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Wednesday 13 December 2006

Mercredi 13 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 13 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 13 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo—Wellington): It is my contention that of all the hospitals in Ontario, there is not one that has more enthusiastic local public support than the Groves Memorial Community Hospital in the township of centre Wellington.

The Groves hospital's reputation for excellence is well deserved, a reputation that is shared by the hospitals of North Wellington Health Care and the other hospitals which serve my constituents. As this year comes to an end, we express our thanks.

In the spring of 2007, the Groves hospital will open its new community chemotherapy clinic in partnership with the Grand River Hospital in Kitchener. This new cancer care clinic will mean that cancer patients will receive their chemotherapy closer to home. This new clinic represents hope for families as patients beat cancer and get better.

To complement this new cancer care service, there is a need for a new CT scanner to ensure that the level of service at Groves is consistent with the standard of care and availability of CT at other hospitals serving a similar population with a similar clinical program. It will mean reduced wait times and improved local access to this essential diagnostic procedure and it will mean better medical care all around.

Recently, the Groves Memorial Community Hospital board submitted an updated master plan to the Ministry of Health which includes a bold vision for a brand new hospital. As the MPP for Waterloo—Wellington, I will continue to actively support whatever hospital redevelopment plan the board and our community put forward for the ministry's consideration. I'm pleased that the Minister of Health is in the House to hear what I have to say today and I urge the ministry to move swiftly to respond to our health care needs.

FEDERAL LIBERAL LEADERSHIP CONVENTION

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): The energetic exercise of our democratic rights is vital to a healthy, self-rejuvenating society. Rule by a free, educated and

engaged majority is sometimes awkward, lurching from time to time in new directions. Nonetheless, these corrections are usually what keep us on course at least in the long run, and all partisanship aside, I believe democracy usually gets it right.

I had the happy privilege recently of participating in the Montreal federal Liberal leadership convention, and upon reflection, it seems to me that exercises in democracy like this are, for any party, important moments in the life of a free and open society. Yes, it's combative, expensive, even draining, but it works.

Stéphane Dion is a man of principle whom I was honoured to support right through the convention. He brings a sense of balance and a vision to the future of his party, which is what Canada needs. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate both the convention organizers for staging such a compelling exercise in grassroots leadership and the new Liberal Party of Canada leader for triumphing through it all. Stéphane Dion, on behalf of my colleagues, we wish you well.

MID-PENINSULA HIGHWAY

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): Thirty-eight long months since Dalton McGuinty's election and the mid-peninsula corridor is still stuck in reverse. We're still waiting for the start date of the environmental assessment for the mid-peninsula corridor.

You will recall that the EA was ready to go under the previous government. When this government came in, they tossed out all the old studies, wasted hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars and said they'd start from square one.

Sadly, it took a long time before the mid-pen policy even got to Minister Takhar's desk over at the Chalmers Group. He said he would finally get moving on the terms of reference in the fall of 2004, but it wasn't until October 28, 2005, that those terms of reference were submitted. Now that they have finally been approved, in June 2006, we still have no firm date for the EA consultations to begin. It was suggested they would finally begin in the fall of 2006—mind you, technically there are still eight days left in the fall—but nobody would think that December 2006 is an adequate start date for this project. Commuters and business still stuck on the 403, the Queen Elizabeth Way and the Lincoln Alexander want to see an investment in highway infrastructure; they want to see the project moving soon. At this Dalton McGuinty snail's pace, we're all going to be like the

Jetsons, flying over where the highway should have been, unless they get moving. Let's put the highway in gear.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On January 31, 2007, PenSafe, owners of Haun Drop Forge, is pulling the plug on its Welland operation. Haun Drop Forge, part of the Welland-Niagara area forge industry—70 years old, highly skilled workers, an incredible history of quality product—is having its production transferred to Asia. Perhaps when the Premier is visiting India with his entourage of MPPs on his January junket, he can say hello to the Asian workers who will be manufacturing the quality products that used to be made by workers at Haun Drop Forge in Welland.

These are hard-working folks, raising their families, raising their grandkids, building homes and building communities. But you've got a forge operation—a high electricity consumer—that simply can't afford the electricity costs anymore, and you have a small business that tells me this government doesn't understand small business. This government thinks small business is 200 workers in a non-union factory.

Haun Drop Forge, with 23 active workers, was out of the loop when it came to funding and support for research and innovative development of new products. This type of operation increasingly is becoming the source of employment here in the province of Ontario, and they're the ones that are under direct attack by this government's electricity policies. No Parkinson salary and severance package for these people, just a pink slip.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I rise today to point out that the Office for Victims of Crime worked this past year with community representatives in six regional committees across this province to review and suggest projects that are innovative and effective that could fill some gaps. There was nearly \$6 million spent this year alone, and nearly a million of that is going to community-based agencies in central western Ontario to support new programs and services for victims of crime. I just want to highlight a couple of them. One of them, St. Joseph's Immigrant Women's Centre in Hamilton, received \$42,660 at the end of last week to create 12 workshops to offer immigrant women a safe environment to discuss issues of domestic or sexual violence and explore choices and services available to them in the community of Hamilton. The project will also provide for a series of four staff training and development sessions on violence against women.

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In Burlington, Halton Women's Place received \$150,000 from this fund to implement a domestic violence public education outreach strategy for Halton region. This is targeting marginalized communities. Elements of the strategy include recruitment of community ambassadors, updating the organization's website, and

translation of print materials into multiple languages and formats.

My congratulations to those agencies, to their staff and to the volunteers who work there for coming up with these excellent programs and for getting this funding.

ORPHANED DEER

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): Let me share a sad Christmas story from my constituency. It is about a family, a deer and the grinches who are attempting to steal Christmas; in Nepean-Carleton, we call them over-zealous MNR officials.

You see, I represent a caring and a compassionate community, like my other colleagues do, with suburbs and farms. We are a city, but with a rural flair.

On one of these farms lived a deer named Bam Bam. Bam Bam has been cared for since she was an abandoned fawn by the Straby family. Bam Bam became part of their family. She would come when she was called. The Strabys, for their part, made sure Bam Bam was well taken care of with food, shelter, and, most importantly, love. That is, of course, until representatives of the MNR heard about it. Like the grinch who stole Christmas, no one quite knows why the MNR, backed up by three police cars, confiscated Bam Bam and moved her away from the family.

Sadly, the Strabys have to pay to visit her at a faraway zoo. Worse still, they may still face charges for their act of compassion.

So I wrote to the minister and I asked that he intervene. I believe, as my constituents do, that this family should be reunited. The Minister of Natural Resources has the authority to bring Bam Bam home for Christmas. He can right the wrong of his officials. After all, even the grinch who stole Christmas brought back the toys.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): This Friday, I will be in my riding to announce an exciting new program that will teach high-school-aged youth the principles of CPR. The Ontario segment of this program was made possible through the joint efforts of our government, the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Advanced Coronary Treatment Foundation. The program has aimed to establish a CPR program in high schools across Ontario in order to provide nearly 450,000 youth with the skill and awareness to help save lives at home and in their communities. By understanding the "chain of survival," these youth will be adept at understanding the warning signs and providing the person in duress the best chance for survival.

To date, 60% of the high schools in Ontario have this significant program in place. The success of this program has been made possible through \$650,000 over three years from the McGuinty government through the Ministry of Education. This is in addition to the \$300,000 in funding over three years from the Trillium Foundation

and also the tireless work of the Advanced Coronary Treatment Foundation in both fundraising and implementation of this program.

This program is an excellent way of preparing Ontario's youth for emergencies in their homes and in their communities. I'm very proud to be part of a government that helps fund programs like this so that we can make real progress in building strong communities across Ontario.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): It is with great pleasure that I rise in this House today to declare the McGuinty government's commitment to our children and youth.

Last year I became a father, and I have to say that after my twin boys' birth on December 11, 2005, Sébastien and Alexander changed my life and gave me a wonderful perspective on the work we do here. The boys celebrated their first birthday on Monday of this week with family, friends, cake and much wrapping paper.

Our kids are our most precious resource, and we need to ensure that we take care of their development and needs in the early years so that they arrive at school ready to learn. We need every Ontarian at his best, and we need him to start at birth.

A funny story also happened this past week. Alexander likes to squirm around all the time when I'm trying to change his diaper. Sébastien, the other twin, was very observant and saw that daddy was having a hard time, so he came over and helped to pin Alexander down so daddy could change his diaper, which was very funny; it was hilarious, actually, at the time. You could just see the learning and how observant kids are.

I look forward to the time that they will attend public school, with reduced class sizes and improved schools. Today our newborns, thanks to our government, receive vaccines for pneumonia, chickenpox and meningitis funded by the government. Our kids are counting on us to clean up our environment: water, land and air.

HOLOCAUST

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): Sadly, I rise today to speak about the Holocaust. It's in the news today: The notion of the Holocaust is under attack, as we sit here today. It is described as a myth in some quarters. This is false, absurd and beyond comprehension. Jews, blacks, gypsies, homosexuals and other minorities were the target of concentration camps, the target of the Holocaust. Mothers, daughters, sons and fathers were lost forever, lost to hatred.

On behalf of the lost family members, on behalf of all survivors, on behalf of all Canadians who fought against this regime in the Second World War, we in Ontario will remember this. I stand here to say to those today who are continuing to spread hate, to spread intolerance, that your lies will not be tolerated. We will remember. We will all

remember. The idea that the Holocaust is a myth is truly sinful.

VISITORS

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I rise today to introduce and to welcome two wonderful people, Peter and Helen Soderquest, hard-working individuals from Hamilton. They are here today celebrating Peter's retirement. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

NOTICE OF REASONED AMENDMENT

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 69(b), the House leader of the third party, the member for Niagara Centre, has notified the Clerk of his intention to file notice of a reasoned amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996, and the Executive Council Act. The order for second reading of Bill 173 may therefore not be called today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Pursuant to standing order 61(c), the supplementary estimates (2006-07) of the Office of the Assembly before the standing committee on estimates are reported back to the House, as they were not selected by the committee for consideration, and are deemed to be received and concurred in.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I beg leave to present the first report 2006 of the standing committee on regulations and private bills and move the adoption of its recommendations.

In tabling this report, I'd like to note that it's the committee's 31st report since it began reviewing regulations in 1978. This report covers all of 2005 and the period right up to May 20, 2006.

As Chair of the committee, I want to thank the staff and all of the people who helped with the committee, all of the members of the committee who worked very hard for their ongoing contributions to the standing committee on regulations and private bills. May all of the members have a very happy holiday season.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member has made a brief statement. The member for Hamilton East.

Ms. Horwath: I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Ms. Horwath: I beg leave to present a report for the standing committee on regulations and private bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill Pr29, An Act respecting Sheena's Place.

Your committee begs to report the following bills as amended:

Bill Pr31, An Act respecting the Perimeter Institute; and Bill Pr32, An Act respecting the Centre for International Governance Innovation.

The Speaker: Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I beg leave to present a report on Ontario's student assistance program from the standing committee on public accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

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

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Sterling: As members of the Legislature know, the public accounts committee, an all-party committee, deals with recommendations from the auditor. This particular recommendation regarding the student assistance program emanates out of the auditor's report of 2003, which then was reviewed again in 2005. So the committee was dealing with the 2005 report to follow up what the recommendations of the 2003 report pointed out.

A great concern of the committee surrounded the default rate. In other words, how many students were not paying back their loans? Up to about 2003, the default rate fell. In other words, more students were paying their loans. Subsequent to that time span, the default rate has begun to rise, so more students are not paying their loans. This was of concern to the committee.

There are many, many recommendations in the report, including actually seven or eight recommendations asking the ministry to report back to the committee as to why this rate is rising at this time and why the 10% target, which was set back in 2003, was not attained.

When this process was begun in 2003, the default rate was around 20% to 22%. It fell to about 13% but has risen again to about 16% or 17%. It was the feeling of the committee that a new target should be set and it should be attained. The 10% target probably could be reached if everyone got together.

I commend this report to all members and to the ministry. I believe it's a challenge that can be met by that ministry.

I move adjournment of the debate.

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

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I beg leave to present a report on agencies, boards and commissions, Hydro One, from the standing committee on government agencies and move the adoption of its recommendations.

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

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mrs. Munro: This is the second of three agencies on which the committee has held hearings. I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation of the efforts of the presenters, the legislative staff and the committee members themselves to make this process a valuable contribution to the public record.

I move adjournment of the debate.

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

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

STRENGTHENING BUSINESS THROUGH A SIMPLER TAX SYSTEM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 VISANT À RENFORCER LES ENTREPRISES GRÂCE À UN RÉGIME FISCAL PLUS SIMPLE

Mr. Sorbara moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 174, An Act to enact the Taxation Act, 2006 and make complementary and other amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 174, Loi édictant la Loi de 2006 sur les impôts et apportant des modifications complémentaires et autres à diverses lois.

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

The minister may wish to make a brief statement.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I'll reserve my comments until ministers' statements.

PENSION BENEFITS AMENDMENT ACT (UNLOCKING PENSION FUNDS), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE (DÉBLOCAGE DE FONDS DES CAISSES DE RETRAITE)

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 175, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act to allow transfers of locked-in pension funds to registered

retirement income funds / Projet de loi 175, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite pour permettre le transfert de caisses de retraite immobilisées à des fonds enregistrés de revenu de retraite.

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

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I do. Currently, pension funds that are in locked-in accounts can't be withdrawn except in very specific circumstances. In fact, many people can't get access to them in the current regime until they turn 90. This is unacceptable. I have been working with CARP, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, or persons over the age of 50, on trying to get this ball rolling, and hope that we can some day soon unlock locked-in funds.

VISITORS

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I know the House would enthusiastically welcome three residents from the great city of Ottawa here: Alycia White-Brown, Joel Monfils and Adam DeCaire, from Ottawa West–Nepean and Ottawa South. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I'm sure that members would be pleased to join me in welcoming Doug Galt, the former member for Northumberland, who's with us today, and his lovely wife, Cathy, who is the candidate of record for the riding of Northumberland. Welcome.

MOTIONS

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 158

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding discharging a bill from committee and ordering it for third reading.

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

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that the December 7, 2006, order of the House referring 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, to the standing committee on general government be discharged and it be ordered for third reading.

The Speaker: Shall the motion carry? Carried.

1400

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CORPORATE TAX IMPÔT DES SOCIÉTÉS

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): On October 6 of this year, I joined my federal counterpart, federal minister Jim Flaherty, to announce the first step in our plan to harmonize corporate tax collection. Today, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share with you and the members of this House the next step in the plan.

J'ai déposé aujourd'hui un projet de loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les principaux éléments annoncés dans le protocole d'accord que le ministre Flaherty et moi-même avons exposé en octobre dernier.

If passed, this bill will accomplish three important goals. First, it will deliver clear benefits to businesses of all sizes. They will spend less time on paperwork and they'll save up to \$100 million annually from one set of tax rules, one tax auditor and one tax form. Second, there will be a modest reduction in the amount corporations in Ontario will actually pay in taxes, by some \$90 million a year. Third, it will reduce red tape by cutting the combined personal and corporate tax legislation and regulations currently in existence by more than half.

Ce projet de loi montre également jusqu'où peuvent mener les efforts de collaboration intergouvernementaux et à quel point une telle coopération sert nos intérêts communs.

To accomplish these goals, the bill combines two existing statutes, the Corporations Tax Act and the Income Tax Act, into one single new piece of legislation. In doing so, this legislation proposes to simplify and streamline tax administration in this province.

Let me assure you, as is abundantly clear to anyone who has ever filed a corporate tax return or tried to meet a payroll, that this legislation is vital to our collective economic well-being. In that regard, any time that businesses spend on paperwork is time away from what they should be doing: creating jobs, investing, and contributing to a strong and prosperous economy.

Businesses have been asking us for some time to simplify our corporate tax structure. We've listened to their concerns and drafted a bill that goes some distance to meeting their needs.

As I said in October, there will be a period of transition, not just for business but for some of our staff. There are still steps to be taken before we conclude a full tax collection agreement, but we know that at the end of this process, some people who now work for us will be working for the federal government. To these people, I say: We know that change is not always easy. We will continue to work with you, with your bargaining agent, to help ensure that this process is both fair and transparent.

We now have a timetable for the process. We have committed publicly to having a single tax form in place for businesses beginning with the 2009 taxation year. The memorandum of agreement signed in October and the tax collection agreement that will follow represent important and positive steps in building a more productive working relationship with the government of Canada.

Ces accords, je l'espère, serviront de précurseurs à d'autres accords futurs, afin de mieux définir et élaborer des pratiques communes de collaboration, pour le mieux-être de tous les Canadiens.

But as I have said before on numerous occasions, now, more than ever, we need the federal government to own up to the rest of its responsibilities to this province. We've recently seen some good news in this regard, and we hope that this is a sign of many good things to come.

I look forward to the discussion that this legislation will generate in this House, and I genuinely appreciate the attention that I know members will give to it.

HIGH-OCCUPANCY VEHICLE LANES

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to talk about another greater success of the McGuinty government.

One year ago today, the government opened the first provincial high-occupancy vehicle lanes on Highways 403 and 404 with the goal of managing congestion and improving travel time for commuters. We heard that commuters were frustrated by the time it took to get to their destinations, and we responded. We knew that the delays they encountered on the road meant less time to spend with their friends and families. We opened our high-occupancy vehicle lanes last December so that commuters could get to their destinations in less time.

I am delighted to inform you that one year later, the HOV lanes are an unqualified success. Many groups have come forward with their support for this important initiative. Organizations such as the CAA and the Ontario Motor Coach Association see the value in building the HOV lanes.

Before the HOV lanes were built, a trip on Highway 403 eastbound during the morning rush hour took about 22 minutes. The same trip now takes about eight minutes in the HOV lanes.

The choice is obvious, and many commuters have recognized the benefits of these lanes. In 2003, only 14% of people travelled in carpools on Highway 403 eastbound. Now, nearly 40% of people are carpooling on the HOV lanes on Highway 403 eastbound during the peak rush hour.

Our HOV lanes are working, but there's room for more carpoolers. It's important to keep the momentum going and to keep the carpools growing. Indeed, I encourage all the members of this House and their staff to lead by example and carpool on a regular basis.

The high-occupancy vehicle lanes are also encouraging people to take public transit because the bus oper-

ators can offer faster, more reliable trips, and customers can be confident that their bus will not get stuck in traffic. GO Transit has reported that ridership on the bus routes using the HOV lanes is growing, and public transit agencies using these HOV lanes are reporting back that their buses arrive at their destinations on time and with greater consistency than ever before.

Of course, our environment also benefits as lane use increases with more and more commuters carpooling or taking transit.

Our government's plan to encourage carpooling and public transit use is working. Habits are changing. People who carpool or take public transit are telling us that the high-occupancy vehicle lanes allow them to spend more time with their families than on the road. If, for example, you were to take that 17 minutes that they save on the 404 every day, and when in 2007 the other lane is ready, we're talking two and a half hours that people will be able to spend with their friends and families every week. So commuters are telling us that their travel time is shorter.

But it's not just HOV and public transit users who benefit. Motorists in general also benefit. We've seen that the lanes both on Highway 403 and 404 are less congested, and we have seen that folks have shaved somewhere between eight and 11 minutes from their commute times simply because there are less cars on the road.

Our government is building on this success. By next summer, the HOV network will expand with the opening of the northbound HOV lane on Highway 404 north of Highway 401.

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Initial stages of construction are under way to add HOV lanes on the QEW between Oakville and Burlington, and we will also introduce high-occupancy vehicle lanes on Highway 417 in Ottawa between Palladium Drive and Highway 416.

High-occupancy vehicle lanes are part of the McGuinty government's plan for a sustainable transportation network across Ontario. We are building on this year's success and we are creating a transportation network that takes a holistic approach to keeping not only people but goods and services moving.

We have laid the foundation for this network. Rob MacIsaac, our newly appointed chair of our Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, is already working with municipal partners to plan for some exciting transit initiatives.

We have delivered on our promise to share the gas tax and provided municipalities with \$1.6 billion for new buses and increased services.

We are committed to extending the TTC subway to York University. Extending the subway line will help more than 65,000 students and faculty members at York University get to and from school quickly and conveniently. The subway extension is a solution that demonstrates the McGuinty government's commitment to supporting public transit in Ontario.

The federal government must come to the table with funding to make crucial transit projects happen in

Ontario. Our government is on the side of commuters who want to get to work and get home early, reliably and safely.

A sustainable transportation network is the key to Ontario's economic future and a crucial part of our plan to ensure that Ontarians continue to enjoy the highest quality of life.

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

CORPORATE TAX

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to respond to the statement on the bill introduced by my colleague the Minister of Finance.

As we've stated before on behalf of the opposition, we're pleased to see this initiative moving forward. Work had been done under the previous Progressive Conservative government and continued under this government. I give the minister a commendation, and his staff and Ministry of Finance civil servants, for their efforts on this, as well as Mr. Flaherty and his officials at the Department of Finance nationally.

The minister will know that we'll look closely at this bill. There have been some problems in the past. You will recall that the previous finance bill, for example, buried deep in the bill, caused a reduction in the frequency of municipal elections without being mentioned by the minister or his PA. Just this past week, your colleague the Minister of Government Services brought in a last-minute amendment to increase taxes on cemeteries, for example. You're going pretty far when you're increasing taxes on the dead.

I want to use this moment to reinforce to the Minister of Finance the importance of allowing the income splitting for pension income that's been announced by the federal government to go through here provincially. That will be a big bonus and a big assistance to seniors and those living on pension income.

My colleague the leader of the official opposition brought forward our strong concern with the last-minute spending that's occurred, as cited by the auditor's report, in cabinet meetings going up to the end of the fiscal year. It seems like the only limit was the physical ability of the minister to sign cheques, to put them out the door. As Mr. Tory pointed out, the last three cabinet meetings saw the following: \$2.4 million a minute spent; the March 23 cabinet meeting, \$643 million, or \$3.5 million a minute; and the March 30 cabinet meeting, \$205 million, or \$1.4 million a minute.

The auditor's report had previously criticized this minister and this government for similar activities in previous budgets, including \$1 billion the year before. The minister decided to top that up with \$1.6 billion this last fiscal year. It's certainly no way to run a budget and no way to run a government.

The last caution I'd have is, we had hoped we would see actual tax reductions for working families and for seniors in this budget. The minister knows that Ontario has the most uncompetitive tax regime for businesses,

right next to Saskatchewan, in the entire country. We do hope that will be in the bill, or, if not, the next bill coming from the minister.

HIGH-OCCUPANCY VEHICLE LANES

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Our leader, John Tory, and our caucus are fully in support of HOV lanes. It should be clear to people who are familiar with this topic that when we were in government, under the leadership of Frank Klees and Norm Sterling, this process began in 2001-02. The McGuinty government is always anxious to take credit for initiatives by others, but fails to take responsibility for their errors under their watch. In fact, I think today they should stand up and apologize for breaking over 230 promises, for instance the \$2.6-billion health tax. You've got to recall also that the energy file is in a complete mess, and we still have many doctor shortages and patient delays. You should also stand up and say you're sorry for the evidence released this week by the Auditor General, not to mention just a couple: Hydro One, the culture of entitlement and children's aid's excessive and scandalous spending.

The real issue is the lack of a responsible response by this government to the AG's report. In fact, there's no action plan to curb the excessive account card or credit card culture of entitlement, no plan to look at vulnerable children under children's aid care, no plan to re-communicate the information on hospital wait times, and the risks go on. There's no plan also for the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority and letting it come to reality. Even your chair and vice-chair are reported as asking, "Where's the money?"

What about the extension of service of GO Transit? What about the mid-peninsula corridor? What about the Highway 407 east completion? Minister, the HOV lanes are not going to solve the gridlock problem, and you should know that. Clearly the McGuinty government has no plan of any sort to solve the gridlock crisis.

People do remember that it was this government that started the process, and it will be this government that will fail to complete their promises, as has been the case. What's needed here is a real action plan for this government to address the findings of the Auditor General. With less than eight months to go, the Liberal government is falling into its own potholes. I say to the minister, as you said in your remarks, the people are still frustrated. Why did you bring up your little entourage to north Toronto, causing—

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

CORPORATE TAX

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I'm now responding to the Minister of Finance. When the Minister of Finance stood up in October and talked about the new deal, I had this instant image of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the two finance ministers standing there together. I had it because they seemed to be, for the first

time, in absolute harmony. I am revisiting that same image in my mind here today because here they are again in absolute harmony.

I look down into what was said today because, quite honestly, it is impossible for me or anyone in this House—we don't have Superman in this House or Flash Gordon, who can read the 500 pages that were handed to me as we walked in here today. But I am very, very mindful of what may be contained and the secrets that may be contained.

Just from the minister's statement and what he had to say today, there will be a reduction of some \$90 million in taxes from the corporate sector to the province of Ontario. I have no doubt in my mind that the corporate sector is going to say, "Thank you very much for the \$90-million reduction," and well they should. If someone gave me a reduction of my income tax in that kind of largesse, I would say this was a good thing too. But I have to question a province and a government that has not been able to balance the budget in the first three years of its mandate and may not be able to balance the budget in the fourth and final year of its mandate, cavalierly coming to a conclusion, and a set of agreements that is going to take \$90 million from the people of Ontario and stop them not only from balancing their budget, but also the \$90 million that those corporate taxes could be doing for the benefit of ordinary people in this province. I have to wonder about the need for a variety of legitimate purposes that exist in Ontario.

I looked very quickly to see where those taxes were likely to be removed. The minister can correct me if he wants, but there seem to be four areas where the taxes are going to be lowered. The first one is the provincial corporations income tax, the second one is the life insurance tax, the third one is the corporate minimum tax and the last one is the corporate capital tax. I looked at these, and quite obviously this will be a boon to some businesses. Some businesses I suppose will deserve the money; others could possibly do without having to hand it back. It seems to me why it's happening is that the federal tax appears to be less than the Ontario tax, so the harmonization and us agreeing to the harmonization is agreeing to that reduction.

1420

I'm also very nervous, because the minister talked about continuing to work with the workers of this province, the public employees of Ontario, to try to come to some kind of agreement around human resource management issues. They have been working on this for months and months. In fact, when the minister stood up here in October and talked about this, they were probably at very much the same juncture. Nothing really has come to a conclusion, and although meetings continue to be held, there still is, as far as I am aware, a huge gap between what the workers of Ontario are requesting happen to them and what this government is prepared to offer. This has not been finalized and is nowhere near being finalized, and you will pardon me and pardon those public employees if they're just a little bit more than

nervous. They are left to wonder what is going to happen to them.

There is, finally, the potential and possible loss of expertise to the province of Ontario in this harmonization procedure. We have had excellent auditors in this province for many, many years. It has been said, and I believe it to be true, that the auditors more than 10 times pay their own salaries, for going out and auditing books, in monies that they are able to recover on behalf of the province from those companies that are reluctant to pay their fair share of taxes. That expertise is going to be lost.

Where this is most troublesome—

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: —as the Minister of Finance tries to intercede, is in those corporations that are not only in the province of Ontario but exist in all the provinces of Canada. It is very difficult for a federal auditor—it's easy enough for him to say how much a big corporation has made in Canada, but it's very difficult to say how much they've made in the province of Ontario versus Quebec, versus Nova Scotia or versus Alberta. It's very easy for large corporations to say that the profit was made in Alberta, where the tax is less. I am afraid there is a potential huge loss to this province.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO ONE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. People across the province continue to write me on e-mail about a man who quit his job and got a \$3-million severance payout. They just don't accept multi-year, multi-million dollar severance arrangements for someone who quits.

Yesterday, the Minister of Energy suggested that he was merely following advice, that he was merely adhering to contractual provisions. I have the details, as we've heard shared in the House, of Mr. Parkinson's contract; they're public. They indicate that he gets severance if he's terminated without cause. It goes on to say that he gets severance if termination without cause comes about in the form of his contract not being extended in 2010. It says nothing about compensation if he just quits in 2006.

The government says he quit. The board says he quit. If this is really the case, why did he get the \$3 million?

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

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): This government is proud that it sent the Auditor General in not only to Hydro One and to OPG but across the broader public sector. What I said is that, in all the circumstances, the best advice we had is that the least costly alternative for all concerned was the course of action that was in fact pursued.

This government is determined not only to identify the types of challenges that were identified by the auditor but

moreover to act on them in a responsible and timely fashion that will ensure the ongoing integrity of the public utilities in Ontario.

Mr. Tory: What the minister in fact said yesterday was that those are part of contractual provisions that are entered into that you simply can't ignore. The fact is, the minister is right: A contract is a contract. If the payment of \$3 million actually followed what the contract said, this would be quite a different discussion.

The minister said that this gentleman quit. If that's true, there was no payment provided for under the contract. The cheapest option under the contract would have been to give one of those thank you cards and away he would go. If you ordered Hydro One, I say to the minister, to fire him, then you should stand up and clarify the record. Do you want to be straightforward with the people of Ontario and confirm that you ordered him terminated? Why don't you just do that?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I would suggest to the Leader of the Opposition that in fact what we said was that under the circumstances, under the conditions, and with the advice that we received, the course of action that was pursued is the least costly way of proceeding. But make no mistake: We are proceeding.

There is much more to be done. We will have more to say about compensation levels in the public utilities. We will have more to say about how we're going to go forward. We cannot ignore the Auditor General's advice. That's why we put the Auditor General in place. That's why we opened up Hydro One and OPG.

The final thing I would note to the Leader of the Opposition is that what I said yesterday was quoting him. That's what you quoted back. You said on December 6, "But those are a part of contractual provisions that are entered into that you can't ignore." You can't ignore a whole range of things. That was said in this House. It was not just implied; it was said. There's a range of factors that were taken into account. On balance, the advice we had was that the way it was dealt with by the board was in fact the least costly way of dealing with the situation in all of the circumstances.

Mr. Tory: The minister and I do agree on this: that a provision of a contract is a provision of a contract. What I'm saying here is that we all have seen the provisions of this contract; they're public. I'm asking the minister to direct us to the provision of the contract that says that if the man quits his job—as the minister said, as the board said—where does it say in the contract that he gets \$3 million? That leads only to the conclusion—because there is no such contractual provision that says that; there's nothing that says, "If you quit, you get \$3 million"—that there was multi-million dollar, multi-year payout to someone who quit outside of the contract. So what I'm asking the minister is this: Isn't it true that you told the chair of Hydro One to get rid of Mr. Parkinson and that if she didn't do it, you would; and that that's what really happened here? All we're entitled to is a straightforward explanation. You can't hide behind the contract. We know what it says; it doesn't say, "You get

\$3 million if you quit." Why did he get the \$3 million if he quit?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: In all the circumstances, the advice of the board was that this was the least costly alternative in dealing with the situation. We rely on the board to make those determinations. They in fact made those determinations. I would remind the member opposite that under the previous Tory administration they spent \$40 million for the American dream team to come in and fix up OPG, to deal with nuclear refurbishment. Not only did they not deal with it, but the projects came in over budget and over time, and the result was a lot of changes that this government did make. We brought in freedom of information. Your government refused to do that.

We brought in the auditor for good reason. The auditor has given a number of recommendations that this government is acting on to improve the integrity of all aspects of the broader public sector. We're acting on those recommendations. In all the circumstances, based on the advice we had, this was in fact the least costly—

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

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. On August 31, 2006, there was a story in the St. Catharines Standard which quoted the Premier as saying that the protestors staying on the Douglas Creek Estates land "in some kind of permanent way, through the winter, for example—that is not acceptable to us."

The promise was that this would be resolved by winter, that the protestors would not be occupying the land come winter. There are now nine days left until the official start of winter. The protestors have been on the land for 289 days. Can the Premier tell us whether this commitment that he made, this promise that he made, will be kept, or will this join another in the long line of promises that will in fact be broken?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm pleased that things are in a more peaceful state these days in Caledonia. I gather this comes with some regret on the part of the leader of the official opposition.

We are pleased that the three levels of government have been working well together. We're pleased that we've been able to organize a negotiating table to bring all parties together. We're pleased we've been able to purchase the land in question and hold that in trust pending the outcome of these discussions. We're pleased that we've been able to work with the community to ease tensions. I'm sure that the leader of the official opposition would, under all circumstances, not want to do anything that will contribute to anything other than goodwill and the relief of tensions.

1430

Mr. Tory: The fact of the matter is it was the Premier of Ontario, the very same Dalton McGuinty, who said

that "it would not be acceptable to us"—referring to his own government—to have these people staying on the land through the winter. He said this, not me.

I was down there last week to meet with the residents. It's the sixth time that I've been there, and I did what the Premier has refused to do—you haven't even visited: I accepted the invitation to stay overnight with one of the families and to meet with a whole lot of the people who have been very directly affected by that. What I heard about from these people—when you talk about the lack of tension there—was the disruption to their lives, which continues. I heard about new buildings being built on the land by the protesters, notwithstanding that your government has said there is a moratorium. I heard about kids going to school every day past barricades and police cars. I heard about people trying to put up Canadian flags and being told they can't.

These are people who see two sets of rules. They see no one in government standing up for them. My question is this: They were counting on you to keep your word about when these people would be off the land. Do you intend to do it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I understand why the leader of the official opposition and his party are eager to pour gasoline on the situation, but we're going in a different direction.

The houses that are referenced by the leader of the official opposition: The fact is that there are houses coming down. It is true that there was some kind of a security hut that has been recently erected.

As the leader of the official opposition well knows, this is the subject of a dispute which has been outstanding now—well, it predates Confederation. The first claim in the area was filed in 1980. In 26 years, 29 claims have been filed and only one has been settled. We will continue to work with the federal government, but I know that the First Nations community involved understands this, that the community of Caledonia understands this and that the federal government understands this. There is an ongoing dispute between the Six Nations community and the federal government. We will do our part to maintain peace and stability as best we can.

Mr. Tory: The fact is, it was you who said it would be unacceptable for them to stay there for the winter. You said that. And the other fact is that there are new structures being built on that land as we speak.

Another promise made by your government to the people of Caledonia is that compensation for residents directly affected by the blockade would be forthcoming. That promise was made on June 16, and here we are, six months later, and the residents confirmed to me when I visited there that there has been nothing done for them—not a postcard, not a letter—nothing, no proposal of any kind. It just underscores how empty these words are about what is unacceptable to you or what you will say you're going to do to help these people who have been so dramatically affected by this whole regime.

How is it you can do up a cheque for \$3 million late on a Friday afternoon to accommodate one desire you

have to solve one matter, and yet these people are told, six months later, nothing is happening, nothing has been done, but you promised you would. Why don't you keep that promise?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition tells us he's been there a half-dozen times. It wouldn't surprise me if he was down there 12 more times because—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I need the government House leader and the Minister of Agriculture to restrain themselves, and the member for Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant. Premier.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: With respect to financial support, the members of this House will know that our government has purchased the Douglas Creek Estates. We have put forward monies for a business assistance plan. We provided money for signage and markings on the land. We provided money for assistance for residents already. We provided money for a marketing campaign. We provided money for a new school fence and security cameras. We provided money for communications help in the municipality, and other areas as well.

The fact of the matter is that the federal government, thankfully, is now taking a lead role in this area. They are leading the negotiations at the table, and we look forward to them developing a significant proposal that they can table for us to lend our—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

MEMBERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. People across Ontario are now aware of the outrageous salary increases granted by the McGuinty government to Hydro executives, including Mr. Parkinson's \$3-million golden handshake. As a result, hard-working people are asking the McGuinty government to be more thoughtful in spending the people's money.

Premier, you promised to listen to the people; you promised open and transparent government. In that context, how do you justify trying to ram through a 31% pay increase?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I look forward to hearing more from all of the NDP on this particular issue.

There is a 40% gap between what members of this Legislature make and what the members of Parliament in Ottawa make. I think that is unacceptable, and I think it's unsustainable. I think we have a shared responsibility to help close that gap. I'm not asking that we close that entirely. I'm saying that to establish a gap of 25% is reasonable and fair in the circumstances.

The federal government transfers money to us so we can deliver health care. We deliver education, not only at the post-secondary level but all the way from JK through the post-doctorate level. We assume principal responsibility for our national environment. We assume prin-

cipal responsibility for strengthening our economy. We have the same ridings and the same constituents. I think that 40% by way of a gap is unsustainable, and I think 25% is fair.

Mr. Hampton: Well, Premier, if you want to talk about context, let's talk about context. Already, Ontario MPPs are the second-highest-paid provincial representatives in Canada. Ontario MPPs already are paid more than MLAs in Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Manitoba—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I need to be able to hear the leader of the third party place his question.

Mr. Hampton: It appears that I have touched a nerve with members of the Liberal government.

Ontario MPPs already get paid more than MLAs in Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Your proposed 31% pay hike is completely out of touch with the kinds of pay increases ordinary working Ontarians are getting.

I ask you again, Premier: Given the huge pay increases you already gave to your Hydro executives, how do you justify ramming through a 31% pay hike here and now?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The fact of the matter is that during the course of the past 15 years, members of this Legislative Assembly have experienced nine pay freezes, and in one of those years we experienced a 5.5% pay cut.

I still have family in Timmins, and although I may not agree with Mr. Bisson, they tell me he works very, very hard. The leader of the NDP believes Mr. Bisson should make 40% less than his federal counterpart; I disagree with that.

I can't do an education event in Toronto and not have Mr. Marchese there. The leader of the NDP may believe that Mr. Marchese deserves 40% less than his federal member, but I disagree, and I say that about that caucus, and that caucus, and our caucus. I say a 40% pay gap is unsustainable. We shouldn't apologize for saying that all we're looking for is a 25% pay gap between MPPs of this House and members of Parliament. I think it's fair, I think it's justifiable and I think it's high time.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Final supplementary.

1440

Mr. Hampton: Premier, I believe that working Ontarians deserve fair pay and a decent pension, but I look around Ontario and I see 140,000 manufacturing and forest sector workers who have lost their jobs thanks to your government and who have no pay this Christmas. I look at one in six Ontario children living in poverty. I look at all the working families who are struggling because you won't raise the minimum wage, such that it's a living wage, to \$10 an hour. I ask you, Premier, in that context, after you've already rammed through huge pay increases for your friends the hydro executives, how do you justify ramming through a 31% pay increase now?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I don't know where the invention of 31% is coming from; it is 25%.

I understand that the leader of the NDP is going to exploit this for his own political purposes. I think he's being unfair to his caucus; I think he's being unfair to the value that we ought to be associating with the work that is done in this Legislature.

We have the same ridings as our federal counterparts. We have the same number of constituents as our federal counterparts. I think you could make a very good argument to the effect that while they deliver us money for health care, we deliver health care. While they deliver us money for education, we deliver education, whether at the post-secondary level or from JK through to post-doctoral. We deliver when it comes to protecting our natural environment. We deliver when it comes to strengthening this economy. I think it's high time that we recognize that collectively we owe it not just to ourselves but to generations of MPPs to come that we attach real value to the work that is done in this House. I will not apologize for that, and he shouldn't stand in the way.

We've created an option for this leader of the NDP, if he so chooses: rather than acting out in this Legislature or, as his colleague did, outside this Legislature, they can actually take action and say they will not accept this increase. If that's the value they attach to their work, then they're welcome to avail themselves of that option.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Minister for democratic renewal. The Minister for Health Promotion will come to order.

New question, leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Apparently the Premier doesn't like it when people ask questions about his 31% pay hike. Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The member for York West will come to order.

Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: You see, Premier, I care about working people across this province. I care about people who are trying to—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. This can't go on. The next member that I hear interjecting will be named.

Mr. Hampton: I care about those folks who haven't seen a pay increase and are certainly not going to see a 31% pay increase. Reaction to your 31% pay hike proposal has been swift and it's been negative. On Citytv's online poll, a large majority of respondents call it "ridiculously high." On the Toronto Sun online poll, 92% of respondents say the pay hike is too high. And radio call-in shows are buzzing with callers angry about this. I say again to you, Premier, when lots of Ontarians are being told, "Work harder, work longer for the same pay," how do you justify what is a 31% pay increase under Dalton McGuinty?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP is right in this regard: There has never been and there never will be a good time for any politicians, to my knowledge, on

the face of this planet, to give themselves a pay increase. Because we've been uncomfortable with that notion, that's the reason why, during the course of the past 15 years—we froze our pay for nine years. During another one of those 15 years, we cut our pay by 5.5%.

We find ourselves in a position now which I believe is unsustainable. I know that because I've experienced this in the past, and I fully expect that Mr. Layton's office, Mr. Harper's office and Mr. Dion's office will begin to scour this Legislature for hot prospects and will make them a very inviting, very seductive offer. They'll say: "Come to work in Ottawa. I'll give you a 40% pay hike, just like that. I'll give you a pension the likes of which you could never have dreamt of."

I think it's time to be fair to the members of this assembly. I'm not looking for parity with the federal government; I'm saying, we'll take 25% less and we'll work just as hard.

Mr. Hampton: If I follow your line of argument, then the Legislatures of Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia would already be empty because their pay is in fact lower than the pay here. But that's not happening, Premier.

I can't speak for what may be happening within your government, but the fact that you may be having some trouble with your caucus is hardly a rationale, I think, for hiking pay by 31%.

This is what the *Globe and Mail* says: "But one has to wonder how many other working stiffs in the world ... can hope to see their pay increased by 25% at one fell swoop." In fact, when you add it up, it's a 31% pay increase. Then they quote: "Nice work if you can get ... it."

Premier, again: How do you justify ramming through a 31% pay increase under the cover of Christmas when the vast majority of Ontarians will not even see anything near that amount?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It will be up to each and every member to make their own call on this particular issue. We have specifically created an option in the bill, and I assume that the leader of the NDP will be availing himself of that option. I assume that perhaps one or two other members of his caucus will be availing themselves of that option.

But let me say to prospective NDP candidates for purposes of the upcoming provincial election: I will stand up for them. I will ensure that, should they enjoy the privilege of serving their constituents in this Legislature, they will be party to the new pay scheme—not the old pay scheme that Mr. Hampton would have them become embroiled in—because I think it's fair, not just for people on this side of the House, not just for members of the official opposition, but for everyone in this House. I'm not going to apologize for that. It's high time that we acted on this. The politics always dictate against this, and that's why for 15 years now we've done nothing. I think it's time for us to come together and attach real value to the work that is done by the members of this assembly.

Mr. Hampton: Gee, if only Dalton McGuinty would stand up for those folks who are struggling on minimum

wage. If only Dalton McGuinty would stand up for those poorest kids in Ontario who see the McGuinty government claw back \$250 million a year from them. If only Dalton McGuinty would stand up for all those people across Ontario who are being told, "You want to keep your job? You take a pay cut." Premier, I don't know about you, but I'd have a hard time looking those folks in the eye and then saying, "I'm going to hike my own pay by 31%."

I ask you again, Premier: When you deny an increase in the minimum wage to \$10 an hour, when you continue to claw back \$250 million a year from the pockets of the poorest kids in this province, when workers are taking pay cuts, how does Dalton McGuinty justify a 31% pay increase?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I guess we know for sure, then, that there will be at least one member of the NDP caucus who will be availing himself of the option to decline the pay hike.

Again, the single most important comparator—and it was set out by the Integrity Commissioner himself. We can look at councillors and we can look at mayors and we can look at judges and the like. But he said, "The single most important comparator is the federal MP." He tells us that we are in danger of becoming a farm team in Ottawa, where if you aspire to working in the higher echelons of public policy, then you would abandon Queen's Park as some kind of a backwater and make your way as hastily as possible to Ottawa. I see things differently. I attach real value to the work that is done here by all members of all parties.

1450

It's been 15 years. During the course of those 15 years, salaries were frozen for nine; in another one of those years they were cut by 5.5%. We do at least the same amount of work as our federal cousins. The comparisons to MLAs in other provinces are simply not fair. We have many, many more constituents than those other MLAs. We do at least the same work as our federal counterparts. I'm not looking for parity. I'm saying that we'll work just as hard for 25%—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Premier: Premier, as you know, just last week the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld the decision of arbitrators that certain employers will be liable to pay the so-called health tax for their employees. Effectively, the Toronto Transit Commission, the Hamilton fire department and the LaPointe-Fisher Nursing Home in Guelph will now be liable to pay the so-called health tax for their employees. This effectively creates a two-tier tax in the province of Ontario, where some people of the same income levels, in the same neighbourhoods, will pay different levels of tax—one set, none.

Premier, how many situations are like this in the province of Ontario? What will be the total burden to taxpayers as a result of this decision?

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

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I think the government has made it clear from the day that the Ontario health premium was introduced that it is a tax which is levied on individuals. At that time, I made it clear that if collective agreements had the impact of shifting that responsibility from individuals to employers, that was a matter to be determined between an employer and its bargaining agent and the workers that work for that employer. I think what the Court of Appeal said in its judgment was simply that.

Mr. Hudak: I think I'll take issue with the minister's interpretation. In fact, at least these three employers, all public sector entities, will now be forced to pay the health tax, and that will be a new burden on taxpayers or these agencies.

The minister will remember that the Premier himself, on October 27, 2004, said, "If this situation persists, then we will take the necessary steps to introduce whatever clarity is required. Our intention remains the same today as it was from the outset: This is something that should be paid by taxpayers."

Minister, I remind you that you and your colleague Mr. Duncan have brought in not one, not two, not three, but 15 pieces of finance legislation since that time. Not a single one of those bills addresses this issue. It lingers today, putting a burden on taxpayers and on these entities. We now know that this health tax was revealed to be nothing but a greedy tax grab written on the back of a napkin without thinking through these types of occasions.

Minister, please tell me that the bill you brought forward today, or the one you're bringing forward tomorrow, is going to correct this situation. You've had two years.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I can only reiterate, the government made it perfectly clear when the bill was introduced that the premium represented a tax on individuals. What the court said is that if a collective agreement, as reviewed by an arbiter, determines that the employer has through that collective agreement assumed the individual liability of individual workers for that premium, that would shift the liability. I'm quite comfortable with that. I think the law is clear and I think the judgment of the Court of Appeal is clear.

I think what is even clearer, I tell my friend, is that \$2.6 billion is now being applied to better health care around this province. That means more nurses, that means more access to family doctors, that means transformation of primary care. That's the real issue here.

NATIVE CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, last year you tried to take away the power of aboriginal communities to govern child welfare for themselves, and First Nations at that time forced you to back down on that. On November 30, you snuck those

very same rules about customary care in through the back door by regulation without even consulting First Nations.

The Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians wrote to you on November 28, pleading with you not to bring in this regulation because it does exactly what they asked you not to do during Bill 210: It takes away their right to govern child welfare for their own children. Minister, why did you ignore their letter and their rights?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): The member from Hamilton East knows that what she says is absolutely not accurate. I have worked more closely than any other member of this House with aboriginal communities over the past almost 18 months. In fact, 35 amendments to Bill 210 were actually applied when it came back to this House for third reading.

We have taken several steps to demonstrate that it is our government's interest to ensure that aboriginal kids are cared for wherever possible by aboriginal children's aid societies. That is exactly what is happening now in terms of our realignment of resources and kids in northern Ontario between non-aboriginal societies and aboriginal societies, and we will continue along that line.

Ms. Horwath: Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, the letter says, "We will not compromise our original position by allowing the implementation of a ministry-driven policy that does exactly what the withdrawn section 44, part 223 proposed to do in Bill 210." The minister should know darn well that she is doing exactly what she promised not to do. How can you go ahead and take on this action when you know that First Nations children have a right to have care provided that's developed by their own people in their own communities? That's the fundamental fact.

The same letter says that your ministry is giving \$1.4 million to develop alternative dispute resolution but only \$100,000 to aboriginal ADR. We also know that they're desperate for designations of more native child welfare agencies, for funding of band representatives. They are desperate for the respect that they deserve from the McGuinty government.

Minister, the auditor's report showed a whole bunch of spending that was inappropriate by children's aid societies. How can you then justify First Nations getting so little money to create a child welfare system that works for their children, especially when you know darn well that their children are overrepresented in the child welfare system?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I had the very real pleasure of traveling to Kenora in the summer of this year to designate a new aboriginal children's aid society, Anishinaabe Abinoojii. We are in the process right now of realigning resources, which means more money, and the associated kids from the care of non-aboriginal societies in northern Ontario to aboriginal societies in northern Ontario.

There is another aboriginal family and children's services organization that we are working with currently towards designation. Kunuwanimano has been working closely with my ministry, and I am actually eager to have

that process move along more quickly than it has been moving. To that extent, my deputy minister and assistant deputy minister will be in Timmins to meet with that organization on Friday of this week, because I am very eager to move this along a lot more briskly than it has moved to date.

I have to tell you that I'm very proud of the record of our government in working with aboriginal communities, because we respect those communities and we respect the rights—

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

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): My question is for the Minister of Labour. Yesterday was a historic day in the province of Ontario. Yesterday, Bill 211, an act that puts an end to mandatory retirement, came into effect. Your parliamentary secretary toured the province in 2004 chairing many consultations on how to end mandatory retirement and give Ontario workers the right to choose when to retire.

As a result of this government's consultative process, I believe we have created a well-balanced piece of legislation that addresses concerns raised during that process. At the heart of this issue is the right of all Ontarians to choose when to retire. Until yesterday, it was perfectly legal to discriminate against someone on the basis of age.

Minister, what is the government's core philosophy behind the idea that it's unfair to insist that people stop working simply because they're 65?

1500

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I thank the member for Willowdale for the question. Certainly over the past few days I've been asked on numerous occasions why we chose as a government to end the discriminatory practice of mandatory retirement. The answer is very simple: It was the right thing to do. Forcing capable, experienced and knowledgeable citizens to stop working because they've reached a particular age is discriminatory. The Human Rights Commission said the very same thing in 2001—it was discriminatory because, the Human Rights Commission said, it undermines the dignity and sense of self-worth of older workers. Premier McGuinty and our government agreed and we committed to ending this discriminatory practice. In fact, Barbara Hall, chief commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, joined us yesterday at an event marking the end of mandatory retirement.

As we get down to the business of crafting a fair and balanced piece of legislation, as we move forward, I believe we've succeeded. Mandatory retirement is an outdated, unfair, discriminatory concept in our modern society. It is wrong, and mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario is now history.

Mr. Zimmer: Minister, my constituents are happy that the government values the contributions of older,

experienced workers, so much so that it has created this legislation. We all know that our skills and knowledge do not disappear once we turn 65. Society should not lose the benefits that skilled and experienced workers bring to their workplace.

Through the consultation process, many concerns were raised on diverse topics regarding ending mandatory retirement. I've heard some concerns also through my constituency office and I've listened as passionate advocates and detractors have stated their views. Our government carefully considered each of these arguments and, in the end, created a fair and balanced piece of legislation.

However, Minister, concerns still persist, particularly around the one-year transition period and the CPP benefits issue. Could you take a moment and address these two issues?

Hon. Mr. Peters: Again, I want to thank the member for the question and, as well, thank the member for Oakville for the extensive consultations he undertook on behalf of the citizens of Ontario with this issue.

As we listened to people, one of the things that became obvious is that we needed to put a transition period in place. We needed to ensure that businesses were prepared for the transition to the end of the discriminatory practice of mandatory retirement. We needed to ensure that collective agreements were in place to deal with the end of mandatory retirement.

On the issue of pension benefits, there has been absolutely no change to the entitlement of CPP benefits. This is and will continue to be a federal program. All those individuals who are eligible to receive CPP once they turn 65 will have that ability to receive those benefits. Employees who choose to work past the age of 65 will stop paying into CPP once they reach that age of 65.

I know that something that's extremely important to many people in this province is the issue of seniors' discounts. Our concern to many was that there would be changes to seniors' discounts. We have said to our seniors that they've paid their dues and they deserve the discounts they receive. This legislation will do nothing to change those—

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

GUELPH TURFGRASS INSTITUTE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Premier, details of a secret land deal involving the Guelph Turfgrass Institute have come to light. Your government is planning on closing the turfgrass institute in Guelph in order to sell the land to sweeten a real estate deal to a local developer. Given your Minister of Research and Innovation statement of last Monday in this House asking for the best and the brightest to come to Ontario to practise their research and development skills, how can you now sell off this valuable research station?

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

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I think it's important that we take this opportunity, first of all, to clarify what our government has done with respect to research stations in Ontario. Our Premier listened to agriculture stakeholders who've said they wanted the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario to be the driver and the agency that determined how investment in research would be conducted in Ontario. Our Premier led that initiative and made that happen. ARIOS is the agency that will determine how and what research in the area of agriculture will take place in the province.

It is my understanding that no final decisions have been made with respect to the particular property the member has identified, and that the Ontario Realty Corp., the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal and the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario are all dealing with this issue.

Mr. Chudleigh: ARIOS has always directed research in Ontario and has always been an integral part of what research is conducted and where. The transfer of the research stations to ARIOS ownership as of April 1, 2007, is a good idea. However, all those research stations should be transferred to ARIOS, not sold off for land development as is being discussed and considered for this research station in Guelph. Even if it was to be moved, it would still ruin many, many years of ongoing research and development projects. And if it moves, the symbiotic relationship between this research station and the University of Guelph would be badly harmed, if not ruined. Minister, can you assure the House today that this research institute in Guelph will not be moved and will not be sold?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I think the member really needs to tell this Legislature the whole story. This district is part of a secondary planning process that was initiated by the city of Guelph itself. So of course, the ministry, through the Ontario Realty Corp., is working with our partners at ARIOS, at the city of Guelph and certainly at the University of Guelph around the future of this. As the Minister of Agriculture has very clearly stated to this House, no final decisions have been taken.

Of course, I know the member would also want to tell the whole story, that when his party was in government, funds were severely cut back, many of these stations were not kept up and in fact were starved for funds, my colleague the Minister of Agriculture informs me. It's been quite a different story under the leadership of this Premier and this minister. I say to the member opposite that I'll compare the track record of this government versus yours—

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

SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): My question is for the Premier. Today we have members of the Trans Health Lobby as guests in this House. Transsexual people face harassment and discrimination in access to employment, accommodation, education and services, and also with health care. Eight years ago the provincial government removed funding for sex reassignment surgery. Your government has continued that policy. Alberta and Manitoba both offer sex reassignment surgery; so do the Canadian Armed Forces. When are you going to follow their lead and end this discrimination against those with gender identity disorder?

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

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I want to say to the honourable member that I had a chance to sit and have a good chat with, I think, at least half of the delegation that was here. You will of course be aware that for the period of time we've been in office we've been awaiting a ruling from the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal, which has recently come forward. I want to let all members know that we'll of course abide by the direction provided there. It did not push for the relisting of these services, and yet I'm mindful of the opportunities to enhance the quality and quantity of services for people who are transgendered. We'll be looking to build on the things we've done to date.

The Sherbourne Health Centre wasn't in existence when our government came into office, but it is now and is providing a tremendous amount of new resource and support for transgendered individuals. We've also moved to ensure that those who require hormone therapy are getting very good, equitable access to it. We have taken steps.

There is, of course, more to do on all health-related fronts, and we'll continue to work with the Trans Health Lobby on these matters.

Ms. DiNovo: We're asking a very simple thing; that is, to relist sex reassignment surgery. This government can find the means to give itself a fat raise. It can't find the means to pay under \$200,000 a year for a medically necessary surgery for incredibly disenfranchised people. I ask, why are you refusing to respect these basic human rights and relist sex reassignment surgery today?

1510

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: First, the honourable member, again in her questioning, would seek to try and create a circumstance where there's a distinction between the advice and direction that was offered by the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal, which has ruled on very many of the points that you've made in your question, and at the same time, no acknowledgment that steps have been taken. She says that it's simple to do, but the point of the matter is that obviously, for these individuals, there's quite a lot involved. We have a broader responsibility beyond just the issue of sex reassignment surgery to address.

I had a conversation with individuals. My staff has been involved with the Trans Health Lobby and will continue to be engaged with them. They made it very clear to me in the time that we spent together in the cafeteria today that there are opportunities across Ontario to address other issues of importance to the trans community. We'll be looking at all of those and acting appropriately.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, I know that you and our government have been working very hard over the past three years to build the province's partnership with municipalities after almost a decade of tension under the previous government. That spirit of co-operation is very much appreciated in London and across the province. For example, we enhanced the memorandum of understanding with AMO by giving our municipalities a say in the federal-provincial negotiations that directly affect them, and we enshrined that in legislation. Together with our municipal partners, we've launched a broad review that will fully examine the best means to deliver and fund key services in the province. We consulted with municipalities about changes to the Municipal Act that were referred back to this House by standing committee just yesterday.

Minister, could you please explain how these proposed amendments to the Municipal Act build on the strong and constructive relationship between our province and our municipal partners?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Let me first of all congratulate for the member from London Centre for all the active work that she has done on behalf of her community.

Mr. Speaker, as you may well know, Bill 130 is really about giving our municipalities greater autonomy so that the local councils can make the decisions that they are in the best position to make for the people in their community. Amongst other things, it means that there's greater flexibility by municipalities to pass bylaws with respect to matters ranging from public safety to the economic health and well-being, social and environmental well-being of a community; greater flexibility to pass bylaws to deal with the financial management of the municipality; greater accountability and transparency in its operations; broader power with respect to the governance models and structure that the municipality and its local boards may want to adopt; broader authority to take economic development, which is so crucial for our municipalities; and also more flexibility to delegate powers and responsibilities to committees, to boards and staff. It is to give the municipalities and their councils a much greater sense of autonomy than they've ever had before.

Ms. Matthews: This proposed legislation is clearly another example of our government's recognition that municipalities are responsible and accountable orders of government.

Minister, as you well know, my riding is in the city of London. You were there last week to see the snow for yourself. There has been an ongoing debate for some time in London about the existence of the board of control. In fact, it's the only board of control left in the province of Ontario.

Minister, a specific requirement in the Municipal Act is seen as an impediment to abolishing the board of control if city council so desires. This past September, the city of London council adopted a resolution that the city would request "an amendment to the Municipal Act to eliminate the provision requiring the approval of two thirds of council to eliminate the board of control."

I believe, Minister, and I know you do too, that municipalities should have broader powers with respect to their governance structures. What steps have you taken to ensure that the city of London has more autonomy, and particularly more power over the existence of the board—

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

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: First of all, it's our hope that, with the co-operation of all parties in the House, this bill will be given approval before Christmas so that municipalities and councils can enjoy the greater levels of autonomy that they've been given under the act, hopefully starting as early as January of next year.

Yes, our government believes that local solutions are best determined at the local level and the manner in which the board of control is elected, or whether or not there should be a board of control, is best left to the council of London. It's a perfect example of the kind of local autonomy that we're seeking in the act. We made many amendments along those lines, which were specifically requested by municipalities to deal with their specific circumstances.

During our committee hearings, the city of London requested that we amend Bill 130 so it would no longer require the support of two thirds of council to dissolve their board of control, and we listened to them, as we did to other municipalities. If Bill 130 is passed, the city of London may dissolve its board of control by a simple majority vote and without the necessity of going to the OMB.

When Bill 130 is passed, it will usher in a new era for municipal responsibility in the province of Ontario. If—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. New question.

WATER SUPPLY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. It's a water level question in the Great Lakes that I'm concerned about, and it affects a number of my colleagues' ridings, as well.

Minister, you may be aware that the Georgian Bay Association commissioned the Baird water levels report,

at a cost to the foundation of the Georgian Bay Association of some \$250,000. The Baird report concluded that erosion and the continual ongoing dredging of the St. Clair River are causing water levels on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay to drop at a greater rate than ever before. The Baird report convinced the International Joint Commission that the erosion of the St. Clair River is a major cause of low water levels on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. More water is in fact flowing out of Lake Huron than is coming into it.

Minister, can you explain what steps your ministry is taking to stop the declining water levels on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I certainly have a professional interest in this, and a personal interest, as I enjoy recreation on the Great Lakes.

We are very well blessed in Ontario to have access to 20% of the world's fresh water, just on those Great Lakes. We are very concerned about the quantity of that, and of course, as you know, that's why we entered into an arrangement with eight neighbouring American states and with the province of Quebec called the Great Lakes Charter Annex: in order to maintain the water levels.

It's interesting to note that 98% of the water in the Great Lakes was there during the ice age, so we have done a pretty good job of maintaining that. But I do share the member's concern. We do work with the International Joint Commission, and we work with the neighbouring states also through the Charter Annex to find ways to preserve the levels of these lakes.

Mr. Dunlop: Minister, the low water levels on Georgian Bay have a very negative effect on property values and shoreline appearance, on access to the dozens of marinas on Georgian Bay and Lake Huron and the jobs they create. But equally, there are many wetlands on Georgian Bay and in the Muskoka-Parry Sound area—many wetlands that are drying up, affecting wildlife, fishing and the natural heritage system.

In the past, when problems occurred on the Great Lakes, partnerships were created, that still exist today, to rehabilitate environmentally sensitive areas on the Great Lakes. I know the federal government has committed to mitigation funding. Ministers Ambrose and Clement made that announcement in September. Can I ask you, Minister, when will the McGuinty Liberals and your ministry show leadership and provide mitigation funding as well to find a solution that will stop the declining water levels on our Great Lakes?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: Again, I appreciate the member's interest, and I want to say to him that the McGuinty government is committed. We will be part of that five-year study, and the Ministry of Natural Resources has dedicated an engineer to be working on that study.

We take this issue very seriously. There is an incredible potential environmental and economic impact if we don't maintain the levels of the Great Lakes and the surrounding watershed.

I appreciate the member's interest, and I want to let him know that we are dedicated to this issue.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, in July 2006, the Ministries of Community and Social Services and Health signed an agreement called the long-term-care home access protocol for adults with a developmental disability. The protocol has been condemned by Family Alliance Ontario. They point out that on page 2 the protocol encourages developmental sector service providers now supporting adults in existing group homes in the community to transition these adults into long-term-care homes because "this will create community-based capacity to accommodate residents moving from the DS facilities"—Huronia, Rideau Regional Centre and the Southwestern Regional Centre.

Minister, adults with developmental disabilities in existing group homes or those being supported in the community should be fully assisted to age in place in the community, and residents from the DS facilities should be allowed to do that too. Why is your protocol pushing agencies to push adults in existing group homes into long-term-care homes?

1520

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for franco-phone affairs): I thank the member of the third party for her question. I want to assure the member from Nickel Belt that when individuals are leaving one of our three institutions, we place them in a group home. I don't know where the member gets her information, but these individuals have the same rights as any other citizen in Ontario. So if they need to go to a long-term-care home, they will go to a long-term-care home. In my review, perhaps three individuals went to a long-term-care home. All the others were placed in group homes in the community.

Ms. Martel: In January 2004, there were 1,125 adults with developmental disabilities in long-term-care homes; in January 2006, there were 1,202—77 more. We don't want to see a protocol that forces even more developmentally disabled adults into long-term-care homes. Minister, your protocol also says that additional money from the developmental services sector will be given to long-term-care homes so they can provide "sufficient supports and services to accommodate the person's developmental disability so that the safety and well-being of all residents is not affected." That means that long-term-care homes don't have the expertise necessary to meet the needs of adults with developmental disabilities. Agencies in the development services sector do, and you should be funding these agencies and families to deliver and receive a broad range of supports in the community. Why are you prepared to top up long-term-care homes to support adults with developmental disabilities when existing agencies could properly do the job themselves—

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

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: I want to assure the member of the third party that when individuals leave one of our

three institutions, they are placed, first of all, in a community close to their family. The transfer of these individuals is done with a lot of sensitivity. The family is involved, and we place the person where it's best for them to be. If it's in a long-term-care home, they have the same rights as other individuals in Ontario. But I can say to the member that the large majority of them, if not all, have been placed in group homes.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would like to introduce, in the Speaker's gallery, Eva Tomalin, who has served the constituents of Algoma-Manitoulin in my constituency office for nearly 20 years.

PETITIONS

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I've received more petitions to do with the Mary Lake dam.

"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.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member for Hamilton East.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, I'm glad you saw me through the crowd. Thank you very much. This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads:

"Whereas people relying on assistance from Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario disability support program (ODSP) face increasingly severe hardship because the

McGuinty government failed to keep its promise of regular annual increases; and

"Whereas in 2003, McGuinty promised to tie OW and ODSP rates to the real cost of living but broke that promise once elected; and

"Whereas current OW and ODSP recipients often don't have enough money for food after paying the ever-rising cost of living for rent, utilities and transportation costs; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government continues to cut back on necessary supports such as the special diet supplement and the national child tax benefit, taking even more money away from Ontario's most vulnerable;

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

"That the McGuinty Liberal government raise OW and ODSP rates immediately by 3% annually; and

"That the McGuinty Liberal government close the 21.6% gap left by the Harris Conservatives; and

"That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately end the clawback on the national child tax benefit; and

"That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately reinstate the special diet supplement to Ontarians who have seen the benefit cut."

I will sign it as well and send it to the table by way of page Sarah.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I've got a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly under the title "Access to Trades and Professions in Ontario." It reads as follows:

"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."

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario as follows:

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

I affix my name in full support.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have petitions sent to me by SEIU. They read as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

1530

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member for Peterborough.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for your nice reception last night. Everybody had a great time. Your warm hospitality was shared by a lot of people.

"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. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Sarah.

ORPHANED DEER

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): Over 2,500 people have signed this petition to reverse the decision made to seize a domesticated deer from Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Straby.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario....

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

"That the Department of Natural Resources listen to the public outcry which is demanding just one thing: Bring Bam Bam home to the Straby family" by Christmas.

I support it and affix my signature.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Although Bill 124 passed last night, I promised Satar Amin of Mississauga and Gurjeet Gill of Brampton that I would read their petition anyway. It goes as follows:

“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 join with everyone in thanking all members for the passage of Bill 124. I’ll ask page Colby to carry it for me.

CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Mr. John O’Toole (Durham): My petition from the riding of Durham reads as follows:

“Whereas the Lung Association’s women and COPD national report 2006 reveals that more than 425,000 Canadian women have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and more than 4,300 will die of the disease this year; and

“Whereas the women and COPD national report indicates that since 2000, female mortality due to COPD has risen at double the rate of breast cancer;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support a call for early diagnosis and optimized management of COPD to reduce illness and suffering;

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the Ontario Lung Association’s COPD advisory panel report to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on the prevention and management of COPD in Ontario; and

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario endorse a comprehensive strategy to address COPD in this province.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this on behalf of constituents in the riding of Durham and present it to Gloria.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): This is a petition from the Canadian Federation of University Women in Orangerville. It reads as follows:

“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 agree with this petition. I sign it and send it to the table by way of page Philip.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I’m pleased to read a petition sent in to me by my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, to whom I send my greetings and those of the members present. It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

I’m pleased to affix my signature to this petition and to ask page Colby to carry it for me.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition circulated by the Sisters of Our Lady Immaculate Marian Residence in Cambridge. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the proposed Long-Term Care Homes Act is extremely lengthy and complex and requires full and extensive parliamentary and public debate and committee hearings throughout the province; and

"Whereas the rigid, pervasive and detailed framework proposed is excessive and will stifle innovation and flexibility in the long-term-care sector; and

"Whereas the additional burden, red tape and punitive measures imposed by the proposed legislation will aggravate and exacerbate the chronic underfunding of the sector, to the detriment of residents of the homes; and

"Whereas the proposed legislation will have serious implications for the viability of the for-profit and not-for-profit, charitable and municipal long-term-care sectors;

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

"We demand that the McGuinty government withdraw the proposed act, or remove the offending sections, and fulfill its commitment by a substantial increase in funding on a multi-year basis in the order of the promised \$6,000 per resident, per year."

As I agree with the petition, I affix my name thereto.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

Mr. Phillips moved third reading of the following bill: 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. Michael Prue): Debate? Minister, is there any debate on this? Okay.

Mr. Phillips has moved third reading of Bill 158. 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.

1540

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice concerning this afternoon's debate on government notice of motion 277.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Is it agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that the time for debate on government notice of motion 277 be apportioned equally among the recognized parties in the House; and

That, at 5:50 p.m., the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of the motion and any amendments thereto; and

That, in the case of any division required, the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes, the members called in once and all divisions taken in succession.

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

Orders of the day.

HOUSE Sittings

HEURES DE SÉANCE

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, notwithstanding standing order 6(a), the House shall continue to meet until Thursday, December 21, 2006, at which time the Speaker shall adjourn the House without motion until Monday, March 19, 2007.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Debate?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I'm the person who is moving this particular motion and I'm delighted to be able to have the House sit even further into the year, even though the federal House has completed its business or is going to complete its business. From time to time, we have to ensure that there is ample time for debate of all legislation that comes forward. I must say, if I may comment on what has happened to this point in time, there has been a very busy legislative agenda which has been dealt with to a very large extent by the government, the opposition and all members of the Legislative Assembly.

I want to say from the beginning that it's my job as the government House leader to deal with the two opposition House leaders—and with others, but primarily with the two opposition House leaders—to ensure that appropriate debate takes place on legislation before the House and that there's an allocation of committee time which is, again, adequate to deal with the issues before the House and before those committees and that ultimately my job

as government House leader is to try to ensure that the legislation is finally passed. But legislation does require some debate, and we do have more to deal with in this session. That is why the Legislature is being extended until next Thursday, and we'll have the time to debate a number of issues.

I want to review for the Legislature some of the bills that have been dealt with over that period of time. They've been significant, and I think the bills have been enhanced in their quality by the fact that amendments have been proposed—not always accepted but proposed—and indeed there has been an opportunity to have public hearings on a number of them. Our government has, in a general sense, been prepared to have public hearings on bills of great significance to the province.

Where there is a consensus that develops among the House leaders after consultation with the public and invitations for people to participate in terms of deliberations and committee through their submissions, we try to determine the length that may be required, whether there's travel that might be required and how much time might be necessary for what we call "clause-by-clause."

I must say that my characterization of the fall session is that it has worked well in this House. While the two opposition House leaders are there to defend the interests of their own political parties, and ultimately of the people they feel they serve, nevertheless, without getting them in trouble with their own caucus, I can say that both have been reasonable to deal with on matters related to legislation going through the House. So you won't find me standing in the House, railing on at the opposition about the length of time that some measures have taken to go through the House.

Part of that is because I've had the position of opposition House leader, and when you've had that, you of course frame your arguments through the opposition mentality or mindset, if you will. Understanding what the needs of the opposition are, I've endeavoured as much as possible—and it isn't always possible—to accommodate their needs and what they feel is necessary for legislation. Ultimately, a government has the majority, and what the government wishes to pass can pass. But it's important to have the debates we've had over this session.

We've had a long-term-care bill that was introduced, a bill dealing with seat belts, a bill on the budget, consumer protection, the referendum, the Public Service Act, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, the Health System Improvements Act, the Legislative Assembly Statute Law Amendment Act, and the Strengthening Business through a Simpler Tax System Act. Those are bills that were introduced specifically this fall. There were other bills that had been introduced previously and we were dealing with them.

We have second reading now completed on the blood sampling bill, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Act, the Mortgage Brokers Act, the Regulatory Modernization Act, the Independent Police Review Act, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, the municipal act, the Long-Term Care Act, the seat belt law, the fall budget

bill, consumer protection, the Public Service Act, and interim supply and concurrences. Still to do in terms of second reading would be Bill 155, the Referendum Act, and Bill 173, the Legislative Assembly Act.

I want to review what has happened in committee in this fall session: The blood sampling bill, the traditional Chinese medicine bill, learning to 18, which is an education bill, the Mortgage Brokers Act, the Ontario Human Rights Commission Act, the Fair Access to Professions Act, the municipal act, the seat belt act, the budget bill and the consumer protection bill.

We did not need committee on the Public Service Act. Sometimes we, as parties in the House, determine whether committee will be specifically needed, and there was a determination, having canvassed people out there, that there was not really a need to have committee, but we're always open to that. I think that particular bill passed this afternoon.

What happens in the intersession? You'll hear people say, "Well, the House isn't sitting, so you people are on holidays." I think members of the Legislature realize that of course that's not the case. First of all, committees sit, and there have been bills that have been referred. In the fall, first of all, Bill 103, the Independent Police Review Act, went to justice policy; Bill 69, the Regulatory Modernization Act, went to general government; Bill 140, the Long-Term Care Homes Act, went to social policy—and Bill 155, the referendum act, as well. So what happens in the intersession is that there are committees that are sitting for various purposes. I'm going to deal with that in a moment.

1550

But I want to talk about the ones where there was third reading now; that is, completed. That means the bill has gone through all of its stages except where it requires proclamation: Bill 14, Access to Justice; Bill 28, blood sampling; Bill 43, the Clean Water Act; Bill 50, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Act; Bill 51 dealing with the OMB and planning; Bill 52, learning to 18—as I've said, an education bill; Bill 65, mortgage brokers; Bill 107, Ontario Human Rights Commission; 124, Fair Access to Regulated Professions; 148, the seat belt law; 151, the fall budget bill; 152, the consumer protection act; and 158, the public service act; still to do as we extend this session of this Legislature in third reading is Bill 130, the municipal act.

So we have some business to complete next week in the Legislature: third reading of one bill, processing of another bill at second reading, and completion of a third bill which has been introduced.

But in the intersession, so that, again, members of the Legislature are familiarized with what we are doing, there are pre-budget hearings taking place in one of the committees. It's called the standing committee on finance and economic affairs. They go about the province and here in Toronto and conduct hearings on what people believe should be found in the budget. Bill 103, the Independent Police Review Act, will go out so that people will be able to comment on that. That will go to justice

policy. Bill 140, the Long-Term Care Homes Act, will be out there so that people can comment. I believe that is travelling as well so that people in communities other than Toronto will be able to comment in their own communities. Bill 155, the Referendum Act for the Legislative Assembly, has been referred. Government agencies would like to meet in the intersession, and there are some members who serve on that committee who would like to deal with matters that the public believes are important, that the members of the agencies committee believe are important. The public accounts committee always wishes to meet in the intersession to deal usually with what comes out of the auditor's report; they do some report writing. So there's a lot of good work being done in the committees.

I know for those who are not specifically attached to a committee that people are engaging in all kinds of meetings when the House is not in session, that they are catching up on their telephone calls—I'm sure that's happening now—on their correspondence, on meeting with various people in their community, meetings initiated by MPPs or at the request of others. So there's an opportunity to continue.

For those of us who are in the cabinet, we still have matters to deal with in our responsibilities within cabinet, but all members of the Legislature are tasked to deal with a number of important items.

This motion that I have this afternoon does permit us, as a Legislature, to continue. I know, as I said, that the federal House may be completed by now. It was certainly scheduled to be completed by the end of this week. I know that there are a lot of people who have things to do immediately prior to Christmas, but members of the assembly I believe are ready and willing to meet to deal with the further business re pieces of legislation and, of course, the daily question period and petitions and matters of that kind. So I am pleased to put this motion forward and I look forward to the approval—I won't say applause in this case, but certainly to the approval—of all members of the House, that they see fit to pass this motion this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member from, um—that's awful.

Interjection: Erie-Lincoln.

The Acting Speaker: Erie-Lincoln. I'm sorry. I'm having momentary lapses here today.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Mr. Speaker, after all the quality time that we spend together in committee and as finance critics.

It's a pleasure to rise to address the motion before the House. I appreciate the comments of my colleague the government House leader and Minister of Tourism.

I know that some of my colleagues, including the member for Leeds-Grenville and, I believe, the member for Durham, will be addressing the motion as well, but there are a couple of items that I wanted to have an opportunity to comment on, and I appreciate the chance as part of the calendar motion.

One of the bills that my colleague the Minister of Tourism and government House leader had brought

forward in his reference to bills that have been before the assembly this session was Bill 152, which is effectively a consumer protection piece of legislation. There are a number of concerns that I wanted to bring forward about that bill particularly. One is—and I referenced it today during question period—the last-minute amendment that was brought forward through the auspices of the Minister of Government Services, Minister Phillips. Effectively, this last-minute motion increased the taxes on cemeteries. This was a change from what had existed in the bill. I understand the amendment was brought forward on the very last day, perhaps near the last hour of the session. We certainly have made a lot of the McGuinty government's voracious appetite for tax increases. I just didn't expect them to be increasing taxes on cemeteries as part of the massive tax increases we've experienced under the Dalton McGuinty regime, beginning with the infamous health tax, of course, which plucks up to \$900 from working families and seniors in Ontario—per taxpayer.

We did note in the House today that some recent decisions by arbitrators, backed up now by the Ontario Court of Appeal, are going to compel the employer to pay the so-called health tax on behalf of the employees in those groups, three of which are the Toronto Transit Commission, a long-term-care facility in Guelph, and the fire department in Hamilton, who now will have to come up with the funds from their budgets to pay for the health tax. Equivalently, we now have two classes of taxpayers in Ontario when it comes to the health tax: those who have to pay the tax and those who do not.

Two years ago, Premier McGuinty and his finance minister, Minister Sorbara, said that if these decisions came back this way they would bring forward legislation to reverse it to ensure that individuals pay the health tax, no matter what their employment situation. But, listening to the Minister of Finance today, it seems like he's backing down on yet another promise that he has made to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. But I digress a little bit.

The issue I wanted to bring forward deals with Bill 152 and the fact that at the last minute the minister brought forward a tax increase on not-for-profit cemeteries in Ontario. While on the surface of the issue one would see arguments for and against the amendment that the minister brought in, we need to make sure that's taken in context. Back as far as 2001, a process began that brought together all parties in the bereavement sector, whether funeral services, cemeteries, monument builders, religious cemeteries as well, to forge a consensus on how to bring this piece of legislation together—very important to the industry; a very important piece of consumer protection legislation. It may not have generated a great deal of media interest at the time, but nonetheless some excellent work was done. Unfortunately, five years later, after consensus had been achieved, after the consensus had been embodied in legislation: a last-minute change that pulls apart the consensus. I think it's going to cause an awful lot of problems, going ahead.

As you know, any time that there is this type of negotiation, consensus-building, there's give and take by all

parties. You cannot simply change one part of the deal without causing impact on other parts of the deal as well.

Political lobbying routes were used that obviously influenced the minister to make the change and increase taxes on cemeteries.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: As you know, my colleague from Peterborough would probably be very sensitive about increasing taxes in a last-minute amendment on cemeteries.

Let me read from a letter from the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals to the minister, dated December 3, 2006. It says:

"The property taxation component of schedule D, Bill 152, was achieved after detailed and lengthy discussions with the Ministry of Finance. It was reviewed, debated and endorsed by both the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the association of municipal clerks and treasurers of Ontario, the two municipal bodies responsible for the collection and administration of taxes in Ontario."

1600

Despite the fact that this had taken place over what was schedule D of Bill 152, the minister still made a last-minute change. That last-minute change provoked a very strong letter from a number of stakeholders and interested parties on the legislation. This letter to Minister Phillips—I'll read the list of signees—goes on to say—I'll read the letter.

"Throughout the last six years, the undersigned have engaged in a process which culminated in Bill 209 and reflected in schedule D of Bill 152. These were very difficult, protracted negotiations, yet on August 10, 2006, consensus was achieved among all participants.

"One of the key fundamental principles of the agreement was the recognition and acknowledgement of the validity of making a payment in lieu of tax to the care and maintenance fund if a religious, municipal or non-profit cemetery engaged in a 'commercial enterprise.' This principle is totally in keeping with the intent of the BSAC recommendations." I referenced those; they had taken place in 2001.

"The act as introduced is an important step in the provision of consumer protection legislation and regulation in the province of Ontario. This act clearly mirrors the consensus reached and reflected in the BSAC document dated November 23, 2001, and the round-table meetings and consensus of the summer of 2006.

"Therefore, we cannot support any amendment to this fundamental issue of taxation," and they strongly urge the minister not to bring forward the amendment. At the end of the day, he did so.

This letter is signed by Norris Zucchetti of the Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries; Gary Carmichael of Arbor Memorial; John O'Brien, the president of the Ontario Catholic Cemetery Conference; Bob Young, the legislation co-chair of the Ontario Monument Builders Association; Joan Huzar, the past president of the Consumers Council of Canada; Al Gruno, the vice-president of the Federation of Ontario Memorial Societies; and Glen

Timney, the past president and legislation co-chair of the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals.

I hosted a press conference involving a number of these individuals where you had a broad range of interested parties, from cemeteries to monument builders and funeral professionals that are referenced here, the Catholic cemeteries, the Hebrew cemeteries, all objecting to the last-minute amendment made to the bill that increased taxes on the not-for-profit cemeteries in the province of Ontario.

It's regrettable, the way that this took place, but what's most regrettable is that it tosses aside years of hard work that had taken place through Justice Adams and the BSAC recommendations. The Speaker will probably remember the November 23, 2001, Bereavement Sector Advisory Committee Report to the Minister of Consumer and Business Services, which reflects the history of this file. In fact, it was the Red Tape Commission that began the consultation process and reported to the then Minister of Consumer and Business Services on February 6, 2001.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Tim, that was you, wasn't it?

Mr. Hudak: Actually, not at that point in time.

Mediation took place, facilitated by the respected and Honourable Justice George Adams, that was quite encouraging. The then minister, the Honourable Norm Sterling, directed staff to convene the Bereavement Sector Advisory Committee, BSAC, which brought forward a consensus report to the minister that formed the basis of legislation. I say to my colleague from Peterborough, I had the honour of bringing forward the legislation. My predecessors, Minister Sterling and Minister Runciman, had done a lot of the heavy lifting as part of the consultations.

The Honourable George Adams, QC, facilitated meetings on July 19 and September 13, 2001. Robert Dowler, then director of the marketplace standards and services branch at the ministry, facilitated meetings on June 21 and August 22, 2001. I had the pleasure of serving with Mr. Dowler, who I think is an outstanding, very hard-working civil servant. I'm pleased to hear that since then he has been elevated to a position of assistant deputy minister. Not to make Mr. Dowler blush, but I anticipate that he will one day soon join the deputy ranks. I hope to have a chance to work with him again.

So I know the work that had been done at consumer and business services with some strong staff. I know the commitments that had been made by those interested in the ministry, the countless hours bringing this consensus together, and it's very disappointing that the minister chose to, effectively, tear apart that consensus by bringing in a last-minute change to raise taxes on the cemetery sector.

I think my colleagues will know that there are ongoing consultations on the regulations impacting on the bereavement sector. To make those regulation consultations effective, you need buy-in from the various parties, who

will spend, as I said, countless hours reviewing the material. If they feel that they can't trust the process, if they feel that the process they have trusted to date changes at the last minute because of political lobbying or a minister who decides to change the course of history for whatever purpose, then I worry that future consultations are going to be very difficult to convene to finally get the set of regulations completed that stem from consumer protection legislation of 2002.

So I needed to make sure that history was on the record, why a number of us have objected to that last-minute change by the minister and why the press conference was brought forward. I certainly hope the minister will now hear advice from a broader spectrum of the bereavement sector and ensure that the original BSAC recommendations that formed the consensus are maintained going forward.

The other aspect of the report I wanted to bring forward was my disappointment in the lack of muscle behind the initiatives to combat mortgage fraud in the province of Ontario. I want to commend my colleague Mr. Tascona, the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Brampton, who had brought forward a very muscular bill to combat mortgage fraud and to help out people who have already been victimized by scam artists through mortgage fraud or property fraud. Mr. Tascona's bill, for example, would allow access retroactively to the compensation funds for those victims we have read about in the Toronto Star or seen on television on CTV and other media outlets. Regrettably, Bill 152 does not contain those provisions or other powerful initiatives brought forward by Mr. Tascona.

I think the last time I had a chance to refer to this legislation, I commended the work of Alan Silverstein, the well-known consumer advocate and successful lawyer, who I know has given advice on Mr. Tascona's bill and finds what was actually brought forward at the end of the day to be quite disappointing.

Lastly, there are a number of concerns related to the gaming provisions of the bill and what they actually mean. There has been an inconsistency between what the minister has said, what his policy advisers have said and other public statements by the ministry as to the actual effect of the ban on advertising on the Internet. I know my colleague from Niagara Centre had brought forward an interesting point, that while the government was bringing this bill forward on one day, at the very same time the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. was conducting a poker championship sponsored by an Internet gaming company. So the irony was not lost on members of the assembly, and I wondered if Mr. Gough, the current chair of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., was on a giant ladder trying to bring that banner down while the minister was introducing the legislation at the same time.

Mr. Leal: He got overtime pay for that.

Mr. Hudak: He may have received overtime pay, as my colleague from Peterborough said, or danger pay, because that would be one big banner and one large

ladder to bring it down. I know that was embarrassing for the government, to be saying one thing on one hand and doing the opposite on the other.

So those are my comments on the motion on the floor. I know my colleagues also want to share time, but I thought it important to get on the record some of the history that led up to Bill 152, the disappointing turn by the minister that did not reflect the work that had been done before, and my trepidation that all of the good work that has been done by Justice Adams, by my colleagues Ministers Sterling and Runciman, and by hard-working civil servants and those engaged in the industry, may face even greater obstacles going forward, because now they have good reason not to trust that the work that has been done in the past will continue.

Thank you very much for the time, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the comments of my colleagues on this motion before us.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Thank you kindly, Speaker. I propose to share the time allotted to the New Democrats with my colleague Andrea Horwath, the member for Hamilton East.

Let's understand exactly why this motion is being brought. The House calendar—which had fallen, to our chagrin, into disuse—indicates the dates when the House begins and when the session ends, and this session ends December 14. That's why the motion says, "Notwithstanding standing order 6."

1610

As the government House leader accurately illustrated in his comments that opened this brief debate, there had been significant effort on the part of the House leaders of the three caucuses, the three parties, to protect the interests of stakeholders to whom a particular caucus felt beholden, but also to understand that the government has an interest in seeing a reasonable amount of legislation passed. Opposition House leaders have a responsibility to ensure that matters—because at the end of the day, the government controls the agenda. You know that, Speaker. It's a majority government. They don't need the co-operation of opposition parties. Hell's bells, what are time allocation motions for if not to override opposition parties trying to do their job here in the Legislative Assembly?

So let's understand why the government is compelled to extend the House sitting by a week. Heck, this will extend the House sitting to the 21st. We've got the 22nd on Friday, the 23rd and 24th on Saturday and Sunday, and the 25th is Christmas Day. I'm not sure the House can sit; that's a statutory holiday. It wouldn't be fair to the staff here. I don't know whether Boxing Day's a statutory holiday or not.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): It is.

Mr. Kormos: Well, then, if it is, I'm prepared to wait until the 27th to come back. If the government wants to sit on the 27th, I'll be here on the 27th; New Democrats will be here on the 27th.

But let's understand. The government's not extending the sitting of the House so that we can discuss the plight of minimum wage workers in this province. The government's not extending the session by one week so that we can debate Ms. DiNovo's bill, which would raise minimum wage for those poorest and, yes, very hard-working women and men in our province to \$10 an hour immediately, in an effort to make it not just a minimum wage but a minimum living wage. No, that's not why the government's extending its session by a week. The government's not extending its session by a week to talk about the job losses of so many workers across this province, far in excess of 100,000 over the course of the last two years alone, most recently the 23 workers down at Haun Drop Forge. Mr. Hudak knows where Haun Drop Forge is down in Welland. Some of those workers may well live in his riding, in Port Colborne or Fort Erie or Wainfleet.

Ever been to a drop forge, Speaker? I grew up in the east end of Welland and Crowland, and we woke up in the morning to the vibration of the ground and went to bed to the thump of the hammer and the vibration of the terra because the drop forge industry was a significant part of the industrial nature of that community. These hammers would come down and they would vibrate the foundations of houses literally blocks away. It was dangerous work. Come down to Welland or Port Colborne or Thorold or St. Catharines. Go to Hamilton. You know who the forge workers are. They're the ones who can't count to 10 with just their hands because they have a finger or two or a hand missing.

Most of the hammers now are no longer drop hammers; they're horizontal hammers. You go there and it's a steady, rhythmic process, because down at Haun Drop Forge—and I toured that forge not too long ago. I was there with Tom Napper, who's the president of CAW Local 275. He was here in the gallery last week. The Haun Drop Forge makes high-quality hooks and connectors for safety equipment and repelling equipment, so this has to be very high-quality—high, high standards. You've got workers who are placing these rough castings into the hammer, one after the other, rhythmically. The worker has got to be handcuffed and chained to their machine so that the arm is inhibited from extending far enough that the fingers get caught in the hammer. But as we all know so tragically, from time to time, the safety devices on this equipment don't work the way they should; from time to time, maintenance is skipped in the interest of profit.

I remember back when I was practising law, I had only been practising for a year or two and a young worker came in, a young man. He was a college student; he was taking business administration. He'd been a hockey player—a very physically fit, good-looking young guy, except, you see, that his hands were missing. He had a summer job at one of the local factories. He never intended to be a factory worker. He wanted to carry on with his education and get involved in business administration, maybe pursue an accounting career. It's hard to

hold a pencil when you don't have any hands, isn't it? It's hard to work your word processor when you don't have any hands. It's a tragedy when it happens to a kid 20 years old, 21 years old, who hasn't even thought about having children yet, but who is never going to really be able to hold his baby when he does have one.

Those are the prices that workers pay in these factories. These are the workers who not only lose their hands and their eyesight and their health and their lungs, but they're losing their jobs now too: 23 workers at Haun Drop Forge as of January 31, 2007, are going to be out of work.

I heard the minister talk about the retraining programs that the province is going to engage in. I'm sorry, my friends, but a 30-year forge worker? What are you going to train him to do? It would take years before the calluses wear off enough so that he can do tender, delicate work. What are you going to do, train him to be a milliner or a seamstress? Come on. For the casino? The casino is laying people off. You know that because we've raised that here in this Legislature.

No, we're not coming back next week to talk about those workers at Haun Drop Forge or similar workers across the province—tens and tens and scores of thousands of them. Look, you know what happens. You're talking about less than a year on EI, and maybe a little bit of a half-baked training program that's futile but which people participate in because they're prepared to grasp at any straws. But when EI is over, you're on welfare. Families that raised kids and paid for mortgages and paid taxes on a hard-earned middle-class salary can be on welfare in the course of a year. You know what happens then: Marriages break up; people drink too much; if they've got access to drugs, they take too many drugs; kids drop out of college and university or lose all of their aspiration for going. And then we have human tragedies and yet more social costs that sometimes cannot be evaluated in terms of dollars and cents.

I suspect that Miss Horwath, with her passion for improving the WSIB, Ontario's workers' comp system, may well speak to the fact that this motion we're debating today would be so much more relevant if we were going to talk about WSIB benefits next week and the need to improve the lot of injured workers, severely injured workers—workers who are never going to work again, notwithstanding that they would love to. They dream about it, in between the bouts of pain.

1620

We're not coming back next week to talk about those families, the poorest families, almost inevitably single mothers raising kids as best they can—and by God, most of them are doing a pretty darned good job of it—who had their federal child benefit clawed back by this government, even though Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals promised they'd end the clawback. They promised these moms, they promised these kids, yet Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals continue to pocket, what, \$250 million a year, Ms. Horwath?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): That's right. Right about there.

Mr. Kormos: Some \$250 million a year clawed back from the poorest moms and kids in the province of Ontario. New Democrats would dearly love to come back next week to debate that.

Ms. Horwath: You're absolutely right.

Mr. Kormos: Let me tell you, Ontarians with disabilities, ODSP recipients, who have been tossed crumbs by this government over the course of these last three years: We New Democrats would dearly love to be here next week to talk about increasing the pensions, the allowances, the incomes of disabled persons who rely on those modest incomes and who struggle to survive because of the inadequacy of them.

People on social assistance benefits: You want to stigmatize social assistance. Do it if you dare, do it if you want to, but down where Mr. Bradley and I come from, when we see industry after industry after industry shut down, we see family after family after family forced onto social assistance, because there are no alternative jobs. The casino provided some respite for a period of time, but that's over now.

Hard-working, honest, decent, good people—hard-working middle-class income earners and taxpayers one year, within the course of 16, 17 or 18 months can be on welfare. There was a 21.9% cut to their benefits by the Conservatives during their period in government here at Queen's Park, and no restoration of that 21.9% by the Liberals since they've been elected over three years ago. That is a sad observation. New Democrats would dearly love to be coming back here next week to talk about people on social assistance.

But the government doesn't want to come back to talk about injured workers on WSIB. The government doesn't want to come back to talk about job losses across the province and the plight of workers like those at Haun Drop Forge in Welland. The government doesn't want to come back next week to talk about kids and their moms who are having their child benefit clawed back by this government to the tune of \$250 million a year. The government doesn't want to come back to talk about making life a little fairer, a little more decent, a little kinder, for kids on social assistance. This government doesn't want to come back here to talk about improving the plight of recipients of ODSP pensions. This government is coming back to ram through its Bill 173, its Tom Parkinson-styled salary and severance package for MPPs here at Queen's Park.

You know, the scandal of the Tom Parkinson, Hydro One salary and severance package still shadows this government at Queen's Park. Notwithstanding that, the government demonstrates by its Bill 173 that the only thing it has learned from the Hydro One, Tom Parkinson's salary and severance scandal is how to do it for themselves.

I tell you, members in this Legislature talk about working hard. Do you know who works hard? Single moms with two and three jobs work hard. This government isn't improving their lot.

Do you know who works hard? The folks who walk through the plant gate down at Dofasco or Stelco in

Hamilton. Walk that catwalk one shift—I dare you—around the arc furnace. Walk it for one shift. Most members of this Legislature would be scurrying out of there so fast it would make your head spin.

Do you know who works hard? Child care workers taking care of people's kids, taking care of little kids, preparing them for better educations and better learning experiences than they would have without child care workers. They work hard.

Construction workers work hard, from 5 in the morning every morning, maybe 4:30, out there pouring concrete, working on the 25th, 35th, 45th floor of open construction whether the wind is blowing, whether it's minus 10, whether you've been up all night with a sick kid. They're up at 4:30 and 5 in the morning working hard.

People working underground in the mines of northern Ontario: Man, that's working hard.

MPPs figure they work hard just because they work long. But check the hands here. As I've had occasion to say over the course of the last few weeks, the most dangerous part of the job here is the occasional bruised ego or perhaps, on a bad day, a paper cut. How come a 21% salary increase alone, never mind the doubling up of the defined contribution pension payment by the government, never mind the attractive, Parkinsonian enhancements to the severance package, is important enough for the government to sit an extra week, but hard-working people out there don't warrant this government's attention? How come they don't warrant this government's attention?

Greed; self-serving self-interest. It's all about not being satisfied with being in the top 5% of income earners in this province. That's what MPPs are.

I say to the Liberals who voted for the Harris pension package, I say to the Conservatives who voted for the Harris pension package, were you wrong or were you simply mistaken or were you asleep at the switch or were you not doing your job or didn't you have the courage of your convictions then? I say that to those Liberals and those Conservatives who cheerleadered and pompomed the Harris pension plan proposal and who gave themselves a 10% salary increase when they blended the non-taxable portion of the MPPs' income with the taxable portion—a 10% salary increase in 1996. It's amazing that government members can show such disregard and disdain for people in this province who are hurting, but when it comes to serving themselves, they leap at the opportunity.

Mr. Tory was seen by many as a breath of fresh air—by many. I'm sorry to say that he has revealed himself—it's like Preston Manning in Stornoway. Remember, Speaker? Preston Manning in Stornoway. Mr. Tory has demonstrated that he's just like the rest of them. Mr. Tory has lost his virginity; he's no longer pristine. He was prepared to do some backroom wheeling and dealing. The Conservatives and the Liberals were conjoined for the sole purpose of breeding Bill 173 and giving birth to a Parkinsonian salary, severance and pension package for themselves.

1630

Look, do I begrudge anybody more money? Of course not. But I say it's a matter of priorities. Do you know what? If this Legislative Assembly could drop its partisan differences long enough to put the minimum wage up to \$10 this year; if it could make some meaningful adjustments to the ODSP and social assistance benefits right here and now, at least restore the 21.9% the Conservatives stole; and if the three political parties here could get their heads together and end the child benefit clawback to the tune of \$250 million a year from the poorest women and kids in this province, members of this assembly might be held in a little higher regard when they ram through, drive through, rush through, charge through—the incredible self-interest. You're going to see a bill that the government, along with the Tories, is going to try to package up, grease up, slide through in a way that you rarely see. They'd have wanted to do it in the dark of the night. They'd have wanted to do it in one fell swoop. They'd have wanted to do it without any debate. These folks are prepared to sit an extended week to serve themselves; they're not prepared to sit an extended week to serve others.

New Democrats won't be supporting this motion. New Democrats think that the priorities of this government, the Dalton McGuinty Liberals and the John Tory Conservatives—we think the priorities of Mr. McGuinty and Mr. Tory are skewed. We don't think they're the right priorities; we don't think they're the priorities that serve Ontarians well. If the Conservatives members and Liberal members want to play games about the issue, God bless; there's nothing New Democrats can do to stop them.

But we can and will speak up for those people who need speaking up for: kids; single moms working hard, who aren't getting a 21% or 31% pay/pension/severance increase this year—more often than not they're getting pink slips; retirees, senior citizens who are at risk of losing their homes because they can no longer afford the property taxes or the electricity bills or the natural gas bills, the heating costs; workers like those at Haun Drop Forge; young people, students, the children of those workers who lose their jobs, who are going to have to drop out of college and university and who will never fulfill the dreams that not just they had but that their parents and grandparents had, that they worked so hard to help them achieve—because the factory just shut down because electricity costs, amongst other things, are sky-high here in the province of Ontario.

New Democrats won't support this motion.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): This is a time to reflect on a year that is soon to pass into history, it's a time to resolve to do better where we can, to change what needs change and to offer thanks for what we have, for the friends and family we have, and for the hope and the promise and the opportunity that we have just for being Ontarians.

I have some thoughts on what the things that were done in this Legislative chamber mean in western Mississauga. It goes like this:

'Twas the time before Christmas, and all through Queen's Park

Not a member sat listless; the Chamber soon would be dark.

The foreign-trained were contented, Bill 124 had just passed;

Opposition relented, careers could continue at last.

And deep within Lisgar, there arose such a cheer

For the news that our GO station soon would be here.

The invited had connected, shiny shovels were found

And those who are elected showed up to break ground.

Commuters who stew idled when east they drive forth

Will find traffic unbridled on roads that lead north.

With spaces 900 at Lisgar to park

Fewer souls will be driving while outside it's dark.

And those patients who waited for the fourth MRI to appear

Had their hopes elevated when its delivery we moved ahead by a year.

"The government gets it," say patients and staff;

"Together it's progress, not cutting by half."

And there on the south block, where a parking lot lies

Work crews will soon gather, and cranes will then rise.

Credit Valley is world-class, its staff are the best;

"A" and "H" block will serve us throughout Mississauga West.

Young doctors we need, and to get their degree

At Credit Valley they practise while they attend U of T.

And Speaker, I rise in this chamber of laws

To greet all Ontarians, before Christmas we pause;

To wish to our friends and our neighbours alike

"Merry Christmas and to all, and to all a good night!"

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Just give me a quick calculation here about how much time I have, since we've divided it up equally amongst the three parties.

I do appreciate this opportunity to speak to the calendar motion, which is extending the legislative session for another week, until next Thursday. I think it's fair to say that there's a real possibility we'll be sitting through the New Year as well. Whether that's appropriate or inappropriate, who knows, but I think the fact that we have adequate time to debate legislation that still remains before the assembly is a good thing.

I know that some of the restrictions on time which we've seen in the past limit our opportunities to put all of our concerns—constituent concerns, critic concerns—on the record, so this extension gives us an opportunity. I know there are a number of members of our caucus who have petitions they still wish to table and others who have private members' legislation or resolutions and wish to have an opportunity to ask additional questions of the government. So in that sense, I think this is a positive

thing to be happening, because if you look at the Auditor General's report and all of the criticisms and red flags raised by the Auditor General, we have, as the official opposition, been trying to get some clear answers from the government with respect to how they are going to deal with these concerns. As is usually the case, we get non-answers from the government.

The Minister of Energy, Mr. Duncan, is perhaps the worst offender. My colleague Mr. Yakabuski from the Renfrew area has frequently raised the issue of the experts that they utilized to make a claim to the electorate in the last election that they were going to close all of the coal-fired generation in the province of Ontario by 2007. Of course, he said, "We had expert advice," whereas 2007 arrives and, "Well, we're going to extend it until 2009."

1640

Then, just recently, we heard that Ontario Power Generation indicated we wouldn't be able to close coal-fired generation down until 2014 at the earliest, which pretty much coincides with the promise the Progressive Conservatives made in the last election, which was a realistic and honest commitment—and I stress h-o-n-e-s-t—with respect to coal-fired generation.

We asked Mr. Duncan and we've asked Premier McGuinty on a number of occasions, "Tell us who these experts were, these people who told you that you could make that kind of a very significant promise to the people of Ontario in the last election campaign." Of course, they have refused, they have declined, despite a commitment made by the Minister of Energy during estimates at the committee process, where he committed to Mr. Yakabuski that he would supply that list of experts. I think we've all reached the conclusion that there were no experts, and if they did consult experts and were advised by experts, they were not experts in the energy field. They were experts in politics, people who came to them and said, "This can score you some points. This can win you some votes."

Who gives a damn if there's any truth or honesty attached to this? This might be a pretty significant factor for people in the province of Ontario who care about the environment and the damage that coal-fired generation is doing to our environment. But they didn't care about being honest or truthful or telling the facts. If they did, they'd reveal who these experts are. The fact that they have failed and refused to reveal the names of those so-called experts clearly indicates to anyone who cares about honesty and integrity in government that these people were not being truthful to the electors of Ontario.

Of course, we could refer to any number of promises and commitments made during the last election, over 50 of which have been broken in the going-on-four-years that the McGuinty government has been in office.

I think that having an extra week, two weeks or three weeks is good for us to be able to, once again, hammer home the point that honesty and integrity within the ranks across the floor are very much in question, very much in doubt, and the facts make that very, very clear.

A couple of things I want to touch on briefly: One of the pieces of legislation that I didn't have enough time to speak to was Bill 140, the long-term-care legislation, which is going to be travelling—the committee looking at that—the province in January. What amazes me about legislation like that being brought forward by the McGuinty government is the fact that there are no supporters of this initiative. I cannot find any supporters of this legislation, anyone who believes this is the right thing to do in terms of the long-term-care sector in the province of Ontario. I've had everyone appearing in my riding, from the non-profit sector, the for-profit, the municipally operated long-term-care facilities—everyone, to a person, is very, very concerned about this legislation and opposed to this legislation. I don't know. It's difficult to fathom, and this is just one example. But I know, from the concerns that I'm hearing, that—

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Bill 107, Bob.

Mr. Runciman: Bill 107's another example, the human rights legislation, where they spent over \$100,000 to advertise public hearings, had over 100 witnesses lined up to hear and then arbitrarily, after the Attorney General assured the committee that everyone would have an opportunity to be heard, shut the door, slammed the door on those people, and they lost their opportunity to be heard. They shoved it through.

Bill 140, getting back to long-term care—I think it's sort of thematic with this government because it's dominated by members of the Toronto establishment, if you will. It's Toronto-centric, and the people who represent small-town rural Ontario are relegated to the back-benches and are intimidated by those who sit in front of them apparently, because we see so much legislation coming before us that has negative impacts on small-town rural Ontario, yet these people do not stand up and defend those interests, the people they're supposed to be representing. They don't do it. If they do it, they do it behind closed doors in caucus and obviously have not been very effective. Certainly, Bill 140 is another very, very—I think—frightening example of that.

If you talk to people in small-town rural Ontario about the nursing home sector and what this legislation could mean to them—they feel it threatens their very future, their very existence. If you look at the licensing requirements and the compliance requirements that they're imposing on nursing homes without appropriate funding to meet those standards—and then they can come in with inspectors who say, "You're not in compliance with the standards that we imposed but didn't fund. We can pull your licence; we can put you in serious jeopardy." And there is no appeal from a compliance officer's order—no appeal whatsoever. So when these people want to improve their facilities, upgrade their facilities, when they go to a lending institution that looks at this kind of jeopardy these people are facing in terms of the viability and security attached to their operations, they're getting doors slammed in their face. This is the reality that these people simply do not want to accept.

If you look at my riding, Kemptville, for example, in the township of North Grenville: The nursing home there

has a \$2-million payroll, employs 100 people, pays taxes of \$160,000 a year—property tax. In Gananoque: 141 staff there at Carveth Care Centre, a wonderful facility. I have to point out that 95% of the employees are women. You can say that about virtually every nursing home in the province. The vast majority of employees and people earning their living in those facilities are women. Again, they're jeopardizing the futures of those individuals. Anyone who represents small-town rural Ontario knows how hard we've been hit over the past three years with the loss of manufacturing jobs in this province. What is it—60,000 so far this calendar year?

Mr. O'Toole: It's 140,000.

Mr. Runciman: It's a very significant number.

Mr. Hudak: It's 160,000 in two years.

Mr. Runciman: One hundred and sixty thousand in two years. I just had another plant close, in Prescott in my riding. We saw Domtar in Cornwall. We've seen a whole series of plant closures, a real erosion, a hollowing out of the manufacturing sector in Ontario, especially in small-town rural Ontario. What are they doing? We have employers like this who are serving real needs in our communities, providing meaningful employment to many, especially women in these communities, and they're putting their jobs in jeopardy, and further, potentially damaging the economy of so many small-town rural communities.

I appreciate the fact that I've had an opportunity to put a few more comments on the record with respect to Bill 140.

One quick comment that I want to make: Ms. Andrea Horwath, who's an NDP member from Hamilton East—I haven't had a chance to see the bill she tabled today, but I gather it deals with locked-in pension plans. I want to indicate my strong support for a change there. If you look at what's happening across Canada, I think there are four other provinces which have now loosened up the requirements on locked-in pension plans by making available at least up to, I think, 50% of those locked-in funds.

I was part of this place a number of years ago when we passed legislation which afforded members who saw their pensions rolled up—we were given the opportunity to freely move money out of locked-in accounts. That's wrong. There should not be an opportunity for members of the Legislature or other elected officials to have this kind of standard approach. I was part of that. I apologize for that, I want to see it corrected, and I will very strongly support Ms. Horwath. If the government moves quickly on this, they'll certainly have my strong support.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I, too, am looking forward to the opportunity to speak to the calendar motion, and I will be supporting it. I'm absolutely delighted to be able to stay here; hopefully it is till New Year's. What better way to celebrate, bringing in a new year in this House? I personally am looking forward to it. I know that the members who are sitting with me today can think of no better place they would rather be than right here. So I look forward to it.

1650

One of the things that this gives me is a wonderful opportunity to speak to—the member from Leeds-Grenville talked about rural small-town Ontario. I'm so glad that you remember us now that you're in opposition, but where were you when we needed you in rural Ontario? When you were in government, where were you? You talk about our voices. Where was your voice? I say to you, sir: You downloaded on rural Ontario; you ignored rural Ontario. You didn't even know where rural Ontario was. So I'm delighted that you now are thinking of us, because you did not, in government, think—not once—of rural small-town Ontario.

I wanted to have this opportunity to talk about all of the things happening in the riding of Huron-Bruce. I don't want to brag about it, but I do have to say that it is the most beautiful riding in the province. I just have to bring that out, because I know it's true and we must always be truthful.

I want to talk about the good work that is happening in the riding of Huron-Bruce. We've heard from members about the hardships that they are facing in their ridings, but I can tell you that I have never seen the sense of excitement that is happening in my riding: 1,500 new trade jobs, 500 new trade jobs—north, south. There is an excitement that I haven't seen in a very long time, and I don't have to look back very far to when the third party was in government and what our riding was going through at that time. And I have made comments on the previous government—

Mr. Leah: Four of them are still here.

Mrs. Mitchell: Four of them are still here and, I don't know, they must have been somewhere other than the cabinet meetings. What can I say? Posing, maybe.

Interjection.

Mrs. Mitchell: Some of them are still here. We remember.

But I do want to talk, just for the few minutes that I have been allocated, about what is happening.

When we see the energy—650 apprenticeship jobs are happening right now in the riding of Huron-Bruce. I can tell you that it has been a very long time since we have seen that volume. Think about that. One of the things that we have had a problem with in our rural communities is losing our young people. And 650 new apprenticeship program jobs available in the riding of Huron-Bruce, to me, are 650 young people who are going to stay in the riding of Huron-Bruce. They're going to choose to stay and to raise their children in their rural communities. That is what we need to grow strong rural communities, and that's what this represents.

A new ethanol plant: Not only will this help the agricultural community, but it will also clean up the air that we so desperately need.

There's so much good news and I only have such a short time. By golly, I could take all the time, and I know that that's not fair, because there are members clamouring to get up and talk. I know we're going to be here

to New Year's, so we're going to have lots of time to talk, but we have so much to say.

One of the things I want to talk about is health care in the riding of Huron-Bruce, the seven hospitals that we have in the riding of Huron-Bruce. We're proud of our seven hospitals. You talk to the nurses, you talk to our doctors, and you ask a very simple question, as the member from Durham always says. You ask this simple question: "Are things better today?" And what's the answer? What is the answer that we hear? "Things are better today," and they acknowledge that it is. And why is it? Because of the McGuinty government. We have made significant investment, and not only in certain areas. We have made it across this good province, and people do say that things are better today. To me, that is the test: Do people feel it?

Then we can talk about our health teams and what a difference they have made, especially in our rural communities. We don't have the accessibility to the large medical centres, and moving forward in a team approach makes such a difference in our rural communities.

Mr. Leal: It's all about small-town Ontario.

Mrs. Mitchell: That's right. We have nurse practitioners; we have psychologists. They're part of our family health teams. We have eight family health teams in the riding of Huron-Bruce.

Interjection.

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes, we do, and I know that those eight family health teams will go a long way in not only recruiting our new doctors but also in retention.

Mr. Leal: Did you say eight?

Mrs. Mitchell: Eight.

Mr. Leal: How many did you have three years ago?

Mrs. Mitchell: Zero. Zip. What we had at that time—I know the members want to hear a bit more, so I'll just take a little bit to talk about that. The community health centres that the previous government had set up never worked.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Why is that?

Mrs. Mitchell: Well, they never went and asked them, I can tell you that.

The other thing was chronic underfunding. For the nurse practitioner's position, it was laughable. They'd hire them, let them go, hire them, let them go, hire them, let them go. It was this constant strain on our community. The funding, the technology dollars and the facility dollars were never in place to make our community health centres go along. So now the family health teams have certainly been embraced.

Education: When you go into the schools now and talk to the students—I love to go in to talk to the students, because it's about our young people and their future.

Mr. Leal: They've got smiles on their faces—big smiles.

Mrs. Mitchell: Big smiles on their faces; the member from Peterborough knows. His wife is a teacher. He has a lot of opportunity to go into the schools, as we all do. What a difference. You walk into a school and you can

feel the difference. It's so much more positive. It really is.

Unfortunately, I do have to say that I have a few more things, but I know that I'm going to be here till New Year's, so I'm going to have lots of time to talk. I just want to wish the members the very best for Christmas, and I'll be able to wish that every day from now until the new year.

Mr. O'Toole: It's a pleasure, on these kinds of motions, government motion 277, a calendar motion which, as has been explained, is extending the amount of time for debate—but it's too little, too late, quite frankly, if you want to summarize it. On such important matters before the Legislature, this government seems to be walking away from any plan that I can see. The minister today introduced a finance bill. When it's done by a Liberal, you can expect that there will be a tax increase of some sort in it. This is the history, and it's the predictable outcome of those events.

I just want to put on the record the work that has been done by a lot of different people and that, in my view needs to be—

Interruption.

Mr. O'Toole: We need to make sure that we turn our phone off first.

That being done, I'm saying to you that the bills that I have particular—there's a few here that I think members should reflect on in the debate that occurs over the next week or two that I think will certainly serve the people of Ontario well, in a very generous way, I might say, in sort of a non-partisan way.

This one here is a private member's bill by Mr. Frank Klees from Oak Ridges. It's An Act to amend various Acts to require a declaration with respect to the donation of organs and tissue on death. The organ donation thing is a huge and often silent issue, but it could save lives. Mr. Klees has done so much work on this that I think it would be, in a non-partisan way, a gift, if you will—the gift of life itself, you might say—at this time of year. I think there could be unanimous consent for that particular bill, Bill 67. I would encourage all members to give it fair consideration in the debate—amongst the House leaders, primarily, who do this backroom business of giving time and giving voice to private members' work.

That being said, I remain hopeful and faithful, but I think there are a couple of bills—this may sound self-serving, but Bill 24 is a bill I've had on the books a couple of times, that's been introduced a couple of times. It's Bill 24, and it's regulating the spreading and storage of sewage sludge and biosolids on agricultural land. I've given that bill to Minister Broten and told her that I'm pleased to work with her to make sure that we protect the resource in agriculture, and that is the land that I'm talking of. This bill could easily be dealt with in a matter of a day or two.

1700

Bill 26 is another bill of mine that's been introduced. It's about decorum and respect within the Legislature.

Mr. Tory, our leader, has gone to great lengths to raise the bar, the personal responsibility of respect and accountability in the Legislature, and I'd like attention paid to Bill 26.

I'd say that Bill 32 is an act of mine that Minister Watson, in his health promotion ministry, could pay some—it declares, I believe, the first Monday in September to be physical fitness day.

Mr. Leal: That's Labour Day, isn't it?

Mr. O'Toole: That's right. It's the first school day, or whatever, after Labour Day. Mr. Leal is interrupting me, but it's a kind interruption, in respect to the previous comments I made.

It would just give them the opportunity to celebrate the importance of proactive personal responsibility in health care. You are what you eat, and a part of your lifestyle has consequences for your general health. Your activity level is so important. It's the easiest, simplest and most beneficial form of personal responsibility and, if you will, medication.

Mr. Leal: What about the cellphone bill?

Mr. O'Toole: We'll probably get to that. I have so many private members' bills over the 11 or 12 years I've been here that sometimes there isn't enough time to go through all those bills. Some of them have been successful. I've had a couple of bills that are actually now law in the province of Ontario. Irish heritage is celebrated, and I think a lot of people celebrated that. It wasn't an argument about northern and southern Ireland or a religious debate; the debate was about celebrating culture and heritage. All Canadians have a cultural heritage, and we should be proud of that and celebrate it. The minister is here and nodding her head respectfully as well.

I would like to think there are other members in this Legislature who would like to see their bills get some time and attention. There's some expertise on all sides of the House: the NDP private member's bill on locked-in retirement funds for seniors that was introduced today by Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East. We know, without seeing it yet—I have written to the minister several times on the issue of locked-in retirement funds. My belief is that the actuaries and those people who developed the models for disbursing the wealth spread out over time, often referred to as annuities—quite frankly, the life expectancy quotient in those actuarial models has changed. People aren't dying at 65 or 70. In many cases, people are living well into their 80s, like my mother-in-law, Madge Hall. I speak of her often; she's in a long-term-care facility. I visit her every weekend. She's probably home watching, because I made sure she had the parliamentary channel.

Mr. Leal: A lovely lady, Madge.

Mr. O'Toole: Jeff Leal says again, as he does every time, "A lovely lady," and she is. She's 88. So there's a case where they do live longer. Let's be clear: The cost for her in long-term care in the small community of Millbrook—it's a lovely, new long-term care, built under our government when Elizabeth Witmer was minister. Twenty thousand new long-term-care beds were built

under our command, if you will. It was an important part of the restructuring of health care.

The point I'm making here is that her cost per month is about \$2,000. That's \$24,000 a year. She has to have a little nest egg here. Her old age security and Canada pension pays part of that. So there's a copayment involved in health care, plus if she has podiatry work done or other kinds of things to take care of herself, my wife is very engaged in that personal care under the power-of-attorney issues. But we allow her—in fact, we encourage her—to take responsibility for her life and decisions, and we are there to support her.

When I think of those things and of some of the bills that are before us, like those mentioned by Mr. Runciman, Bill 140 is a bill that needs more time. The future of long-term-care facilities in this province under Bill 140 is a serious concern—if not now, it should be to members who are perhaps newer here. Of the four classes of long-term-care homes, classes B and C are in serious trouble. If they happen to close those beds, what's going to happen to the baby boomers? There's no plan. If I look at their commitments, Mr. McGuinty—and probably George Smitherman was involved in that policy—promised \$6,000 more per patient. We are entering the boom, bust and echo thing, and you're going to see huge and growing expenses that somehow the families are going to have to endure. There's a lot of work to be done on the long-term-care side.

I was looking at a bill by Frank Klee—again, a very effective member. Mr. Hudak has a number of bills that are quite important as well with respect to property assessment issues. These bills need the light of day and the debate we're being paid to be here for and respond to.

Bill 122, An Act to enhance safety on Ontario's roads and to empower police officers to shut down street racing: There have been young children's lives taken because there aren't the right tools in the hands of enforcement officers to deal with the issue. It's a very civil bill. I think that Minister Cansfield would be smart to embrace the bill with the openness that Premier McGuinty often speaks of. Often, actions speak louder than words. We should all take heart in that.

I do want to go on—I've only got a few minutes left. I suppose some people here might be a bit taken aback by me moving into a more seasonal commentary to talk about my family. Having a son who served our country, I want to say Merry Christmas or season's greetings—the appropriate greeting—to all persons serving Canada: the Canadian troops in Afghanistan or in other roles serving our country. I had a son who served, and I'm always proud to say I know a number of officers who were actually his classmates from military school and who are in Afghanistan. They've been in my home. They've been great company to know.

My wife is often saddened at this time of year—my wife, Peggy, was here yesterday, actually. The reason is simple. We have three daughters and two sons. My three daughters are all finished university, married and have relationships, but all three daughters are in different

countries. I have one in Australia—that's Rebecca—and her husband Dave is a test pilot. I'm very proud of those children. I like to think that Dave is actually my son. Anyway, they have two of our grandchildren, and I'd like to wish them a Merry Christmas. I'll send them a copy of Hansard—if I haven't sent them a Christmas card with a cheque in it, it would be even more troublesome. Dave and Rebecca's children, Meghan and Daniel, are lovely children. We did see them last summer, but we don't see them very often except on the webcam using Skype, which is a really good software tool that people should use if they're calling long distance. We do all the time.

The next daughter, Marnie, is a high school teacher in England. She's department head now, and she's expecting her first child. Marnie is a wonderful young person and she's expecting a child now—today—in London. I just talked to her before I came in here. We're really anxious, and quite frankly it's very personal when you express things in the Legislature like this. But I wish Marnie and Ben well, and I hope they are smart enough to call the child John.

Laughter.

Mr. O'Toole: That's an inside joke. Perhaps she would be unhappy if I didn't mention that.

My youngest daughter, Rochelle, and her partner, Jason, live on the Isle of Man. Rochelle is coming home next Monday for Christmas vacation.

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: Yes, the Isle of Man. He's a tax lawyer and that's why they're there. But now that the Legislature is sitting, I'm not going to be able to pick up my daughter, whom I haven't seen for some time.

I said to John Tory, compassionate leader that he is, that I may not be here on Monday. How's that? I have that commitment, as we all should to our families at this time of year.

All of us, when we look around our ridings, at the people we serve in a non-partisan way, extend season's greetings to them. I, like many members from rural Ontario, have been to at least four, perhaps five, Santa Claus parades. The volunteers who put these things together to celebrate the joy of the winter season, if you will, or the Christmas season or just the joy for children—it's an important contribution to our communities and the vibrance and quality of life.

1710

In that regard, I have to thank a few people, specifically Val McCormick. They had the 45th anniversary of their parade this year. These volunteers work almost year-round, not unlike the Toronto parade. There were many, many people.

There are a lot of volunteers I'd like to thank. Another person, Brian Hammond, took the time to drive me in that parade. I thank Brian. I see him on occasion. He's a nice young fellow, an executive with a company, and he took the time out.

Another was the Scugog, in Port Perry. It's a wonderful evening parade. The chamber of commerce does all the work there. Craig Traylor is the organizer, along with

a group of volunteers. Jim Conlin, a successful young business person, was my driver in that parade.

In Newcastle, we also had an evening parade. I think it's the second anniversary of their parade. They did a wonderful job. The committee there, I think, was Mark Hendrikx, Karen Bastas and Joan Kimball. They had a marvellous night and a marvellous parade.

I just want to extend to my constituents, and to other members here from all parties, season's greetings and Merry Christmas—making sure that, in the time we spend here, the tone we try to set is more co-operative, more collegial and more productive for the people we serve.

When you're speaking to a calendar motion or other motions—perhaps the specific difficulties around the MPP pay issue—I want to compliment Premier McGuinty in his responses today in showing respect for public service. It's in that tone that he and Mr. Tory—and I would hope Mr. Hampton—would take some time to understand the respect that is required here to make sure that people have the tools and resources to have a productive life in their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity, and best wishes.

Ms. Horwath: No matter what happens around this place—it has been about two and a half years that I've been here; I guess at the end of May it will be three years—it's interesting, because there's always something new. For me, the new thing is a calendar motion. I don't think I've ever had occasion to vote on or debate a motion that talks about the schedule, more or less. Maybe it has come up and I haven't been on House duty, or whatever, but this is my first opportunity to debate that kind of motion.

As I was listening to the different speeches of the various members here this afternoon, it struck me that it's similar to when we deal with budget bills, because members pretty much have some latitude. I'm sure that if that's not the case, Mr. Speaker, then, as the effective and studious Speaker you are, you will let me know if I'm wandering off track. But it seems to me that the discussion that's been happening this afternoon has been fairly far-reaching, fairly broad, fairly expansive in terms of topics that members have been able to cover. I see that the Speaker is looking at the standing orders. I hope he's not taking this as a challenge to clip my wings in terms of what I'm going to be saying this afternoon. I don't think that's the case because, being one of the final speakers this afternoon, I'm hoping I'll be able to raise some issues that are important from my perspective.

When I first got here, I had the privilege, actually, of participating in the House leaders' meetings; I was given that opportunity. I must say that I really did appreciate that. I think it gave me insights that a lot of members aren't able to obtain, not having had that experience. It's very enlightening to watch and pay attention to the way the various House leaders to and fro around who places priority on what piece of business that goes on here. Of course, not all of that is about bills, and not all of it is

about government bills. Some of it is about private members' bills, and many other things come into the fray of that discussion. It's interesting because, although at the end of the day the people who watch the legislative channel see various bills called and various items come up for discussion and debate, all of that stuff is taken care of at the House leaders' meetings. Interestingly enough, there has been quite a bit of give and take over the last little while around what this House has had the opportunity to deal with, both, as I said, in regard to bills as well as other business. Of course, one of the things that is happening today is the extension of the time frame for us to be able to sit into next week. Funny enough, it seems to come up—again, I guess this would be my second Christmas experience here.

Mr. Kormos: Ho, ho, ho.

Ms. Horwath: Ho, ho, ho. Last year, I can remember—has it been my third? It would have been my third, right? That's 2004, 2005—so it's my third. Both other times there was this anticipation—kind of like kids on Christmas morning—that we're going to finish early, we're not going to be here right up until Christmas Eve. The first year I was here—of course, it was all new and you're learning, and it's pretty interesting in terms of the—

Interjection.

Ms. Horwath: My friend from Niagara Centre mocks and says it's no heavy lifting here. But I've got to tell you, mentally it's a big learning curve. If you're doing the work and you're paying attention and you're trying to figure out what's going on here, it can be draining, at least from a mental perspective. So that first year I was looking forward to it. I'm thinking, "Okay, I'm tired." I had to get into the swing of not being with my family every night and all of the adjustments, for most members who aren't from the Toronto area, that come around the lifestyle changes that take place and the learning curve. So I was really excited when I figured it would give me a couple of days at least to go back home and start dealing with these Christmas issues. Then my House leader came in and said, "We'll sit here until New Year's Eve if we have to sit here till New Year's Eve to get things done around here." I thought, what a wet blanket that is to somebody who is a little bit tired and really looking forward to taking a few days in between before it got into the heavy-duty holiday season.

Having said that, I have now learned that there is no such thing as leaving a little bit early around this place when it comes to the end of the season. That is because, notwithstanding some of the remarks made earlier today, it's not all roses and it's not all pleasantries when it comes to House leaders and their discussions and their decisions around what comes and doesn't come into our agenda for debate.

So in that vein, I have to say that although we are going to be sitting next week, we're going to be sitting next week to debate something that I think could be taking a second place or the back seat to other issues.

Excuse me while I pick up what I dropped. I was trained to always pick up what you drop. So there you go,

Mom, I picked it up as soon as I dropped it. It didn't lay on the floor for another week.

So the issue is that there are many other items, certainly from my perspective—even government bills—that I would rather be sinking my teeth into right now, not to mention some of the private members' bills even that I have on the order paper that I think we could be spending some good time on next week. I know for a fact, or I suspect strongly, notwithstanding what other members have said, that these other issues are not going to be coming up, that in fact there is only one sole reason for us to meet next week, and that is to deal with Bill 173, which the government tabled yesterday, around the increases.

I have to tell you, though, I would even prefer that we deal with a bill that was introduced just about two weeks ago, Bill 165, which is about making the child advocate independent. Now, if we had brought that bill forward and taken it through the process, I would have happily sat here and not seen any conflict in my own mind around the prioritization of the government and what needs to be done in the province of Ontario, because the independence of the child advocate is long overdue. So passing strange how something that was promised back in 2003, re-promised back in 2005 and re-promised again at the beginning of this year—finally we have the bill. But, of course, we just have the bill. We have to go through second reading, we have to go through committee public hearings and clause-by-clause, and we have to go through third reading. All of those things take time. So I would say we'll be lucky if we actually end up with an independent child advocate by the end of this government's term, specifically because they're pushing it to the bottom of the pile in terms of priority. They've been doing that all along, and they're continuing to do that. It sits on the bottom of the pile with other issues that are of significant concern to New Democrats, and that includes the issues raised by my friend from Niagara Centre around job losses in this province. In fact, members of the Conservative caucus have also raised in this current debate the issue of job losses in the province of Ontario.

1720

I come from Hamilton. We have seen significant job losses in our city. It's extremely difficult for families to make ends meet and extremely difficult for families to go through this very season. I think the member from Niagara Centre was very correct when he indicated that the stresses on families who have lost their jobs, at this time of year specifically, are horrible. It leads to all kinds of personal tragedies that I think we need to acknowledge, and we need to, therefore, redouble our efforts to deal with issues like the reduction of jobs in our economy and economic stagnation, at least in the manufacturing sector. It's a significant problem in the city I come from.

But do you know what? There are a couple of other issues that I think we should be putting on the record that need to be addressed. Again, the member from Niagara Centre raised the issue of injured workers. Just last week, we were out in front of the Ministry of Labour offices

urging the minister not only to deal with the indexation of workers' compensation pensions for injured workers but also to acknowledge and recognize the fact that 35% of workers in this province are not covered by WSIB. They can go to work and get injured—and many of those are in the financial and insurance sectors, quite frankly, which everyone knows do have injuries, particularly repetitive strain injuries, for example. Nonetheless, there are workplace-related injuries that go on in those sectors. Private schools and the insurance and banking industries particularly: Those industries can well afford to pay into the workers' compensation system so that when their workers are injured on the job, they can, at the very least, have some kind of income replacement because, through no fault of their own, they were injured on the job. So that's one.

Another one that I think we should be dealing with, quite frankly, is the clawback of the national child benefit. That's something the government could have and should have been doing. We could be spending some real effort on making that happen. There's the special diet. The fact that they have changed the special diet forms that now restrict the ability of people who are on ODSP and Ontario Works, who need a special diet to maintain their health and keep them well, people who are diabetic, people who have conditions, for example, like ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease—we were able to take some action on that one small piece. But there are many, many others who are having significant reductions in their well-being, who are having significant negative health effects because this government refuses to acknowledge that their new special diet regime has become extremely punitive and causes significant health problems for people.

The other one I thought was important to raise—and there are really so many. But the whole reality—and I'm going back to the beginning again in terms of raising issues—is that this government still refuses to invest the dollars they said they were going to invest in our child care sector. That's a problem. That \$300 million would go a long way on an annual basis to create more child care spaces, and of course that would enable families and parents to be able to get good-quality, regulated developmental child care for their kids. I know that many, many parents in the province of Ontario need and want that.

I believe I'm supposed to be leaving a few minutes at the end of my speech. So, on that point, I'm thankful to have had an opportunity to speak to these issues because I really believe that when it comes to the salaries, the pay increases and the pay raises that this government would rather talk about, as a New Democrat I believe that these other issues are much more important.

Mr. Ramal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in support of this motion. It's very important to be here to do the business that's needed to serve the people of Ontario.

When I got elected in 2003, I had one assumption: We're here to serve. The time and the location don't matter. Whenever the opportunity is open for serving people, we should be there to serve. That's why I'm sup-

porting this motion to extend the time in the House: to serve the people of Ontario, to deal with some issues concerning the people of Ontario, to deal with some bills that are still not finished yet, because it's very important to pass those bills, very important to deal with a lot of issues, because people trusted us when they elected us to do this job for them.

I'm honoured and privileged to be a part of the government. I think all the time about the people of Ontario. When I go to my riding of London-Fanshawe, people ask me all the time, "What happened?" I attend many functions, and people ask me, "What happened today at Queen's Park? What kinds of bills did you guys pass? What kinds of issues are going on there?" I talk all the time about education, how much we work with the educators in the province of Ontario. I'm happy and honoured and privileged when I go to schools. I see the happiness, I see the teachers working very hard. The teachers smile when they see me. They think we have the best government ever, we have the best Minister of Education ever working with them, creating peace and tranquility, which we never had before. You see now, in the education system, the teachers, the boards and the parents working together to make sure we have a good education system in Ontario.

When I drive down on the highway from here to London, I see a lot of construction: bridges being built, the highway being expanded. All the people are happy because they can have a safe road. They have the ability to move their goods from one city to another city. It's very important for all of us.

Last summer, when we visited the farming community with the honourable member John Wilkinson, we had the chance to meet the farmers; we had the chance to visit many farmers in the province of Ontario. We had a chance to meet with them one-on-one, to visit their farm and listen to them. I felt we have a great community and we have great people talking to you because they think, and they believe strongly, they have a government in Ontario that listens to them and listens to their concern and tries to work with them to ensure that every one of them has a good life and a good future.

When you visit the hospitals, you see also the relaxation; you see people happy. I know it's not fixed all the way. We're trying to establish a mechanism to work with health care people who work on the front line to serve the people of Ontario. We see them all the time. We also visit many different long-term-care homes in the province of Ontario. You see our progress there. We're still working with those sections, with those elements of our society on a daily basis to make sure everyone in Ontario is being served well by this government.

We pass many different bills in this House. Lately, we had a great bill, Bill 124, fair access to regulating bodies. I had a chance to work as PA with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Minister Mike Colle, who worked very hard since we started consultation on this bill to visit many different communities across the province of Ontario, to talk to many different regulating

bodies, to talk to many different stakeholders, to talk to many different foreign-trained skilled workers, and he listened to them. The minister's staff worked very hard to establish a bill to serve their concerns, to look after them, because we believe strongly that everyone in the province of Ontario should be able to use his or her skills to serve himself or herself, their family and the people of Ontario. That's why we passed that bill yesterday.

Today we passed another bill—what did we call the bill today?—the public service act, and also to regulate or reform so many different parts of the government, from real estate departments to bankers to bereavement homes to cemeteries to gift cards. So many different concerns, so many different elements were in this bill to help people to be served very well because, as you know, many different laws and regulations had been established a long time ago. Times have changed; technology changed; modern life changed; situations changed; the population changed. Therefore, it's time to change some of those bills, to reform those bills. That's why I think this extension gives us some chance to deal with more bills to help the people of Ontario.

1730

The member for Peterborough—he's a great member. He represents his constituents very well; and also the member for Huron–Bruce, who spoke before me about the importance of being in this place, even if we're going to stay until Christmas in order to serve the people of Ontario. Also, the member from London North Centre, who worked together most of the time to visit many communities to work on different issues, from health care to education to colleges to universities to hospitals to long-term homes and all the stuff that's important to us.

That's why we call ourselves the London team. We have on our team the Minister of Labour, Steve Peters. We have also on our team the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Chris Bentley, and we have the member for London North Centre, Deb Matthews, who worked very hard on different fronts. This team has worked very hard on different fronts. Especially lately, they're working especially hard on the poverty line. They're trying to solve and trying to address the poverty issue in the province of Ontario, especially—she's a part of the women's caucus: the member from—

Interjection.

Mr. Ramal: No, no. Maria Van Bommel, the member for—

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): Huron–Bruce.

Mr. Ramal: No, not Huron–Bruce. What's the—

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): Lambton.

Mr. Ramal: Lambton. Yes.

Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture): Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mr. Ramal: Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. Thank you, Minister, for correcting me.

She is the head of the women's caucus and works very hard. Most of the time we have the privilege of visiting

that women's caucus, that deals with a lot of issues. As I mentioned today, yesterday and the day before, they've been dealing with the poverty issue. They've been listening to many different stakeholders.

We have a vibrant caucus. We have vibrant members in the caucus who, all the time, are trying to tackle all of the issues, without any fears. That's why we are here today to serve, and we are privileged to continue working next week in order to deal with all the issues, with passion, ability and an open mind to solve them all.

I believe it's our privilege. The people of Ontario give us a chance to be here to be able to serve them and be able to represent them. That's why I came: to be part of this government, to be elected in 2003, to be the advocate of the people of London–Fanshawe, to listen to them and to consult them every single time we have an issue and when we have a critical time.

Mr. Leah: What about Bill 124?

Mr. Ramal: Bill 124 was a very strong bill. It's a very positive step forward. A very important element of our society is going to benefit from that bill, especially the newcomers who come with education: doctors, professors, engineers, nurses—all of the people who come to Ontario who want to be full citizens. They want to utilize their ability to serve the great community of Ontario. That's why the government came with that bill: to serve them and to give them the chance to be strong participants in this community.

I think we're on the right track—also in the right directions—in order to serve the people of Ontario.

Mr. McMeekin: Right track, right direction.

Mr. Ramal: Right track and right directions. I believe that most of the time when we have debate in the House, we listen to the opposition. The opposition come with good ideas sometimes, and we work with them because we have an open mind. Personally, myself, I like to have the dialogue open all of the time, because the only way we'll have the ability to serve the people of Ontario is when we work together as a team. All of the elected members of this House—it's the only way we can proceed.

In the end, I want to wish all of my constituents in London a Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year. Hopefully, I'll be able to speak with them and to them before that time. If I don't get the chance, I wish them happy holidays and a great season.

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr. Berardinetti: Southwest, but it's close to Centre.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry, sir. My apologies.

Mr. Berardinetti: I'm right beside the Honourable Speaker's riding. We share a common boundary. In just a couple of minutes, I wanted to say—

Interjection: You should invite him over once in a while.

Mr. Berardinetti: I do invite him over once in a while. He invites me over as well.

Just in a few moments, the motion before us today is straightforward: that we shall continue to meet until Thursday, December 21. I have no problem with doing that. I think there are a number of important pieces of legislation in front of us that we need to deal with, and I'm happy to sit and debate those issues.

I think back and I look back at how far we've come in these past three years, the amount of legislation we've put through and our commitments on health care, education and so many other areas where we've made improvements and still need to make more improvements, because the job is not done yet. We are still working on that, and that's been made clear through the Premier and through members of the cabinet in their various announcements.

I just wanted to say that I'm proud to be part of the government, proud to be able to sit next week and debate the necessary bills. Earlier on, the member from Niagara Centre, Mr. Kormos, talked about workers and their conditions. I think about my own father, who's sitting at home right now with about 65% of his hearing gone because of the working conditions in the wood mill that he worked at and the 10- or 12-hour workdays six days a week. I grew up without a father because he was always at the lumberyard, trying to earn minimum wage. So I well know and understand and can appreciate the dangers of that kind of work, that kind of heavy labour, and the toll it takes on a body. When that body reaches 70 or 75 years old, it seems like a 90-year-old body.

We've done a lot to try to improve things. It's not a perfect world; we're trying to make it better. I'm happy to sit here and say hello to constituents. I know that my father right now sits at home and watches with his nephew, Matthew, my brother's son, and Katharine, Lia and Amanda. They all sit together and they watch when they get the chance. My father knows that he tried to make something better for us, and we in turn will try to make it better for the next generation, for our children, when that day comes.

So I'm happy to sit till the 21st and, if need be, beyond that, and to come back early if we need to, because I'm here to work and to represent the constituents of Scarborough Southwest.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–Baie James): C'est avec plaisir que j'ai la chance de participer à ce débat, parce que c'est un débat, je pense, qui est important pour beaucoup de monde, non seulement ici à l'Assemblée certainement, mais aussi dans les comtés qu'on représente.

Premièrement, ce débat aujourd'hui fait affaire avec une motion pour que l'Assemblée revienne au travail la semaine prochaine, du lundi au jeudi. Ce travail va être pour avoir un débat pour donner une augmentation de salaire aux députés provinciaux ici à l'Assemblée.

Je veux être très clair, comme j'ai dit aux médias aujourd'hui. Est-ce que les députés veulent toujours avoir plus? Oui. Est-ce que le monde travaille fort? Bien oui; il n'y a pas de question. Mais je pense que le point est qu'il y a beaucoup de monde dans cette province qui ont besoin de l'aide et de l'assistance du gouvernement

provincial. C'est pas mal difficile pour ce monde-là d'accepter que les députés vont avoir une augmentation de salaire de 20 % ou 25 % quand on a du monde dans des communautés à travers l'Ontario qui ont perdu leurs emplois.

Je regarde le monde dans mon comté—à Opasatika, à Hearst, à Timmins, à Smooth Rock Falls, certainement, et à d'autres places—qui ont perdu leurs emplois. Comme leur député, je pense que je leur dois au moins l'opportunité de parler de leur part dans ce débat pour que le monde ici à l'Assemblé sache qu'ils ont eu beaucoup de difficultés et qu'ils ont perdu leurs emplois.

Si les députés disent, « Écoutez, on va tous, dans le noir, sortir de l'Assemblée un jeudi soir et accepter un projet de loi » —comme on dit en anglais, « Nod, nod, wink, wink»—je ne pense pas que ça va aller très bien avec le monde que je représente.

Je regarde ma collègue M^{me} Cheri DiNovo, qui a introduit pour nous un projet de loi qui est très important sur la question du salaire minimum. On a tous dans nos comtés à travers l'Ontario du monde qui travaillent fort au salaire minimum et qui veulent avoir la chance d'espérer avoir certaines affaires que nous prenons pour acquis : acheter des bebelles pour leurs enfants dans le temps de Noël, acheter un peu d'extra sur l'épicerie à la fin de la semaine et avoir un loyer qui fait du bons sens. C'est pas mal difficile quand tu travailles pour un salaire minimum. De la part des néo-démocrates, notre députée M^{me} DiNovo a introduit un projet de loi qui dit, « On doit éléver ce salaire minimum à 10 \$ l'heure. »

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En regardant ce monde-là, je pense qu'on doit au moins avoir la chance d'avoir un débat dans cette Assemblée pour dire au gouvernement que c'est toute une affaire d'essayer d'aider les députés. Oui, les députés travaillent fort. Les députés aimeraient avoir plus d'argent. Mais il y a beaucoup de monde dans cette province, tel que le monde sur le salaire minimum, tel que les travailleurs qui ont été congédiés ou qui ont perdu leurs emplois, et d'autres personnes qui ont besoin de l'assistance du gouvernement provincial.

Quand on voit un gouvernement, tel que celui de M. McGuinty, introduire un projet de loi sans regarder les besoins des autres personnes dans la province, je pense que c'est difficile.

On va avoir de la chance. Le gouvernement a décidé d'avoir ce débat la semaine prochaine. On va être ici. On va participer à ce débat et on va s'assurer que les voix du monde de nos comtés sont entendues et que le monde comprend bien que, dans la province de l'Ontario, il y a certaines personnes, telles que les députés, qui vont faire très bien cette année. Mais il y a beaucoup de monde dans nos comtés qui ont des misères sérieuses quand ça vient à leur situation financière. Ils demandent à travers nous, les néo-démocrates, et autres s'ils veulent se joindre à nous dans ce débat, de faire quelque chose pour avancer les dossiers qui sont importants pour le monde dans notre province.

Je finis le débat en disant que le gouvernement aurait pu décider de faire ça différemment. D'habitude, il y a un

accord entre les trois partis concernant la manière dont on va avancer les salaires ou les bénéfices des députés. C'est un peu triste que M. McGuinty n'ait pas été capable de faire ça pour des raisons—ce n'est pas totalement de sa faute, mais c'est de sa faute certainement. J'aimerais beaucoup mieux avoir une situation où on aurait pu accepter quelque chose à l'unanimité.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I am also delighted to be joining in the debate this afternoon. The question in front of us is whether or not we're all going to agree—or most of us, anyway—to sit next week. I want you to know that I agree. I believe we should sit next week because there are many important pieces of legislation that are still on the order book and they need to be dealt with.

There may be some members opposite who are going to vote against this. They don't think we should be here next week, and I would say that that is in character. I know the member from Niagara—left-of-centre brought up some concern as to those people who are hard-working and about whether or not there's some justice in the world. I think about who has to work at night. You know who has to work at night? People who work on shift work have to work at night. They really don't have any choice. They may have a collective agreement, they may not have a collective agreement, but many of them work at night.

I know that our bravest public servants—not us—work at night. Our nurses and doctors, paramedics, firefighters, police officers and corrections officers work at night. But do you know who doesn't want to work at night? Since this session began, there have been 76 votes in this Legislature about sitting for evenings. I want to tell the good people back home that the days here are Monday to Thursday, and in this place we start at 1:30 in the afternoon. On Thursdays, we come in at 10, but from Monday to Thursday, when we're sitting, we work in the Legislature starting at 1:30.

Seventy-six times the question has been asked, “Are you prepared to sit at night, from 6:45 to 9:30?” and 76 times in a row, since the beginning of this session, just since the last throne speech—we're not going back to 2003, just this year—every member of the third party stood in their place and said, “Nope. I'm not working tonight.” If it was up to me, I would work. I know all the members of the government caucus said we're prepared to work at night. I know that many members of the official opposition said, “Yes. Given what we're remunerated, we're going to work tonight. We think that's right. There's important public work that has to be done.” But consistently, 76 times in a row, just in the last year or so, the members of the third party said no.

So it's no surprise to me. When we say, “We really should work next week in this House,” who's opposed to it? Well, we're going to find out, because in this House you've got to stand in your place and vote. When you stand in your place and vote, you tell your constituents back home if you're for something or you're against something.

But there's one bill in front of our House right now, Bill 173, that goes a step further, because it doesn't just require you to vote and say that you're opposed to something. You then have to, if you feel so compelled, make an election. I think that that will be very, very instructive for all the good people of Ontario, that there may be people who will stand on one side and say that they're opposed to Bill 173, and then the question their constituents will ask is, “What did you do about the election? Within that 60-day period of time, what did you decide?”

I know some of us are very comfortable with that, because we feel that the Integrity Commissioner—the man in this province who has, without doubt, integrity; it's right in his job description—the Honourable Justice Coulter Osborne, has given all of us some sage advice. Some of us in this House will take it; others will not. But all of us will be held to account as to whether we voted for or against the bill. All of us will be held to account as to whether we decided to elect or not to elect. I think that was very wise of the government to do so.

I think it's wise that this issue is before the House now, not at some nefarious future date, where people can say one thing now and say something else later on. I'll give you an example of that. I distinctly remember the previous government stating that there was no deficit in the final year of their government, and then the Provincial Auditor discovered some \$5.5 billion worth of debt.

I distinctly remember a former colleague of ours who's now the federal Minister of Finance, Mr. Flaherty, backing up Prime Minister Harper, who said on the campaign trail, “I'm not going to tax income trusts. No, not me.” Then on Halloween—boo—he decided to do it. I want you to know, and I'll put on the record, that I agree with Mr. Flaherty. Times had changed. Companies were structuring their affairs so that they would not retain earnings, so that they would not grow, and they did it so they could avoid paying tax. I think Mr. Flaherty had a very difficult decision. He said that he didn't like making it, but he had to make it. It reminds me of my friend the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Greg Sorbara, who was faced with a different set of facts: some \$5.5 billion worth of hidden deficit. He too had to make a very difficult choice. That's what we do here. Many, many times we have to make difficult choices.

But there have been some wonderful choices made in this session. I want to commend my good friend the member from London–Fanshawe, who's the parliamentary assistant to the Honourable Mike Colle, our Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Khalil Ramal and his wife, Nisrine, are a wonderful but typical tale in the province of Ontario of people who are newcomers. Mr. Ramal and his wife, who is a medical doctor, for me personify what it is to come to this province. They will tell you the stories about how this is a wonderful country and a wonderful province, but it hasn't always been welcoming to all newcomers.

Our history in this province is filled with the history of the newcomer. Today I know was a particularly proud

day for my friend Khalil Ramal. At a reception that was held with the newcomer communities across Ontario to celebrate the passage last night—I want to say to all members in the government and opposite that it's one of those times when we all came together. We all agreed that Bill 124 should be passed. There was no opposition last night. I didn't hear a lot of debate last night. There seemed to be perhaps some people who decided to be quiet about it. But the most important thing is that historic piece of legislation, which I think is going to set a standard for all provinces and our federal government about the fact that if you come to Canada, you're welcome. We don't just say that we're going to roll out the welcome mat, we actually do something about it. We actually make sure that you have fair access to the profession that you have learned in your country of origin and those skills and those talents that you've brought to this wonderful province.

I know next week as well will be difficult. My good friend from Durham was saying that on Monday night he has his daughter coming in from England. My daughter Alexandra is in first year at Western. She was counting on her daddy to come and pick her up on Tuesday. I had to tell her this afternoon that I'm not going to be able to do that. All of us are going to have to make some sacrifices, but we have important work to do. We are valued by the public for the work we do—not at all times, but at the end of the day, they know that democracy is better than the alternative: no democracy. That's why we're here, and we take that very, very seriously. So if it means that we need to sit next week to move through important pieces of legislation like Bill 130, which is going to reform the Municipal Act, I think it's very important that we're here to do that.

I want to say particularly to my constituents that I, like other members, wish everyone in our constituencies the best of the season. I say in a non-partisan fashion that I extend that to all the members in this chamber. I look forward to standing in my place and voting and subsequently electing on Bill 173.

The Acting Speaker: The time for debate is now concluded, it being 10 minutes to 6.

In accordance with the motion agreed to earlier today, Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 277. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard some noes.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

There being five members, call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1751 to 1801.

The Acting Speaker: Would all those who are in favour please rise and be counted by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Phillips, Gerry
Arthurs, Wayne	Kular, Kuldip	Qaadri, Shafiq
Balkissoon, Bas	Leal, Jeff	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Levac, Dave	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	MacLeod, Lisa	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Marsales, Judy	Runciman, Robert W.
Bryant, Michael	Martiniuk, Gerry	Ruprecht, Tony
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Sergio, Mario
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Smith, Monique
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Smitherman, George
Di Cocco, Caroline	Miller, Norm	Van Bommel, Maria
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Fonseca, Peter	Munro, Julia	Wilkinson, John
Gerretsen, John	O'Toole, John	Zimmer, David
Hoy, Pat	Patten, Richard	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will please stand and be recorded by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Marchese, Rosario
DiNovo, Cheri	Kormos, Peter	Martel, Shelley

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 47; the nays are 6.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The time now being after 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1803.

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Chair / Présidente: Andrea Horwath
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Vacant
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Andrea Horwath, Jeff Leal, Dave Levac,
Gerry Martiniuk, Bill Murdoch,
Lou Rinaldi, Mario Sergio
Clerk / Greffier: Susan Sourial

Social Policy / Politique sociale

Chair / Président: Ernie Parsons
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Khalil Ramal
Ted Chudleigh, Peter Fonseca,
Kuldip Kular, Jeff Leal,
Rosario Marchese, Bill Mauro, John O'Toole,
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