing none, Mr. Kwinter has moved third reading of Bill 28. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

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

PUBLIC SERVICE OF ONTARIO
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006
LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
AYANT TRAIT À LA
FONCTION PUBLIQUE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 27, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 158, An Act to revise legislation relating to the public service of Ontario by repealing the Public Service Act, enacting the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006 and the Ontario

Provincial Police Collective Bargaining Act, 2006 and making complementary amendments to various Acts and by amending various Acts in respect of the successor rights of certain public servants / Projet de loi 158, Loi visant à réviser des lois ayant trait à la fonction publique de l'Ontario en abrogeant la Loi sur la fonction publique, en édictant la Loi de 2006 sur la fonction publique de l'Ontario et la Loi de 2006 sur la négociation collective relative à la Police provinciale de l'Ontario, en apportant des modifications complémentaires à diverses lois et en modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne la succession aux qualités pour certains fonctionnaires.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Debate? Seeing none, Mr. Phillips has moved second reading of Bill 158. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on general government.

The Acting Speaker: So be it.

Orders of the day.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The deputy House leader moves adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m. of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1620.

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