

No. 157B



N° 157B

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
Second Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario
Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 16 April 2007

Lundi 16 avril 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 16 April 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 16 avril 2007

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario's electoral system, when Bill 155 is next called as a government order the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That there shall be no deferral of any vote allowed pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Mr. Bradley has moved government order number 324. Mr. Bradley.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I will be sharing my time with a number of members of the government caucus, and they will be standing to speak at the present time, I understand. So the members of the government who are standing to speak on this will stand.

The Acting Speaker: There is no sharing. Either you have to speak or I go in rotation.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I understand.

The Acting Speaker: So you're not speaking? Further debate? Is there any further debate?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): Good evening. Sorry, you caught me a little off guard. I thought I was coming in about an hour.

Before I begin discussing the importance of this bill, I'd like to take a minute to thank each and every member of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform and their chair, George Thompson, for all the dedication and hard work. I'd also like to acknowledge, if I may be permitted, the citizens' assembly members from the Hamilton area: Rosemarie Arsenault from Hamilton East; Frank O'Grady from Hamilton West; Susan Tiley from Stoney Creek; Jeff Witt from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot; and, last but not least, Jennie Stakich, the

member from Hamilton Mountain, who said she was excited to be chosen because she thought the process would be very interesting.

I hope that the last seven months since the first meeting of the citizens' assembly took place was as exciting and rewarding as expected.

The selection process for the assembly members first began almost one year ago, on April 25, 2006, when invitation letters were mailed to over 120,000 randomly selected Ontarians. From there, 12,000 responded and 1,200 were invited to selection meetings across the province. One hundred and three members were chosen, one from each of Ontario's ridings: 52 women and 51 men. Once again, congratulations on all their hard work.

This bill that we are speaking about this evening is a testament to the hard work that was done by this citizens' assembly, and I'd like to share with you some quotes from the members about their time spent discussing and debating electoral systems.

"Participating in the citizens' assembly is my chance to have a say in the electoral process for people from northern Ontario"—Julia Craner, assembly member.

"The province is changing demographically and it is important to examine other electoral systems to see which works best"—John Toll, assembly member.

"I'm excited about participating in a committee that jointly will discuss and review the electoral process and possibly contribute to change"—Joyce Hughes, assembly member.

"The citizens' assembly is a once-in-a-lifetime experience"—Mappanar Sundrelingam, assembly member.

Finally, "I want to express this point to my fellow citizens: Elections are very important to the democracy of our country"—Zaya Abram Yonan, assembly member.

This bill represents all of the things said above by citizens' assembly members. After months of meeting every second weekend at Osgoode Hall Law School and after over 30 public forums held across the province, the citizens' assembly process is beginning to wind down.

1850

This past weekend, the citizens' assembly voted 94 to 8 in favour of recommending the mixed member proportional electoral system. Although we will not receive the citizens' assembly final report until May 15, the vote indicates that the assembly will be recommending that Ontarians be asked to decide in a referendum on whether to adopt a mixed member proportional electoral system. In order to enable that referendum on October 10, Bill 155 would be required to pass. I look forward to the final

report, which will provide much more detail and rationale behind the citizens' assembly decision.

This time allocation is fundamentally about the work of the citizens' assembly and about the process required in order to conduct a referendum. Given last weekend's decision, stakeholders and the public will expect the rules relating to the conduct of the referendum campaign and the referendum question to be made public in a timely fashion.

Pour la première fois dans l'histoire de notre province, la population aura l'occasion de participer à un débat ouvert et approfondi sur notre système électoral. C'est une occasion sans précédent pour les Ontariens et les Ontariennes d'aider à renforcer notre démocratie. Jamais un gouvernement ontarien n'a donné aux citoyens ce genre d'occasion de façonner les rouages du gouvernement. C'est un procédé sain et passionnant.

This bill has gone through a thorough and rigorous debate process. In fact, it has been debated for over 11 hours, including two days of third reading. I had the great pleasure today to answer questions from the member for Kenora–Rainy River, the leader of the third party, and to discuss some of the fundamental aspects of this bill.

We appreciate that there are groups concerned about the threshold. We have heard their arguments for a simple majority and those in support of our recommended decision rule. What we must remember is that the adoption of a new electoral system would represent a foundational change to Ontario's democracy and that a decision of this magnitude deserves to have the support of a solid majority of Ontarians across the province. The proposed legislation reflects the significance of this decision. We are requiring a consensus among the Ontario electorate and the regions of our province. We believe the people of Ontario deserve that level of certainty.

This is historic legislation. A decision to change electoral systems should not be taken lightly. Regular elections allowing citizens to choose who will represent them and govern are the foundation of our democracy, and so we have developed a referendum process so that Ontarians can make a choice on the future of the electoral system by which they elect members to this Legislature. With the establishment of a citizens' assembly and the introduction of this legislation, we're making it clear that the shape of Ontario's democracy is a matter for Ontarians to decide.

Our government believes that citizens should have a meaningful voice in shaping their democracy. That's why we created this opportunity. The very exercise of re-examining our electoral system will reinvigorate and heighten our understanding of our democratic system. It will also contribute to a strong and vibrant democracy that will serve us now and in the future.

We have also had the opportunity to participate in the formation of a Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform. They met for one weekend and mirrored for that one weekend the citizens' assembly process. One hundred and three high school students, one from each riding in

Ontario, began their weekend with a day at the Legislature, where they were able to attend question period as well as a reception that followed. Many were even able to meet their local MPP and ask any questions they had. I believe that many have kept in touch online and continue to discuss everything they have learned, and have watched closely as this bill has worked its way through the legislative process. With the assistance of the Minister of Education, we have funded a program in the schools as well where curriculum materials are available for those teachers and students who are interested in having in-school student assemblies.

Although the citizens' assembly will not submit its final report until May 15, this legislation will ensure that if a referendum is required, we have a legitimate process in place that would provide Ontarians with a clear outcome. It's up to Ontarians to decide which electoral system best reflects their values. Every voter in this province will have a chance to consider and to make the choice for themselves in this referendum, and that's what this bill is all about: a process in place for Ontarians so that they can have the final say on electoral reform. This is an important decision that deserves to have the support of a solid majority of Ontarians across the province. By participating in a referendum, Ontarians will contribute to building a strong, vital democracy for our province in the future.

This bill also went to committee. A number of individuals came and spoke to this bill. Everyday Ontarians feel passionate about this bill, and some drove across the province to be heard at these committee hearings. The committee heard a diverse array of opinions on a wide range of areas within the bill.

The citizens' assembly has invested much time and effort in making its recommendation. This legislation reflects the significance of this decision. The assembly is a new form of decision-making that is empowering citizens as never before. No government in this province has ever given citizens this kind of opportunity to shape Ontario's democracy. Citizen engagement is all about providing opportunities for Ontarians to have meaningful participation in the deliberative and decision-making process.

It is also about facilitating debate and discussion and creating forums for Ontarians to listen to one another. Processes within this bill have to be put in place in time for the next provincial election so that this referendum can take place. This bill has provisions that allow the referendum question to be written. The content of the question must be based on the citizens' assembly recommendation. This legislation ensures that the question will be presented in a manner that is clear, concise and impartial.

We are working to move towards the next steps in this democratic renewal agenda.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my pleasure to join the debate today on this time allocation motion to do with Bill 155, which is about setting the

threshold for the upcoming referendum that will occur on October 10, the same date as the next provincial election.

It does seem a little strange, though, that we're having a time allocation debate on a referendum bill, on a bill that's about electoral reform and democratic reform, that we're effectively ending debate on this bill by this evening's debate, because I'm sure the representatives of the third party who will speak after me will make it very clear that a number of members—I think most of their caucus—that were keen to speak to this bill and wanted to get their feelings on the record will now be denied that opportunity by this debate we're having here this evening. So it does seem a little strange that this bill is being time-allocated.

Certainly, democracy can and should be enhanced and public confidence restored by government through measures other than electoral reform, such as, to begin with, keeping campaign promises, respecting the role of individual MPPs, fixing the lack of productivity in the Legislature, improving decorum in the House, improving the flow of information to the public and the media and the opposition.

I had the opportunity to take part in the select committee on electoral reform. That committee made a number of different recommendations. The member from Lanark–Carleton, who will be speaking a little bit later this evening, and I did write a dissenting opinion to the report on electoral reform. I will get to that a little bit later, but I'd like to quote from that report. In the dissenting opinion to the report on electoral reform submitted by Mr. Sterling and myself the inevitability of the assembly recommending change was noted: "With the present lack of trust by the public in their politicians, the temptation to seek change will be virtually overwhelming. It will be difficult if not impossible for an objective assessment of the current system to be carried out due to the cynicism and distrust that has arisen towards politicians and the political process." So where we have the current government that was elected and has set a new record for broken promises, I'd say the danger with the referendum that we're about to hold this fall is that people vote to voice their displeasure with the government for having broken so many electoral promises instead of voting about the proposed changes that are being put forward by the citizens' assembly.

The minister did mention some of the members of the citizens' assembly. I did have an opportunity to meet with the representative from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Jordan Elliott, who I know took his job as one of the 103 members on that assembly very seriously and spent a lot of time on the work he did. I thank him for that, for his dedication and all the time that he spent. I know that's probably true of all the members who took part. I had the opportunity, as part of the select committee on electoral reform, to visit British Columbia and meet with some of the members involved in that process. That was long after their process was done. They were still quite involved and engaged, which is a positive thing. In their case the recommendation was for a different system than

is being proposed by the citizens' assembly here, but they were very much still engaged.

1900

I would like to point out that the select committee on electoral reform recommended that the referendum should be binding upon a vote of 50% plus one, but the government has actually decided to go with a higher threshold of 60% plus one. In light of the record of this government, their many broken promises, perhaps that is a wise thing to do so that it isn't just people voting against the record of the government, it's people voting for the proposed changes.

I note that the citizens' assembly has just come out—and there have been a lot of media reports about the suggestions they're making for a new system for electing MPPs to this place. At this point, I haven't seen the final report. I know that's due May 15. However, I would certainly like to raise some questions as to what is being proposed.

I know it's being recommended that the number of the MPPs in this place increase. I think if you went out and asked the general public how they felt about having more politicians, probably most of them would say that that's not necessarily a good thing. We would be increasing the number of politicians. I think the recommendation is to go up some 20 politicians. There are currently 103 politicians. But the number representing geographic areas, as I understand it, would go down to 90 from the current 103, and then the balance—some 39 members—would be made up from lists which the political parties would make.

Without having seen the final report, there are some questions I would like to raise at this point. I can certainly speak for rural and northern ridings. My riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka is huge at this point. For me to drive from where I live to Dokis First Nation, as an example, is a three-and-a-half-hour drive one way. So the idea of there being fewer northern ridings or larger ridings is something that I would not be thrilled about. Certainly, for me, the constituency and all the issues that come out of it are very important and they're something I spend an awful lot of time on. From my perspective, that's a big part of the reason why I am here. So getting bigger ridings is not something I would be supportive of.

The other part of it is that you have the new 39 members who come off lists to make up proportionality, based on the recommendation. Those members would not have a constituency, so I'm sure there would be a lot of people lining up for that position because I probably spend more of my time in the riding learning about issues and being accountable to the constituents of Parry Sound–Muskoka than I do down here in Toronto. It's a huge riding and I spend a lot of time getting around to meet with people, to attend events and to learn about things going on in the riding. I am accountable to those people. These 39 new MPPs would not have a constituency, would not have anyone other than the party bosses, the party leaders that they would be accountable to.

How you get on the list is something that I would wonder about as well, because we'll really hand over quite a bit of power to the parties to determine who gets on the list. Essentially, they'd be unelected because they'd be appointed to the list and then would become MPPs based on their party's percentage of the total vote. That's another thing that I would certainly wonder about. As I say, I haven't seen the final report, but those are two that I certainly would have some questions about.

Our leader, John Tory, has been pushing for parliamentary reform, and that's what was highlighted in the select committee on electoral reform dissenting opinion. John Tory has been looking to make this place function better, and specifically he's brought up making this place play its role of oversight of the finances of the province on a more significant scale. Right now we have, basically, the Minister of Finance deciding most of the financial questions of the province. You have an estimates committee, which really is more political than anything else. It doesn't in any way go through in great detail the finances of the province. I can tell you from my experience of talking to other jurisdictions that really that's one of the central roles of being a politician: to make laws and also to oversee the finances of the province. Particularly when you see the sorts of increases in spending we've seen in the last three and a half years—some \$22 billion a year or \$4,500 per household under this government—that's something that I think needs more oversight. I know when I had the opportunity to travel to the Council of State Governments and meet with some of the American representatives, they'd spend about half their time going almost line by line through the budget for their state, and have much more oversight than we do here. That's one thing we could really improve.

As well, I think that we could have the Legislature play a much greater role in terms of committee work. One of the committees that I think did an excellent job—of course, I sat on the select committee on electoral reform, but the select committee on alternative fuels was also made up of all parties and did some excellent work. Many of their recommendations were acted on. I believe that one of them, if I recall from memory, was removing the sales tax on biofuels and ethanol, so that the 14-cent provincial tax was removed by the actions of that committee. Also, with parliamentary reform, we need to enhance the role of the MPPs in this place so that they have more free votes and more say in the goings-on of Queen's Park.

I see that I've almost used up all the time I have available to speak. I know there are other things, but I would just like to say that there are a number of questions that came out of the process we've been through with the citizens' assembly. I'll look forward to the final report on the recommended option—this mixed member proportional option—the members have come out with. I think it's very, very important, though—and this was learned from the BC experience as well—that there be significant education on the question that is proposed. Certainly that was the BC experience, that there wasn't enough of an

education component for both the No and the Yes sides. Here in Ontario, I know that just in my own area on the weekend, for example, I was out speaking to people and asking them what they knew about it, and most didn't even know the process was going on. There's going to be a lot of education required for the people to be well informed so that come October 10 they'll be able to make a rational decision about whether they want to keep the current first past the post system we have now or whether they want to switch to this new proposed system, the mixed member proportional system. There will be a lot of education required in that.

Another point I wanted to talk about briefly before I close is the actual question itself. From the select committee on electoral reform, they recommended that the responsibility for the referendum question, including the wording and the number of questions to be asked and whether there would be a review, should rest with the Legislature, acting on the advice of the citizens' assembly, the select committee on electoral reform, if required, and Elections Ontario. I see that in this bill the government is actually having the cabinet make the decision on the actual question, so they didn't follow the advice, again, of the select committee on electoral reform.

I will close now and leave time for the members from Whitby–Ajax and Lanark–Carleton, who I know are going to want to make some points as well. I'd just finish by saying I would advise all those people out there who are just learning about the citizens' assembly proposal to do their best to learn as much as they can about it to help make a decision come October 10.

1910

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

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Thank you kindly, Speaker, and I want you to know that this brief, brief 50 minutes is going to be shared by my very capable and talented colleague Paul Ferreira, the newly elected member for York South–Weston.

What a crock of spit. This is an absolute crock of spit. And for the minister to come in here today and talk about this government's commitment to democratic reform when the debate on a critical element of that so-called reform becomes the subject matter of a guillotine motion—amazing and thoroughly repugnant.

Let's take a look at the bill itself. I find it remarkable that a minister with this minister's experience would talk about how much time has been devoted to second reading debate—11 hours. Well, I'll tell you how much time is being devoted to third reading. You know, Speaker, that amongst the mere 10 New Democrats here, only you and I have had a chance to speak to this bill. This government's time allocation motion that we're debating tonight is going to prevent any other New Democrat from speaking to Bill 155. There weren't, quite frankly, that many more Conservatives who were allowed, permitted, to speak to the bill on third reading.

We've got a government that talks about democratic reform, that talks about wanting to ensure that people are

represented in a more effective way here at Queen's Park. That's what they say. What do they do? They bring in time allocation motions and they treat this chamber with disdain, disregard and disrespect. Indeed, the government's position this evening demonstrates disgust on the part of this government for the folks in this province.

Let's understand what Bill 155 is, because the suggestion that somehow it doesn't warrant debate is a suggestion that can only be born in naïveté or a purposeful attempt to be less than candid. Let's understand very, very carefully what the government has done, the game they've played. The government knows there's an appetite out there for that broad proposal of proportional representation, and indeed the undercurrent in all of this government's talk about democratic reform, democratic reform, democratic reform was the hint of a promise of something akin to proportional representation.

What did the government deliver? It delivered a citizens' assembly. The citizens' assembly has indicated where it finds itself at the end of its discussion. And then the government pretends somehow that Bill 155 in its present form, in its existing form, is going to deliver on promises that this government made while it was in waiting, seeking election here to Queen's Park. You know, Speaker, as the member for Beaches—East York and this caucus's critic on democratic reform, democratic renewal, what a phony proposition Bill 155 is.

Let's understand very, very clearly how little power has been given to the citizens' assembly, how little power. The citizens' assembly is being hidden behind now by a gutless government that has no intention of ever effecting democratic reform. They weren't even capable of effecting democratic renewal. Indeed, they have taken this chamber and the process, this parliamentary process here in the province of Ontario, beyond limits that were ever contemplated by the most hard-line, autocratic predecessors of McGuinty and his Liberal gang here at Queen's Park.

Let me tell you what I had occasion to tell one of the journalists earlier today who asked me what I thought were the three most important things that could be done here at Queen's Park to effect meaningful reform. I said, "Well, that doesn't trouble me at all. As a matter of fact, it comes quite easily."

If a government were to acquire a greater regard for the opposition and the role of the opposition, it would be a good first start, wouldn't it? This government's disregard for the opposition is demonstrated in its dismissal of second reading debate by saying, "Oh, well, we've had 11 hours." Where, oh, where did you get the idea that somehow legislation should be rapidly processed through a Parliament? Why? Shouldn't major reforms be the product and subject matter of a thoughtful, meticulous, sometimes painfully slow process? Shouldn't they?

I told the journalist earlier today that this government, like some of its predecessor governments, doesn't understand the role of the opposition. And when you have successive governments that undermine the opposition

with rule changes, like the Baird reforms to the standing orders—remember Baird's reforms to the standing orders? It's an absolute embarrassment to this Parliament that that government would use its majority, its jackboots, to invoke standing orders that would remove all but the symbols of opposition available to the opposition.

Second is committees. Committees at Queen's Park are a joke. Government members are scripted. They're rotated, not just from day to day but throughout the course of the day. If they're not writing love letters to their girlfriends, boyfriends, mistresses, concubines, anticipated assignations for the evening, they're nodding off or reading day-old or two-day-old newspapers. You've been in the committee rooms. Or they're playing, thumbs adrumming, with their BlackBerries, embarrassed at whatever it is that they're watching because they hold them down low so that nobody can see what's on the screen.

Interjections.

Mr. Kormos: Well, think about it. Is there somebody in here using a BlackBerry right now? I want you to see what I mean. They don't hold them up so that other people can see what's on the screen. They hold them down low like they're ashamed of what they're looking at. I've seen it over and over again. And you've got members here who want to be able to bring computers into the chamber? I'll tell you what. If you want to bring computers in, let me put this to those same members: Why don't you read your legislation first, and then we'll talk about whether or not you should be bringing computers into the chamber? You don't have to read all the bills. Just read the ones that are relevant to your little portfolio. You know what I'm talking about, Mr. Ramsay. You've been here a long time.

One of the greatest delights you can ever have in this chamber is to jog by the next speaker for a given caucus and pull the briefing notes off their table just moments before they stand to address this assembly about a particular bill or piece of legislation. Now, I wouldn't think of doing that to somebody who didn't have responsibility for the bill, but as I say, it's somewhat entertaining, the prospect of doing that to somebody whose bill it was to carry, either as an opposition member or, more significantly, as a government member.

Committees—a joke and, quite frankly, an embarrassment for the public who come here. Committees sitting shorter and shorter, committee members from the government side less and less interested and engaged, no willingness whatsoever to respond meaningfully to the presentations put to them by public presenters—no interest whatsoever. They vote as they're whipped; they read as they're scripted.

1920

Then, thirdly and finally, I told the journalist that there should be a recognition that we are attached to our constituencies, that we speak for folks and that the kind of folks that one member speaks for, the kind of communities that one member represents, the kind of neighbourhoods that one member advocates for could be very

different from the kinds of families, communities and neighbourhoods that another member advocates for—a rural member versus an urban member, a big-city member versus a small-town member, a northern member versus a southern member. That's not to say that those differences are not reconcilable, but they are differences, aren't they? Why, even within caucuses those differences rear their head, don't they, and call upon members of given caucuses to find some common ground so that that caucus can speak with one voice.

But understand what Bill 155 doesn't do: Bill 155 doesn't guarantee that there will be a reform exercise engaged in here at Queen's Park by the subsequent government even if the egregiously onerous threshold is overcome. As the member from Beaches—East York, you've spoken about that many times, haven't you, Speaker? You've railed about it, and with good cause. This super-majority is designed to fail, but even if it weren't to fail, what is the obligation of the subsequent government after a successful referendum based on what Bill 155 tells us? What is the obligation of a successive government to introduce legislation that reflects the proposal approved in the referendum?

And that's it, isn't it, Speaker? If I'm wrong, call me out of order. Feel free. If I'm even this far away from the truth on this one, stand up right here and now and shut me down. Do you understand what I'm saying, Speaker?

Appreciate that, because the reality is that Bill 155 doesn't in any way, shape or form assure Ontarians, whether they're farmers, whether they're teachers like the OECTA members who are here at Queen's Park this evening talking to MPPs about the need for more resources in our schools across Ontario, or whether they're retirees or factory workers who have just lost their jobs—like over 140,000 of them here in province of the Ontario, like the people down at Cadbury Schweppes processing and bottling plant down in St. Catharines. They made grape juice.

I had occasion to tell you about this the other day, and I'm going to tell you about it again. There's 2,000 acres of juice grapes here in the province of Ontario, most of in Niagara. There are 105 families farming those 2,000 acres, some for as many as three and four generations. They produce juice grapes—not wine grapes, juice grapes. Cadbury Schweppes is shutting down the factory and 26 workers are losing their jobs forever, and 105 farm families are losing their livelihoods. And this government hasn't uttered one word that would indicate any hope for help or support for those farm families. I'll tell you what. Those farm families, those juice grape growers, they'd sure like to see some democratic reform here in the province of Ontario, but this legislation isn't going to give it to them, because the subsequent government is obligated, should the referendum indeed pass, to only introduce legislation and not even to keep it alive. First prorogation of the House, the bill dies; end of story. First day of second reading, the bill may well never be called again if there's full compliance. Even if it passes second reading, the bill can fly off into legislative orbit, into the

black hole. And where are the Liberals? Well, as I told you so many times before, the nice thing about being a Liberal is you don't always have to be a Liberal. You can be a Liberal one day, you can be a Conservative the next day. You can campaign like a New Democrat and govern like a Tory. You can cross the floor; you can flip-flop. Ms. Stronach can be a Tory one day, she can be a Liberal the next, and flee off to Magna heaven with no guilt, shame or remorse, because there's really no difference, is there? The nice thing about being a Liberal is you don't always have to be a Liberal.

So where do the Liberals stand on democratic reform? Where do the Liberals stand on proportional representation? Where do the Liberals stand on the proposal of the citizens' committee? Nowhere. You look, you look—you look under the sole of your foot. Check out the heel of your boot. From time to time you find something amusing or interesting there. You can't find it there. Where are the Liberals? They're nowhere. They're not behind the door, they're not in front of door, they're not above the door frame, they're not below the door frame. They're not on the top floor, they're not on the ground floor. They're not in the basement, they're not in the backyard, they're not in the front yard. The Liberals are nowhere. The Liberals just don't have any idea. The Liberals are pathetically playing games with the people of Ontario. The Liberals are using their majority at Queen's Park to be cute, far too cute, with people across this province. That's where the Liberals are. They come up with legislation that they say is meaningful, and I put to you: Is it? And then they won't even allow debate on that, will they? They won't even allow debate on that. They'll shut it down with a time allocation motion. They shut it down with a closure motion. They use the guillotine to end debate and somehow they suggest the minister puts to us that 11 hours on second reading is somehow more than adequate.

These are the same Liberals who have abandoned working families across Ontario. These are the same Liberals who have destroyed over 140,000 good, industrial, value-added manufacturing, wealth-creating jobs across the province of Ontario. These are same Liberals who send their Premier off to India to cut trade deals. What, we're going to send more of our call centre jobs to India? Is that what the trade deal is? We're going to send more of our jobs to India? Is that how Dalton McGuinty's plan is going to unfold? Because he certainly sure as hell doesn't have a plan for democratic renewal or democratic reform, does he? Are the Liberals going to campaign on support? Are the Liberals going to campaign on support for proportional representation? We don't know. They don't want to say. They want to be like the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. They're walking around and they're going to have big duct tape covering their mouths so that they can't say anything. They're going to be sitting on their hands. They're going to try to have it every which way but loose.

So why should anybody have any expectation level of the Liberals other than more fraud upon the people of

Ontario? Why should anybody expect anything other than that? Why should anybody expect anything other than more arrogance, more dismissal, more disdain and more “Oh, we feel your pain”? Remember that? How many speeches from how many Liberals and how many times by Dalton McGuinty? “We feel your pain. Oh, we feel your pain. Oh, you workers who have lost jobs, we feel your pain.”

1930

Remember when the minister for infrastructure renewal—Mr. Ferreira, I don't think you were here yet. The casino in Niagara was laying off workers. Remember that? We split up and New Democrats asked them, “What are you going to do for these workers who are losing their jobs at the Niagara Casino?” The minister said, “We feel their pain. We're going to retrain them.” And we said, “You doughhead, you already did. That's why they're working in the casino. They used to work in foundries, in steel mills, in pipe mills. Then you retrained them to work in the casino, but now they've lost their jobs in the casino.”

Those farmers on the 2,000 acres of juice grape vineyards, what's the minister got in mind for them? Is he going to retrain them? For what?

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): The casino—

Mr. Kormos: There are no jobs in the casino, Mr. O'Toole. What the heck's the matter with you? They're laying people off in the casino. “We feel your pain,” the whine goes, but is there any light at the end of the tunnel for these hard-working Ontarians? It gets cloudier, murkier and darker every day. I'm convinced that people in this province dearly want democratic reform. I'm convinced that most people dearly want to engage in the debate about proportional representation.

John Tory and the Conservatives have been making it increasingly clear that they are going to have a clear position when it comes to proportional representation. I understand that. I suspect New Democrats are going to disagree profoundly with the Conservatives, but I understand the Conservatives will come forward with a clear position that, should people agree, they will know who to vote for. And never having told anybody how to vote ever in my life—and I haven't—I have no qualms about saying that if people agree with the Conservatives, they should vote for the Conservatives. New Democrats are going to be very clear about where we stand when it comes to proportional representation and the need for fundamental democratic reform.

But what are the Liberals going to be telling folks? They're going to be saying, “Oh, it's up to you. I want to be neutral. I don't want to participate in this debate. It's your debate; it's your vote.” Well, you have no qualms about imposing your interests, your will, your values, your views on people in so many other respects. All of a sudden you clam up. All of a sudden you crawl under the desk and are cowering. It's the “Duck, you suckers” syndrome.

Well, people expect their politicians to stand up and be counted. I expect Liberals to have been angry with their

government about bringing in time allocation, because but a precious handful of them ever got to participate in second reading or third reading debate on Bill 155, didn't they? Yet they have no qualms about taking the salary increase. They thought, “Oh boy, oh boy, just pass the cash. Just pass it along.” So here you've got people who get paid more and more and they work less and less, whereas real people out there are working more and more and making less and less. I find it incredible that we have got a government here that cares so little that it's willing to pull the wool over people's eyes, or at least try to, over and over again, knowing full well that people are simply being duped by McGuinty and the Liberals and their gang of dupers.

Once again, I want to tell you that we had a collection of comments made by Liberals when they were opposing time allocation motions, when they were in opposition. There was one that was made by Mr. Caplan. I won't read that one. He has no credibility anymore, anyway. There was one made by Mr. Levac. I'll leave that one for Mr. Ferreira to read. There was one from Mr. Gerretsen condemning time allocation motions. I have one from John Gerretsen condemning time allocation motions. I have one from Mr. Sorbara condemning time allocation motions. I have one from Mrs. Dombrowsky condemning time allocation motions. I have one from Mrs. Dombrowsky again condemning time allocation motions. And I have one from James Bradley—Jim Bradley—long-time MPP for St. Catherines, condemning time allocation motions.

I should mention that New Democrats will be voting against this motion this evening—

Mr. Lalonde: I just got a message on my BlackBerry that says, “What is he talking about?”

The Acting Speaker: No, no. If you are referring to the use of a BlackBerry in this House, I would ask that the Sergeant at Arms seize it. Please take it.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: You cannot use BlackBerries in this House, and you cannot talk about using BlackBerries in this House. Please.

Mr. Kormos: I find that an interesting punctuation mark for my comments. Look, I want to come to the defence of the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde, using a BlackBerry. Please, don't be harsh on him. He's been away so long on junkets, he didn't know what the rules had become here in this chamber. Thank you kindly, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the members, please, to have some decorum in the House.

I recognize the member from Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to join the debate today, and I think that if there is ever an example of why of people may think electoral reform may be needed, I think we've just seen it.

There's an interesting bill before us and there's an interesting process before us. Last year I had the opportunity to serve with the minister who is bringing this for-

ward, the minister who is responsible for democratic renewal. I can remember the day those people were appointed. I remember the feeling that was in this province, that something different and something new was happening, that people are going to have a say in the running of their province. That was unusual. Now, I didn't know how unusual it was, but if you believe the press reports, this will be the first referendum held in province of Ontario since 1921. It seems to me that that is a historic occasion, a monumental occasion. It's something we should pay some attention to.

It was also interesting today to read some of the press reports. This may scare the pants off some politicians, and certainly seemed to scare the previous speaker, but when you read the press reports, you don't read about the members, you don't read about the ministers, you don't read about the Premier: You read about ordinary people, somebody like a retired computer specialist. Pat Miller predicted the new system would lead to "a more co-operative government" with "some continuity between elections...." A gentleman by the name of Chris Doody—I don't know what he does—says it might encourage more Ontarians to cast ballots. Visible minorities are noted here by a lady by the name of Melinda Selmys from Etobicoke Centre. Another gentleman, Edmund James from York North, decided that he was not going to vote for the system to go forward. There were people who said that they either agreed with the system moving forward or that they liked the status quo. But I believe that to say this is not an exciting time in Ontario's history is something that is just not true and I just don't think it's something that can be backed up.

1940

I think most of us try to get into educational institutions and talk to some of the students. I get in to see the grade 5s probably more than anybody else. I also talk to the grade 10s and grade 12s, but mainly students in our province in grade 5. I've come to realize from that that you're probably the best person you're ever going to be in your entire life in grade 5. That doesn't mean you can't get smarter, it doesn't mean you can't get more skilled, it doesn't mean a lot of things, but it means you're probably the best person you're ever going to be. That is, I think, that as you move ahead in your life, if you ever reach a hard decision and you're wondering, "What should I do? I'm kind of confused about this. I'm not sure if I should go this way or that way," think back to what you would have done in grade 5 and you'll probably get the right answer very quickly and it'll probably come to you in a very accurate form, because people at that age simply know right from wrong.

I like to engage those young people in a discussion on our political system. We start with the cynical view that's just been expressed as to why people shouldn't involve themselves in politics. We hear that every day in this House. It's a view that I don't think is shared by the young people of this province. I use the example of 1820. In 1820 the average person or the average commoner or the average peasant in Africa was equally as rich or poor

as the average common person in Europe or North America. Something has happened between 1820 and 2007. When you look at the North American economy and the European economy and the lifestyle we enjoy, and you look at what's happened in Africa, where we're still dealing with things like famines, massacres, HIV/AIDS epidemics, something has happened that has allowed us to move ahead as a society in a way that those people in other jurisdictions simply haven't been able to do, and yet we started from the same place.

When I have this discussion with the children, I tell them I think it's the way we've organized ourselves politically. I think it's the way we solve our disputes. I think it's the way we decide which way we're going to move forward as a society.

I believe that the current system we have in place has served us well. I was quite surprised, after doing some research, how few jurisdictions still use that system, however. I assumed, perhaps with my North American arrogance, that this system was in place all over the world. There are very few jurisdictions that still use the first past the post system. In fact, most jurisdictions in the world use a different system. That may surprise some people, it may upset some people, but it certainly puts in place the idea that perhaps we should be looking at other examples to see if we can't do better. Perhaps the status quo is the way to be, or perhaps we should be moving to a different type of system.

What people are asking is, can it be improved? What can't be denied—and it may have something to do with the quality of the debate in this House—is that people are turned off politics, young people especially. Is this exercise or process a part of drawing young people back into politics? Perhaps it's a part of it. I don't think anybody in this chamber would argue that it's all of it, but I think it's a good start.

What I don't think we should be doing, and what I think is being suggested by some of the speakers I've heard and some of the reports that I'm reading in the press, is that some people appear to have the temerity to suggest to voters in Ontario what they should do in a referendum, how they should vote in a referendum. Why would you have a referendum if you thought it was your God-given right to tell the electorate what they should do and how they should do it? The very idea behind a referendum is to allow people to have independent thought and to have a free say. That's why they happen so infrequently, because it's generally about very important issues, issues that could change the nature or the fabric of a society. So that's what we're being asked today to consider.

When you look at some of the descriptions in the press—"Cheers and applause rippled through a large meeting room in a government office ... when it was announced that the group of 102 citizens, who had been selected at random by the province and volunteered to study Ontario's voting procedure, approved the referendum," decided they wanted to move forward without any political interference, without listening to the New

Democrats, without listening to the Liberals, without listening to the Progressive Conservatives, decided they'd made up their mind that they had some advice they wanted to give to other people in Ontario that would allow this process to move forward. Somehow what I'm hearing is that there's something wrong with that, that some parties do not support that or some individuals do not support either that process happening or the fact that these people actually had the gall to come forward with an independent thought and say, "Why don't you look at this?" It's exactly what they were asked to do. They've delivered, I think, in spades. I think we should be encouraging them. I think we owe them our thanks. I think we should be proud of them. And I think in a non-partisan way in this House, we should be sending that thanks to them for the work they have done. Whether you agree with proportional representation, whether you agree with the status quo, whether you like the first past the post system, whatever your opinion is, we already owe those 102 citizens our gratitude for the work they have done.

To try to dismiss or to try to belittle their work, I think, is beneath the dignity of this House, and that's what I've been hearing so far. These people have given a lot of time. They've given up a lot of weekends. They knew this going in, and yet they delivered. They came to a conclusion on their own. They looked at models from all over the world. They looked at what other jurisdictions had done, how that reform had taken place, whether it was the sort of reform that had worked in the long run, and they came forward with what was their best effort by actually quite a substantial vote: 94 in favour, eight opposed. And yet I can imagine in that process that for those eight people who had a contrary view, their opinions were heard just as loudly as the 94 who voted in favour. That's a sign of a good and healthy system. It's one that I think we should be not only upholding and supporting in this House; it's one we should be looking for as an example to make some of the future decisions in this province. It's a model that I think we can refer back to when some of the larger decisions need to be made.

I'm going to step down now, but I'll tell you, this process has my full support. Whether I agree with the status quo or whether I agree with proportional representation I think is irrelevant. What is relevant is that in October 2007, people in Ontario, most people in Ontario for the first time in their lifetime, will have an opportunity to say how they should be governed, to take part in the process that has given us the freedoms, the lifestyle—whether you're a New Democrat or a Conservative or a Liberal or even a Green Party member, we know that we in Ontario have built a lifestyle that most people in the world would love to have. We know that we've got something to be proud of here. I think it's the approach we bring. Often it should be brought, and it's not brought, in a tripartite way in this House. But this should be an example of how it can be done.

I have no idea what the politics are of these people. They could be all Conservatives; they could be all Liberals; they could be all New Democrats. I suspect that

they are a blend of all of the above and perhaps parties that we haven't even heard of yet. But what can't be argued is that they've done their best for their province and brought forward some information that they've asked us to act upon. To try to hold that up or to try to besmirch that work, as I said, I think is below the dignity of this House. I think it's time to move forward on this. I think all members should be supporting the bill, at least at this stage. In the future, you'll have your say as an independent citizen. Each member of this House will have the opportunity on election day to go in and to mark a private ballot as to how you think we should move ahead on this question. But we should definitely be allowing this process to continue and respect the work that's been done by the citizens in this province.

1950

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I want to make it clear to the people of Ontario that this process is not a process of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It's not set in a bipartisan or tripartisan atmosphere. This is a process that was set down by the Liberal Party of Ontario from start almost to finish, save and except for the select committee on parliamentary reform, which was only formed after complaining by the opposition. The select committee was not an initiative of the government of Ontario or the Liberal Party of Ontario as such.

Let's talk about the process as we've gone through it. The select committee did a tremendous amount of work. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you were involved in that work as a member of the select committee. The select committee was dominated by government members. But I will say to the government that most of the decisions of the committee were resolved in a unanimous way, so that the majority of the government was not used to move the select committee one way or the other in general. They voted against some of the amendments which I would have desired to put in, and I will refer to those later because I found it necessary for our party—Mr. Miller and I—to put forward a dissenting report.

I do not argue with the previous speaker from Oakville, who said that we should not denigrate the work of the members of the citizens' assembly. My only problem with the process is how those particular members were chosen. We keep hearing that they were chosen in a random way etc. That's not exactly true. There were 120,000 people selected from across Ontario and people were asked to write in about their interest in this particular matter. These people were not selected by the leaders of the various communities from across Ontario. I would have more comfort, quite frankly, going to various different people and trying to get a consensus on who should be sitting on the citizens' committee. I would have felt more comfortable with their recommendations had that process been that way.

My fairly long experience in this place tends to push me towards the idea that most people in Ontario view government from afar and not close in, and that most of these people perhaps were more involved in the process

than the average citizen. I don't know that totally, but I've read some articles on it etc. Notwithstanding that, these people went out and spent a lot of time—\$6 million worth—in order to put this particular recommendation in front of the Legislative Assembly or in front of the voters.

I guess the problem that I've had with the process is there was not even a debate in this Legislature about what was going to take place. There wasn't an opportunity for you or I or other members of the opposition to stand up and say, "We think you should maybe tweak this process this way or that way." It was a fiat from the government of Ontario, a fiat from the Liberal Party, that it was going to be done this way or that way. I guess the bottom line on the outcome of all of this—

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Remember your eight-and-a-half-year-old Fiat.

Mr. Sterling: I have a 15-year-old Taurus, but anyway, the outcome of all of this and Bill 155 is that at the ultimate end of the process, we're going to have a question that is not going to come in front of this Legislature to be approved or debated in this Legislature. We're going to have a question from the Liberal cabinet, the cabinet of Ontario, the Liberal Party of Ontario. I don't know what that question is going to include, but we all know that the wording of a question can have a tremendous impact on the results, on which way people vote. Do you include certain words which tend to make people think that this is forward-looking, or do you include other words which make people think that they're looking back?

So the whole process—I don't feel any ownership of this process. I don't feel any obligation to this process, because I am a member of the Legislature who has not had my fair say during the various stages of this process. I believe that I'm entitled, on behalf of the people of Lanark-Carleton, to have that say—I do have that say—particularly at the end, to have some input into what the final question is that will be put in front of the electorate of Ontario.

I also want to talk about the motivation for going through this process. When we were on the select committee, we found various motivations in various jurisdictions for going through a process of looking at how their elected representatives are in fact elected. In Germany, of course, the process was set up with a mixed member proportional system, which is somewhat similar to what the citizens' assembly has put forward. We found out that the primary purpose of that was to try to split power so that what happened from 1930 to 1945 would not reoccur in the historical context. So a lot of the impetus in terms of putting that forward, an MMP system, was driven not from inside but was driven from outside by the Allies, who insisted on a democratic process that would ensure that a despot like Hitler would not come to the fore again.

In Scotland, we found that an MMP system came not because of any wonderful motives by politicians that they

would have more women in their assembly or in their Parliament or that they wanted more people to vote or anything else. We found out that it was a pact between the Liberal government and the Labour government of Westminster to ensure that Scotland would never have a Conservative government. Even people whom we talked to who were "impartial" put forward exactly what the motives were for that change. So I guess I'm left a little in wonderment as to what the motivation for going through this whole process really was. I don't know what the motive was. I've never, never heard anybody come to me over the last 30 years that I've been elected and say, "Norm, we've got to elect our MPPs in a different manner."

Next, I would like to come back down to where we are today in the time allocation motion on Bill 155. It's more than ironic that, on a bill for democratic reform, the government cannot wait to pass this bill through the legislative process. It is really strange, given all I have said about the participation of the opposition in setting this up and the participation of the opposition in the Legislature in putting the final touches on it in terms of the question, that we have been denied that participation, that we have now moved to time allocation on Bill 155, the final legislative juggernaut in the process.

I don't want to say, "I told you so," but if we go back to the report of the select committee, which reported in November 2005, I think our dissenting opinion totally predicted what has come about. I want to put down and read into the record what that dissenting opinion was. Mr. Miller and I served on that particular select committee. I thought it was a good select committee. I thought Caroline Di Cocco was a good chairman of the committee. I think she did a good job, and I think all of the members worked very hard to come forward with consensus, as best they could. But as I said in my previous remarks, our caucus could not come to total consensus, and therefore we put forward a dissenting report.

2000

I want to read you a little bit of that report:

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

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

We are referring there to the fact that if an MMP system goes forward as proposed by the citizens' assembly, we are destined for minority Parliaments, coalition Parliaments and a new dawning of perhaps two, three, four or more political parties in this province.

My view, with my experience as a parliamentarian here, is that of the three parties that are presently represented in this Legislature, within their caucuses they have individuals who want to express extreme positions. When they express those extreme positions in front of their colleagues in caucus, they are sometimes moderated in their particular positions. So when they come to this

Legislature, they find a consensus within their own party normally, sometimes not; rarely, if ever, on the government side. Mostly it happens on the opposition side.

I believe that the public in general support that kind of system. They don't want radical, irrational behaviour by their Legislatures. They don't want Legislatures to say irrational, negative, racist kinds of things. I'm not saying that all of those kinds of things are said, but there is a moderating effect within our legislative system as it now exists, and I think that's important to maintain.

I think it's also important to note that when parties become government, they moderate their ideological positions, whether they be right, left or centre. It's hard to moderate a centre position, I guess, but they do moderate their positions on different areas. I think people, in general, in Ontario support the moderation of change. They want change, but they want thoughtful change and they want parties to think and talk about that from within, and I think that is best served by not having "coalition governments" where you can have a situation where a radical party with radical ideas can change the whole atmosphere of where a government may or may not be going. They can divert that ship that they drive down a canal in many different directions. I don't think the public necessarily support that. What they want is consistency of decision, and they want a government which is not changing all the time or changing their position.

I also would note that when you go to coalition governments or minority governments, it's harder for the public to call the governing party into accountability because, as we learned in Scotland, where there is a coalition government, the government of the day, which wins the most seats through the constituency system, first past the post, plus the MMP system, the mixed member proportional system, if you don't have a majority and you have to rely on support from other parties, you can easily say to the public: "Listen, we said we were going to do that, but we have to rely on these people over here in order to become the government. Therefore, we can fudge our political promise to you." Accountability becomes much more difficult; for the public to look at the political party and say, "You promised us this, and you didn't do this" or "You promised us this, and you did that." So I have difficulty with that particular part put forward.

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

How would you ask 102 people to spend 38 weekends and not come forward with a change? If I was asked to suggest a change in our political system and I gave up 38 weekends, I would not be one of the eight who voted against this particular proposal.

I went over to the event where they had students come in and they picked 103 students from across our

province. I guess the minister hired this young fellow, who came up and he said, "You have the chance to change the history of Ontario." And by God, you know, if I was one of those people, that's what I'd believe. I would believe that here's my chance to make history. I'll be darned if I'll just congratulate the eight people who voted against—maybe they didn't vote for the status quo. It wasn't clear to me whether anybody voted for the status quo. So it's really difficult to see how a group elected to change—as I understand, in the first meeting, the chairman of this venture said—a system that's broken—that was sort of the lead-in to this whole process. So I say, God bless these people who've spent their time doing this. I don't blame them for coming forward with another solution because I wouldn't spend 38 weekends and not come forward with some kind of solution.

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

What we do as individual legislators here on the government side or opposition side has one big effect; the other part is how this institution functions, and I think this institution doesn't function very well. It don't think it functions as well as when Mr. Bradley and I came here 30 years ago. I think, for whatever reasons—political reasons, time, etc.—the institution is just not as good as it was. We have to look at that, and I think that we should do that, quite frankly, before we make a major change in how our politicians are elected.

"Consequently, we believe that, prior to examining the method by which we elect our members of provincial Parliament, we should show the leadership necessary to reform the Legislative Assembly itself and its functioning in the public interest." Number one, I don't think we need some reforms; all we need is the political will by our political leaders to use the tools that are there to make this place run better.

The select committee on electoral reform was extremely interesting for you and I, Mr. Speaker, and for the other members of the committee. It was a great process where we learned a great deal: what had been done in other jurisdictions, what had been done in British Columbia, what had been done where the experts were, where the interest groups were, and all that kind of thing. For the life of me, I don't understand why governments—and this is not just the present government; it was true of our government, and I'm going back almost 20 years now—have not used select committees so that individual members can participate in a meaningful and constructive way towards government policy and legislation.

2010

When Jim Bradley, the member for St. Catharines, and I were first elected here in 1977, there were four or five

different select committees that sat, year after year, and the membership would not change from one Parliament to the other—maybe minor adjustments, but, generally speaking, would not change. There were people who may have been interested in education; there was a select committee on education. There were select committees dealing with rural affairs, etc. The beauty of that was that there was less animosity across the floor because you got to know members very, very well, on the government side, on the opposition side, etc., and a lot of knowledge was gained as you went through the process. I believe that those select committees had a real impact on the legislative and policy decisions of the government of the day.

You could have more select committees. When I was the government House leader in 1997, I brought forward a change to the standing orders to allow the government to refer bills out after first reading. I think that just about every piece of legislation should go that way, or at least half of them—the ones that are not related to confidence matters. I can understand perhaps a budget bill not going that way, but a lot of legislation could go that way.

The beauty of a bill going out after first reading is that people and the government are not entrenched into their position. Members learn about the subject matter of the bill before they have to put their vote up, and the government can listen to people coming to public hearings after first reading and say, “Hey, that group really has a cause.” When the legislators are sitting around the table at first reading and listening to these people—they’ve really caught on to the legislators, and, “Maybe we should make an accommodation for their point of view.” If you’re there after second reading, the government unfortunately feels that it’s their show. It’s very, very difficult to make any argument that there’s going to be substantive change, and they feel trapped. They’re sort of in a corner where they can’t move without a great deal of embarrassment that they may have made a mistake in terms of the consultation that took place before that happened.

The third matter which I think would really generate tremendous freedom and extension of a private member’s role would be a much greater role for you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the Speaker should have much greater power in this legislative chamber and outside of this legislative chamber to act as an honest broker between various members and various different parties.

We learned when we were in Scotland that the reason they had more women in the Legislature is not necessarily anything to do with MMP. It has something to do with the Labour Party in terms of nominating more women candidates, but do you know what it has more to do with? It’s that when women come to sit in the Scottish National Parliament, they know that they’re going to be out of there at 6 o’clock. They have daycare in the Scottish National Parliament. There’s a schedule that’s set up in the first part of the week, controlled by the Speaker—not the government House leader; the Speaker is the primary person who sits as the Chair at the House leaders’

meetings each week—and he sets a reasonable schedule so that all members of the Legislature, their points of view and their arguments for more or less debate are taken into consideration.

When you get somebody like Lisa MacLeod or Ms. Mossop—

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): Or Laurel Broten.

Mr. Sterling: —or Laurel Broten or whomever, if we want young women or men who have child responsibilities to come to this place—and we want them because we need their points of view, as well as a few of us with a few grey hairs—we have to accommodate them, and I think we can; I think we can do it easily. This place would be much more civil. It would be a better place to work. We should sit in the morning. Why sit at night? Let’s sit in the mornings. Who cares whether the cabinet is on? Other members of the government can come and fill in the benches in terms of dealing with legislation during that period of time on Wednesday morning if they have to have a cabinet meeting. We can adjust our schedule, anyway, to that.

I think there’s a lot of good ideas that we can put into place if our political leaders—the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the third party—decide that they’re going to play the game, they’re going to be involved in trying to make this place, in some cases, a more consensus-based decision-making body than a place where we are butting each other’s heads all the time. At any rate, our point here is that we should consider those kinds of institutional changes here before we set out on a brand new path to elect our members by some other way or manner.

Our last point in terms of this was that we also believe that this referendum bill, Bill 155, lacks one very significant clause, and that is to allow the people of Ontario to have the opportunity sometime down the road to decide—if there’s a change—whether they want to keep the system or change the system.

I met recently with some politicians from a province in South Africa called Gauteng. All their members are elected under a proportional system. They were telling me about the stranglehold that their party has on them. They cannot move. They cannot speak out. You want to talk about our members having to toe the party line? These guys and women, if they speak out against the party, they ain’t on the list the next time around. The party is in total control of the whole process. And every one of these provincial politicians from South Africa told me that they would love to have a first past the post system; they would love to have the direct accountability with their members.

So I really do feel that there is an absolute necessity to provide the population an opportunity go backwards. Because I’ll tell you this: If you go one way, the parties ain’t going to let you to come back to the other. They will not let you come back to the other. They will love the control they have. They will never let this system come back.

We have another speaker. I did not think I was going to go on as long as I did, but I want to thank all of the members of the select committee who sat with you and me, Mr. Speaker, for their participation in this, and I really do believe that we're putting the cart before the horse in this situation.

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): I want to thank the member for Lanark–Carleton for his insightful comments. I know he is one of the two longest-serving members in this place. He certainly has a lot of knowledge and experience to relate, so I want to thank him.

I also realize that I have a very tough act to follow in the member from Niagara Centre, who entertained and amused us for the better part of 25 minutes. But I'm glad he's left me with some time to make what I hope is a compelling presentation on Bill 155, the Electoral System Referendum Act. I will be splitting my time into two sections, if you will, the first to be spent talking about this motion of time allocation and the second on the bill itself.

I think that my leader and certainly my colleagues, through the press over the past several days and weeks, have made it quite clear that New Democrats are in favour of real electoral reform. However, we cannot support this sham, this charade that's being foisted upon the unsuspecting people of Ontario. Why do I describe it in that way? First of all, it seems ironic to me that on a bill talking about democratic reform, about altering, perhaps modernizing, our system of selecting representatives to come to this place, this government decides to invoke a limitation on the amount of time we have to debate this important motion.

I haven't been here for very long, but I recall that there were members on the government side who, when they were on the opposition side, whimpered against the government of the day. I remember the Minister of Health, who at one time considered healthy debate to be screaming at private citizens across Gerrard Street.

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Hon. Mr. Smitherman: And I remember you when you lived downtown.

Mr. Ferreira: I remember that too, Minister.

But we have members of the government side who, when they were here on this side, stood up and railed against the undemocratic measures of the government of the day. And what have I witnessed here, just sitting in this House in three and a half short weeks? I've witnessed this government try and ram through omnibus legislation which they formerly, when they were in opposition, spoke out, lashed out, against. And now, tonight, we see this government invoking time allocation on this bill; again, a practice they thought unseemly and anti-democratic when they were on the opposition side.

I call this the government's greatest hits when it comes to speaking out against time allocation. I'm going to read some of these, because it shows that this government acts quite differently when it is in charge here. The first one: Mr. Bradley, the government House leader, is one of the other longest-serving members of this House. I

know he is a member who has a great deal of respect for the traditions, protocols and procedures of this place. But he, in opposition, spoke out several times against time allocation. I want to read a few of those selectively.

Back in December 2001, Mr. Bradley said, "How I wish we didn't have to debate this time allocation motion.... I simply want to say that once again we see the government using its iron fist on the opposition." "Iron fist" is how Mr. Bradley, today the government House leader, referred to that government. I say his government tonight is pounding with an iron fist. Mr. Bradley, again, these are the greatest hits.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity, unfortunately, to speak on yet another time allocation motion. That is a motion, of course, where debate is choked off in the Legislative Assembly by the dictum of the government; that's most unfortunate, but it does happen only too often," said Mr. Bradley.

He is a member I respect, but here is another one from him on time allocation: "I always deplore the fact that I have to speak on a time allocation motion. I would prefer to be talking about several important issues that could come before the House."

When I was elected to come to this place, I thought that's what I would be doing, that I would be given an opportunity to debate the issues and the bills that come before this House, that my colleagues would all be given equal opportunity to speak, to rise on the bills that come before this House. As my friend from Niagara Centre pointed out during his presentation on this particular bill, only two members before this day, including you, Mr. Speaker, and our leader had had a chance to comment on this bill on behalf of their constituents.

I have some other greatest time allocation hits from the present members of the cabinet, from Mrs. Dombrowsky, the Minister of Agriculture—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: If you wish to speak—please have a seat, or I'm going to have to grow taller, because I cannot see him with you standing there. Please continue.

Mr. Ferreira: I think we should put that chair on a riser, Mr. Speaker, to give you a clear sightline.

I want to quote Mrs. Dombrowsky, the Minister of Agriculture, on some time allocation quotes that she was gracious enough to supply. She said, "I have to say that it is with regret that I have to stand in my place again today to speak to yet another time allocation motion. I think the point I would like to stress in this debate is that this is probably one of the most significant issues that this House will consider in terms of business on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario. The bill was introduced a little more than a week ago and already the government has moved to close debate on this most significant issue."

Mrs. Dombrowsky's comments could be taken for comments on this particular bill and what this government is trying to do with this particular bill.

Later on, she says, "Here we go again. Sadly, again, we're here debating a time allocation motion. We're here

talking about all the reasons why we would like to see this bill get full debate in the Legislative Assembly.”

I could quote Mrs. Dombrowsky further. She certainly has given us plenty of material to work with. But she’s joined by some of her colleagues. Mr. Sorbara, the finance minister, said in this House, on the opposition side, when he was sitting over here next to the now-Minister of Health, “I stand here today to condemn this time allocation motion “and to say to you that—let me put it this way—governments are defeated for two reasons: one, because of what they do, because of the policies they bring forward and the things they do to the people of a place like Ontario, and the second reason they are defeated is the way in which they go about doing them.... This time allocation motion is just another example of why people are so anxious to get to the ballot box in a general election and send them packing.”

Perhaps the Minister of Finance is looking ahead to what will happen six months from now, and that’s advice that he’s giving to the people of Ontario, to send this government packing on October 10.

But there’s more. There’s more on the greatest time allocation hits of this Liberal government. My friend across the way—the members will know that I’m the housing critic here and I’ve had a chance to ask on a couple of occasions some questions of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. He joins the hit parade here and he says, “It is shutting off debate. We’ve got many, many members on this side of the House who want the opportunity to speak on this bill, and that’s being denied....”

He says further on, “Closure is not the way a democratically elected Parliament should operate.” If there’s one time that I agree with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, it is on that quote.

Mr. Gerretsen goes on and says, “We are losing our parliamentary democracy in this province and it doesn’t do any of us any good. It puts politicians in disrespect as far as the general public is concerned.

“I would urge this government: see the error of your ways. Do not use time allocation again; enter into a discussion with the House leaders so that we can come up with a meaningful legislative program so that bills can be debated for the length of time that is required in each and every case.”

Is his government today listening? Well, based on what we are debating here tonight, they are not listening. They are ignoring the words of Mr. Gerretsen.

I’ve got just two more to go through.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: And then you’ll have some content?

Mr. Ferreira: I’ll get to comment, all right.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Content.

Mr. Ferreira: I’ll get to the content. But this is quite revealing content, because it speaks to the duplicity of this government.

Mr. Levac: “First, in a nutshell, time allocation itself, the reality of what time allocation means: basically the

stopping of debate ... a new device with which this government has been stifling democracy.”

This government today is stifling democracy.

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I’ve saved the best for the last, and I won’t be referring to page 68 of an Ombudsman’s report; instead I’ll be referring to a quote from Mr. Caplan himself. He says, “I usually start off my remarks by saying it’s a pleasure to speak to something on behalf of the people of Don Valley East, but it really isn’t. This is yet another closure motion, a gag order on the Legislature. How could it ever be a pleasure to speak to that, when that’s the normal course of action and when this Legislature is shut down for the very purpose it was meant for, which was to discuss important matters?” That was—I lost count, there were so many of them—six or seven members of the cabinet of this government railing against the very tactics their own government is utilizing to muzzle, to stifle, to cut off, to shut down debate in this House on a very important piece of legislation.

I mentioned that the second half of my presentation would speak to the bill itself.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: All right.

Mr. Ferreira: I’m glad I’ve got a fan over there in the Minister of Health; I’m that glad I do.

I want to congratulate the members of the citizens’ assembly, who have put in a great deal of time and effort to put forward an impressive recommendation to the people of Ontario. The people of Ontario will get a chance to pass judgment on that on the same day that they vote for their new government in this place. They have come forward with an MMP proposal that is used extensively in other jurisdictions. It certainly is a serious proposal that is worthy of strong consideration, and New Democrats will be campaigning Yes to electoral reform and to the initiative being brought forward. But it’s obvious that this government is not serious in their intent to have reform take place.

Why do I say that? Well, they have imposed a supermajority requirement. We must have 60% of all the valid referendum ballots cast in favour of this recommendation in more than 60% of the ridings, which means at least 64 electoral districts in the reconfigured House we will have after October 10. That’s not a sign of a government that’s serious about electoral reform, serious about changing the manner in which members are elected to this House. Why is it that they may not be serious? Well, take a look: They have been tremendous beneficiaries of the present system. In the last election they only received 46% of all the valid ballots cast, yet they have more than 70% of the seats in this House.

Now, I will agree that over the course of the past couple of decades, all parties have benefited from the flaws in the present system. And yes, in 1990, our party received 38% of the votes and was able to win 55% of the seats. That pattern was repeated in 1995 with the present official opposition and again in 1999, when they received well less than 50% of all ballots cast in the province but, in the present flawed system, received well

over 50% of the seats. The difference is that my party, the New Democrats, is serious about seeing reform through. We have said quite clearly that the threshold should be 50% plus one. That should determine whether or not we reform the system. In fact, the select committee on electoral reform, in its report from November 2005, set the threshold at exactly that: 50% plus one. This committee, it's interesting to note and to point out, was comprised of a majority of members of the government side—how quickly they changed their minds. That committee unanimously recommended 50% plus one as a threshold for democratic reform.

In case they need to be reminded, let me point out the members of the government who unanimously supported that. There was the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge; there was the member for Sarnia–Lambton, who is now the Minister of Culture; there was the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale; there was the member for Ottawa Centre; there was the member for Nipissing; and lastly, now Minister of Education, the member for Don Valley West. All said unanimously that the threshold should be 50% plus one. When I referred earlier to a sham and a charade by setting the bar at 60%, that's what this process becomes. It means that this government isn't serious.

Interestingly enough, they haven't talked about the amount of money they're willing to put forward to help educate the people of Ontario about the choices before them in this referendum. The head of Fair Vote Canada, which has done excellent work on electoral reform, suggested a figure of \$13 million in the newspapers this weekend, and I'm wondering if the government will take heed and invest that kind of money to ensure that we have a fair process and that these calls for democratic reform are given an opportunity to succeed.

I see that my time is quickly diminishing—

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: That's right. October 10 will be the end of it.

Mr. Ferreira: I'd like to suggest to the Minister of Health that I'll be here for a whole lot longer than that. In fact, I think that he may be the one who serves here for not too much longer. But that could be a for a host of reasons.

My party has made a number of meaningful, thoughtful proposals for real democratic reform and renewal in this province, and I'd like to share these with all the members. Perhaps the government will see fit to borrow some of the ideas, because they are good ideas.

First of all, on the issue of political finance in this province, we've been quite clear: There ought to be a ban on corporate and labour donations. Let's level the playing field. In fact, it is working quite well federally. This isn't new; we've called for this in prior campaigns. In fact, this model exists quite successfully in other provincial jurisdictions across Canada—in Quebec and Manitoba, to be precise—and I would argue that it is working quite successfully at the federal level, where we've been able to take that element of big money, of corporate money, out of the political process. Perhaps the members on the

government side feel hindered by this because they have to work a little bit harder to connect with the grassroots, with regular folk across this province, to encourage them to make smaller donations to support their campaigns, and that's perhaps why I hear the cries of protest from the members on the government side.

We also believe that we need to bring back enumeration in this province. I can't tell you how many thousands of electors in my riding have been disfranchised because those Elections Ontario staffers no longer come knocking on doors to ensure that you are on the election list. We've seen this problem of folks being left off the list escalate. There's an estimate out there that as many as 1.5 million Canadians have been left off the list on the federal level—Canadians who should have been on the election list. That's another reform we would like to see.

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We'd like to see true proportional representation in this province, to adequately reflect the wishes of Ontarians to ensure that the Legislature is reflective of their voting intentions and that not a single vote that is cast in a general election is wasted. That would be true, meaningful reform that would have long-lasting impact on the province of Ontario and the composition of successive Parliaments in this place. But what we're seeing from this government is far from that. We're seeing a half-hearted attempt that, at the end of the day, I'm afraid will not succeed in bringing much-needed reform to this place.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I want to begin by talking about somebody who is probably similar to a lot of the individuals who gave seven months of their time to be on the citizens' assembly. Her name is Donna Tichonchuk. I've known Donna for a very long time, but when Donna told me she had the appointment, my biggest fear was that I have a heck of a time pronouncing her last name. It's Donna Tichonchuk. I've never been able to say it all that well, but she is an incredible individual. I think that, probably like a number of the individuals on this citizens' assembly, she has undergone an incredible experience.

I'm going to tell you a little bit about Donna because, like I said, I think she's similar to a lot of the people who had the opportunity to participate in what I think was just an absolutely fantastic process. Donna is from the North Bendale community. She was very involved in the community for many years: in community garage sales, in the community association, in our Jingle Bell Ball that we do every year, in the North Bendale Softball Association. Her husband, Michael, was involved in all those activities as well. They have a couple of kids—really good kids; they're doing well in school. They're a terrific family that contributes a great deal to our community.

But Donna is not at all an expert on politics and political associations and different levels of government and international politics. When she went into this, she went into it just as a regular citizen who has had an interest in politics but certainly had not taken courses in it and certainly had not participated directly in politics, which I

think makes her the perfect kind of person to have a look at the potential changes this citizens' assembly had to consider.

It wasn't long ago that I had an opportunity to sit down with Donna—I asked her to come into the office. I just wanted to see how she was doing, how she was enjoying her duties, where they were at and how she thought it was going overall. I could not believe the enthusiasm that Donna exuded that day, the passion she had for where they were going. I had a feeling that they were going to come out with something new, just by the passion that she talked to me with during our time together. Donna felt that this was the best experience she had had in her entire life. She said that the people she met across the province were absolutely wonderful, dedicated people. She felt that this was something she would never give up for anything in the world.

I would like, on behalf of all of us here, to thank Donna for the work she has put into this citizens' assembly, and I'd like to thank all the over 102 residents across the province who have contributed to what I think was a very healthy and productive process.

I'd also like to thank George Thomson. I had an opportunity to speak with him as well when I attended one of the assembly sessions. He has really dedicated himself to this project. Everything he has ever been involved in has always turned out to be very successful in terms of the work he has done and the advice he has given. I think the leadership he has shown on this has been absolutely stellar and is going to serve us very well heading into the future.

A few minutes ago, I had an opportunity to go out to the members' lobby and there was a TV show on, *The Agenda*, with Steve Paikin. They were discussing this very issue, and the debate was absolutely fascinating, as they were going back and forth talking about the pros and cons of the systems and that the public is soon going to be engaged in this debate. Just listening to that debate and thinking that our public are going to have an opportunity to engage themselves in a process where they will be able to choose for themselves how they want to be governed was exciting to me. I think that is a terrific process.

I think of the alternatives and imagine if we didn't go the referendum route. Imagine if we said, "Okay, let's just do it the way we do most legislation." The way we do most legislation is appropriate. We come to the House, debate it, go to committee, hear from the public—there's usually a fair amount of room for consultation. We often amend the legislation at committee and bring it back here for final reading. The process works pretty well for most legislation. But on something as important as this, I think it really behooves us to go to the public directly and see how they feel about it, because I think that if we were to go the other route there's no question that all of us here would probably get into partisanship on it eventually. When we talk in terms of the electoral process, each party would probably look at, "What's best for us, in terms of our own re-election chances?" I think

those are the kinds of things that would start coming into our psyche when we're debating it, and I don't think it would be a healthy and fulsome debate. I think it's better to let this go to the public. Let them have a look at it.

I hope that all parties in this House recognize that while it's important to get the information out there, and there's probably nothing wrong with parties taking a position one way or another, and probably nothing wrong with members taking a position one way or another if they choose to—some may choose to remain neutral; we'll probably all decide in our own way how we want to handle it going into the next election. But I hope that the public is not subjected to any kind of propaganda campaign on this. I hope the information they get is information that allows them to make a decision based on what they think is in the public interest, and not be subjected to political campaigns based on narrow political interests. I would hope the political parties get the message in terms of ensuring that, yes, bring the message forward on what you think is best; that's fine. If you want, take a position as a party, take positions as individuals, but let the public decide on something like this. I think it's very important that we allow the public to have their say. I think it really speaks well of a government, of the confidence of a government, of the confidence we have in the people.

I'm confident in the people of Scarborough Centre. I'm confident that they will know what's best for them if given the information they need to decide. I'm confident in the people of Ontario. I'm confident that they will do their due diligence, that they will consider this very important matter, an issue that could be very historic in terms of the decision they decide to make. I think they will make the right decision.

I want to touch just for a second, because I don't have too much time left, on the 60% threshold. This is a very important decision that we'll be putting to the public, and I think it requires a consensus. It requires more than 50% plus one. I think it's extremely important that there's a consensus. I would hate to come in with a fairly significant change to our electoral process and have 49% of the people out there not supporting it. I think it would likely deem that process subject to failure. I think a 60% threshold is reasonable. If this is a positive change, if the people of our province are properly educated going into this referendum to make an educated decision—and I expect that we'll ensure they are—I don't see any reason why a 60% threshold wouldn't be quite possible to achieve if the system being advocated is the best system to pursue.

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I'm looking forward to this referendum. I think it will be historic. I think it will be exciting for each and every one of us to be part of it. I think it will be exciting to allow the people of Ontario to have their say. I certainly think it's something that's going to reinvigorate interest in politics in Ontario. I think this referendum is likely going to see an increase in participation at the polls across this province, which is a good thing. I think you're

going to see young people involving themselves in the political process as a result of this. I know this for a fact, Mr. Speaker, because you and I will be at a school in Scarborough later this week, talking to young people about a number of interests in a political forum. One of the issues they'll be talking about will be democratic renewal. Certainly we'll look forward to hearing what they have to say on this, and I think they're going to be very enthused about engaging in a debate that's going to have potential to historically change the electoral process in this province.

I'm looking forward to moving forward with this legislation; I'm looking forward to moving forward with this referendum next October. I think it bodes very well, whichever way it turns out, for the political process in Ontario. I would like once again to thank Donna and all the members of the citizens' assembly for the incredible work they've done on behalf of this province and on our behalf.

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): As has been noted by several of the other speakers this evening, including my colleague the member from Lanark–Carleton, how ironic it is that we're dealing with a time allocation motion on a bill that deals with electoral reform, democratic renewal and restoring the public's faith in the political process. But I should say that this is something that, in my short time in the Legislature, I've seen happen several times. There seems to be a pattern emerging that every time the going gets tough—things aren't quite working out the way they want—the government just invokes closure, shuts the door and shuts off any further debate.

I've just passed my first anniversary here in this Legislature, and already I've seen the government invoke closure on what I would consider to be three fundamental bills. The first was in December 2006: Bill 107, with respect to the human rights reform legislation, which dealt with human rights issues, matters of great importance to vulnerable Ontarians. What happened? The debate was summarily cut off. Secondly, we've seen it in the budget bill, debate which involves \$23 billion of additional spending, year over year. It's going to basically go under the radar without the benefit of a great degree of public scrutiny. Finally, here we are with the bill on electoral reform, dealing with this motion to time allocate this bill.

Before I get into substantive discussion with respect to this, I would like to go back to some of the comments that have been made by some of the government members over the years with respect to this issue. In 2001, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said the following about closure: "I know there are some people who will say, 'You know, nobody really cares. Nobody cares any more about closure. At one time this was a big thing, where democracy in effect was shut down by a government, but nobody cares any more.'"

"If that's so, and it may very well be, it's a sad state of our democracy in this province if people really don't care about that."

I'd say it's a very sad state of our government that on one hand claims that the very aim of this legislation is to restore public faith in the system and on the other uses time allocation on the bill, a measure that one of the Premier's ministers is on record as saying is a factor that is perhaps responsible for disenchanting voters in the first place. He is also on record as characterizing closure as "cutting off the parliamentary debate that we believe in with our democratic system." I'd really like to know how the government would reconcile this disparity, given the motion they have filed.

Notwithstanding this irony, I say to government members that there are ways to start restoring public faith in the political system immediately—not in a month, not after October 10, not after the next government introduces legislation to implement a new electoral system, if that is what is chosen, but today. The very fact of the matter is that people care more about how politicians act once they are elected than how they are elected. Thus, I believe that effecting parliamentary change would be more beneficial than instigating electoral reform as we try to restore public faith in the political system.

One of the ways we can do this is through strong leadership. Almost four years ago, the people of Ontario elected Dalton McGuinty with a majority mandate, a result that comes with immense responsibility. However, since his election, he has done nothing but erode the confidence of the public in their government by displaying weak leadership. He has broken his promises, broken his faith with the people of Ontario and completely abdicated his responsibility to remain accountable to voters.

Just this afternoon, we gave the Premier and his ministers an opportunity to show that he is really committed to real and tangible openness and accountability in politics by tabling an opposition motion to refer the issue of the OLG scandal to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. That way, we could finally start getting to the truth about the OLG issue and what the government knew about this before the matter was unearthed by the Ombudsman's office. Instead of voting to support this motion, to support a practice that has legislative precedents, would cost very little and would give the Premier an opportunity to honour his election commitments to the people of Ontario, this Premier and his government cavalierly voted to defeat it in an attempt to continue their apparent cover-up of this egregious scandal. This is quite something, coming from a Premier who made repeated demands for legislative committees of the Assembly while in opposition.

In 1991, the Premier said, "Our public and our traditions of fairness demand that this matter be reviewed by a committee of this House. The course that the government members of the committee have embarked the committee upon means that this government has no intention of dealing with this matter publicly and fairly. Government members have accused us of being on a witch hunt. We are on a hunt—a hunt for the facts, and we will pursue those facts relentlessly, rigorously and unflinchingly."

Given his overwhelming record as an active pursuer of legislative inquiries, you might think the Premier would have seized the opportunity with which he was presented this afternoon. Instead, for some mysterious reason, he has completely reversed his position on this issue with no substantive explanation. As I noted earlier, supporting our motion would also have given the Premier an opportunity to consider some of the election promises he made back in 2003. He has broken promises since then, such as not to raise taxes, to close coal-fired electricity plants by 2007, and on and on—over 50 promises that have been broken. Now it seems we can add another broken promise to the Premier's resumé.

Despite all the initiatives to start restoring public trust immediately that we have urged the government to consider, we are left here tonight debating a motion to invoke closure on Bill 155. Not only am I wary of the very principle of cutting off debate on a bill concerning electoral reform, as I've noted; I have to say that my apprehension is only increased upon examination of the full content of this legislation, which is something I would like to comment on in further detail but unfortunately time is not going to allow.

In closing, I would say, small wonder that this government is losing the trust of the people in the political process—we have no clear plan detailing what will happen should this bill be proclaimed. In fact, as I stated in the outset, there's a pattern emerging here, and it's most regrettable for all of us who believe in the democratic process.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): As parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for democratic renewal, I'm delighted to join my colleagues again in speaking today in support of Bill 155, the Electoral System Referendum Act, 2007. Let me start by saying that this bill will enable every Ontarian's voice to be heard regarding the province's electoral system.

We know the decision of the independent Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, now that they've completed their deliberations. We know they have recommended that Ontario adopt a new electoral system. We know that the members of the citizens' assembly voted 94 to 8 in favour of recommending replacement of our current first past the post system with mixed member proportional representation, which means the question will go to a referendum in which a 60% majority will be required to pass the change.

This new system will also result in an increase in the number of MPPs from 107 to 129. As the minister reminded us earlier today, the citizens' assembly members have been spending two weekends a month since September studying our current electoral system and others. They also led public consultations in communities across this province. As well, these 52 women and 51 men were given the opportunity to consult with former members of the select committee on electoral reform.

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I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of those members of the citizens' assembly on electoral reform.

I'd also like to make a personal thank you to my citizens' assembly member from the riding of Brampton Centre. Her name is Joyce Hughes. I understand she's an avid traveller. She was really excited to participate in the assembly and to discuss and review electoral systems and she was excited about contributing to some possible change. As well, I'd like to acknowledge the hard work of former judge and chair of the committee, George Thomson.

I think everybody in this Legislature is looking forward to receiving the final report, which apparently is going to be available to us on May 15. It will include the details and the rationale for the citizens' assembly. I think we heard earlier that there was a show tonight on TVO, and it was really interesting to listen to the citizen member who was on the panel tonight talk about her rationale for her decision, and I think each member of the committee would have a different reason for the decision they made. I'm looking forward to seeing that report.

May 15 is an important date. It's at that time we'll have an opportunity to learn about the details of those recommendations, and after reviewing the final report, we're going to announce the next step in this process: public education. That's why we're here tonight, because we've given the people of Ontario the power to shape the future of the electoral system. Our government trusts the people of Ontario to make this important decision.

In order to respond to the citizens' assembly recommendation, we have to put processes in place in time for the next provincial election, which is when this referendum question will be placed before Ontarians. That's why we're time-allocating this bill this evening. We are working toward the next steps in this democratic renewal agenda. Our government has done much to bring democracy into the 21st century and we're continuing to work on delivering results.

This bill promotes our belief in democracy, where each citizen has the opportunity to participate in building a better society, and their government takes pride in empowering those citizens we serve. Now that the citizens' assembly has recommended a new electoral system, we will ensure that Ontarians have access to fair and neutral information that they need to make an informed decision on the referendum in October.

If in the referendum Ontarians vote to change the electoral system, the government would be bound by the results to introduce the alternative system. This proposed legislation would require the government to introduce a bill by December 31, 2008. This bill would support implementing the recommendation of the citizens' assembly. It's up to Ontarians to decide which electoral system best reflects their values. It's the government's responsibility to guarantee that their voices are heard loud and clear. This bill promotes our belief in democracy, where each citizen has an opportunity to participate in building a better Ontario, and our government takes pride in offering the process that will allow that to occur.

I had the opportunity to sit on the committee that heard from numerous Ontarians and groups on this piece

of legislation. It was rewarding and heartening to see so many individuals who were captured by this bill. They were enthusiastic, they were passionate, they were either for or against it and they had different recommendations. I recall the day we sat at that hearing that there was a snowstorm, and despite the snowstorm, people came out and were still passionate about what they heard. They didn't say, "I'm too busy," or "It's too dangerous; I can't get there." They still made a point of getting here. So, clearly, people care about this issue. I'm very grateful for their participation.

We heard a variety of recommendations and concerns expressed on the issue of the threshold. We heard arguments for a simple majority and those in support of our recommended decision rule. What we must remember is that the adoption of a new electoral system represents a foundational change in Ontario's democracy. We believe that a decision of this magnitude deserves to have the support of a solid majority of Ontarians across this province. This proposed legislation reflects the significance of this decision. We're requiring a solid majority amongst the Ontario electorate of our province. We believe that the people of Ontario deserve that level of certainty.

There's something to be said about the fundamentals behind such an important piece of legislation. It's important to understand how a referendum vote would be administered, and I'd be happy to explain some of those details. This legislation is rooted in the existing election process. The referendum will be administered by Elections Ontario in a way that maintains both the integrity of the election and of the referendum. The powers of the candidates and their scrutineers would not change, and they'd retain the right to challenge electors and oversee the vote and the vote counting process.

If passed, this bill will build on our existing election process and allow the referendum to take place with the same safeguards and protections. We recognize the need to make sure that Ontarians have confidence in the election process. We understand the importance of transparency with respect to the rules that will govern a potential referendum campaign. This bill entrenches the importance of safeguarding the integrity of the referendum process and the electoral process.

This proposed legislation would also allow the government to create and Elections Ontario to enforce rules regarding referendum campaign finances. There may be spending and contribution limits set similar to those that govern parties and candidates. The structure we've proposed for referendum campaign finance rules is similar to the Election Finances Act. It would include spending and contribution limits, advertising rules, reporting and record-keeping requirements similar to those governing parties and candidates. The regulations would impose registration requirements on those wishing to campaign in the referendum and, overall, enhance the transparency and fairness of the process. This is all in an effort to ensure that a referendum campaign is carried out in a manner that Ontarians will be equipped with the information

necessary to make informed opinions in an election. These rules would enable a province-wide referendum conversation and establish an inclusive process that's good for democracy.

I really look forward to reading the citizens' assembly report, which is due on the 15th. It's going to provide us with some decisions and rationale and help us move forward with that process.

Interestingly enough, the Ontario students' assembly, which was composed of young Ontarians from age 14 to 18, also recommended a new electoral system. They recommended that the province adopt a new MMP system similar to what we've heard is available in New Zealand and Germany. The students' assembly was reportedly attracted to the MMP system because it would preserve this province's strong local representation and enhance the overall proportionality of the Legislature. They believed it would do this by adding new seats that would be allocated according to each party's share of the total vote.

The second program run by the students' assembly secretariat encouraged more than 2,500 students in classrooms across Ontario to learn about electoral systems. Once they had completed the in-class unit, these classroom assembly participants were asked to vote for the system they preferred. Again, the overwhelming majority of students favoured changed and increased proportionality, while a strong 30% of student voters indicated that the province should retain its current system.

The students' assembly programs created a powerful opportunity for young Ontarians to learn about a political issue with real consequences for our future. We hope that it will set an important precedent for youth engagement in Ontario and become an important part of our province's democratic legacy. Many members, both government and opposition, had an opportunity to meet with the students' assembly. I know it was a very interesting and engaging activity for both students and members. The naïveté that we expected to see wasn't there. They were a very professional, enthusiastic group of students, and I think we're very lucky to have had that group participate.

An undertaking of this magnitude must have the solid support of Ontarians from across the province. I believe that this proposed legislation reflects the significance of this electoral reform and, indeed, is what we mean when we say the word "democracy." I think we believe so strongly in democracy that in fact our government has sent 68% of its bills to committee, compared to a mere 36% by the previous PC government. Fifty-four per cent of our government's bills have had a public hearing, as compared to 24% of the previous government's. Our government has time-allocated only 16% of its bills; the previous government time-allocated 49% of its bills, nearly half of the bills that it introduced. As a percentage of bills passed, our government has time-allocated 19%; the previous government time-allocated 62%, more than three times our government's percentage. That's a very powerful statistic.

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The public believes that this is an important issue, and I think they understand that we have not only walked the walk; we're talking the talk. We're trying to provide legislation that will respect the work that the citizens' assembly did, and we expect to provide them with legislation that honours the work that they've been doing since September.

This legislation is about our government's faith in the people of Ontario to make the best decision about the shape of our political system. We are very encouraged by so many Ontarians and their enthusiasm about participating in the referendum debate. We know how many people came out to the meetings that the citizens' assembly had, how enthusiastic they were, how they spent long hours in debate, asking questions, trying to learn about the system—and continue to do. I know that I have been stopped by people at my husband's Rotary Club and asked, "Is it too late to offer information?"—that was as late as three weeks ago—offering their best advice on how to improve the system. I think all of us have been really impressed by the thoughts that constituents across Ontario have provided on this issue. It's heartening. We trust the people of Ontario to approach this historic task thoughtfully and carefully and to choose a course of action that will ensure that Ontario continues to have a vital democracy for the future.

We think it's important to respond to the citizens' assembly recommendations in a timely manner, which is why this bill has been time-allocated. For the first time in our province's history, Ontarians are being asked to participate in a full, open debate on our electoral system. When we were watching TVO in the back room tonight, I think we saw a change in people's behaviour. Up until now people have been negative about this issue, fear-mongering about what could happen, but I think we're turning the page. I think we heard tonight individuals who had previously been negative about the opportunity for democratic renewal now having a new philosophy, understanding that it's time for a change. It's time for us to stop looking at the way things were and being afraid of change, and accepting and embracing that change. As somebody said on the television tonight, it's status quo plus. It gives us some opportunities.

This is historic. This is a historic time, and we're probably never going to get this opportunity again in our lifetime to make a change of this significance, of this magnitude. We as a government trust the people of Ontario to approach that task very thoughtfully. I know they're going to do their homework. I know they're going to be inundated with information. But they're up to the task. I believe that they really do have the best interests of how they're represented at heart. We know that they understand it's not going to happen again. We know that it's unprecedented for Ontarians to be able to participate in strengthening Ontario's democracy. No government in this province has ever given citizens this

kind of opportunity to shape how their government works. It's a healthy and exciting process. It might be a little scary, but it's healthy. It's democracy in action, a democracy that belongs to the citizens of Ontario, not just their elected officials.

I think we all think that debate in this House is the only place it should happen. It should happen on the streets. It should happen in Tim Hortons. It should happen in our kitchens. This is a healthy thing. The debate is good. It shouldn't be a threat to any good representative in this House. There are many good representatives in this House who do talk to their electorate and ask their opinions on things and reflect their opinions in this House. It's important that we embrace this change, that we look forward to the opportunity to have a different kind of dialogue so that not only will people be voting for the candidate on October 10; they'll have an opportunity to take a historic step, to take a ballot in their hand on a referendum issue that they've never had an opportunity to vote on before. I think that's critical.

Our party has enormous faith and respect for the members of the citizens' assembly who have dedicated so much time to this process. For that assembly and for the student assembly, we want to say thank you very much. Many people wouldn't have given up that time. We know they're a very special group. They were the average person but they were above average. They did a very extraordinary job for us and we thank them for that kind of time that they gave up with their families to become our 103 experts on this issue. They've provided great leadership and I know that they look forward to providing their report on May 15 to us to help us understand the rationale for their decision. I have every confidence that we're going to be enlightened by that report. I'm really looking forward to seeing it because I know they put a lot of work into it. We trust and respect their decision and we know that Ontarians will make a good decision on our future on October 10.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak about Bill 155, the electoral reform act. I think this is a good piece of legislation. We're acting in a timely fashion. We respect the work that the citizens' assembly did on our behalf, and we thank them for the time that they put in on our behalf and all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker: The time for debate has now expired.

Mr. Bradley has moved government motion number 324. 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 nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 2117 to 2127.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please stand and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Balkissoon, Bas
 Bentley, Christopher
 Berardinetti, Lorenzo
 Bountrogianni, Marie
 Bradley, James J.
 Brownell, Jim
 Craiton, Kim
 Crozier, Bruce
 Dombrowsky, Leona
 Duguid, Brad
 Flynn, Kevin Daniel
 Fonseca, Peter
 Gravelle, Michael
 Jeffrey, Linda
 Lalonde, Jean-Marc
 Leal, Jeff
 Matthews, Deborah
 McNeely, Phil
 Meilleur, Madeleine
 Milloy, John
 Mitchell, Carol
 Mossop, Jennifer F.

Racco, Mario G.
 Ramal, Khalil
 Ruprecht, Tony
 Sandals, Liz
 Smith, Monique
 Smitherman, George
 Van Bommel, Maria
 Watson, Jim
 Zimmer, David

Elliott, Christine
 Ferreira, Paul
 Kormos, Peter

Nays

Miller, Norm
 Murdoch, Bill
 Ouellette, Jerry J.

Scott, Laurie
 Sterling, Norman W.
 Yakabuski, John

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

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): The ayes are 31; the nays are 9.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The time now being after 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30.

The House adjourned at 2130.

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