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Jeudi 3 mai 2007

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Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 3 May 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 3 mai 2007

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

JOB PROTECTION
COMMISSIONER ACT, 2007
LOI DE 2007 SUR LE COMMISSAIRE
À LA PROTECTION DES EMPLOIS

Mr. Hampton moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 126, An Act to provide for a Job Protection Commissioner / Projet de loi 126, Loi prévoyant la nomination d'un commissaire à la protection des emplois.

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

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I want to outline for all members of the Legislature how vitally important a Job Protection Commissioner is and would be for Ontario at this time.

Ontario has lost over 150,000 manufacturing jobs in the last three years. In many communities, these jobs are the core of the community. They are the best-paying jobs in the community; they are the jobs which sustain other jobs and other economic activity in the community. In so many communities, they are the real economic base.

So far, the response of the government too often has been to say to workers and communities, "Oh, I feel your pain, I feel your pain, I feel your pain," but to not do anything significant to address the issues. In my view, much of the manufacturing job loss in this province is preventable and it is avoidable. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this significant loss of manufacturing jobs, but many of these factors are under the control of or can be influenced by governments of some level.

Now, what would a jobs commissioner do? This is not an idea that I claim I creativity over. Other jurisdictions have created this position. In effect, the jobs commissioner is a jobs advocate. The jobs commissioner, when this office was created in British Columbia, was a position entirely independent of government. The jobs commissioner doesn't go around the province handing out cheques. A jobs commissioner, as it was established in British

Columbia, was an independent body. It was staffed with people who knew something about operating manufacturing facilities. It was staffed with people who knew something about labour relations and negotiating collective agreements. It was staffed with people who knew something about corporate finance, especially short- and medium-term finance. It was staffed with people who knew something about export development and export chains and the things you had to go through in terms of developing export financing and then finally export rules.

In British Columbia at the time—we're talking about the early 1990s—people were worried about the risk of losing about 100,000 jobs in the secondary manufacturing of their forest sector. Clearly, 100,000 jobs would be devastating for British Columbia, just as the loss of 150,000 jobs in Ontario has been devastating for communities and workers across this province. But rather than say, "Oh, I feel your pain, I feel your pain," the government of the day there did create the office of the jobs commissioner and did make it independent of government.

The jobs commissioner was proactive. They didn't wait until an announcement was made about a factory closing and 500 people being put out of work. They didn't wait until an announcement came through that a plant was downsizing and 200 or 300 people were going to be put out of work. They recognized that there were some issues affecting their secondary manufacturing sector, so one of the first things they did was to conduct some studies: What are the issues? What are the challenges that many of these plants and factories and manufacturing facilities are facing? Then, with some knowledge of the challenges and the issues that needed to be confronted, they actually went to individual plants and factories and facilities around the province and said, "Look, our information indicates that you may be facing some challenges. We'd like to sit down and talk with you now about these challenges and what we can do to meet these challenges and what we can do to, hopefully, reposition your facility to sustain its output and to sustain jobs and economic activity."

Many employers were happy to come to the table because, having operated in the province for some time, having a commitment to individual communities, they wanted to see their operations sustained. So in many cases employers came to the table, certainly workers and unions came to the table, municipal leaders came to the table, provincial government departments came to the table, even federal government departments came to the

table; in many cases, even financial institutions standing in the background came to the table. Once you had everybody at the table, you could sit down and do a deeper analysis: What are the challenges we face and what are the things we need to do to reposition this facility?

In other cases, employers were not willing to come to the table. In some cases, employers were already in the backroom making the decision, "We'll move this operation to Mexico," or, "We'll move this operation somewhere else." In those cases, it took moral suasion on the part of the jobs commissioner to get some of those employers to the table. But if workers were willing to come to the table and their unions were willing to come to the table and municipal leaders and provincial representatives and federal representatives were willing to come to the table, in many cases those employers were reluctantly persuaded to come to the table because they didn't want to be identified as selfish and self-interested individuals or selfish and self-interested corporations that were not good corporate citizens.

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Once everyone was at the table—and there are case studies of this that I understand are being looked at in business schools and industrial programs across the country—it was, in many cases, possible to identify specifically what the issues were. I'll be blunt: In some cases the issue was hydro rates. Different kinds of manufacturing facilities could be penalized or prejudiced because of the way hydro rates were established. That is certainly the case in this province today, across northern Ontario. Then the call went out to the provincial government—"Address this issue"—and pressure was put on the provincial government to address the issue. In some cases, it may have been a financial institution that was nervous about what was happening in the forest products sector, and the financial institution was calling in short-term or medium-term loans, in which case the issue was, "How do we renegotiate some of this short-term and medium-term financing so that these workers aren't put out of work and this facility isn't shut down simply because someone in the financial community may have over-extended themselves?" In some cases, it was about redeveloping an export chain. In some cases, it was about export financing, in which case the federal government was called to the table: "What are you going to do to address these issues?"

The net result in British Columbia over 11 years is that, of those 100,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs that were originally identified as being at risk, 75,000 were successfully repositioned and sustained so that many of those facilities continue to operate today and many of those jobs that were at risk continue to be in place in those communities today, sustaining those communities, sustaining working families and contributing to the economy of that province.

What do we have in Ontario today? I can tell you that in the part of Ontario I represent, we have paper mill after paper mill after paper mill being closed. In every

case, when they make their announcement, they're asked, "What's the issue here?" and they say, "Look, the Ontario government is forcing us to pay seven cents a kilowatt hour for electricity that only costs one cent a kilowatt hour to produce in our part of the province. Meanwhile, our competitors in British Columbia and Quebec, in Manitoba and Minnesota, Wisconsin and in the southern United States are paying 3.5 or 4 or 4.5 cents a kilowatt hour. Electricity is a big part of our cost structure, 25% or 30% of our everyday cost structure. We cannot continue in the face of this kind of unfairness." So they're either closing or they're simply saying, "We're not going to make any further investments in Ontario."

Just this week I was at the Genfast plant in Brantford. In 2001, the Genfast Manufacturing plant was identified as the manufacturing facility of the year in Brantford. The plant is still profitable; it still makes money. I hear the minister of industry talk about the advanced manufacturing strategy of the government. Well, the Genfast plant should be a poster child for the advanced manufacturing plan of the government. But they're being closed down and people are being put out of work. Why? One of the reasons is, as the company has said to workers, "You know what? It's easier and quicker for us to close a facility in Ontario rather than do it in another jurisdiction, where we'd face some barriers." That's why we need a jobs commissioner in Ontario to deal with these kinds of issues.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Good morning. It's very important to talk about job protection. The leader of the third party was talking about creating a job commissioner to have job protection. We on this side of the House don't believe in this position in order to protect our jobs; we strongly believe on this side of the House that it's by creating a good environment to attract business to Ontario to invest in many different companies and to invest in many different research and innovation programs to create protection, to persuade people to come to Ontario to open and also hire many people.

I was listening to the honourable member, and he referenced British Columbia. To my knowledge, British Columbia cancelled the job commissioner because it didn't think it's the right thing to do. As a matter of fact, they want to follow in the steps of Ontario because, as the honourable member knows very well, Ontario is creating a good environment by investing a lot of money in the health care system, making it accessible for all the people across the province. This is very important for investment when they decide to come to Ontario.

Another part is to invest in our post-secondary education to create good, skilled workers to be able to operate and function and supply those factories or those companies that want to open in Ontario. Our strategy is also to persuade many different factories to come to Ontario, like Hino, like Toyota in Woodstock, like Diamond Aircraft. Many different factories across the province remain in Ontario because our support is

tremendous and a great help for them to compete at an international level.

I understand that the honourable member wants to protect jobs in Ontario. It's a very good and noble thing to do, and that's what we're doing in this House. We have a Minister of Economic Development and Trade and a small business minister and also a labour minister who work day and night to make sure the infrastructure and the environment are there for the workers and for companies to come and open in Ontario.

I have had the chance to go with the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to many different spots in the province, and one of them was in my riding of London–Fanshawe; we went to Diamond Aircraft. We gave them our support because they were going to hire 500 extra workers to support their factory. Also, they've partnered with Fanshawe College to create good, skilled workers to supply their demand. All that happened because of our investment in that area, which I guess was a million dollars going to Fanshawe College and Diamond Aircraft to have a joint venture, a program to train people for the aviation skills they needed. There are also a lot of programs across Ontario, like apprenticeships, in conjunction with many different unions and with colleges and universities to supply the demand for those factories and companies that want to open in Ontario.

I want to tell you something very important too. Last Friday we went to the University of Western Ontario and invested more than \$14 million in many different areas for research and innovation. I want to tell you, that innovation system and that research in terms of audiology science was labelled number one on the whole globe. This is the way we think we can persuade companies, persuade scientists, persuade people to come and invest in Ontario, by creating a good environment. It's also very important to know we have a public education system. We have great infrastructure: highways, roads. All these elements make it easier for many different factories and companies to open in Ontario.

This is part of our strategy: creating an environment, not creating a position. A position doesn't attract business. It's when we have a vibrant government willing to support, willing to invest, willing to travel the world—to China, to India, to Pakistan, to Europe, to the Middle East—to persuade companies to open in Ontario, to open trade with many different nations. Due to our investment, due to our strategy, we've created roughly about 400,000 net new jobs in this province.

I think we're on the right track and in the right direction. I hope we can continue to work to protect jobs in Ontario, not by appointing a person but by creating an environment and also supporting financially many different companies to open in Ontario.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to have the opportunity this morning to speak to Bill 126, the Job Protection Commissioner Act, 2006, brought forward by the leader of the third party. He has brought this forward because the present McGuinty Liberal government hasn't been doing a good job—

losing manufacturing jobs almost daily. It's a sad, sad fact out there.

I'm very passionate about my communities, as I know all the members of the Legislature are, and how we can work to keep good-paying manufacturing jobs, and keep these things, especially in rural Ontario, where we're having a hard time. Yesterday was a terrible day for me, because I lost a manufacturing plant in Lindsay: Fleetwood had to close its doors. It has been there since 1972. At one time within the last year, it was employing over 500 people. It has been having to scale down over the months; they've been struggling. I've written letters to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, going back a year and a half now, to say, "What can we do to keep jobs in Ontario?" Eastern Ontario, which this is part of, was hit very, very hard. They need some incentives to stay there, to keep those employees. So yesterday's headlines, "Fleetwood Closing Its Doors"—at this point 315 were left out of work, just there.

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But we all know that there's a huge spinoff effect in our communities. These are valuable jobs. There are other businesses that supplied parts to them; there are the economic spinoffs of just the towns—buying groceries, going to the dress shops. So when a loss that big comes to a small community, it's a huge, devastating impact. We have young families and experienced workers, skilled trades. Opportunities are gone. Youth and summer employment opportunities are gone. Staff were sent home yesterday and told they wouldn't have their jobs past July 25.

One of the employees was quoted in the Lindsay Daily Post as saying, "It's disappointing. There are a lot of people that work here in this town. You've got 300 people here that buy groceries.... I'm also at an age, 55 years old, where it's going to be pretty hard to find a job." It's a very tough pill to take in our community. It's a very tragic thing that has happened there. I spent most of my time on the phone yesterday, talking to the company to say, "What can we do? How can we help the employees you have had there?" many of whom I know personally, because the company has been there since 1972.

Like I said, it's hard for us, once we lose an industry, to try to get new industries built up. That is why the Leader of the Opposition has been bringing these resolutions before us today, because something has to be done. There's a critical situation in our small towns and all over Ontario. We want people to stay in our communities. We could lose these people from our communities.

I know that my colleague from Halton, back in December 2005, presented a motion requesting the government to act and recognize the growing crisis in communities affected by significant job losses as a result of, among other things, plant closures. My view is, one job loss is significant; every job loss is significant. It's important for the people here today to know that under Dalton McGuinty's watch, there were over 120,000 or more job losses in the manufacturing sector—and he was quoted as saying that's a hiccup.

My colleague from Waterloo–Wellington more recently, in November 2006, presented a resolution which received support from all parties. It called attention to addressing job loss issues in the province of Ontario. But we have yet to see any of these things acted upon. If the attitude is that with over 100,000 manufacturing job losses at that time, the Premier says it's a hiccup—it's not a hiccup. It's very important; it's trend-setting. We see more and more job losses every day. I know my friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is going to speak later. He also had a plant close down yesterday in his riding—more job losses. It's on a daily, daily basis, and we haven't seen a plan from this government. There has been no vision, no commitment to address this growing situation. It is bad out there in Ontario.

My question is, what will our children and our grandchildren do to find the good-paying jobs in the future? With the increasing and rapid erosion of these manufacturing jobs, the lack of action by this government, very few of our children and grandchildren are going to find jobs, especially in rural Ontario. There is a lot that ministries, as I mentioned earlier, along with this government, could do to show leadership in the province of Ontario. Liberal policies leave business and industry struggling. They're struggling to meet regulatory burdens, ever-increasing taxes, energy instability. They're pushing businesses like Fleetwood out of Ontario, and we cannot stand by and let that happen.

We need short-term, medium-term and long-term strategies to assist people who have lost jobs, just like my colleague from Waterloo–Wellington's resolution suggested. It was passed last November by all parties, and we still haven't seen it. The job losses in the forestry sectors that were spoken about so passionately before—you know what? It's going to be too little, too late. Promising an Ontario Manufacturing Council that was in the recent budget with no dates, no timelines and no plan—the consistent theme with the Liberal rhetoric and electioneering. It's time for action now, and my communities in Haliburton–Victoria–Brock need much, much more.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this very important motion before us here today.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for York South–Weston.

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's coming to you more naturally now—that's good to see.

It's with great pride that I rise this morning to speak in favour of this very worthy and thoughtful legislation that's been put forth by my leader, the member for Kenora–Rainy River. The member for Kenora–Rainy River embodies the type of strong, proactive leadership that the people of Ontario are clamouring for, and I have no doubt that he will be richly rewarded on October 10 for his tireless efforts on their behalf. We are already seeing evidence of that with the recent by-election returns in Parkdale–High Park and in my own riding of York South–Weston, and I believe we'll see more of it very, very soon.

It occurred to me this morning that the last time I rose in this House on a Thursday morning, it was to speak in favour of the anti-scab legislation proposed by my colleague the member for Niagara Centre. When it came to that legislation, the members on the government side contorted themselves into pretzels trying to figure out what to do. At the end of the day, a number of them voted in favour of that bill. I'm hoping that this morning, all of them join with the New Democrats to vote in favour of this bill calling for a much-needed creation of a job protection commissioner.

Ontario is crying out for the creation of such a commissioner, an independent agency. We are bleeding well-paying manufacturing jobs across the province. We've heard the figure: more than 150,000 have disappeared in recent years. That's more than one in 10 jobs in manufacturing in the province—gone.

When I say that I hope we can count on the support of the government side for this bill, I'm hoping that the members opposite accept this situation with a higher degree of seriousness than their leader, the Premier.

Just last month, the Premier made what I would call an incredibly unbelievable and insensitive remark about the crisis in manufacturing in Ontario. Speaking in St. Catharines in mid-April, he said, "Those who lose their jobs in the manufacturing jobs can find jobs in other sectors." Thanks for the thoughtfulness, Premier. That sure sounds like a man who is out of touch with the reality that is confronted by thousands of hard-working Ontario families who have seen their livelihoods disappear as a result of his government's inaction.

It shouldn't surprise anyone in this province that this is the same man who gave himself a \$40,000 raise just a few days before Christmas. That same amount—\$40,000—would go a long way toward improving the plight of a working family anywhere in this province, including in my riding of York South–Weston, where the unemployment rate is considerably higher than the provincial average and where the average household income is barely more than the Premier's raise.

My riding has seen significant job losses in recent years. The latest to go was Kodak, which shed the last few hundred jobs at its Mount Dennis production facility last year. Perhaps it will be of comfort to the Premier and his colleagues on the government bench to know that the Kodak lands, 52 acres in all, are likely to turn into a new home for—what else?—big box retail outlets. So those workers who earned a very good and fair salary at Kodak will be left to, perhaps, hawk sporting goods or peddle electronic gadgets for the minimum wage that the Premier refuses to raise immediately.

With any luck, I suppose, those workers will be able to land two or three of those jobs so that they can afford to pay the mortgage each month and feed their kids. Unfortunately, in the greater Toronto area, it isn't just Kodak that's left. In the past five years alone, this part of our province has lost one fifth of our manufacturing jobs. That's a staggering amount. A few recent examples: Tower Automotive—178 jobs gone; Smurfit-Stone container—140 jobs gone; Mueller Canada—158 jobs gone.

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The count rises and rises and the toll on working families mounts and mounts, yet we get nothing from this government, not even a peep from the Minister of Economic Development over there, who, just a couple of weeks back, Mr. Speaker—I believe you were here for that debate since it's in your region—sat glued in her place and didn't even rise to speak out on behalf of her constituents in the great city of Windsor when, ironically enough, the member from Kenora–Rainy River presented a constructive motion that would have greatly improved the economic conditions there in the city of Windsor.

The inaction of that minister speaks to this government's "say nothing, do nothing" attitude when it comes to protecting Ontario jobs. Thank goodness we have the member for Kenora–Rainy River filling the leadership vacuum. His bill would give Ontario much-needed direction in enhancing our economic competitiveness and effectiveness. The commissioner that the bill would create would work with both employers and labour to come up with the strategies and tactics to ensure that good, well-paying jobs are protected. It's a concept that has worked in other jurisdictions and will work here in Ontario if this government supports it today.

I know that labour leaders from across this province support this bill. In fact, it's why a number of them were here this morning on the front steps of the Legislature for a press conference. They brought with them workers who themselves have lost their jobs and now face economic uncertainty. These labour leaders and their members realize that the fight to protect jobs in our province is too important to stand on the sidelines.

New Democrats welcome their support and applaud their determination in this fight. Their hard-working members are well served by their leadership.

I want to wrap up so that one or two of my colleagues can also speak to this bill. I want to close by urging members of the government side to think of their own communities this morning, to think of the job losses in those communities and the devastating economic impact they have had and to think of the good that the passage of this bill would do to curb future job losses in their communities. I say to them, your constituents are watching. Do the right thing this morning: Support this bill; join New Democrats in supporting it.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): I just want to start off by saying that in terms of the economy, what we have to do as a government is to ensure that what is in place will allow for economic prosperity. That is the role of our government. I want to start off with saying that. As a result of the Dalton McGuinty government's creating the right environment, 327,000 net new jobs have been created since October 2003.

I'm going to start there, but I want to seize this opportunity to talk about rural Ontario and what we have done as a government to make sure we are able to seize our opportunities and move forward, more specifically as related to Huron–Bruce.

I just can't help but start off in this manner, as the member from Kenora–Rainy River talks about "feeling

your pain." Well, I represent the most rural riding in the province of Ontario, that being Huron–Bruce, and if his energy policy goes forward, I hope he can hear me today saying, "Can you feel my pain?" Bruce Power employs a third of my riding. When we look at the work that had to be done from my riding to make sure we move forward, I hope you can hear my voice when we talk about feeling pain. I know there has been a lot of conversation, certainly some conversation from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, who talked about feeling the pain of rural communities. Well, where was their government when you downloaded on rural communities that had no ability to pay for the services that were downloaded upon them? We talk about economic prosperity. We talk about the formula that needs to be in place, the foundation. When I hear comments like that, I find it very, very difficult, I must say.

I believe that to go forward, and specifically in rural Ontario, we have to ensure that we have a strong health care system. Within the riding of Huron–Bruce, I have eight hospitals, and I am only going to speak specifically to the hospitals, knowing that health care is much more than hospitals, but I am going to talk about the hospital sector for just one minute.

When we took over government in 2003, I can tell you that all our hospitals were running deficits. Threats of closures were the daily conversation. I am very proud to say that all of my eight hospitals today have balanced budgets, are enhancing services and hiring more nurses. We have never seen the investment by any government—and that represents a 29% increase overall in the province of Ontario in the health care budget; that represents \$8.5 billion. We have gone from closures to hiring. I can tell you, in rural Ontario—and some of you have been up in my riding and you know what it's like to get from A to B to C—when our roads are closed, you're not going anywhere. So there's this investment in the hospital sector, understanding that there are many providers in the health care sector, but I'm just going to speak to the hospitals.

Then I'll talk about better schools, higher test scores. I talk about post-secondary, but when we took over government in 2003, what we had going on was school closures. What we had going on was community fighting community, pitted against each other. As for community members, all of their time was focused on fundraising, getting out there and talking about stopping the school closures, ensuring that their children had—and I know that there's a book in the future. We talk about the children who came through the Harris years of schooling. My children went through that: strikes, protests. It was not, I tell you, an environment where one could go forward.

But what have we done? In post-secondary, for the first time in a rural riding, the rural riding of Huron–Bruce, we now have post-secondary available to us. In Kincardine, we have a portal. At Bruce Power, the Power Workers' Union has gone to Fanshawe College, on site, training millwrights. In the town of Goderich we have

post-secondary education available. No government before the McGuinty government had ever made that commitment to the riding of Huron–Bruce, so when I see people stand up and talk about that—I don't want to lose sight of tax competitiveness. If that's not available, we then cannot go forward.

Unfortunately, so many other members want to speak that I must stop talking now, but I do thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I certainly want to stand here and support the leader of the third party on his resolution today with regard to a jobs commissioner. It's similar in fashion to what we asked for last year—in fact, a motion that the government supported. It won in a voice vote here in the Legislature, so you would think that the government would be willing to support this, considering the record they have with job losses in this province.

I received information yesterday about another 100 jobs to be lost in my riding: Trimag, in Haley. General Motors is one of their primary customers. Where are the jobs going? You might be interested to hear this. They're going to Quebec, because the Quebec government is actually doing something to attract and retain manufacturing jobs, but the Ontario government is missing in action on that file. So we continue to bleed jobs while other provinces are attracting them in the manufacturing sector, because they're doing the things necessary to do that.

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The member for Huron–Bruce went all over the map, so I suppose I have some latitude here. I want to talk about Tuesday and yesterday, and how it has sunk in this chamber. I talked to some members who have been here for between 20 and 30 years—20 and 30 years—and they have never, ever in their history here witnessed what they saw in the last two days; that is, the government of the day devoting some of their statement time and all of their question period time to attacking, personally, a member of the opposition of this Legislature—never before in the history of those members, who have been here since 1977. It gives you an indication of where this has gone.

On Tuesday, my colleague from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford was the target—

The Deputy Speaker: I would really prefer that you address the bill at hand.

Mr. Yakabuski: On Tuesday, my colleague from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford was the target. He has lost jobs in his riding. Yesterday, I was the target, and I have lost jobs in my riding. I want to talk about my riding, Mr. Speaker, because yesterday I was accused of not standing up for my riding. I was accused of not standing up for my riding, and that's what I'm doing today for jobs in my riding and for the constituents of my riding who still might have a job. Yesterday, a number of things were said, and I want to address a couple of them.

The members for Prince Edward–Hastings, Sault Ste. Marie, Huron–Bruce, Northumberland and Nipissing lowered themselves to that level in this Legislature. They should be ashamed of themselves. They are all desperate

people. I want to address a couple of things. You know, what is sad is that they are allowing themselves to be pawns of the Premier's office. When you abandon whatever principles you have with regard to common decency, then you have to ask yourself whether or not you really should be here.

The member for Prince Edward–Hastings talked about the closing of the Pembroke Civic Hospital. That hospital was closed by the hospital restructuring board. What he failed to recognize is that the previous government invested \$38 million in improvements and expansion at the Pembroke Regional Hospital.

The member for Nipissing completely incorrectly accused me of being opposed to supply management. I'm on record, and every farm organization in my riding knows my stand on supply management: I have been four-square in favour of it since I came here and before I came here. In fact, I'm one of the first signatories to FarmGate5. That's the kind of stuff that gets said from those members across the way.

The Minister of Agriculture accused me of not being interested in the Klaesi digester project in my riding. Well, I have in my hand a letter that I sent to the minister asking them to support the Klaesis and the extension of their biodigester program in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. You would think that the Minister of Agriculture would take the time to understand her own file. This is what happens when people jump to conclusions because they are so bent on trying to attack, in an ad hominem fashion, another member in this Legislature. Why have we sunk to these depths?

The other day they attacked my friend from Toronto–Davenport—

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Yakabuski: Toronto–Danforth—my apologies—in question period. The day before, myself and my friend from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford—

The Deputy Speaker: If you're not going to speak to the issue, at least speak through the Chair.

Mr. Yakabuski: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I keep looking for a signal from the man who proposed this bill today, my friend the leader of the third party, and he says to go ahead, so it must be making him happy; it's his resolution.

I guess my—oh yes, and then accusing me of not recognizing things the government has done. I didn't know that when I was elected I was supposed to be the press secretary for the government. I thought it was my job to be the loyal opposition of Her Majesty. If the government wants me to go out and advertise them, they're going to have to pay me through their party reserves as well. But I am not here to do their job. It is their job to tell what wonderful things they may or may not be doing, which they do. They send press releases to my riding all the time.

When you get into the business of attacking a member here—you know that old saying that when you take the toothpaste out of the tube, you can't put it back in?—you

should really ask yourselves if that's the road you want to go down. I am quite prepared, I am very prepared, to stand on my record in my riding in October, because you do not do me a disservice when you behave like that; you do yourselves a disservice.

You know who else you do a disservice to? The people that you are hoping will run against me. You're doing them a disservice. All of those ridiculous Hansards that we have here are going to be distributed in my riding and people are going to ask themselves, "What kind of people are on the other side of this House?" Just check the press, check the current events and see what happens in my riding, and you would see how silly you were yesterday.

I'm prepared to be judged by the people. I hope that you people are prepared to be judged as well.

Mr. Tabuns: It's a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 126 to bring a jobs commissioner into Ontario.

We've talked a lot about numbers, but I want to talk a bit about human experience and human impact. I grew up in the east end of Hamilton, near Stelco. People on my street worked at Stelco. The guy next door worked in a broom factory. My father was an auto mechanic. We didn't live wealthy lives, luxurious lives, but we lived stable lives. People had incomes that allowed them to eat decently, to have hope for the future, to live lives that people wanted to live.

When you look at what the population of this province needs, manufacturing jobs are a crucial part of it, and when those jobs are gone, there is a very significant, very substantial, very painful human impact.

When I was a teenager, I was in Flint, Michigan, on a—what can I say? I was there because I was in a judo club. We were down for the Canusa Games, Hamilton versus Flint, and I stayed with folks in Flint. The breadwinner of the family I stayed with worked for General Motors. As in Hamilton, these people lived fairly modest but, frankly, secure lives. They knew they had an income coming in that allowed them to live a relatively decent life. That family that I stayed with, and many other families in Flint, decades later were plunged into chaos with the shutdown of the industrial base in that city.

Michael Moore, in his film *Roger and Me*, documented what happened in that city: people losing their homes, people desperately trying to find whatever McJob they could get their hands on, because that's what there was. There were scenes in that film of the sheriff going in and repossessing people's homes, of houses that were left empty, abandoned, because no one could afford to either buy them or rent them—neighbourhoods devastated.

So when we come here and we hear from this government that the loss of 150,000 manufacturing jobs over the last three years really is not that big a deal because we've been working so hard to create other jobs, I have to say, it doesn't cut any ice. This is a situation that has to be taken as a significant priority by the government because of the human impact, and when a practical suggestion comes forward—not, as the member for Kenora–Rainy

River has said, a wholly new leap into political policy-making, but simply taking an idea that has worked in another jurisdiction and saying, "We have a crisis here"—we need to apply it.

This morning, I was out at the front of this building with a number of colleagues from the labour movement who were talking about their anger and the anger of their members who feel that they've been cut loose, abandoned, who cannot get action or even communication from this government. I was going to say that they got tea and sympathy. Well, I don't think they got the tea, and the sympathy was very late in coming, if they got it at all.

1050

We are in a situation where people's lives and communities are coming apart, and for the government to not embrace a practical suggestion for moving things forward, in my opinion, is a dereliction of that government's duty. It needs to act on multiple fronts.

If we want to have a stable society in this province, people have to have jobs. One of the reasons that many of our cities are much more stable than American cities is that we have had a lot of people working at stable employment. People have income. Ethnic tension and racial tension are reduced when people have jobs. What we're doing here is seeding the ground for future social conflict.

Some people seem to think, and I think the Premier is one of them, "Oh, okay, we lose those manufacturing jobs." They go to India. They go to China. They're emerging industrial powerhouses. I have nothing against those people improving their lives. I think they need to improve their lives. But I have to tell you, losing that manufacturing base is not the end of it. I talk to a lot of newcomers from India, from China, from Pakistan, from Bangladesh. These are bright, capable, energetic people. Do you think that as those economies develop, they are simply going to continue doing the hard work? No. They are now going to move into those jobs in accounting and information technology and engineering that I think this Premier thinks are immune.

We have to work in a multi-faceted way, in every aspect of our economy, to build up and maintain that jobs base. That's all that's being put forward here today. How do we ensure, from as many angles as possible, that people have stable lives and that this province has a stable economy? Is it wrong to have someone who is an advocate, someone who in many ways would be like the Environmental Commissioner—with more powers, with more intervention duties—who would go out looking proactively for threats to employment and trying to pull people together so that those threats didn't materialize?

What's the record cited by Howard Hampton? The record is that 75% of the jobs they wanted to save were saved. Well, in Ontario, that would mean that far more than 100,000 of those lost 150,000 jobs would have been saved. Hundreds of thousands of people dependent on those jobs, communities dependent on those jobs, would be in situations where their lives would be stable, where they wouldn't be wondering whether they can hold onto

their homes, and frankly, in some communities they wouldn't be wondering, "Who can buy my home? Who is going to buy this place that now will have to be abandoned?" Talk to people from northern communities about the fact that they've sunk their life savings into their homes and now no one's there to buy them.

This is a government that has decided that laissez-faire 19th-century economics work. It certainly seems to work for the Premier, but it doesn't work for the people of Ontario. This government is going to be held accountable this fall when laissez-faire is put forward and people who have been abandoned, people who have been told, "Well, we did all we could. Too bad, so sad. You're on your own" are going to be speaking out. They speak out in rural areas. They'll be speaking out in small towns. They'll be speaking out in southwestern Ontario. They're going to say, "You didn't do enough. You did us in."

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join in this discussion this morning. We in the riding of Peterborough have been fortunate. Just yesterday, my good friend the vice-president of nuclear products of GE Canada announced the first major expansion of their nuclear products division in Peterborough since 1955. They'll have a massive expansion on their Peterborough site, so that's good news for the people of Peterborough. It will also be good news for my good friend the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke: GE have their nuclear pellet operation in Arnprior, Ontario, which is an essential part of the expansion that will take place in Peterborough, to continue the fine work that's done in that operation in Arnprior, Ontario.

We've also been very fortunate: Numet Engineering, another manufacturing company in Peterborough—major expansion; Minute Maid juice, which is part of the Coca-Cola umbrella, has also had expansions in Peterborough.

But I have followed the forestry industry in northwestern Ontario. One of the challenges up there was certainly the appreciation of the Canadian dollar from 63 cents to today, when it's exchanged at about US90 cents.

Look at some of the operational reports from those companies in northwestern Ontario. When the dollar was at 63 cents, their profit base increased substantially, but when you start looking at their reinvestment programs that went back into capital equipment and innovation, that was a very small part of their annual reports. Many of those companies took advantage of making profits based on an exchange rate, and during that period of time they didn't enhance their competitive position.

When you do a comparison, look at the major forestry operators in Finland, Norway and Sweden. If you look at those three countries, where electricity rates are three times higher than what we have in Ontario, those forestry companies in those countries remain highly competitive. Why do they do so? They remain highly competitive because the principles of those companies were reinvesting in new technology, new processes and training their workforce. So what have we done here in the province of Ontario?

That there have been very few questions on the budget in this House, but I will note, on page 15, in northwestern

Ontario we've put together an economic facilitator. If I remember correctly, Dr. Robert Rosehart was the former president of Lakehead University. He's now the president of Wilfrid Laurier University and will act as an economic facilitator, bringing together all the parties in northwestern Ontario to look at the challenges. I readily admit: there are certainly challenges in the forestry sector in northwestern Ontario.

We also announced in our budget that we'll have a new Ontario Manufacturing Council to bring together the brightest and best to look at innovative solutions for manufacturers in Ontario. That is complemented by the work that my good friend from Perth-Middlesex, who's the PA to the Premier, is doing with innovation and technology, formulating programs to make key investments in manufacturing to make them efficient and competitive with the world. We have the talent. We are making the investments to keep manufacturing competitive here in Ontario.

One of the things we've done is we accelerated the capital tax—something the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has been asking us to do. Secondly, in our budget—no one asked any questions about this—we are lifting the business education tax, having a flat rate across the province of Ontario of 1.6%, which will make Ontario businesses—large, small and medium—and other parts of the sector much more competitive. Again, that was something put forward to us by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and recommended by smaller chambers of commerce right across Ontario. It's so important to get those fundamentals right.

We're also investing \$6.5 billion over the next five years in Reaching Higher; again, to put those dollars into post-secondary education to make sure that Ontario has a very competitive workforce. I look at Durham region, where we have the University of Ontario Institute of Technology coupling with General Motors again, making key investment in that manufacturing—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Speaking about jobs in Ontario, the government talks ad nauseam about their Toyota plant in Ingersoll, which is great news. However, in the neighbouring riding of Elgin-Middlesex there have been six companies which have closed, losing 3,400 jobs—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hampton, you have two minutes to respond.

1100

Mr. Hampton: I want to continue where I left off. The reality is that we have a number of manufacturing facilities in this province, some of which have downsized or already closed and some of which are at risk of closure or downsizing. I'm merely proposing that instead of waiting until the sign goes up out front, "Facility closed," "Property for lease" or "For sale," the McGuinty government take some proactive steps, that we as legislators in Ontario take some proactive steps.

That's what the jobs commissioner in British Columbia did. They didn't wait until a factory, a plant, a

facility was putting up the “For sale” sign. They did proactive studies. They went to companies, sat down with them and the workers, union leaders, community leaders, financial institutions, provincial government departments, federal government departments and they asked, “What are the things that we need to do to reposition and sustain these jobs?”

I hear government members opposed to the suggestion, and let me tell you why I think there's some opposition. Members of the McGuinty government are probably worried that a jobs commissioner would point out that the McGuinty government's policy for driving hydro rates through the roof has in fact destroyed 40,000 good-paying forest sector jobs in northern Ontario, and they don't want that out there. A jobs commissioner would point out that some factories have closed in this province.

For example, Ferranti-Packard in St. Catharines told the workers, “We're closing this plant, keeping others open in other places in North America because it's easier and quicker to close down an operation in Ontario than anywhere else.”

We can't afford to lose these jobs. We need to be proactive. We need a jobs commissioner in Ontario.

VISITOR

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I know the members would like to join me in welcoming Bob Huget, a former member of the 35th Parliament from Sarnia, in the members' west gallery.

SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): I move that, in the opinion of this House, our farmers and the agri-food industry play a vital role in the Ontario economy and that this assembly reaffirm its strong and unwavering support for the supply management system that helps stabilize incomes for Ontario farm families and ensures a stable supply of Ontario-produced food for families around the world to enjoy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Van Bommel has moved private member's notice of motion number 59. Pursuant to standing order 96, Mrs. Van Bommel, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mrs. Van Bommel: I bring this motion forward because of my concern that not all parties in this assembly continue to solidly support supply management in Ontario. The Liberal Party of Ontario is clearly on the record with its support of supply management as a domestic food policy that works for consumers, governments and farmers. We had all-party support for a motion presented by Minister Dombrowsky in December 2005, but since that time I have witnessed a weakening of the support by the federal Conservative government and serious attacks on supply management by a man who says he wants to help John Tory write his platform.

The McGuinty government understands that all three pillars of supply management have to work together in order to maintain a sustainable supply management system. The first pillar is the effective border controls that result in limited and predictable imports. The second pillar is pricing mechanisms that allow farmers to negotiate collectively and to set prices that create a fair return on their costs, labour and investments. The third pillar is farmers who exercise production disciplines that produce a supply of safe, high-quality food at levels that meet the needs of the Canadian market. The weakening of any of the three pillars will not be supported by the Liberal Party of Ontario.

Before I go any further, I want to explain to everyone who's listening just what supply management is. Chicken, broiler hatching eggs, turkey, eggs and dairy farms operate within the supply-managed or orderly marketing systems. Established in 1970, supply-managed commodities matched demand to supply. Prices paid to farmers are negotiated based on the cost of production. The prices result in predictable and steady income for farmers, while consumers are guaranteed consistent supply of top-quality product at a steady price. Producers must hold quota to be eligible to produce and market a supply-managed commodity. By forecasting the need for these commodities and planning accordingly, it reduces the instability that can result when supply and demand are out of balance. This system has served producers, processors and consumers very well for many years.

As a farmer, I naturally continue to follow the stance that our Canadian government is taking on the World Trade Organization trade talks. I was encouraged by the strong expression of support in the motion that was passed by the federal House of Commons on November 22, 2005. This was followed by Prime Minister Stephen Harper's statement at the leaders' debate in 2006, in which he states: “Let me just outline some other things we'll do. We're going to continue to defend supply management in the international bodies and the three pillars of supply management. This is the one sector of agriculture that has actually been from time to time making a profit in the last few years.”

You can imagine my angst and frustration when I read in the April issue of the Better Farming magazine an article entitled, “A Short-Lived ‘Victory’ For Supply Management.

“When MPs voted unanimously in 2005 to reject any WTO deal to limit supply management, its proponents cheered. Fifteen months later, things look rather different.

“On February 27, 2007, Conservative Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl and Trade Minister David Emerson made it clear to supply management interests that their 2005 victory was short-lived.”

If a WTO deal happens, Strahl says Canada will sign. “It is inconceivable that we would walk away from the WTO, so take that as your first gospel truth.” But the federal Conservative government continues to claim that they are strong proponents of supply management, and

farmers are left wondering if they are really walking the talk, or is it just pre-election noise?

While Agriculture Minister Strahl continues to repeat his support for supply management, we hear something completely different from Trade Minister David Emerson. At the year end, Minister Emerson was quoted as saying, "There is national interest that government should work with supply management, and with some modest support from government, we should transition to a globally competitive stature—or we're just going to have to go through a painful adjustment."

Wayne Easter, who is the Liberal agriculture critic and a farmer from PEI, stated in a press release on April 12, "The Conservatives have constantly changed their position on supply management.... It seems clear now that their announcement to enter into negotiations was nothing more than a pre-election ploy."

At the provincial level we hear from Randy Hillier, the past president and co-founder of the Lanark and Ontario Landowners Association, of his intent to seek the Progressive Conservative nomination this weekend in the riding of Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. He has declared in an interview his intention to help the Tories shape their platform, which he says has yet to be outlined: "Should I succeed, I will help shape that." From that, I have to assume that Mr. Hillier expects to help shape the Tory agriculture and rural platform.

Please note that on Mr. Hillier's website, you can find a page entitled What Randy Says, in which he addresses a freer marketing system and the disbanding of the present marketing board system for some commodities. He says, "I would challenge the statement, 'providing some economic stability for farmers'; we have seen in every commodity where there is a marketing board that there has been a decline in both the number of producers and also the amount produced." I don't understand this. He goes on to say, "Marketing boards are government-legislated monopolies...."

This is a statement that he repeats in the Ontario Landowners Association discussion paper, Finding Profits on Canadian Farms, which was written in March 2006. In that discussion paper, which is co-authored by Mr. Hillier, the following statement is made: "The cost of acquiring quota in supply-managed sectors has become prohibitive and prevents new farmers and farms from establishing themselves in these commodities.... The solution is to restore the principles of a free marketplace."

Mr. Hillier's argument that supply management discourages new entrants couldn't be further from the truth. My husband René and I bought our first broiler quota in 1991. At that time, we were told it was risky and too expensive. Today, we still operate a midsize poultry farm on 50 acres, and that has supported our family of seven very well. The start-up costs in supply management are no higher than the cost of land and equipment for a grains and oilseeds producer or buildings and land for other livestock farmers.

1110

The discussion paper goes on with comments and recommendations that include, "Supply-managed sectors

become optional and applicable only to those industries where the processors and producers agree to a buyer-seller contract-relationship. A marketing board or supply-managed sector contract cannot infringe upon those people and commodities that are not signatory to the contract." That's like saying it's optional to hold a Tim Hortons franchise if you want to sell Tim Hortons coffee. Another recommendation states, "Eliminate exclusive marketing rights and licensing. Re-establish 'free market principles.'"

In the April issue of the Landowner magazine, of which Mr. Hillier is co-author and co-publisher, an article appears that is entitled "An Udder Marketing Board Failure or Just a Consequence of Socialism?" It states, "Although Hershey's is mum on the exact reasons for relocating, the answers are very obvious. At the top of the list is the cost of production.... Canadian milk prices are determined by the [Dairy Farmers of Ontario] and are very likely to be far above what Hershey's will pay for milk at their new state-of-the art facility in Mexico." Then it goes on to say, "Is the present marketing system managing the supply of milk or is it contributing to the demise of both farmers and processors?" But when you talk to the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, they will inform you that Hershey's buys milk under a "special class" program that reduces the cost of milk to world price levels for further processors who must compete with imported food products.

There is no question of where Mr. Hillier stands on the matter of government support for supply management. And there is clearly going to be a conflict with the current agriculture critic, Toby Barrett, who stated in this Legislature, "Supply management ... has provided decades of business certainty for our chicken farmers and for our food system.... Supply management balances supply with demand. It prevents overproduction, flooded markets and depressed prices."

I look forward to hearing from other members of this Legislature on this issue. I hope that all parties are prepared to walk the talk and not just pronounce shallow platitudes intended to dupe farmers into a false sense of security. Let me assure you, farmers will not be fooled.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I'm certainly pleased to state—actually, to reiterate yet again—my unequivocal support for supply management, and support also coming from the entire Ontario PC caucus—that's 100%.

Supply management, as we know, has long been the strength of our poultry, egg and dairy farming in Canada, and any threat to the system must be seen as a threat to the well-being of rural Canada. I know what it was like before supply management. We had broilers; we had dairy. I had hatching eggs. We had laying hens. It was great work. We were losing too much money and, on the advice of the bank—we had actually gotten very, very large at that time—we had to get out. That was the reality for my family, and that's the reality of farming without

supply management. I can speak to that from the source. We cannot go back.

For these reasons, I'm proud to report on behalf of John Tory and the opposition caucus that our support for supply management is 100%. In fact, 100% of our sitting members have affixed their signature to support the FarmGate5 petition. It's a collective effort from the supply-managed sector attempting to seek balanced trade that benefits all farmers. It's not posted online yet, but our newest member, Joyce Savoline, has also affixed her signature.

As we heard this morning, supply management works on three pillars: import controls, of course; producer pricing; and production discipline. Like any three-legged stool, if one pillar is weakened, the entire system is weakened. For instance, without import controls, production discipline becomes impossible. Without production discipline, pricing becomes impossible. Supply management does balance supply and demand and prevents over-production, obviously, flooded markets and depressed prices.

Here's a good example: Look what happened to the tobacco farmers without the support of this government, when you see one of the legs on that stool weakened.

I'm very disappointed to see the divisions within Dalton McGuinty's Liberal caucus with respect to supply management. How can farmers trust the Dalton McGuinty government to defend supply management when Dalton McGuinty cannot get his own MPPs to sign that FarmGate5 petition? In fact, there's a list circulating today: 28 Liberal MPPs have not signed on to supply management. Check the website.

We've seen the shameful record of this government when it comes to not only agriculture but rural Ontario in general. I quote the environment minister from yesterday: "Stop raising issues in rural Ontario." It's in Hansard. I listened when she said it. Check back in Hansard. Is this government so weak on rural policy that they now want to declare it out of bounds? My suggestion is, move to the city if you want to be heard in this Ontario Legislature under this present government.

To conclude—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, the member for Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford seems to be able to yell out. I'm able to hear the speaker up to this point, but I would remind members that we have to realize that the member for Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant has the floor.

Mr. Barrett: Just to wrap up, Speaker, I do want to condemn the ongoing cuts to our ag budget. We're aware of that reduction of \$191 million in planned funding in this present projection for the ag budget.

I'd like to quote an Ontario Federation of Agriculture newsletter from yesterday: "Minister Strahl Makes Spring Much Brighter.

"Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Strahl made spring much brighter for a lot of Canadian farmers when he announced Monday, May 1, that the \$400 million in cost-of-production payments will begin to flow to

eligible farmers next month." The OFA goes on to say, "Our next challenge will be to get provincial OMAFRA minister Dombrowsky to announce that Ontario will be adding its 40% contribution to the payment."

According to the OFA, producers of non-supply-managed commodities for tax purposes for 2004 are eligible for this payment. That's the reality. The feds are ponying up. Minister Dombrowsky took her chainsaw to that budget, and we would await an announcement on that 40%. I say to the minister, don't let your Liberal colleagues convince you to abandon supply management, and please pony up the \$46 million owing to Ontario farmers.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex has introduced another motion—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Come on. We want to keep the debate and even the heckling at some level of decorum. Please.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I heard that remark, and I would ask the Minister of Agriculture to withdraw that. Addressing another member of this Legislature—

The Deputy Speaker: Would the minister withdraw?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): Withdraw what?

Mr. Yakabuski: The Speaker heard you, so he already raised it. So that's up to you.

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I withdraw.

Mr. Yakabuski: She has to stand up and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Who's running this—you or me? I heard the word "withdraw."

Member for Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant—Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Tabuns: I know people see me everywhere, but it's Toronto–Danforth.

The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex has put an interesting issue before us, just as previously she brought forth the whole issue of electrical leakage, which I thought was—

Interjection.

Mr. Tabuns: Stray voltage. Thank you. I thought that was a very useful debate, very useful for me.

I disagree with her government's position, but I'm glad that she has put the issue on the table.

There's no question that, provincially and federally, the NDP is committed to protecting Ontario's supply management systems. Ontario's supply-managed sectors are the financial backbone of our farm communities. We need to strengthen them, not weaken them through misguided international trade negotiations.

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I have to say there that are elements that relate to food security and the stability of our economy, as well as the

environment, that play into this. Right now we import food from thousands of kilometres away. In talking to retailers, I know that having locked into supply from California, it's very difficult for them to actually bring in Ontario produce, because their suppliers say, "We supply you 10 months of the year. If you don't take from us for those other two months, for the full year, we're not that interested in you."

We need to have a very vital, very strong agricultural sector in this province so that we can supply as much of our food as possible, so we reduce our imports and reduce our environmental impact. A country also needs to be able to feed itself, and we have very talented, very capable farmers. We have good farmland. We have all the resources necessary to have a vibrant farm sector.

What we need on top of that is government policy that actually reinforces those farmers, that gives them the tools to allow them to produce food for us and produce an income for themselves. Now we, as I have said, support the protection of our supply management system and the expansion of our five supply-managed products as represented by the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, the Ontario Egg Producers, the Chicken Farmers of Ontario, the Ontario Turkey Producers' Marketing Board and the Ontario Broiler Hatching Egg and Chick Commission.

As we know, though, other sectors in Ontario agriculture are not afforded the same level of stability associated with supply management. The grains and oilseeds sector and livestock producers, such as the beef industry, have both been decimated in recent years because of unfair trade practices outside of our borders. Has this government, have the McGuinty Liberals, introduced resolutions for debate about the crisis in the grains and oilseeds sector? The answer, simply, is no; we haven't seen this government speak out and act to protect those sectors. Yet, when Dalton McGuinty was drafting his 2003 election platform, he saw fit to promise Ontario farmers "a new generation of farm safety nets and companion programs."

So one has to ask: "Where are they?" Where is the protection for the agricultural sector? Where is the protection for the farmers, whom we need to ensure that we have a secure food supply, whom we need to produce food locally so that we don't have to import from thousands of kilometres away? We've seen the decimation of the grains and oilseeds farmers in their communities across the province—from the Ottawa Valley down to the borders of Windsor. Did Dalton McGuinty introduce a long-term income stabilization program for grain and oilseeds farmers? Nope. Not a chance; not on his agenda; not on the agenda here in this Legislature, not even as a private member's bill. We're not seeing this government move forward on those sectors.

Farmers are resourceful people, they're optimistic people, and they're people who think about how to actually deal practically with the problems that come before them. They've developed a risk management program to provide some stabilization to farm incomes in the grains and oilseeds sector, yet the McGuinty Liberals

would have no part of it. They didn't adopt it; they didn't take it on. And so, in that sector, farmers who deserve as much support as they do in the current supply-managed sectors are left to their own devices.

Does this sound like a government concerned about farmers, about rural Ontario and food sovereignty? Unfortunately not. Instead of developing a long-term plan for stabilizing farm incomes in the grains and oilseeds sector, which was called for by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the National Farmers Union, Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal members, in December, were busy voting themselves a 31% pay increase.

We have heard this morning, and we've heard for a number of days, from time to time members of the governing party of Liberals saying, "Why don't you comment on our budget? Why don't you ask us questions about our budget? It's the greatest budget since sliced bread was first introduced to humanity." I have to point out that the director of the National Farmers Union—Ontario, Grant Robertson, had this to say in a press release after agriculture came up short, once again, in the 2007 McGuinty budget.

Interjection.

Mr. Tabuns: I'm glad I was asked: "What did the president say?" Grant Robertson said, "A huge salary increase for MPPs was a priority before Christmas, but those who produced the food for Christmas dinner are still left struggling." I'd say that the director has got it right. He goes on: "Ontario families care about where their food comes from. They want to know that the family farmers who produce their food do not have to subsidize their grocery bill with off-farm jobs." We know very well that farmer after farmer keeps their farm alive because they have a full-time job somewhere else. That's how they essentially subsidize food production in Ontario.

Mr. Robertson, director of the National Farmers Union—Ontario, goes on to characterize the plight of the family farm under the McGuinty government. He said: "Family farmers are facing the worst five years of realized net income on record. Farmers and their organizations have provided many possible solutions to address the issues for different sectors, such as the risk management plan, but instead of helping move farmers towards greater financial stability and sustainability, this government has in fact cut real dollars from the agriculture budget in Ontario. Talk about kicking someone when they are down." That was Grant Robertson, director of the National Farmers Union—Ontario.

I have to ask this government, which has constantly said, "Come back to the budget," so what did they do? Did they help these farmers? Well, I'll tell you. In the eyes of the director of the National Farmers Union—Ontario, nope, they didn't. The farmers were left struggling. The government cared little or nothing about them. It's spending a lot of time attacking Randy Hillier. Fair enough, but why don't you take action on the real issues that are driving the crisis in rural communities? Not seeing it. The National Farmers Union also tells us that

since fiscal year 2003-04, agricultural spending has now been reduced in real dollars by 10%. Does that sound like the actions of a government that puts the needs of farmers in rural Ontario at the front of the line? No, not a bit.

When the government and its members ask us, ask the opposition, ask the third party and ask others, "Why aren't you talking about the budget?" I have to ask, do they really want a discussion about that budget? Do they really want that discussion? Because part of the reason that there are no questions is that there was so little substance, so little dealt with—essentially a status quo budget—that, what's to ask? It's clear. This was a budget that didn't move Ontario forward, didn't deal with these issues and has not been well received. This is not a budget that is going to keep them in good shape this coming fall. It will be ignored or attacked. I don't think you're going to see a lot of praise.

The National Farmers Union says that the 2007 budget is going to see more cuts to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and they want to know where these cuts are going to take place and what programming might be affected.

In many ways it reminds me of the recent report of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario talking about the fact that the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of the Environment are under-resourced to the point that they cannot actually deliver on the mandate they have been given. They cannot do the work they're supposed to do. With regard to the environment, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario said that the lack of resources puts Ontario's environment at risk of catastrophic events—his words. That has not been corrected. It is not on the agenda to be corrected by this government.

1130

Under the McGuinty government, farmers and farm communities across the province have seen farm income plummet to unprecedented levels. More and more farmers have been driven into bankruptcy, forced to hold full-time jobs off the farm or both.

The McGuinty government promised a new generation of safety nets but delivered only old Band-Aid measures while Ontario farmers and farm communities lurched through crisis. There is no leadership in the farm income crisis, no long-term income stabilization for grain and oilseed producers; that is the tragic record of the McGuinty government on agriculture in Ontario.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to the motion that my colleague the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex has brought before this Legislature, a very important one. She's a very strong advocate for agriculture and certainly the supply-managed sectors. I think it's important that in this Legislature we appreciate what supply management means for the people in Ontario.

Four decades ago, Ontario's poultry farmers were struggling. They were losing their farms and, at the same time, their product was increasing in value. The intro-

duction of supply management in 1965 marked a turning point in the poultry industry, and today that industry provides more than 5,000 full-time jobs, with related jobs employing more than 1,000 people. Under supply management, Ontario dairy producers have thrived as well, and dairy now represents the largest sector in this province's agriculture industry, with clear and crucial benefits to our economy. The story is the same for our egg producers and pullet growers. That is why Ontario is not prepared to sacrifice the regulated marketing structures used by dairy, poultry and egg producers.

I was very happy on December 12, 2005, to introduce a motion in this Legislature to support supply management. It was very important that the motion was passed, and I'm pleased as well to reflect that history will record that it was supported unanimously by all members of this Legislature. It was a motion I was able to carry with me when I attended the World Trade Organization talks in Hong Kong. I was able to very strongly stand in my place as an advocate for farmers in Ontario and say that the people of Ontario wholeheartedly supported supply management.

In Ontario during the year 2006, approximately 6,500 farms and 250 hatcheries and poultry and egg-producing facilities were in the supply-managed sector. This activity generated \$2.4 billion in farm gate receipts, or close to 28% of all farm cash receipts in the province, and roughly 50,000 jobs are related to this sector.

So I think that it's very clear why it is so important that we in this Legislature, as legislators, as elected representatives, do all that we can and stand and speak clearly in support of this very important system we have in place that supports our agriculture industry.

I would say, however, that I am concerned, as my colleague has already identified, that there are some factions in the province that have been working very hard to do all they can to find a chink in that armour and have suggested that the government would have a role to play in dismantling that. Of course, I am speaking about the Ontario Landowners Association. I have here a document that was produced in March 2006. Randy Hillier, I understand, is one of the authors of the principles that are presented here. It does refer to supply management and it talks about the cost of acquiring quota in supply-managed sectors, that it has become prohibitive and it prevents new farmers and farms from establishing themselves in these commodities. The solution is to restore the principles of a free marketplace, the same principles that all other Canadian industries enjoy and that are non-existent in Canadian agriculture.

The document goes on. Mr. Hillier has identified that, "Supply-managed sectors become optional and applicable only to those industries where the processors and producers agree to a buyer-seller contract" for supply management. "A marketing board or supply-managed sector contract cannot infringe upon those people and commodities that are not a signatory to the contract." It also goes on to say that we should eliminate exclusive marketing rights and licensing and re-establish free market principles.

That's from the Ontario Landowners Association document, 2006. One of the authors of this was Mr. Randy Hillier, who I believe is looking to be the Conservative candidate in the next provincial election for the riding of Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: My colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant posed a question, and I would just like to pose the question right back and ask: How can farmers in Ontario trust the members of the opposition when they are lining up with members of the Ontario Landowners Association, and lining up in a very substantive way? Someone provided me with a copy of the Landowner, a document that is published by the Ontario Landowners Association, and who has an ad in that? Toby Barrett, MPP for Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant, advertises in the Landowner.

Obviously, I think the farmers of Ontario need to be very aware that when it comes to support for supply management, members of the opposition stand in their places in this House and say one thing, but they're obviously very supportive of other individuals who would very clearly not be in support of supply management. That is something that I think farmers in Ontario are aware of, have taken note of and will remember at the appropriate time.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I rise to speak in support of the resolution from the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. Having said that, I think it's rather interesting that the member would bring this forward. It must be because we're getting close to an election. Obviously the Liberal government, the McGuinty government, has left the farmers and the agricultural community behind for three and a half years, and this is like a conversion on the road to Damascus. Now, all of a sudden, they're going to come forward with a proposal that will hopefully make the farmers of Ontario change their mind about the government and say, "My gosh, I do believe they support it."

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, member for Huron–Bruce.

Mr. Hardeman: I would just tell the member, I don't think this resolution is going to change the opinion of the farmers. On the narrowness of this resolution, I want to say I strongly support supply management personally, and I'm sure that the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex does too, because she does represent an area with a lot of farmers who have supply-managed commodities, as do I. In fact, I think my riding may be one of the highest in the province of Ontario with supply-managed commodities.

Interjection.

Mr. Hardeman: No, you don't have as many milk producers in your riding.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Oxford, take your seat. I'll remind you once again that the member for Oxford has the floor. I will also remind the member for

Oxford that you don't speak across the floor; you speak through the Chair. Thank you.

Mr. Hardeman: I just want to say that I would hope the provincial government is as supportive of supply management as the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex is. I can understand why she would introduce this resolution, because as was mentioned previously, FarmGate5, which is the organization that represents all supply-managed commodities in Ontario, asked members of this Legislature to support their cause, to get them to sign. Of the John Tory PCs in this Legislature, every member of the party signed it, because we are strongly in support of supply management. The problem is that there were some 28 members of the government who had not signed supply management. One in particular that bothers me somewhat—and I think my farmers in Oxford are very concerned—is the Minister of Finance, the chair of the re-election committee for the Liberal Party, who did not sign in support of supply management in the province of Ontario. I wonder if there's any significance to the fact that the member would bring this forward. I think she is concerned that she may wake up some morning and the Minister of Finance, the chair of the election committee for the Liberal Party, will say, "Maybe we should trade that off for something else." That's why I support this resolution and I also support the member for bringing it forward.

1140

I know there was some concern on the government side when I started my presentation by saying that they have left the farmers behind. In 2003-04, the Minister of Agriculture signed an agricultural policy framework. At the time, I had the opportunity to ask him some questions about it and to ask why he would sign it, and he said, "Well, you couldn't get that done. I got it done." I said, "But, Minister, it's not good for the farmers," and he said, "Well, you couldn't get it done." I said to him then—this is right out of the Hansard of April 7—and I'll say it to the minister today, "I want to point out that the reason Helen Johns, the minister of the day, did not sign the agreement was because the total farm community said, 'Don't sign the agreement, because it's not a good deal for Ontario's farmers.'"

It took three years and question after question and answer after answer defending the CAIS program, and, lo and behold, two days ago the federal auditor said that the program does not work for Ontario farmers. It's too heavy on bureaucracy, too heavy on paperwork, and the program is more interested in making sure that farmers pay back overpayment than worrying about farmers getting their payment. That's what the auditor said, and that's a sign of what the Liberal government believes they should do for Ontario's farmers. The reason I mention the CAIS program is because it's so important. That's the only hope the non-supply-managed sector in agriculture has, and this government has badly let them down.

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): I'm pleased to speak ever so briefly to this motion brought

forward by the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. Following my maiden speech in this place, she and I had a brief conversation, and she talked about her own farming background. I know how important this issue is to all of the constituents in her riding, and I commend her for bringing it forward.

It may surprise the members here that, coming from York South–Weston, an urban riding—there aren't any farms in my riding. But I do want to talk about a very important institution in my riding that affects farmers of this province in a very profound way, and that is the Weston Farmers' Market, which draws farmers from across this province, including a couple from the riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, who come every Saturday from May to November. I hang out there on Saturday mornings and I speak to my constituents, and I speak to those farmers and talk about the issues and concerns that they have and the challenges that they face on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis in trying to keep their family farm operations going.

Unfortunately, this government has let the agricultural sector down. My friend from Toronto–Danforth talked about some of the ways that this government has let them down in their budgetary processes, where they have shortchanged the agricultural sector. I want to raise another way, and that is specifically regarding farmers' markets.

In the province of Ontario, we have more than 120 farmers' markets operating now. According to some figures that I read through Farmers' Markets Ontario, 27,000 people in this province are directly involved in working in delivering and providing goods at these farmers' markets, and it has a direct economic impact of \$600 million. So I say to this government, let's work to make the opportunities, the processes that affect farmers' markets in my community and others, easier—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): I rise today to show my very strong support for the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and to support supply management.

I know that from the other side of the House there have been some questions raised about why this is coming forward at this time, so let me talk about that.

I know that among my agricultural community there is concern. I want to directly quote Adrian Measner, the former president and CEO of the Canadian Wheat Board. He was in Huron–Bruce recently, telling farmers that if the federal Conservative government is successful in disbanding the wheat board, then supply management will be next. Amongst my farming community there is a concern that if the wheat board goes that way, what then is the future for supply management?

To put this into context, I want to give a brief synopsis of what that means to the riding of Huron–Bruce. I can tell every member in the House today that that will create economic hardship that we have not seen the likes of. I can remember when we did not have supply management in my riding, and those were tough times. I know that part of our agricultural community sector, the grains and

oilseeds, are struggling, but I can tell you, my friends in this House, that the supply-managed sector works, and why it works.

Let's talk about what's produced in the most beautiful riding in the province of Ontario. Within the dairy industry, 200 million litres in Huron–Bruce, and 375 dairy farmers. Chicken farmers: 177 in Huron–Bruce; 65 million kilograms produced. Ontario egg producers: 71; 2.1 million birds. Ontario turkey: 13 in Huron–Bruce; 6.85 million kilograms. When I think about the level of produce that is coming out of the riding of Huron–Bruce, the numbers are incredible. You can see the economic stability it provides. I can honestly say to you, as I say to my agricultural community, that the McGuinty government understands the communities coming forward. What we have to do is to focus on the product grown in Ontario, and obviously the bulk of it will be grown in my riding of Huron–Bruce.

I also took the opportunity this summer to do round table discussions about agriculture and what people see for the future of agriculture. From the survey and the round-table discussions, 93% of the people in the riding of Huron–Bruce support seeing an expansion of Ontario-grown product. The consumer believes, and rightly so, that our product is safe, and believes in the quality of the product as well. This is one of the pillars of supply management: the quality of food, the safety, and also the quantities that are produced. That system is already in place, and 93% of the people want to see a further expansion of Ontario-grown product. That is why \$10 million has been allocated to talk about the Ontario brand, because we know the consumer wants to be assured that the safety of their food allows them the capability to maximize their own personal health. We understand that that is a component of their overall health.

So when I talk about what we can do as a government and the concerns that are being raised within my community—and we know the way the wheat board has gone: no consultation; it just went forward. When things were happening within the board that the Harper government saw as not fit in moving in the direction that they went, so went the CEO of the board. We know how fragile that linkage can be when we get into national trade talks. So I ask the members from across the way what we can do to strengthen supply management and speak with a united voice. It's for the betterment of all people of Ontario, and we understand that. That's why this side of the House strongly endorses moving forward with a supply-managed sector.

1150

Mr. Yakabuski: I'm pleased to stand and support the resolution from the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. As you know, every member of our caucus has signed on to FarmGate 5 in support of supply management, which directly contradicts the silly question of the member for Nipissing yesterday, clearly stating that I was opposed to supply management. So again, just to point out that she was wrong.

I see the Minister of Agriculture. I wanted to talk about her answer to that question, saying I didn't support

the people in my riding. I have here a letter that I sent to OMAFRA with regard to the Klaesi brothers' anaerobic digester in their riding. So if she knew what was going on in her own ministry, she might understand. They seem to be more worried about what other people are doing than themselves.

In fact, with respect to the minister, I wanted to say that this past summer we had a terrible tornado hit both our ridings; most of the damage was in my riding but some of it was in the Minister of Agriculture's riding. I got calls from people in her riding to come and see them. I wasn't only looking after people in my riding; I went to see people in her riding. In fact, I had the courtesy, as a member of this House, to call her directly, personally, to bring that issue to her attention. I followed up with those people in her riding.

I would like to ask the Minister of Agriculture: When did you go to look at the people in your riding and see the damage before you attack another—

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Renfrew, will you take your seat. The Speaker took some time, I believe it was yesterday, to speak to this issue, that you speak in the third person, please.

Mr. Yakabuski: I did say "the minister."

The Deputy Speaker: But you said "you."

Mr. Yakabuski: Sorry. I'd like to know, maybe the minister could tell us, when, after that tornado, she went up to visit the devastation in her riding, as opposed to me, your neighbouring member, going to look after your constituents. So shame on you for attacking me for not serving my constituents in this House yesterday.

I just wanted to point out to the member that 28 members of her caucus have failed to sign FarmGate 5—28 members of your caucus, member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: Let me see if I've got the ridings, because I wouldn't want to get in trouble. Oh, yes: London-Fanshawe; Don Valley East, a minister; Thornhill; Kingston and the Islands, a minister; Windsor-St. Clair, a minister; Etobicoke North; St. Paul's—hello, Minister; Scarborough-Agincourt, a minister; Sault Ste. Marie; Scarborough East, a minister; Vaughan-King-Aurora, the Minister of Finance; Ottawa-Vanier, a minister; Mississauga Centre; Windsor West; Kitchener Centre; York Centre; Markham; Eglinton-Lawrence; Hamilton Mountain; Thunder Bay-Atikokan; Timiskaming-Cochrane; Davenport; Thunder Bay-Superior North; Ottawa Centre; Scarborough Southwest; Brampton West-Mississauga; Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh; and Scarborough-Rouge River.

As the House leader said yesterday—he liked to quote the Bible—"Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." I could say to those folks across the way, they would do well to listen to their House leader, Mr. Bradley.

I just wanted to clarify once and for all our support and my support for supply management in the province of Ontario. Every agricultural organization in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has met with me on

this very subject. Let me assure you, when members, like the member for Nipissing, who clearly is in trouble, who clearly is desperate, make statements like that in the House about another member that are absolutely and completely, totally inaccurate, that in fact diminishes this great institution and all of those people who have come here before us.

I will tell you this much, Mr. Speaker: In fairness, the member who came here before me, Mr. Conway, would never have engaged in that kind of ad hominem attack on another member of this Legislature. I can say this to the House leader—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Yakabuski:—that when he was being grilled in the press in my riding and they called me, you know what I said to the press? I said, "I know that man"—I won't use the minister's name—"and I know he would not have done that." I defended him in the press in my riding. You know what? He was man enough to come to me the next week and say, "I read what you said in the paper. I appreciate that." There is a higher level that we can rise to debate to in this place, other than ad hominem attacks on other members.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for St. Paul's, come to order.

Further debate.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I'm really proud of the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. She obviously gets it and understands that we need to stand with our rural and agricultural sector. Thank you very much for your passion and your enthusiasm.

I think it's incumbent on all of us to seek to understand and to respond as best we can to the needs of our farm families. That's why, as a member of the Legislative Assembly, I attempt to get to every single meeting of the Hamilton-Wentworth Federation of Agriculture in my riding. That's why I was proud to help draft the December 2005 resolution on supply-side management. That's why I was pleased to sign on to FarmGate5 and to give advice to the FarmGate5 group, the grain and oilseeds folk, as well as many other agricultural stakeholders who have a real concern about where the agricultural sector is going. That's why I was pleased to be able to organize five different round-table discussions with key farm leaders and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. That's why I was pleased to fight and to continue to fight for new monies in support of the agricultural sector and to be an unabashed and very strong advocate for an extension of rural infrastructure from \$70 million—the doubling to \$140 million, and the whole issue of farm markets, "Buy Ontario," and my private member's resolution—

Interjection.

Mr. McMeekin:—thank you—respecting the need for a co-operative economic development secretariat. We need to be standing in defence. We need to defend and extend whatever advantages our agricultural sector has.

Certainly, the supply-side nature of agriculture tends to stabilize income and ensure a stable supply of products.

It all ties into food sovereignty as well. We're told by UN reports that we're not going to be able to rely, down the road, as much on markets, so we need to be growing more of our food at home. Both senior levels of government need to come to a radical understanding of the importance of food sovereignty and the ability to grow, market and distribute our own food in this country.

I stand as an unabashed advocate for this particular motion and for the supply-side nature of this economy. I'm pleased to support the wonderful resolution placed by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): There's only one question that will be resolved here: Who's driving the bus over on the other side of the House in regard to the Progressive Conservative caucus? Is it Prime Minister Harper and Minister Emerson, who seem to be flip-flopping about their support of supply management? Is it a certain member of the Lanark, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Progressive Conservative Party, one Randy Hillier, who wants to set your policy? Or is it all of us defending supply management? Stay tuned for the vote.

The Deputy Speaker: Mrs. Van Bommel, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Van Bommel: I just want to say how very important it is for this entire House and for all the members to support agriculture and our supply-managed commodities. I want to thank everyone who spoke on this.

During these times of international uncertainty about imported food and food additives, Canadians can take pride in the fact that they have a bountiful and secure supply of safe, nutritious and reasonably priced products. They can feel secure that it's produced here at home by people they trust. Supply management offers Canadian consumers stable prices and a steady supply of safe, made-in-Canada food that also provides a decent living for dairy, poultry and egg farmers without relying on taxpayer-funded subsidies. Supply management provides economic growth and prosperity. We support our rural businesses, including feed mills and equipment dealers. Supply management supports small and medium-sized farms, because our cost-of-production formula gives farm families predictable incomes without the need to intensify the size of their farm operations.

I am proud to say that the McGuinty government believes in a balanced approach to the WTO trade negotiations and that Canada does not have to trade away its right to successful domestic food policy supported by supply management in order to achieve our other goal of increased access to export-oriented commodities.

I hope that by supporting this motion, we will have a strong reaffirmation of our unwavering support of supply management by all members of this House and send a strong message to Ontario farmers about our commitment to their needs. It is important that the government of Ontario, where the majority of supply-managed commodities are produced, send this message to the federal gov-

ernment. These are serious times for supply management, as farmers look for the strong and concrete commitment of their government to the future of their sector of agriculture. I want to thank everyone for their support—

Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

VISITORS

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just want to take the time to acknowledge the presence of two of my constituents who have joined us for an enlightening debate this morning: Bob Ghosh and Sarah Hoffman.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): On a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker: The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said that the member for St. Paul's was not listed as a supporter for FarmGate5. I'm sure he will want to correct the record. He may have old information, because in fact—

Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

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

JOB PROTECTION

COMMISSIONER ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LE COMMISSAIRE À LA PROTECTION DES EMPLOIS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will deal first with ballot item number 4, standing in the name of Mr. Hampton. Mr. Hampton has moved second reading of Bill 126. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. It's carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, Bill 126 will go to the committee of the whole House unless Mr. Hampton—

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the social policy committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Hampton has asked that the bill be referred to the standing committee on social policy. Agreed? Agreed.

SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 5, standing in the name of Mrs. Van Bommel. Mrs. Van Bommel has moved member's notice of motion number 59. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1203 to 1208.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramal, Khalil
Arthurs, Wayne	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Balkissoon, Bas	Levac, Dave	Ruprecht, Tony
Barrett, Toby	MacLeod, Lisa	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Marchese, Rosario	Savoline, Joyce
Bryant, Michael	Martel, Shelley	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	McMeekin, Ted	Smith, Monique
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Smitherman, George
Dombrowsky, Leona	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Ferreira, Paul	Milloy, John	Tabuns, Peter
Fonseca, Peter	Mitchell, Carol	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hardeman, Ernie	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Tory, John
Horwath, Andrea	Munro, Julia	Van Bommel, Maria
Hoy, Pat	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wilkinson, John
Hudak, Tim	Prue, Michael	Wilson, Jim
Klees, Frank	Qaadri, Shafiq	Yakabuski, John
Kormos, Peter	Racco, Mario G.	Zimmer, David

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): Last week, federal Environment Minister John Baird was “Gored” by Al and run over by a Suzuki as he brought in his less-than-intense climate change plan.

Climate change is a very important issue that we must take seriously. Ted Scambos, a glaciologist, says that the Arctic ice cap is melting faster than forecasted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The Arctic Ocean could be relatively free of ice as soon as 2020, not 2050 as predicted by the IPCC.

In the next five years alone, increases of greenhouse gases in Alberta’s oil sands will more than offset the benefits of closing down Ontario’s coal-fired generation plants, which is a tough undertaking for our province but one that we must make. To date, we have reduced emissions from that source by 30% and we remain committed to closing the coal plants. Our recent budget also included funding for many environmental initiatives, including \$150 rebates for homeowners who get home energy audits.

I was very proud to hear this week that our government, led by Premier McGuinty, held discussions with other provinces to develop our own national plan to address how we can all work together to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This meeting is an example of government at its best: leaders who come together to discuss constructive solutions—and real solutions—to environmental challenges. This is a much better solution than intensity-based targets which allow emissions to grow with increased production.

I would like to congratulate our leader, Premier McGuinty, for showing true leadership for our country, our province and our environment.

CABINET MINISTERS

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): Over the last few weeks, this House has witnessed Liberal ministers repeatedly defending their indefensible actions. We have seen ministers refuse to accept any accountability for the failure of their policies.

What has become clear is that this issue is much bigger than the failures of individual ministers. The real problem is the Premier’s complete absence of standards for his ministers. Minister Takhar’s censure by the Integrity Commissioner does not violate the Premier’s standards. Minister Caplan’s failure to deal with Lottogate does not violate the Premier’s standards. And now, Minister Colle’s handouts to groups that are little more than Liberal Party fronts do not violate the Premier’s standards.

The Premier prides himself on never having lost a minister. This is because he sets his standards so low as to be meaningless. That’s why he won’t lose a minister. Previous Premiers lost ministers because they held them to standards. Harris, Rae, Peterson and Davis held their ministers accountable and lost some of them. When it comes to his ministers, this Premier is more interested in maintaining a perfect record than a clean record.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please stand.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 51; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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

The House recessed from 1211 to 1330.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS**MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP
AND IMMIGRATION GRANTS**

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): We’re still waiting. We’re waiting for Dalton McGuinty to do the right thing and apologize. There has been an effort to smear the opposition parties. We believe it started at the top, and we are waiting for an apology.

Dalton McGuinty knows that his government made a mistake. His government gave out grants without any controls or applications. They wrote cheques first and asked questions later. He has pulled good organizations into his political scandal. He doesn’t have a defence, so he’s trying to distract everyone by leading a smear campaign and personal attacks against the opposition parties. From here, it looks like Dalton McGuinty is getting desperate. It looks like we hit a nerve.

Yesterday, Christina Blizzard in her column pointed out that some ethnic and cultural groups didn’t receive any funding. Are they going to start making accusations against her too?

Anyone who knows John Tory knows that those accusations are false. The people of Ontario won’t buy it. Dalton McGuinty should apologize to both opposition parties and then call in the auditor to clean up this mess.

As Christina Blizzard said in her article, “Unlike its toothpaste namesake, though, this Colgate leaves a bad taste in your mouth.” So do the actions of the Premier. Dalton should do the right thing: be a leader, admit he is wrong, stop the smear campaign, tell the Legislature and the people of Ontario the truth about the slush funds and try to get his integrity back. We’re all anxiously waiting.

ANNIVERSARY OF POLISH CONSTITUTION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): I'd like to begin by introducing some members of the Canadian-Polish Foundation. They're sitting in our gallery: Marek Goldyn, founder and chairman; Mathew Syrokomla, the first vice-chairman; Danuta Lechowska-Czarnik and Georgina Bencsik. Welcome to the House.

Today, Canadians of Polish descent are celebrating the proclamation of the Polish constitution 216 years ago, on May 3, 1791. This constitution is Europe's first modern codified constitution and the second-oldest in the world.

In 1772, Russia, Austria and Prussia signed the First Partition treaty of Poland. This was a short-lived constitution and did not save the country from two other partitions which blotted Poland from the maps. During the Communist period, especially the Solidarity revolution, May 3 was a day of anti-government and anti-Communist protests. Polish Canadians celebrate May 3 as a symbol of their freedom from foreign occupation, of national unity, and a symbol of hope that "Poland has not perished" but lives on in their minds and hearts.

I'd like all the members of the House to congratulate our Polish members here today on this glorious day.

VAN BOMMEL FAMILY

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): On May 5, 1957, Martin and Cornelia Van Bommel landed at pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, with 10 of their children. They ranged in age from two to 24. The Dutch family was among the fifth-largest ethnic group to pass through pier 21. They had already travelled 10 days across the Atlantic from Holland on a large passenger ship called the Maasdam, when they boarded a train for a two-day trip to London, Ontario, where their eldest son, Harry, met them.

Martin was 54 years old when he made the biggest decision of his life. Having survived two world wars, he knew that his children would have a better future in a country called Canada, so he sold his farm and left everything he had ever known for a new country, a new language and new culture.

From London, they went on to Blenheim, where another Dutch family, the De Brouwers, had sponsored them. They were proud to become Canadian farmers, so 10 months later they bought their first farm in Ridgetown. In 1965, they moved to another farm at Belmont, Ontario, where they lived out their final days. Altogether they had 15 children, 48 grandchildren and 77 great-grandchildren. Most of the family are farmers, and they have a teacher and a mechanic to fill out their successes.

The occasion is being marked with the installation of a commemorative plaque at pier 21 in Halifax and a visit to Queen's Park today, all decked out in the family uniform. The family wishes to thank Canada and Ontario for all the opportunities they have been given by this great country and this great province.

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION GRANTS

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise in the House to call attention to the fact that the Minister of Finance so far has managed to dodge the growing clouds around the Collegate scandal. But we in the opposition suspected that while Mike Colle was the workhorse in all of this, Greg Sorbara, the finance minister, is the real thoroughbred. In fact, the finance minister has really completed a triple crown when it comes to the Collegate scandal.

First, as the Minister of Finance, he dished out some \$32 million for this end-of-year Liberal slush fund; then, as the Chair of Management Board, I guess he would have approved the list, as Mr. Colle had indicated, of which groups would get the projects and which with Liberal ties would get preferential treatment; and then finally, as the chair of the Liberal campaign fund, he was able to shake hands with the local candidates and local Liberal Party presidents—

Interjection: Cheque in hand.

Mr. Hudak: —cheque in hand as they went through the shopping list for lawn signs and brochures and such.

We know that the Minister of Citizenship told reporters that Mr. Sorbara, the finance minister, and the public infrastructure renewal minister, David Caplan, were in charge of the purse strings and therefore helped approve the grants. We look forward to the TSN highlight of the night as the minister, as chair of the Liberal campaign fund, as Chair of Management Board and as the finance minister doling out the slush, comes home with a triple crown of accomplishments in the Mike Collegate affair.

1340

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): I rise today to speak to the positive health care results the McGuinty government is delivering. It is truly unfortunate that the member for York South–Weston is not raising an important issue for his constituents. You might say he has been missing in action on this file. But I'm happy to take this opportunity to share some of the good news with the people of York South–Weston.

In my riding, my constituents are benefiting from the positive investments we have made after years of neglect under the previous two governments: a \$268.4-million increase in funding for 905/GTA hospitals since 2003; just over \$74 million in wait-times funding; and development of three regional cancer centres, two cardiac surgery programs and five regional dialysis programs.

It is really too bad that the member from York South–Weston won't tell his constituents about the positive things happening in their community. It is disappointing that the NDP can find the time to oppose a much-needed subway extension to York University. I'm happy to make sure that the member from York South–Weston's constituents have a voice in this Legislature.

We are moving forward with the subway, and here's more great news for the people living in York South-Weston: Let's not forget the new state-of-the-art Humber River Regional Hospital and redevelopment of one of the hospital's existing ambulatory care services as part of a major cancer funding announcement—

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

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I rise in the House today to share some important initiatives on community safety in the GTA and York South-Weston in the absence of the member for York South-Weston standing up to share the news with his own constituents.

The McGuinty government is bringing a tough-on-crime-and-its-causes approach to community safety. The strategy involves additional funding for community programs, officers and task forces to combat gangs, guns and drugs.

After the NDP's social contract cut the number of police officers on our streets and the Tory government cut funding for the Ministry of Community Safety by \$181 million, this government knew we had to turn things around. As a result, we've invested in making our streets safer. This includes funding for an additional 1,000 police officers, 250 of whom are right here in Toronto.

The McGuinty government's approach to community safety does more than just increase the number of police on our streets; it also invests in at-risk youth and rehabilitation programming for young offenders.

Communities like Weston and Mount Dennis have directly benefited from our funding. Youth-centric programs like the For Youth Initiative, UrbanArts and the Black Action Defence Committee aim to engage youth in activities that develop strong leadership and creative skills.

The NDP still has no plan, while the McGuinty government continues to move forward, with real results. We know there is more to do, but we are committed to keeping our streets and our communities safer.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): I'm pleased to share some good news with the people of Toronto. Since NDP members like the members from York South-Weston and Parkdale-High Park haven't taken the opportunity to give their constituents a voice, I'm happy to help them out.

There's a lot of good news for public transportation in Ontario. We're especially excited to be fully committed to the extension of the subway line to York University. Despite the NDP leader's efforts to foil a tri-government

agreement to help improve Toronto's subway system, we're moving forward.

In the GTA alone, we've invested \$1.8 billion in public transit since coming to office—the largest investment in over a decade.

While our government has made public transportation a priority by putting money on the table for the York subway line, the leader of the NDP and his caucus, including the members from York South-Weston and Parkdale-High Park, would like to derail the project. That would have a devastating impact on commuters and students living in the GTA, not to mention the negative impact on good-paying CAW jobs in the north.

It's no surprise that his caucus sat silent on this. They must be embarrassed by their leader, who's against extending the Toronto subway and against CAW workers and against good-paying jobs in the north.

We refuse to play politics with major issues like our public transportation system, especially on critical jobs in northern Ontario. I hope the NDP caucus members will take the opportunity to give their constituents a voice, because it's clear that the NDP leader is not speaking for Torontonians or northerners. We'll continue to move forward with real results for Ontarians when it comes to public transportation.

VISITORS

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm delighted to welcome in the members' gallery councillor Maria McRae from the city of Ottawa—welcome, Councillor McRae; Barry Quinn, John Sobey, Mike Knoefler, Ray Balcon and Don Smith, Ottawa firefighters; as well as Johanne Levesque, daughter of deceased firefighter Claude Levesque. They serve our community so well. We're very proud of them and we thank them for coming to Queen's Park today.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want to echo what my colleague from Ottawa West-Nepean just said. I want to let them know how proud we are today to stand and support them.

On the weekend I was able to be with Mark Johnson's mother and to tell her that I would be very much supportive of this bill, with Councillor McRae. So thank you very much.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think if we all stood on a point of order to recognize every single one of the wonderful firefighters who are here today, we would be taking quite a long time at this portion of the agenda. But I do want to say that I'm proud to see our Hamilton firefighters here as well: Larry Staples, our president; Henry Watson; Ron Summers; Stan—Stan, I can't remember your last name. I'm really sorry.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: For the sake of the very same sanity the member was talking about, for anyone who has not been invited to say hello, we say hello to everybody.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Yesterday the member for Erie–Lincoln raised a point of order concerning the language contained in a certain petition. The government House leader and the chief government whip also spoke to the point of order.

Having carefully reviewed the petition in question, I can only concur with the member for Erie–Lincoln that it is not temperate in its language and not respectful in its request.

The petition is not unique, in the sense that other petitions have been used recently as attacks on other members—as, I might add, have various members' statements.

The general tone and tenor of debate and language in this House, most recently exemplified by the petition challenged yesterday by the member for Erie–Lincoln, causes me grave concern, and I have addressed this several times.

All these tactics in combination represent an erosion and a lowering of the Legislative Assembly for the expediency of partisan gain. I'm not suggesting that the assembly is not a partisan forum—it certainly is—but I am suggesting that legitimate partisan interplay needs to come about in a manner that is respectful of the dignity of this place and accords each member the respect that is owed by virtue of his or her membership here.

With respect to the specific petition at issue, it is my decision that it is not acceptable for presentation in the House and will not be accepted. Going forward, I've asked the table to be especially vigilant of all petitions, having regard for my general level of concern about decorum and temperance in language.

During petitions, we in effect allow the public to come directly into this place in order to make a respectful request. The House does not dignify itself if it gives a petition attacking one of its own members, nor does the member representing it serve the greater interests of the institution.

VISITORS

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Speaker: I would ask the House to join me in welcoming Maria Petrenkova and Ludmila Bakosova, visiting from Slovakia, joining their brother Branislav Galat and his wife Margita Galat.

1350

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
JUSTICE POLICY

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on justice policy and move its adoption.

The Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Mr. Berardinetti from the standing committee on justice policy presents the committee's report as follows:

Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 165, An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth /
Projet de loi 165, Loi visant à créer la charge d'intervenant provincial en faveur des enfants et des jeunes et à y pourvoir.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LINCOLN ALEXANDER DAY ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LE JOUR
DE LINCOLN ALEXANDER

Ms. Mossop moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 220, An Act to proclaim Lincoln Alexander Day /
Projet de loi 220, Loi proclamant le Jour de Lincoln Alexander.

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

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): This bill proclaims the third Wednesday of February in each year Lincoln Alexander Day in Ontario's public schools. February, as you all know, is Black History Month, the third week in February is Heritage Week in Ontario and the third Monday in February is Heritage Day across Canada.

Who among us embodies black history and our heritage as a province and a country growing towards tolerance and inclusion more than our own accomplished, charismatic and most generous Lincoln MacCauley Alexander, former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, former MP for 11 years and Minister of Labour of Canada?

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE
AMENDMENT ACT (PRESUMPTIONS
FOR FIREFIGHTERS), 2007LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR
LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET
L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS
DU TRAVAIL (PRÉSUMPTIONS
CONCERNANT LES POMPIERS)

Mr. Peters moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 221, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to firefighters and certain related occupations /
Projet de loi 221, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et

l'assurance contre les accidents du travail à l'égard des pompiers et de certaines professions connexes.

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

Does the minister wish to make a brief statement?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I'll wait for ministerial statements.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm going to ask for unanimous consent to move forward with second and third reading of this bill. All parties spoke in favour of it when it was introduced by my honourable colleague Ms. Horwath. The firefighters are here today, we've had an opportunity to review the bill and we certainly would ask unanimous consent to call the orders and move forward without amendment or debate.

The Speaker: Mr. Wilson has asked for unanimous consent that we move forward on this bill to second and third reading without debate. Agreed? Agreed.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE
AMENDMENT ACT (PRESUMPTIONS
FOR FIREFIGHTERS), 2007

LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR
LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET
L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS
DU TRAVAIL (PRÉSUMPTIONS
CONCERNANT LES POMPIERS)

Mr. Peters moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 221, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to firefighters and certain related occupations / Projet de loi 221, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail à l'égard des pompiers et de certaines professions connexes.

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

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE
AMENDMENT ACT (PRESUMPTIONS
FOR FIREFIGHTERS), 2007

LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR
LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET
L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS
DU TRAVAIL (PRÉSUMPTIONS
CONCERNANT LES POMPIERS)

Mr. Peters moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 221, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to firefighters and certain related occupations / Projet de loi 221, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail à l'égard des pompiers et de certaines professions connexes.

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

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

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: In the spirit of co-operation, I would seek unanimous consent to have third reading of Bill 67, the mandatory organ donation declaration bill which has now received unanimous support in second reading, has gone through committee and has been referred back to the House for third reading. The organ donation bill.

The Speaker: Mr. Klees has asked for unanimous consent for the organ donation bill. I heard a no.

1400

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

FIREFIGHTERS

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and on behalf of the firefighters assembled here today, to all my colleagues of all sides, thank you.

Perhaps, Speaker, your statement at the beginning may have helped to get us to this position today, and I thank you.

I entered the Legislature today first stopping at the firefighters' memorial at the corner of College and University, and was moved when I was there because of the presence of that monument. It struck me, as I read the monument and I read the name of a friend of mine, Dennis Redman, 2001, St. Thomas, captain—and right beside Dennis is Robert Shaw, 2004, Hamilton, captain. Dennis was a good friend of mine who lost his life in the line of duty, in a different way than Bob Shaw, but they're both memorialized on that memorial, which struck me as I stood there today.

Unfortunately, the Premier could not be here today for the introduction and passing of this bill, but he was present this morning. Premier McGuinty has asked me to convey to the Legislature his tremendous pride in our firefighters and the work that each and every one of you do. He's also asked me to thank Jacqueline Shaw and her son Nathan, who lost a husband and a father—Hamilton firefighter Bob Shaw—for their inspiration in the development of this bill.

I was honoured and pleased to be able to introduce and pass this legislation, which would ensure that Ontario firefighters are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve when filing occupational disease claims with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. We introduced a bill that would allow us, through regulation, to identify diseases as well as heart injuries that would be presumed to be work-related for firefighters, unless it was shown otherwise. This bill will lift the burden of proof off the backs of our hard-working firefighters and their families.

Firefighters are vital to keeping our communities safe from life-threatening dangers. Every day they risk their

lives to protect us and to protect our property. As a result, though, they sometimes find their own lives threatened by occupational diseases. These are caused by exposure to toxic fumes and any number of hazardous substances that may be present when they are fighting fires.

Firefighters protect us. In return, we must protect them.

We must, as a government, ensure that they and their families are treated fairly and receive the respect that they deserve during this time of personal crisis. The bill that was introduced and passed today is going to ensure that this happens.

This bill has the support of many honourable members of all three parties today, and those individuals in this chamber know who they are. To those individuals, I say thank you.

It took, though, the leadership of Premier McGuinty to insist that we work with our stakeholders to bring this important piece of legislation forward.

There are two names that I do need to recognize from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association. I'd ask all members to join me in recognizing Paul Atkinson and Colin Grieve for their work.

Currently, when a firefighter is diagnosed with cancer or a heart injury, they or their surviving families must go to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and demonstrate that the cause was work-related before they can receive compensation of any kind. This puts an enormous responsibility on them at a time when they are least equipped to deal with it.

Our proposal would take this responsibility off the firefighters and their families. It would reverse the onus, so that these diseases would be presumed to be work-related unless it were shown that there was another cause, such as a non-work-related exposure or heredity. It will make it easier for claims to be processed by the WSIB.

Our government will move quickly, through regulation, now that this bill is passed, to identify the eight forms of cancer that would be presumed to be work-related. This regulation as well would presume that any heart injury sustained by a firefighter within 24 hours of fighting a fire was work-related.

While initially extending this presumption to full-time firefighters with set years of service, it is our intent to go further—further, in fact, than any other jurisdiction in Canada. The legislation would be applied to all relevant claims back to January 1, 1960, an approach not taken by any other jurisdiction in Canada. Any firefighter's claim for an identified cancer diagnosed or heart injury suffered within 24 hours of fighting a fire on or after that date would be covered. Any claim that had been denied or is still pending during this period could be reopened and reassessed by the WSIB.

As well, it is our intention that we are going to move forward very quickly to consult with part-time firefighters, the fire marshal's office, fire investigators and volunteer firefighters on developing a regulation to determine what criteria will be used for the eight identified cancers. We believe that this is the best way to move

forward on this important issue. We believe that this will provide a fair and reasonable approach to ensuring that firefighters and their families receive fair treatment and respect in regard to workplace compensation claims for occupational disease and heart injuries.

This legislation helps to build on our commitment to health and safety in the province, but we need to recognize that, sadly, workers, including firefighters, do suffer job-related diseases and heart injuries. Today, collectively, we have done the right thing for Ontario firefighters. We must continue to ensure that they are able to face their personal tragedies and receive the support they deserve. The McGuinty government believes that this legislation will help ensure that our firefighters—heroes from all communities—are treated fairly in the face of occupational illness. It is the right thing to do. It was the right thing to do what we have just done. It is the fair thing to do.

I thank all of my colleagues assembled in this Legislature today for supporting our bill and providing for firefighters and their families what they need most.

ROAD SAFETY

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I rise in the House today to raise the profile of this year's ERASE program: Eliminate Racing Activities on Streets Everywhere. Project ERASE is an annual province-wide campaign that is designed to eliminate street racing everywhere. The campaign started several years ago with local police services right across the greater Toronto area and has expanded and grown every year.

Earlier today, I attended the launch of this year's ERASE program. It's a campaign with the York Regional Police to deliver our message that confronting the dangerous practice of street racing is a priority of this government. We are committed to keeping Ontario's roads safe, and we have a simple message for street racers: Stay off our roads.

1410

Street racers need to know they are putting their own lives and the lives of innocent people at risk by racing or speeding. Almost half of all deaths on our roads are tied to speeding or loss of control. Every day in Ontario, two people die and 10 are seriously injured because of collisions and crashes. In fact, the police and media reports indicate that street racing may have been a factor in an estimated 39 road deaths in Ontario since 1999. These are senseless tragedies that should never have happened anywhere.

There's no such thing as an accident. It's either a collision or it's a crash, and it is totally preventable. That's why our government recently introduced legislation to tackle street racing head on.

Today, drivers charged and convicted of street racing can be fined up to \$1,000, assigned six demerit points, face jail time and lose their licence. But if our new legislation is passed, it contemplates even tougher sanctions

for drivers who use our roads, and especially for those who use our roads like racetracks. If passed, the Safer Roads for a Safer Ontario Act, Bill 203, would give police the power to immediately suspend licences and impound vehicles for seven days when drivers are involved in street racing and stunt driving. That means that at the curbside, right then and there, the licence can be suspended for both the vehicle and the driver. It would also put in place the highest street racing fines in Canada. Minimum fines would increase from \$200 to \$2,000 and maximum fines will go to \$10,000.

We've given police across the province the tools they need to get tough with speeders, street racers and stunt drivers to get them off our streets. And yet, of course, there is more that we can do. Street racing is a selfish, thoughtless act that ends lives. By racing on our roads, people are choosing to put their own lives and the lives of other people at risk. Families and friends lose their loved ones. We cannot remain idle and let this happen.

Our government has worked tirelessly with many road safety partners to improve safety on our roads. I would like to say a special thank you to the two groups that I met with—one in Sudbury and the other here, where we had a forum on street racing. The police in particular, along with after-market-product individuals, victims' families and others who had an interest came together to look at the sanctions we needed to put in place. I owe them a debt of gratitude for their work.

With public education campaigns such as ERASE, we can get the message out that there is no tolerance for people who create a danger on our roads in Ontario. I would like to thank our police services and our road safety partners right across Ontario for their tremendous work and for their dedication in fighting street racing all year round. Our message is clear: Street racers and other speeders have no place on Ontario roads.

I call upon all members of this Legislature to join me in highlighting this important public campaign as we move forward into the spring and summer season.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Statements by the ministry? Responses?

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): First, let me offer congratulations to the Minister of Transportation on her announcement today. Obviously, one issue that we can always agree on in this House is the importance of road safety in Ontario. Even in opposition, our party is committed to road safety, and we have been able to take action.

I think for a moment about the leadership the member for Oak Ridges has provided, who joined you at the event sponsored by the York Regional Police this morning. He introduced a tough bill to fight street racing in Ontario. I'm glad that your government has responded to his bill with legislation. My colleague the member for Durham has pointed out to this House on several occasions the importance of eliminating distractions such as cellphones while driving. And the member for Simcoe-Grey has repeatedly condemned your cancellation of the repairs to Highway 26 in his riding, and you have done nothing to help the people of Simcoe county.

Three years ago the Legislature unanimously passed my resolution directing the MTO to permit roadside memorials to commemorate the victims of drunk drivers. I'm happy that the government responded and has announced it will establish a program.

But there are a couple of issues I'm rather surprised at, particularly given the comments made by the minister today about the notion of needing the support of many other organizations. I find it in contradiction to the fact that you've cut off the funding to the Ontario Safety League and also the question of funding to the Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving. It seems unfortunate that, while you recognized in your comments the importance of having everyone work together, you've left out a couple of really key players.

FIREFIGHTERS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I'm very pleased today to rise on behalf of our leader, John Tory, and my caucus. I certainly applaud this move that has been undertaken by all members of the House today to give unanimous consent to this bill, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act (Presumption for Firefighters), 2007.

Ever since the introduction of the private member's bill on May 4, 2006, I know that our leader, John Tory, and our members of caucus have been very supportive of this initiative, and my colleague Jim Wilson spoke to this bill when it came forward on October 5, 2006. I do want to, on behalf of everyone in this House, express our appreciation to Andrea Horwath at this time for her leadership on this initiative.

Indeed, when we learned today, through the media this morning, that this bill was going to be coming forward, in discussions we had with our leader, John Tory, he felt it was very important that we do what was necessary in order to move forward this legislation, which is going to make it easier for firefighters to qualify for compensation for job-related cancers and heart disease. That is why we moved second and third reading. I hope now that the government will quickly complete their consultations and I hope they will bring forward the regulations, which will offer the needed protection to our firefighters. They are, as has already been said, vital to our community. They deserve fair treatment and they deserve respect in regard to workplace claims and occupational diseases and heart disease. So I applaud the government and the minister for bringing this forward today.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to thank all members for the unanimous consent. When I first spoke to Ms. Horwath's bill last year, I told her and I told young Nathan Shaw that we would not let them down, that we, as the Progressive Conservative caucus, would stand by you.

I said at that time, Nathan, that it was the best letter that I'd ever received in 16 years of public life, and I stand by that today. Your father would be very, very proud, and it's a very good day for you and your family and for firefighters. We applaud you and we applaud Ms.

Horwath. I think all members should get on their feet and once again thank these courageous people for bringing this forward and thank Mr. Peters for introducing the bill today.

Applause.

1420

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): On behalf of New Democrats, who have fought so hard for improved health and safety for firefighters and all workers, I am pleased to see that the McGuinty government brought forward the presumptive legislation, and I'm so proud of what we did today in terms of making sure it got swift passage and is ready to go to the next step, which is what needs to happen very quickly.

The impetus of people who have already been named—and I'm going to name them again because I'm so darn proud of them: people like the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, editorial boards across this province, the general public. Everybody has been pushing very hard to see the changes that were announced today by the minister come about, people like Fred LeBlanc, who's the president of the Professional Fire Fighters Association. And I can see that Brian George, the vice president, is here as well, and of course, Colin Grieve, a Hamilton guy; I've got to say, one of Hamilton's own. Colin Grieve and Paul Atkinson are really the brain trust of the firefighters in terms of the work that was done to bring presumptive legislation to the province of Ontario.

Henry Watson, the fire chief of my own city, of course has always been active on these issues and has been a good leader in our community. And of course, Nathan Shaw and Jackie Shaw have both been extremely instrumental in terms of bringing this issue to my attention. They were the impetus behind Bill 111. As you know, Captain Bob Shaw's name was on Bill 111. It was brought forward in his honour, and I can say that we've really succeeded today in an important step forward in moving the issue of presumptive legislation to the top of the agenda.

Many, many people have signed petitions across this province. This issue has been extremely important for so many people, for so many firefighters, so many communities, so many families. We all know the adage that when a building is on fire, everybody else is running out but the firefighters are running in. And they're often running into a toxic soup, and nobody really knows the effect that it will have on their lives. Yes, we know that we lose firefighters regularly in immediate fires where there is a critical injury or a death on the job. But what this legislation does is acknowledge and recognize that just through the work every day of going to fires in communities across this province and being exposed over and over again to those toxins, to those toxic soups that exist at these sites, firefighters are likely to come down with a number of cancers which the minister has indicated are in the bill.

Of course, I haven't seen the bill yet. We just passed it and I haven't even had a chance to read it, so I'm hoping—

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): Trust us.

Ms. Horwath: Yes, that's later in my speech, Steve. The "trust us" part is later in the speech. But nonetheless, my fervent hope is that today everything is as it appears and that the government regulations, the schedules and the WSIB policies are all going to reflect the intention that the minister articulated and that all of us have continued to talk about.

The bottom line is, the commitment needs to be there. Definitely, the regs are important, but regs can be changed. So we just have to make sure that they're always changed for the better and they're not drawn back on, that we don't lose any ground in the process of the development of the regs and we make sure that everything that the government says is going to be in those regs is going to be there.

I'm running out of time very quickly, but I do want to say that firefighters need to know that New Democrats are going to be dogged in our watching of this process and making sure that the government makes good on the promises. We know that they haven't been that great on promises in the history of their term in government, so we're going to be watching and making sure that those regulations are put in place and that they're never drawn back on. We're going to be watching to make sure that the policy at the board is holding up the promise of today's spectacular day. That's exactly what we are going to do.

I'm very proud to have been one small part in this fabulous fight. Thank you, Nathan. Thank you, Jackie. Thank you, firefighters.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): New Democrats welcome this legislation. We're pleased to see it become law, and we're especially proud of Nathan and Jackie Shaw, who with incredible courage and tenacity have made sure that the loss of a husband and a dad long before his time has made him live forever, because his loss will save the lives and the well-being of families for years to come.

We're especially proud of Andrea Horwath, who on behalf of New Democrats spearheaded this movement with her legislation, struggled across the province to make sure that it came to the forefront in the mind of every firefighter and every voter. Bill 111 is surely the parent of the legislation we witnessed today. We're proud of you, Andrea.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION GRANTS

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who I think is nearby. I see his briefing book at the ready. Perhaps I can have the indulgence of the House for a moment. I think he's—

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): He's here.

Mr. Tory: Ah, there he is, whether he wants to be or not.

My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration about the political slush fund. The Minister of Finance, who also happens to be chair of Dalton McGuinty's re-election campaign, is the man responsible for overseeing the spending of taxpayers' dollars. It was reported in the *Toronto Star* last Saturday, "The way it worked was that the Liberal caucus was told there were year-end funds available, and members were asked to recommend worthwhile groups." If this was a cologne, they would call it "eau de Gomery" or "scent of sponsorship."

What I'd like to know from the minister is this: What exactly was the minister told by the Liberal Party campaign chair or his staff about the disposition of this year-end slush fund money?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): As I've said a number of times in this House, as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, I'm extremely pleased that many needs over the years which have had little attention paid to them are finally starting to be met. That's why we're responding to so many excellent organizations in cities across the province that have said that for too many years they were never listened to, whether it be for capital improvements, whether it be for regular operating funds, whether it be for new programs like the loan program for immigrants. That's who we listened to; that's where we got our inspiration to reach out and try and help so many newcomers' volunteer organizations that have been ignored for so long.

Mr. Tory: It's harder and harder to understand, as the days pass, why the minister doesn't recognize the fact that there's very little debate about that part of this. What the members and the public are interested in knowing about is the process that was followed here, to be able to satisfy themselves that the taxpayers' money was respected, that proper care was taken in how that money was distributed, that there was fairness between and among groups and between and among members of the Legislature as to how the money was handed out.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration made a statement on April 18: "I get a notification from finance that there is some capital funding available...." I would ask the minister: How exactly did this process work? That's what we're interested in knowing here so we can be sure the taxpayers' money was respected. What did the Liberal Party campaign chair or his staff say about this money and how it was to be dealt with? What direction did the minister receive from the Minister of Finance about the distribution of these tax dollars?

Hon. Mr. Colle: As the first stand-alone Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, there are many incredible needs out there. For many years, organizations big and small, whether it be AWIC here in Toronto or the St. Catharines Multicultural Centre, which is in a building that was built in 1860—that's what they're in: a building built in 1860. They haven't had any resources to repair that old building, and they are a centre to help new-

comers, to help women who are suffering distress. They get counselling; they get job training. For decades, that centre has never gotten any help.

Those are the kinds of agencies that are coming to my ministry, asking for support. We listened and we tried to help, whether it be the agency in St. Catharines or an agency in Kingston.

1430

Mr. Tory: All I'm trying to ask the minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, is why he can't answer a single question on the subject of how you made the decisions between and among all of these worthy groups. Who got considered and who didn't? Who knew that you had money and who didn't? How did you decide between and among these various groups who got the money and who didn't? How did you follow up to make sure the taxpayers' money was being properly respected when it was given out?

I want to quote from the *Toronto Star* on April 20: "Colle seemed unclear as to how the grants were approved, but suggested Sorbara and Public Infrastructure Renewal Minister David Caplan are in charge of the purse strings.

"It has to go through the other ministers and ultimately, I guess, by cabinet."

That is what the minister said. What I want to know is this: How did it work? How did you decide? Who picked the groups? Who picked the winners and losers? Did it actually go to the cabinet and get approved? I think we're entitled to have those answers, Mr. Speaker, and I ask the minister, through you, to answer those questions now for this House and for the public of Ontario.

Hon. Mr. Colle: Again, as minister, it is my job to ensure that all members of our government understand that there are many needs, and all members of cabinet understand that I'm the advocate for helping volunteer organizations; I'm the advocate for helping newcomer settlement organizations. I'm constantly trying to find ways of helping them. Whether I'm advocating to the former Liberal government—who didn't help us in coming across with the federal-provincial agreement, or this government that's there in Ottawa now, or whether it is our government, it's my job to let government and ministers know that we must do more to help many organizations and many programs that, again, have been unmet for two decades by governments of all stripes.

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

Mr. Tory: Again to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration regarding the political slush fund: Let's deal with one of the particular examples here. The Minister of Finance, as we all know, is also the chair of the Liberal Party campaign. We also know that the Iranian-Canadian Community Centre got \$200,000 a mere three weeks after it had registered as a charitable organization which was supposed to be for the purpose of protecting animals. We know that seven out of seven directors of this organization have ties to the Liberal Party, including a riding president, a candidate and a number of donors to

the party. We know that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has said that these slush fund monies had to go through the Liberal Party campaign chair prior to being approved.

My question is very simple: Did the Minister of Finance approve and have to approve of this \$200,000 payment to this organization? It's a very simple question. I think you have an obligation to answer it to the people and to the members of this House.

Hon. Mr. Colle: Again, as minister, there are many communities all across southern Ontario now, in new areas like Kitchener-Waterloo, London, or they're into York region or they're into Peel region, that are trying to meet needs that have not been met. I try to find ways of addressing those needs, as I've said, through a variety of programs. We do it through \$50 million we spend on language training programs. We do it through giving extra capacity to organizations. We do it through our partnership with school boards, with our ESL programs. We do it through our partnership with agencies like OCASI or the Maytree Foundation. We do bridge training programs at Ryerson University. So we are trying to deliver those programs and areas. One area was in the Iranian community, where there weren't enough services, and we were trying to find a way of delivering much-needed services. That's what I tried to do.

Mr. Tory: We hear this over and over again. What we never hear is any answer to the question of whether there was any process in place whatsoever, any process at all, that ensured fairness between and among groups. I met one at lunchtime this afternoon outside this building who said they asked you for money and that they were turned down absolutely. We'll hear more about that in the days to come.

Was there any mechanism or process that anybody in the world understood except you and your Liberal colleagues as to how you decided who got this money, that the process was fair, that the organizations were as they said they were, that they were going to do the things that you've said that they're going to do with the money? In the case of the Canadian-Iranian organization we've talked about, the money is still sitting there a year later in a bank account and nothing has been done with it—nothing—nothing good or bad; just nothing. It's sitting there—taxpayers' money—in a bank account. That might have been helping some other people somewhere else who had some use of the money at the time.

Would you agree with me, in the words of one of your own Liberal MPPs quoted in the Star, that this looks terrible? Because it does, and it's time you called in the auditor. Would the minister agree to do so?

Hon. Mr. Colle: My ministry is proud to partner with organizations that have had long-outstanding track records. Some organizations, like Frontier College or the Greek Community of Metropolitan Toronto, have been in existence for many, many years. The resources they get in our partnership are used to expand capacity. You cannot create an instant community centre in 24 hours. Sometimes you have to get more partners, you raise more

money and you continue to grow capacity to do that. That's the kind of investment that we make. But some organizations like I've mentioned before have already—the Greek community centre is already three quarters built. You can see it up there on Warden Avenue. That's proceeding. Not all organizations are able to spend every cent in the first 24 hours. Some are at different stages of development.

Mr. Tory: The minister makes reference to long-standing groups. We're talking about one here that existed for a matter of days before you gave them a huge cheque. It was set up to care for animals, and now it seems to be in some other business.

You talked about the challenge of raising money. In the year since you gave them—without process, without application, without scrutiny—hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money, they have raised exactly \$15,000, according to the newspaper, on their own during that period of time. Don't you think it would have been reasonable to say that maybe your money would come—the taxpayers' money; it's not your money; that's the problem—the taxpayers' money would come after they'd reached a certain threshold in fundraising? You could make a commitment without sending the cheque.

This is about learning the lessons of Gomery. It is about things that do look terrible, in the words of your own Liberal MPP. It is about respecting the taxpayers' money. Why don't you try to wipe away the smell of sponsorship that is increasingly permeating this building by calling the auditor in, letting him have a look at this and deciding if everything is as you say it is? What are you afraid of?

The Speaker: Before the minister answers, the Leader of the Opposition has been doing a wonderful job of placing it in the third person. If you would like to—

Mr. Tory: What's the minister afraid of, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Perfect.
Minister.

Hon. Mr. Colle: The Leader of the Opposition continues not to correct the record. That organization in question was incorporated in 2005. There was a clerical error in getting their charitable registration later. They were created to help newcomers and to create a community centre.

The member again starts to ask for instant results. There are many organizations that are not as large as the United Jewish Appeal, for instance, which already has many investments in the ground. Some organizations, like the Casa dos Açores of Ontario, might take some time to finally build the centre they've been searching for for a decade. They are now very close to having a piece of property, and hopefully it will be built very quickly.

As I said, there are different stages for many different organizations because some of them, again, are very volunteer-based. Some of them have been around, again, for 100 years. It depends on the organizations and their different capacities.

The Speaker: New question. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I have a question to the Minister of Citizenship. The Minister of Citizenship, the Premier and several members of the McGuinty government continue to cast aspersions of racism whenever opposition members ask for an immediate investigation by the Auditor General on the McGuinty government's year-end slush fund.

My question is this: Does the Minister of Citizenship think I am racist when I ask for an immediate investigation and report by the Auditor General on a slush fund that had no formal application process, no criteria for evaluation, no evaluation or audit process after the money was handed out, and where significant amounts of the money seem to have gone to organizations that are very closely connected to Liberal riding associations? Do you think I'm a racist for asking for an investigation of that kind of slush fund?

1440

Hon. Mr. Colle: The Premier dealt with that last Friday. He dealt with that issue, here in the House, yesterday. The key thing is that, as I've said before, this is an issue of helping many volunteer organizations, many of them dealing with seniors or with cultural groups, that for many years have been ignored by government. I've said that that is what this issue is about, that members on all sides of the House and all levels of government have not done enough in past years to invest in these incredible newcomers, especially, and these volunteer groups that have come to our province.

For 10 years in this House, before I was minister, sitting in opposition, there was no discussion about investing in our newcomers in this Legislature. Look at Hansard and see how much discussion there was about this. What I'm saying is, that's what this issue is about: paying attention to these partners that have been ignored—

The Speaker: Thank you. Order.

The leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: The minister must not be able to read the paper, because I want to quote from the Globe and Mail. The Globe and Mail editorial says that the Premier "should do as the opposition asks and request a speedy review by the Auditor General." The Owen Sound Sun Times editorial says that "it's this kind of spending abuse that can't be allowed to go unchecked." The Toronto Sun editorial said, "A review by the auditor is the best and only way to ensure proper accountability. Too bad that message is lost on our current government."

Minister, this is about a fund that had no criteria, that wasn't announced to the public, that wasn't announced to all kinds of organizations out there who would have liked to apply, and yet a suspiciously significant amount of money went to people closely connected to the Liberal Party. Why do you cast aspersions of racism when all we're asking for is—

The Speaker: The leader might want to rephrase the last part of the question.

Minister?

Hon. Mr. Colle: This is the same leader of the third party who painted these organizations with one broad brush and said that they were fly-by-night. These are organizations that we partnered with, like the South Asian Women's Centre, SPRINT—Senior People's Resources in North Toronto—St. Christopher House, St. Clair West Services for Seniors, the Sudbury multi-cultural arts centre, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office of Toronto, Thunder Bay Multicultural Association, Toronto Chinese Community Services Association, Tropicana Community Services and the University Settlement Recreation Centre. That is the aspersion he cast on all of these organizations that we've tried to help by, for the first time, giving them some resources to take care of their capital needs that for 20 years were not even paid attention to.

Mr. Hampton: I say to the minister, what the Globe and Mail is referring to and what the Owen Sound Sun Times is referring to are the two organizations that I've asked questions about. The one organization got its charitable status three weeks before you gave them \$200,000. They have absolutely no record of providing any services whatsoever to the Iranian community. In fact, many people in the Iranian-Canadian community don't even know who they are, even today. The money continues to sit in a bank account. All of the people who are in that organization are either Liberal riding candidates, Liberal riding association presidents, or other partisan Liberals. Those are the organizations that I've asked about. You're the one casting aspersions of racism. I ask you: Do you believe it's racist when someone simply asks for an Auditor General's investigation?

The Speaker: You'll have to rephrase the last part of that question.

Mr. Hampton: Does the Minister of Citizenship believe that I am being racist when I simply ask for an Auditor General's examination—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Colle: Again, what I told the member is that the one thing he truly is is reckless. One of the organizations he condemned had a card-carrying NDPer as the president.

What we are trying to look at in these organizations, which have volunteers and board members and staff from all political stripes, all walks of life—if you look at the breadth of the organizations, you will see that they are a cross-section of what's best about Ontario: There are people volunteering, there are people who are caring, and these people who have been caring and volunteering have been doing such excellent work, but for many years they never got any help from any level of government.

Now we are trying to invest in these organizations, which for years were never given the time of day by any government, and all of a sudden we're the ones being called—

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Minister of Citizenship: We receive notification from very good, long-serving organizations every day. At noon hour at a celebration I was

approached by some people who are long-standing members of an immigrant community who provide all kinds of services. They cannot understand how \$30 million would go out the door with no announcement of the program, no formal application process, no criteria for evaluating proposals and no follow-up audit or evaluation. They just can't understand how any government would operate that way.

I say to the minister that this is why we are requesting an Auditor General's investigation. I ask the question again: Does the minister believe I am being a racist when I ask for an Auditor General's investigation and report on this kind of slush fund?

Hon. Mr. Colle: My ministry has a number of programs. We have an incredible program of bridge training, where foreign-trained nurses, pharmacists, teachers and dietitians are able to get employment opportunities.

We have \$50 million in partnership with school boards where we teach English as a second language. We also have a settlement program. We have an opportunity here to invest in some capital improvements, and that's what we've done. When the opportunity is there to help groups that need to fix their dilapidated buildings, get out of basements and up to the main floor, these are the organizations we've been talking with, visiting through the course of the last couple of years. We try to help them meet those needs.

Mr. Hampton: I would say to the minister and to members of the McGuinty government that you can try to avoid answering the question all you want, but the question is going to remain, and the question was put by the Globe and Mail editorial also today, "It does not take a bloodhound to detect the whiff of a slush fund, and to wonder whether the Liberals are making such free use of public money to suit their own electoral ambitions...."

That's the question, Minister: whether some of this money that went out the door without any process, without any criteria, without any announcement, without any follow-up evaluation, went to people who are simply serving as fronts for the Liberal Party. Don't you think, Minister, that there should be an immediate Auditor General's investigation and report on this "whiff of a slush fund," as the Globe and Mail suggests?

Hon. Mr. Colle: Again, if you look at the organizations that are on our website, based on our principles of ensuring that they engage in diversity enhancement, increased volunteer participation, community building, cultural inclusion—because I also have the citizenship part of my portfolio, which means that we honour volunteers, whether they be seniors, whether they be Girl Guides—in fact, right now we're honouring up to 9,000 volunteers, as we speak, across this province.

1450

As I've said, these organizations are in communities all across Ontario, big and small. They are from every walk of life. We are proud to partner with these organizations because they provide great work in communities. That is an important part of building a true city or a true region, because the services they provide are essential, whether they be volunteer or helping newcomers.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, what I think also bothers a lot of people about this is that we all recognize that there is an untold number of community organizations and cultural groups that do wonderful work. They provide senior services; they help with children; they provide settlement services. Many of these organizations could not apply to your slush fund because you didn't tell them about the slush fund; you didn't tell them to send in a proposal. Yet, organizations that have no history in providing services, organizations that seem to be dominated by partisan Liberals, some of whom now want to run as candidates, somehow found out about the fund and got grants of \$200,000, \$250,000.

How could it be, Minister, that legitimate organizations didn't even know this money existed, but organizations that have hardly existed at all and serve as fronts for the Liberal Party got money?

Hon. Mr. Colle: Our government is partnering with organizations like the Kababayan Community Centre, the Korean Canadian Women's Association, the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre, the Maytree Foundation, the Mennonite Central Committee and the multicultural council. We have many programs where we're partnering with these organizations. We're also trying to help them at times when they need capital improvements.

There are many of these organizations that have great needs. We haven't been able to supply everything out there, because there hasn't been any investment for decades. Now we have an even better process because there is a growing need on the capital side, where there is a direct application online and a registry where we can track these needs, because it's evident there's much more work to do.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and it relates to a follow-up question of yesterday, relating to the scandalous transfer of \$200,000 from the minister's political slush fund to a bank account over which signing authority is held by no one else but Liberal partisans.

I have a letter here—because the minister yesterday, as you know, refused to admit that he did anything wrong—signed by 13 leaders of the Iranian Canadian community. This was addressed to the Premier, copied to the minister. They say this:

"To the best of our knowledge the designated group that received the funding had no prior experience of promoting the welfare or safeguarding the interests of Iranian Canadians in Ontario.

"The flawed and arbitrary manner in which this grant was rewarded" is unconscionable.

Here is my question to the minister: If you won't respond to us, will you at least respond to these people in the community?

Hon. Mr. Colle: We have over 130 different cultural groups of newcomers in Ontario. We have many needs in these groups. In a variety of organizations, there are many that are more established and some that aren't. Some disagree with each other.

There was an attempt by us to try and provide a service in an area where there was a need. You can't get total unanimity from every single member of 130 cultural groups that come to this country. We tried to help meet a need. We tried to invest in an organization that was going to try and meet that need. That's what we tried to do.

Mr. Klees: I quote again from the letter: "The flawed and arbitrary manner in which this grant was rewarded, coupled with the reality that this group has had no prior experience of assisting members of our community, has greatly heightened tension between various members of the Iranian Canadian community in Ontario."

The minister is being asked by the community itself. Here is the quote from the community: "We respectfully demand that full investigations of this transaction be undertaken so as to safeguard the interests of members of the Iranian Canadian community in Ontario."

The community itself is saying that the mishandling of this slush fund by this minister is causing tension within their own community. Will the minister, based on the request from this community, agree to an investigation of how he has handled the disbursing of these funds?

Hon. Mr. Colle: There are many challenges out there in trying to address these needs—many communities, as I said. Many of these communities do incredible work. What I want to say is that at times members of one community, or two or three communities, say they've been ignored by this level of government; they're being ignored by our government or being ignored by city hall. There are constant differences of opinion about what the needs are and who is meeting the needs, but they are all identifying the fact that there needs to be more done. That's what we have tried to emphasize, that at the time action was needed because they've been neglected, not listened to, there was no funding. In fact, the first thing the members opposite did when they came to power was they closed down Ontario Welcome House. That's the first thing they did.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. New question.

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. As an immigrant and the MPP for a culturally diverse riding where more than half of the residents are immigrants, I was deeply offended by the Premier's suggestion last Friday that the tough but fair questions posed by members on this side of the House about the government's slush fund were somehow racially motivated. Since the Premier refuses to apologize, I'm going to ask this minister: Will he do the honourable thing and apologize on the Premier's behalf, not just to members of this House but to all Ontarians, who demand accountability and transparency from their government?

Hon. Mr. Colle: The Premier made his position clear in the House yesterday and on Friday. I say to the member opposite, I have a great deal of respect for the passion he has for his community. I concur that his part of Toronto needs a great deal of help, needs a great deal of support for newcomers, and I know that's what motivates

him. He's motivated to try to help the vast variety of newcomers who are in his riding of York South–Weston, who for too many years have lived below the poverty line, for too many years have been unemployed, for too many years have not had opportunity. He is advocating for that, and I support him as he advocates for the newcomers in his riding and throughout Ontario.

The Speaker: Thank you. I'd just remind the member that the question needs to be placed through the Speaker.

Mr. Ferreira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As my party's citizenship critic, I have received correspondence from other Ontarians who are similarly offended by the words and actions of this government. I'll read from an e-mail that was sent to the minister and copied to my office.

"What left me appalled was your suggestion, Minister, that to question this practice was, in your eyes, synonymous with failure to appreciate our diverse society. Your accusations that the opposition does not appreciate diversity paints not only MPPs but all Ontarians who question this Liberal slush fund with the same brush. This is tantamount to calling a great portion of Ontario's population xenophobic or racist."

I ask again: Will the Minister of Citizenship display the leadership that the Premier refuses to, and apologize to all Ontarians?

1500

Hon. Mr. Colle: What I will say is that I am so extremely proud of all Ontario because, wherever I've gone, there's an incredible, positive change happening. Whether I go talk to the mayor of Sudbury, the mayor of Middlesex Centre, the mayor of London or the mayor of Hamilton or Windsor, mayors of communities all across Ontario are saying to me, "Can we be part of attracting more immigrants to our community?" That's what Ontario business leaders are saying. That's what Ontario mayors are saying. That's what Ontario communities are saying. They're saying in a very loud way, "We want more immigrants to come to Sarnia." They want more immigrants to come to Kitchener-Waterloo. The regional chairman, Ken Seiling—we've made a partnership with them to make Kitchener-Waterloo an immigration gateway. That's what is happening in Ontario. It's a proud recognition that if our newcomers succeed, all of Ontario succeeds. We are partners in investing in that success for cities large and small and for our newcomers.

The Speaker: Thank you. If the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke wish to have private conversations, they can have them outside.

New question. The member for York South.

ONTARIO CHILD BENEFIT

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): It is York West, Mr. Speaker. My question, Mr. Speaker, through you, is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I note that the NDP members of York South–Weston and Parkdale–High Park have no interest in sharing the good news with

their constituents, but I'd like to say I'm very pleased to highlight the unprecedented—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. The member for Parkdale–High Park will come to order. The member for Niagara Centre will come to order. The member for Parkdale–High Park will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Government House leader, I've had enough advice from you over the day.

Member for York South.

Mr. Sergio: It is York West. Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to re-question the question again. Let me start through you, Speaker, to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I know that the NDP members from York South–Weston and Parkdale–High Park have no interest in sharing this wonderful news, but let me say, and I'm very pleased to highlight the point, that—

Interjections.

The Speaker: We had been doing so well. I need to be able to hear members place their questions. Member for York West, I would like you to be able to ask your question.

Member for York West.

Mr. Sergio: Through you, Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I know that the NDP members for York South–Weston and Parkdale–High Park have no interest in sharing the good news with their constituents, but I'm very pleased to be able to highlight the unprecedented \$2.1 billion in investment to Ontario's children. We know that most families are working very hard nowadays. In fact, by creating the Ontario child benefit, we are helping to make sure lower-income families with kids have an easier time making ends meet. The Ontario child benefit is a massive investment in over one million kids. I share the disappointment of so many families who would have loved to get more money, but shamefully, the NDP voted against it.

Child poverty needs to be addressed, and we are raising the bar for a lot of these families. I am asking the minister to—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Interjections.

The Speaker: We've wasted a lot of time through this little period trying to have this question asked, and I would ask all members to be helpful. When a member is asking a question, show some respect. Show some respect for the institution, and especially, show some maturity.

Minister.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I did hear that the member from York West is asking about the Ontario child benefit. Apart from the fact that we're all very pleased with the Ontario child benefit, I thought I'd share with you a couple of comments from people who work with poverty every single day, like Gail Nyberg, executive director of the Daily Bread Food Bank, who said, "The Ontario child benefit will reduce barriers faced by

families with children who are trying to leave welfare for work. At the same time, it will help reduce child poverty and hunger."

Michael Mendelson, senior scholar from the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, said, "This is a great day and a great change. It's historic."

June Callwood was also very, very supportive. She said she was "thrilled with the legislation." She never dreamt that she'd hear "anything this good." She said, "Dalton McGuinty is a good man, and he really heard us."

I look forward to the supplementary.

Interjection.

The Speaker: I'm not going to warn the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke again.

Supplementary, the member from Thornhill.

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): Mr. Speaker, through you back to the minister, I have to add that our 2007 budget was a great budget, with investments in important priorities like children, health care, education and transportation. That is why I feel it was so important for all Ontarians to know about the Ontario child benefit.

I would like to ask the minister to tell us when families with kids will start to receive the new Ontario child benefit.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The Ontario child benefit will issue its first payment of up to \$250 per child on July 27 this year. It's an income-based benefit, so it's really important that families file their tax returns. I also need them to have been registered for the Canada child tax benefit. That's really all they need to do.

Then, starting in July next year, monthly payments of up to \$50 per child will commence. They are non-taxable. These amounts will increase to a maximum of up to \$1,100 per year by the year 2011.

It's good news for families: 1.3 million children, over 600,000 families, should benefit from this.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): My question is for the Minister of Culture. On Friday, the Premier said she was running a slush fund. On Monday, she said there were applications. On Tuesday, when asked whose version of events was correct—hers or the Premier's—we got a bizarre recital of her speaking notes on libraries. That suggests to me and those of us on this side of the House that maybe it was the Premier who was giving us the straight goods when he said that "the money goes out the door, just like that."

But I want to be sure, so I'll ask the minister if she can tell us—through you, Mr. Speaker—whose version of events is the right one: the Premier, who said there was no application, who said that the minister is running a slush fund, or the minister, who said the Premier was wrong and there was in fact an application process.

1510

Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture): I'm proud of the investments that have been made in our

libraries, have been made in our museums, have been made in other major agencies across this province in arts and culture. These agencies, as everyone knows, are subject to annual audits, they have boards of directors, and they all have significant private sector support. I would like to add that it's smart investment to invest in our arts and cultural sector. This sector, as a whole, contributes over \$17 billion to Ontario's economy. I say again that I'm proud of the commitment and support we have provided, because unfortunately, for too many years when the Tories were in power, they totally disregarded arts and culture in the province of Ontario.

Mrs. Munro: As I said through you on Tuesday, Mr. Speaker, it's not a difficult question. It doesn't require a long answer. On Friday the Premier said that "the money goes out the door, just like that." On Monday the minister said there was an application process, but on Tuesday she didn't back that up. Again today she hasn't turned the page in her notes. We're back to the libraries. That's the answer she gave me the last time. So I'm asking for the minister to stand in her place and tell us whose version of events is correct: the Premier's, the money flying out the door, or hers, the application program. Who should we believe?

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: The Premier and this government are focused on continuing to create a strong environment so that arts and the cultural sector in this province can thrive and grow. We've made crucial investments that strengthen our arts and cultural sector, strengthen our people and strengthen our economy. I make no apology for that. All of the agencies are subject to annual audits. They have boards of directors. They have significant private sector support. I would suggest that it is important for us to have a competitive edge to compete globally through the investment in arts and culture. It's about quality of life and it's about a strong economy.

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION GRANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. On Tuesday the minister said he was going to meet with a delegation from the Hindu Samaj Hamilton and region temple. The minister claims to be interested in helping this group, as we all heard, apply for provincial funding to help rebuild the \$1.8-million cultural centre and temple that were destroyed by an arsonist in Ontario's worst post-9/11 hate crime. This is an urgent issue. Why has the minister's office not contacted the Hindu Samaj Temple to schedule this urgent, urgent meeting?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Again, I just reflect back on the fact that this was a tragic event that occurred in 2001. Governments have tried to help this temple. I assured the member the other day when she asked me and I said I would meet with the temple, and I'll do that.

Ms. Horwath: The issue is the urgency of the matter. If the minister was paying attention, he would know that

there is a significant problem with the current financing of the capital improvements that needed to be made to that building. It is, in fact, very urgent. I sent the minister's office a fax on Tuesday. My staff called the minister's office on Wednesday. It is now Thursday, and there is a deafening silence from the minister's office.

The McGuinty government hid the fact from the Hindu Samaj leaders that there were capital funds even available for projects like theirs and repeatedly rejected their request for funding. Now, after the minister says he's going to meet with this group and address the urgent matter, there has been no follow-up. It's embarrassing, especially since Ontario is the only partner that failed to contribute to the Hindu Samaj Temple fund.

Speaker, I've raised this matter with the minister three times this week alone and I want to ask him, through you: Will he quit stalling and quickly arrange the meeting he promised?

Hon. Mr. Colle: Again, I know the member recognizes that many of these incredible organizations, of all different faiths and all different backgrounds, are in need of help, and that's what we try to do. We've now established a direct application registry which is going to track these for the first time, because this was never done before. We're trying to do that as best we can. I told the member when she raised this the other day, I will meet with them.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care: I have a question that might be of interest to the member from Parkdale-High Park. During this past summer, the community of Parkdale-High Park welcomed the news of a new state-of-the-art hospital to be built on the existing Runnymede Healthcare Centre site. Connie Dejak, president and CEO of Runnymede Healthcare, said this: "The announcement made by the McGuinty government has erased 20 years of uncertainty."

Minister, the community of Parkdale-High Park would like to know: Is this project going forward?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The Runnymede hospital has, for 60, perhaps 70, maybe even 80 years, been operating out of a site that is a converted educational facility. We're very proud that within the next 12 months, not only will the hospital be going forward but a very significant expansion to St. Joe's hospital, also in riding of Parkdale-High Park, will be taking shape.

At the Runnymede site, we'll be evolving that from a 95-bed hospital to a 200-bed complex continuing care facility, and down at St. Joseph's Health Centre there are already early works projects under way that are leading to a major redevelopment of St. Joe's that will see modern maternal and newborn services and create a capacity for a six-bed child and adolescent mental health unit.

After very little action by previous governments on hospital construction, our government, in five years, is in the midst of building more hospitals in the province of Ontario than the last five governments in Ontario combined.

Mr. Zimmer: Minister, I'm glad you've raised the issue of mental health. Looking back to the early 1990s, the government of the day actually cut mental health funding by \$65 million. Relief could have been offered by way of supporting housing units and counselling, but nothing was done for years and years to come.

Community support services are necessary to help vulnerable people live independent and productive lives. The community, the constituents of Parkdale–High Park, are in need of these types of services. Minister, how have you addressed these needs?

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I want to thank the member from York South–Weston for the congratulatory heckle that he offered with respect to the fact that I'm going to marry my same-sex partner this summer, and I hope—he's inquiring as to who's participating—when he goes through the same circumstance, I hope he'll invite me.

When we look to the riding of Parkdale–High Park, we look to an organization like CODA which is deeply involved in the community, providing services for people with mental health problems and acquired brain injuries. Indeed, for a 12-year run, led by the New Democratic Party in our province, community mental health received no additional resources.

We've surely changed the situation: new service enhancements and short-term crisis beds, support for people with acquired brain injury and mental health supportive housing. All told, the budget of CODA from the great riding of Parkdale–High Park has gone up under our watch by 273%.

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION GRANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration concerning his slush fund. Yesterday, we heard about My Canada Integration and Settlement Services, which has been around since 2001. It has had to close its doors because they couldn't get the \$36,000 from you that they needed to stay open, but an animal welfare organization, in business for barely three weeks, managed to get \$200,000 because of its Liberal Party ties. The minister's response yesterday was that, "Most organizations are seeing a dramatic increase in the available funding they never saw before." But the people who access My Canada this week saw a dramatic decrease in the services available to them. Can the minister please explain why My Canada was denied the funding they needed to continue providing services?

1520

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): As I said yesterday, the member opposite

fails to recognize the fact that for the first time in 20 years in Ontario, in York region, Richmond Hill, Markham, Mimico, all over this province, there are now funds available as a result of the hard-fought battle we made with the federal government to get the federal government to finally recognize the fact that there are 140,000 immigrants who come to Ontario every year. Now programs will be allowed to invest up to \$3,800 per newcomer in Ontario where before, under the Tories, the newcomers only got \$800. That's where the resources are. Settlement services in York region and all over Ontario are hiring people, expanding programs and opening up doors because of that hard-fought battle for the \$920 million we were successful at.

Mr. Yakabuski: Yesterday the minister talked about how every agency, big and small, has different needs. That's all well and good. My Canada needed \$36,000 to continue to stay in operation, and it looks like the Liberal candidate needed \$200,000 to buy his election in Richmond Hill.

The minister has been very careful in not answering questions—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order.

The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. Yakabuski: The minister has been very careful in not answering questions. His failure to deny that the Liberal Party campaign chair or his staff have ever given direction on which group to give money to or which group not to give money to suggests that that's in fact what did happen. The minister can clear this up with a simple, direct answer. Who is pulling the strings—the minister or the Liberal Party campaign chair?

Hon. Mr. Colle: The reality is that for the first time an Ontario government is recognizing the fact that there is growing immigration settlement in York region. We have just created a partnership with York region to establish it as an immigration gateway. We have given resources of \$300,000 to the region of York to create that gateway.

With the federal government, we'll be opening up a new access centre in York region. JVS is now offering JobConnect services in York region. Catholic Community Services of York Region is now offering more services.

There are incredible new investments made in York region where they were ignored for so long. No one spoke up for the needs there. They are now speaking up. I've met with the CEO of the United Way of York Region, Rahul Bhardwaj, who has now moved on, back to the private sector, and the Markham Board of Trade diversity committee. Good things are happening for the first time in York region, where for many years those services didn't exist.

The Speaker: New question. The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Minister, for three long weeks—I'm sure you think the

longest three weeks of your life—this government has stonewalled the people of Ontario: (1) in refusing to answer questions about why millions of dollars were shovelled to groups with no application process, no criteria, no follow-up or even where the money went; (2) why some of the money ended up in groups with strong Liberal connections; (3) why the Premier is afraid to bring in the Auditor General and you yourself have refused the same request; and, lastly, with the whole fear of your government and the Premier to apologize.

My question, through you, Mr. Speaker, is: Why should anyone believe that this government cares about them when this government is doing everything it can possibly do to avoid answering a single question legitimately put to it?

Hon. Mr. Colle: As I've said on a number of occasions, there are many, many organizations and programs that have not existed or have been underfunded. For instance, we now have an Ontario public service internship program for newcomers. It never existed. Now we have foreign-trained pharmacists or foreign-trained economists in internship programs. We have a loan program of up to \$5,000 for every newcomer who needs to pay for courses or books. We spent \$50 million on bridge training programs for foreign-trained dietitians or social workers. These are the investments we're making, along with the international medical graduate programs with Minister Smitherman.

We're also investing in our long-standing partners or organizations that are trying to fill needs. Their capital needs were never even talked about in decades. We are partnering—

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

VISITORS

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I know that all members will want to join me in wishing the members and representatives of the College Student Alliance a great welcome to the Legislature.

PETITIONS

STEVENSON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

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

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital needs \$1.4 million in new funding over the next three years to get its birthing unit reopened and to ensure that they can recruit enough obstetricians and health care providers to supply a stable and ongoing service for expectant mothers in our area; and

“Whereas forcing expectant mothers to drive to Newmarket, Barrie or Orangeville to give birth is not only unacceptable, it is a potential safety hazard; and

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital cannot reopen the unit under its current budget and the McGuinty government has been unresponsive to repeated requests for new funding;

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

“That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately provide the required \$1.4 million in new funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital so that the local birthing unit can reopen and so that mothers can give birth in Alliston.”

Of course, I thank the people of the Alliston area for sending that to me and I support the petition.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South-Weston): I'm pleased to present the following petition, which reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the right to join a union and to fully participate in free collective bargaining is recognized by the United Nations through its International Labour Organization as a fundamental human right; and

“Whereas part-time workers at the province's universities and secondary schools have the right to free collective bargaining; and

“Whereas these part-time college workers do the same work as their full-time counterparts; and

“Whereas this work is often performed without comparable rights and remuneration; and

“Whereas these workers are subject to discriminatory treatment by their employer; and

“Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada to deny this basic right to part-time college workers; and

“Whereas there is no rationale for denying bargaining rights to these employees; and

“Whereas the abuse of part-time workers is having an impact on the quality of education college students receive;

“We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to extend full collective bargaining rights to part-time college workers.”

I agree and will affix my signature and hand it to page Dillon.

REGULATION OF ZOOS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have three petitions today related to the regulation of zoos to protect animals and communities.

“Whereas Ontario has the weakest zoo laws in the country; and

“Whereas existing zoo regulations are vague, unenforceable and only apply to native wildlife; and

“Whereas there are no mandatory standards to ensure adequate care and housing for zoo animals or the health and safety of animals, zoo staff, the visiting public or neighbouring communities; and

“Whereas several people have been injured by captive wildlife, and zoo escapes are frequent in Ontario; and

“Whereas these same regulatory gaps were affirmed recently by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in his annual report;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP David Zimmer’s bill, the Regulation of Zoos Act.”

I support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

1530

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario.

“Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

“Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada’s multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

“Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario’s diverse religious and cultural communities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member’s bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day.”

I enthusiastically support this petition, affix my signature to it and send it down to the table with Zachary.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly entitled “Fairness for Families in the 905 Belt.” It reads:

“Whereas the population of the greater Toronto region will increase by an estimated four million more people in the next generation, with the bulk of that growth coming in the 905 belt of fast-growing cities located north, east and west of Metro Toronto; and

“Whereas these cities are already large and dynamic population units, with big-city issues and big-city needs, requiring big-city resources to implement big-city solutions”—

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Where’s your petition from yesterday?

Mr. Flynn: You know, Speaker, I thought you could get through a petition without the ignorance of the member from Renfrew–Nipissing’s heckling.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Take your seat. Retract that statement now.

Mr. Flynn: I withdraw it.

The Acting Speaker: Next petition, Oak Ridges.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition from the St. Vincent de Paul Catholic school in Markham addressed to the Parliament of Ontario.

“To the Parliament of Ontario:

“Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

“Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada’s multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

“Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario’s diverse religious and cultural communities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member’s bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day.”

I am pleased to affix my signature as a proud proponent of this bill and pass it to Safa to present to the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): Thank you, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Hold it, hold it. On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Klees: The Speaker can recognize—

Hon. Mr. Caplan: No, in the tradition of this place—

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat, Deputy House Leader, now.

The Chair recognizes the member from Simcoe–Grey.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Move.

Mr. Wilson: I have a petition signed by teachers and students of St. Michael’s College School in Toronto, including the president, Father Redican.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Speaker, this is very—

The Acting Speaker: You’ll be thrown out.

Mr. Wilson: “Whereas the legacy of”—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the deputy House leader.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It’s the tradition of this place that we move in rotation and that members are recognized. The member from Oakville has clearly indicated his desire to read a petition on behalf of—

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Wilson: “Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to”—

Interjection.

Mr. Wilson: You can’t threaten the Speaker. You cannot threaten the Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Simcoe–Grey. You’re warned, Deputy House Leader. You’ll be removed—any more.

Mr. Wilson: “Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

“Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada’s multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

“Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario’s diverse religious and cultural communities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member’s bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day.”

I’m very much in favour of this petition.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Fairness for Families in the 905 Belt

“Whereas the population of the greater Toronto region will increase by an estimated four million more people in the next generation, with the bulk of that growth coming in the 905 belt of fast-growing cities located north, east and west of Metro Toronto; and

“Whereas these cities are already large and dynamic population units, with big-city issues and big-city needs, requiring big-city resources to implement big-city solutions to social issues and human services needs; and

“Whereas the 2007-08 Ontario budget proposes aggressive and badly needed increases in operating funding to build and strengthen capacity in developmental and social services agencies and to invest in helping the young, the weak, the needy and the vulnerable; and

“Whereas the social and human services sectors in the 905 belt have historically received per capita funding far below that of other regions despite facing far greater growth in the populations they serve, and this per capita funding gap has increased in the last four years;

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

“That the 2007-08 Ontario budget implementing measures to strengthen Ontario’s families be passed without delay, and that the first priority for the allocation of new funding in meeting the government of Ontario’s commitment to fairness for families flow to the social services agencies serving cities within the 905 belt, and that funding for programs to serve the 905 belt be allocated to established or growing agencies located within the 905 belt.”

I agree with this petition.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): This is a petition to the Parliament of Ontario.

“Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

“Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada’s multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

“Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario’s diverse religious and cultural communities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member’s bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day.”

I support this petition and affix my signature.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Fairness for Families in the 905 Belt

“Whereas the population of the greater Toronto region will increase by an estimated four million more people in the next generation, with the bulk of that growth coming in the 905 belt of fast-growing cities located north, east and west of Metro Toronto; and

“Whereas these cities are already large and dynamic population units, with big-city issues and big-city needs, requiring big-city resources to implement big-city solutions to social issues and human services needs; and

“Whereas the 2007-08 Ontario budget proposes aggressive and badly needed increases in operating funding to build and strengthen capacity in developmental and social services agencies and to invest in helping the young, the weak, the needy and the vulnerable; and

“Whereas the social and human services sectors in the 905 belt have historically received per capita funding far below that of other regions despite facing far greater growth in the populations they serve, and this per capita funding gap has increased in the last four years;

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

“That the 2007-08 Ontario budget implementing measures to strengthen Ontario’s families be passed without delay, and that the first priority for the allocation of new funding in meeting the government of Ontario’s commitment to fairness for families flow to the social services agencies serving cities within the 905 belt, and that funding for programs to serve the 905 belt be allocated to established or growing agencies located within the 905 belt.”

I’m going to sign this petition and send it with page Julie.

1540

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition that was sent to me by Joyce MacDonald. A number of these signatures are from the Lifecare facility in Mississauga, where a number from her church volunteer every Monday evening. The petition reads as follows:

“Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

“Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada’s multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

“Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario’s diverse religious and cultural communities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member’s bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day.”

I am pleased to affix my signature and pass it to Zachary for delivery to the table.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a similar petition to the one just read, which was sent to me at my constituency office. It’s a petition to the Parliament of Ontario.

“Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

“Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada’s multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

“Whereas, as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario’s diverse religious and cultural communities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member’s bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day.”

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I rise, pursuant to standing order 55, which is of course one of my favourite standing orders, to give the Legislature the business of the House for next week. I would love one of the pages to come and share this with the table as well.

On Monday, May 7, 2007, in the afternoon we’re going to have second reading of Bill 174, Strengthening Business through a Simpler Tax System Act; in the evening, second reading of Bill 218, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act.

On Tuesday, May 8, 2007, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 174, Strengthening Business through a Simpler Tax System Act; in the evening, second reading of Bill 212, the Education Amendment Act.

On Wednesday, May 9, 2007, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 187, the budget bill; in the evening, second reading of Bill 174, Strengthening Business through a Simpler Tax System Act.

On Thursday, May 10, 2007, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 103, the Independent Police Review Act.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTION STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2007LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 2, 2007, on the motion for second reading of Bill 218, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act and make related amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 218, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale et la Loi sur le financement des élections et apportant des modifications connexes à d’autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Further debate.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I thank the members of the House. As with some of those who may have been present here last night, I began my speech and, like so many speeches, it was bifurcated, cut in half, but in fact it was me who bifurcated it last night, because it was my own motion. So I am here now today to deliver the second half of my speech.

Just to go over what was said on the last occasion, I spoke at first about the bill and about the lofty promises the government had made three and a half years ago, which had not been met and have not been kept within the body of this bill.

I went on to talk about the alternative voting methods that have been settled in the bill and the very real pitfalls that the government is introducing in this not-very-well-thought-out piece of legislation, which will allow the Chief Election Officer of Ontario during by-elections to experiment in a whole bunch of ways which have never been tried and are, quite frankly, fraught with dangers: things like Internet voting; mail-in ballots, with the complete disaster that has caused for the community of Kawartha Lakes in the last municipal election; multiple days of voting where voting day not be one day but may be many days—and I’m not talking about advance polling; I’m talking about multiple days of polling, of

actual election days—proxy voting and the like. It's not set out in the legislation, but it gives unfettered and free rein to the Chief Election Officer.

I talked about the thought process, which I do not believe was full and fulsome, in looking at the identification restrictions that will require all people seeking to vote to have two pieces of identification. I pointed out that Jean-Pierre Kingsley, the chief elections officer of Canada, has said that if done in Canada this will disenfranchise as many as 1.1 million voters, which would equate to about 400,000 in Ontario—people who do not have two pieces of identification.

I also pointed out the dichotomy and the wrong-headedness of the government in not requiring any pieces of identification of those who come with that card you get saying you have been enumerated. If you have that, you don't require any identification. I pointed out, I think forcefully, that prosecutions that have taken place for illegal voting in Ontario are primarily of people who find these notices of enumeration and take them in to vote one, two, five or 10 times during an election. They are the ones who are committing real voter fraud. You won't require a piece of identification for that, which seems to me very bizarre, considering that when you go into apartment buildings prior to an election, you can often see tens or hundreds of them thrown into the wastebasket because people have moved and the mail is not addressed to them, and that is literally how this happens.

I pointed out as well my own problems in trying to register to vote in not one, not two, but four elections in a row, where my name was put on a list in another riding. To this day, I have no idea how this happened, and every time, because I was hopefully a good citizen and went in to register, I had to have my name taken off the list in, I believe, York West and put into Beaches—East York, where I have resided in the same house for 25 years. The whole thing was fraught—I ended with the whole enumeration process and how we need to get back to enumeration, because if anything fails in elections in Ontario, it's the fact that we don't have an enumeration process and that as many as one quarter of the people who end up voting have to go in and register themselves because they're not on the list. That's what I had to say.

I closed, because I was frustrated yesterday, talking about the tie I was wearing. I think it caused some consternation to members opposite, because it was a South Park tie and they didn't like the fact that Kenny was often killed during the cartoon.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Kilkenny. Isn't that a beer?

Mr. Prue: It's a beer as well.

I had to reassure them, because I think they're not people who watch that show, that Kenny always resurrects himself and comes back alive and well, because, after all, he is a cartoon character.

I talked about wearing that tie and that I should have worn this tie. So today I wore this tie. For those of you who cannot see it, I tried to match the day. This is a tie of Vincent Van Gogh, a man who was very troubled—a

brilliant painter but very troubled because he had tinnitus; he had ringing in his ears. The ringing drove him really, really beyond the pale on some occasions; on one occasion, even to cut off an ear to try to stop that terrible affliction.

Today, of course, it's curable. But I am not sure that it's going to be curable today, because we again asked the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, because the Premier was not here, to apologize for the comments that I have taken personal affront at. Some of the most pointed questions to the minister have come from me. The first questions asked about the Iranian connection came from me. The first questions asking about the Bangladeshi group in my riding came from me. I'm sure my friend from Mississauga West will forgive me, but the first questions about that one came from me as well.

I take umbrage at the fact that the Premier alluded that I might somehow be a racist for asking those questions. I take umbrage because for 20 years, almost 21, I worked in the immigration department of this great country. I worked here in Ontario but also out west and in the Maritimes—

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On a point of order, Speaker: We appreciate the intent of the member, but question period may have been the time to raise that. Standing order 23(b)(i) suggests that he should discuss the matter under discussion, and frankly, I was enjoying his discussion. He was doing a great job, especially the part about his ties.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you for that. It's not a point of order.

Continue, please.

Mr. Prue: Thank you very much. I will be getting to the point very rapidly.

As I was explaining, I worked for the immigration department for some 20 years. During that 20 years, the immigration department of Canada landed some five million people in this country; that is, five million permanent residents. I'm very proud to have worked for the department that did that. They came from all over the world, and we never cared and we never questioned the kinds of things that this Premier questioned. During that same period, we admitted to this country more than 20 million visitors, and we never questioned the things that the Premier has questioned. During that period, we allowed hundreds of thousands of students to come to the province of Ontario from all over the world, and no questions were ever raised as the Premier has raised.

I have to tell you, I'm very frustrated with what has happened here today. I am so frustrated that I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Beaches—East York has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1551 to 1621.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Prue has moved adjournment of the House. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing. Thank you. Can you take your seats, please.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 9; the nays are 29.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

I recognize the member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Prue: That's twice now that I've interrupted my own speech. I will try not to do that too many more times.

I described what was done on the last day. I commend the minister for being here. I hope she's had an opportunity to read what I said last night. I take all of those things to heart, and I think that major changes need to be made to this legislation if it is to survive and actually do what it is intended to do.

There are a couple more points that I think are important and need to be raised. The first involves the blackout period. That is the period during which parties and others—third parties—are not allowed to advertise. Under the current legislation, there is a blackout imposed upon all parties: They may not advertise until 22 days before the election and then must cease the advertising on the day before the election and election day itself. So there is a window of approximately three weeks in which political parties and others who wish to advertise can do so. That process, in my opinion, has served Canada and Ontario very well.

What is proposed in this legislation, I think, is a retrograde step, because it blacks out paid political and third party advertising for two days only, those two days being the day before election day and election day itself. I don't think that this is a good step, because what this is going to allow is, first of all, for third parties to begin—because they know the date; everyone in the world knows it's October 10, 2007, that we're going to vote. So this will allow people with big pockets, whether it be large businesses, unions, corporations, the citizens' alliance—what was the one where you signed the pledge not to raise taxes?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I didn't sign it.

Mr. Prue: Okay, but the Liberals signed the pledge not to raise taxes.

I am convinced that that group is going to go out, because they can and they will, and start advertising for a considerable period in advance of the election itself.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Have they started yet?

Mr. Prue: No—well, they probably have. But by extending the blackout date to unlimited times before election day minus one and election day itself, you have opened up what I consider to be a Pandora's box. You are allowing third party groups to start advertising for or against the government immediately, for or against the

opposition immediately, to raise questions which will be very difficult for any party or parties to defend.

You also make it incredibly difficult, if you are truly trying to democratize the process, for smaller parties to compete. It is hard enough to raise the funds to put on television or radio or commercial advertising in the media for three weeks if you are a party like the NDP, and even worse if you are a party that is smaller, like the Family Coalition Party or the Greens, to try to muster the amounts of money necessary to run advertising. Under the current legislation, which is confined to a three-week window—E minus 22 to E minus 1—that's a very difficult and daunting task for any party, especially ones that are starting up, to get the kind of money to compete in that window. Now you are opening it up to make it literally impossible for the smaller parties to compete with the larger ones. I include my own almost there. I include my own because it will become very, very difficult to raise the millions upon millions of dollars to get into the media, to get into television and radio advertising, to pay for the professional people who produce that, who target their audiences, all of those things. I think the blackout period should remain. Quite frankly, the blackout period has not hurt the electoral process; it sparks a lot of interest in the election, albeit in the last three weeks, and has a cut-off date that ensures that people have 48 hours in which to breathe and to think and take it all in before they actually go out and cast their ballot.

This will, I tend to think, make Canadian politics very akin to that in the United States. Now, I don't have to tell the members of this House, if you watch the American elections, particularly every four years when the presidential elections coincide in that country, you will see advertising throughout the entire year. You'll have the primaries with all of the advertising. You'll have, starting in January, advertising going on in each one of the states and for the presidential elections. You will have people forced to spend in order to compete and to be on a level playing field with their foes. They spend millions upon millions of dollars for Senate races, for the House of Representatives, for the presidency and vice-presidency, even for judges, even in some places for dog catchers. You have to spend those enormous amounts of money.

I am very worried, given our experience here in Canada and given that we pride ourselves on listening to politicians, we pride ourselves on going to all-candidates meetings to weigh one against another, we pride ourselves on the whole political array of looking at the pamphlets, of watching the leaders' debates, of doing all that is necessary to inform oneself, that we will, through this particular medium, with a blackout that is extended infinitely—there's no blackout starting today, so that if advertising wants to be done today, it can be, and it is not subject to the period under question from the date the writ is issued, probably sometime in early September until election day itself. So this causes me a great deal of concern. I would ask the minister to look very carefully at scrapping this particular provision and returning

instead to, and keeping or modifying in some very small way, what has served Canada and Ontario very well over many, many years, and that is a blackout period that allows only three weeks for paid political advertising and three weeks for the parties and the leaders to get their message out over the airwaves. That will, of course, be three weeks only for those third parties that have big pockets to get their message out as well and to stop the sniping from the sidelines for a much longer and extended period.

I wanted to talk as well about the polling times. Now, I am mindful that the polling has been extended to 9 to 9, albeit 8 to 8 in those parts of Ontario which are west of Highway 90 in the northwest. That's primarily one riding. But there it is: 8 to 8 in that riding.

1630

I'm wondering why 9 to 9 was chosen. I had an opportunity to read what the Chief Election Officer of Ontario had to say: Most of the polling booths were busy after 5 o'clock; they're busy from 5 to about 7. But I want to tell the minister that when I go out to the polling stations, as I have in probably 30 or 40 elections in my life because I am a political person like all of you, when I go out in a municipal election, a provincial election or a federal election, that's true: Between 5 and 7 is the key time. But after about 7 or 7:30, I challenge you to go in there and find a whole lot of people. Between 7:15, 7:20 and 8 o'clock, the number of people who are in the polling station at that time is no greater than it is in the afternoon or the morning.

I'm just questioning whether or not it is serving as a benefit to extend it from 9 to 9. Surely a better benefit would be to extend it from 8 in the morning till 8 at night, in my view. The reason I'm suggesting it, if you're going to do that, is because many people in this province work shift work, of course. Many people do not have an opportunity, once they leave to go to work, once they've dropped the kids off at school, once they go away, to get back in time. I know that the law allows—or did; I don't know if it still does under this legislation—three hours to vote. Even if it allows three hours to vote, someone who commutes, say, from Barrie to Toronto—and there are thousands upon thousands of people who do that, who get up in the morning and who need to get the kids off to school, get on the 400, drive down and go to work, and then try to make their way back—even if they're given three hours to vote at 5 o'clock and try to make their way back, they'd have a hard time, so maybe 9 would help them. But on the converse, if they work, say, from 10 or 11, they won't be able to get back. They need the time in the morning—many of these people, I would suggest—to have an opportunity to go out and cast the ballot after they've dropped the kids off, after they've done what's necessary to get themselves ready and before they take off on the commute.

I would think that opening and extending the polls from 8 in the morning to 8 at night, if you're only going to do 12 hours, would invariably make more sense. If you want to make it 13 hours, I'd agree: Leave it open until 9

at night. But please think very carefully about opening at 8 o'clock in the morning, because people can do that, as I've just explained, while taking their kids to school or getting ready to go out. They cannot always make it back at night. That would make a whole lot of sense to me.

There is a provision in there about the advance polling going from 13 days to six—

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: Six to 13.

Mr. Prue: From six to 13. Sorry, I've got it backwards. I don't think that's a bad thing. It certainly gives options to people to exercise their vote. I'm not going to really comment on that. It's just another option. It keeps it open. It gives an extra few days for people if they haven't had an opportunity to make up their minds to do so, and gives people latitude, if they're going on vacation or anything else, without going through all the bother of proxy votes, which, I will tell you, by the time they're out of the country are usually more hassle than what they're worth. So many people don't bother to do it.

I'm mindful of the time again. There was one other aspect I really wanted to deal with on some level, and that was the whole potential problem of mischief around the election. I raise this mischief not so much from what is in this bill but what is in this bill in combination with another one that has been passed. Combined with Bill 62, which is the lower-threshold-for-party-status bill, you need only run two people now. Two people have to agree, "We will be Party X," and they are now Party X. They have all the rights and privileges of the established parties in Ontario, as maybe they should. But they in themselves, two people, can now constitute a political party. This may create some mischief.

I am mindful about what happened when this same provision was allowed to go forward in Manitoba. It is perhaps the most perverse and telling case of what may be in store for the province of Ontario by allowing as few as two people to constitute a political party. You will remember what happened in Manitoba. They made it easier for parties to get funding and get their names on the ballot. But what this did was not just to encourage new little parties to establish themselves but political operatives to establish parties solely for the purpose of siphoning off votes from opponents. What happened in Manitoba was absolutely bizarre. Of course, the people got caught, so now it's quite the story. It showed what happened with this deeply flawed system, and it was exacerbated by the first-past-the-post. There was a party established in Manitoba, with a couple of people running, called the Independent Native Voice. It was a party and it ran in Manitoba with the sole purpose of siphoning off the votes of the New Democratic Party candidates in a couple of ridings.

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): No. Really?

Mr. Prue: Absolutely.

It was established by the Conservative Party. It was established and was funded and everything else. It became quite the fiasco in Manitoba. It became a real cause célèbre, and at the end they had to call in a judge. They called in Judge Alfred Monnin, and, responding to the

mounting evidence of improper behaviour, he ruled in his ruling that the local Progressive Conservative organizers were guilty of inducing at least one candidate to contest the election, and in his summary Monnin described the behaviour of the Conservative organizers as “unethical” and “morally reprehensible.”

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: That was the ruling of the judge; that's not what I'm saying.

In a nutshell, what happened is that they went out and found a couple of First Canadians to contest elections in NDP-held ridings and to siphon off the vote, hopefully by getting other First Canadians to vote for them who would normally vote for the NDP. It was quite spectacular, but it was unethical behaviour, not so much of somebody intent upon winning an election or putting forward a platform of a new political party or establishing a new political party, but it was an offshoot of a political party that wanted to do damage by simply removing some of the natural constituency of the incumbent.

I would state that the judge probably said it best in his one line, which I'd like to read into the record. Recalling the testimony of these high-profile Tories who perpetrated the vote-rigging effort, the retired jurist wrote that “in all my years on the bench I never encountered as many liars in one proceeding as I did during this inquiry.” That's when they were trying to explain what they were doing.

So I caution the minister: In establishing and setting up Bill 62—and I know why you did it; you did it because of court decisions and because you probably didn't have any other option but to set a minimum bar. But, having done that, and in conjunction with this particular bill, you are going to see that there is a great opportunity for mischief; there is a great opportunity with a lower threshold for people to do or to attempt to do what was done so brutally badly, if I must say, in Manitoba, that they got caught and it itself became an election issue and the judge made that judgment.

I have tried to be as constructive as I can on this particular bill. To reiterate, there are some things to which I do not object. There is, of course, the lofty Liberal premise and promises made before the last election that they were going to have citizens' juries, that they were going to make sure the campaigns were not dragged out, that the campaigns were fair. I am not sure that this bill has met all of those tests.

But I would like the minister especially to look very carefully at not granting holus-bolus the Chief Election Officer the opportunity to experiment in by-elections, because if that includes, as I said yesterday, votes on the Internet, I would be highly suspicious, given how easy it is to manipulate Internet voting. We have seen how that happens in votes that don't matter, where people call in and go from computer to computer, voting four, five and six times and voting the next day, and all of those things. I would caution her against the use of mail-in ballots if we're not going to cause anything to happen like what happened in the city of Kawartha Lakes, because that is a

subject now before the courts where literally 40% of all the cast ballots were declared ineligible because the instructions on how to fill them out were handled, in my view, so poorly. I would caution giving the CEO the responsibility or the option of coming up with multiple voting days, as they do in some countries where you vote two, three or four days. I'm not talking about advance polls, but leaving the polls open for more than one day, which is a possibility.

The whole question of proxy voting: I would ask you to carefully look at—if you are going to ask for identification, you should ask for it from everyone who votes, not just those who do not have the “vote at” card. Jean-Pierre Kingsley said that would disenfranchise about 1.1 million people in Canada if that was required from every voter. That would be about 400,000 people in Ontario, if he is right. I have no other authority which to quote. That's the only one who has come forward to talk about that, and he is a little worried.

If you do do it, please do it for everyone. I've said it twice, but I want to say it again: Every election, when I go into apartment buildings in my riding, when those “vote at” cards are sent out by the Chief Election Officer, I can see 10 or 15 or 100 in garbage bins outside of the mailrooms. People get them, they're not addressed to them—those people don't live there anymore—and they put them in the garbage. Those people who show up with those voting cards only and when you do not know—I am very suspicious. I know the polling officers are very suspicious and I do know that when and if people are caught for voting multiple times, it's usually through that avenue and not through having four or five false pieces of identification. It's that avenue. The “vote at” card, in and of itself, should not be sufficient.

I ask you again to go back to enumeration. I ask you to enumerate everyone and not to do what is in this legislation, which allows for targeted enumeration only. We have an obligation to make sure that every person is registered in a fair and just way. I gave the other day the example of how I found myself, four times—in four elections in a row—registered in another riding. I know I'm not alone and I know that there are lots of people who've been left off. I do know, which I didn't say the other day, that when I was left off, I got a voter's card at my home for my mother-in-law, who had been deceased for two years and about whom we had informed. So, had I been less than an honest citizen, I could have had some other older person go out and vote in her stead, even though she no longer was alive. That's the kind of thing that happens now due to lack of enumeration. I did quote the other day the learned professor from the University of Montreal talking about how the lack of enumeration in and of itself causes hundreds of thousands of people not to vote.

That would be most of what I wanted to say. I have been reminded by my colleagues in the official opposition that we are still very angry with the government for the lack of answers. I think that I have said enough on this particular bill. I have spoken for almost an hour. The

minister seems to have acknowledged that I have kept myself as best as I could to what is in the bill and what needs to be improved. I trust that she has heard that and will make the necessary improvements.

Having said that, we do not have answers on what is the important issue of the day and I still have not, as of yet, had an apology from either the Premier or the Minister of Citizenship on a subject at which I take great umbrage, having worked in the immigration department for some 20 years.

On that, I'm calling for adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Prue has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1644 to 1714.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Prue has moved the adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing. Please be seated.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing. Please be seated.

The Clerk of the Assembly: The ayes are 6; the nays are 26.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

The Chair recognizes the member from Beaches—East York.

Mr. Prue: I've been asked to talk some more about my ties. I don't know whether that was just in jest. But I do want to tell you that today the member from Willowdale came to my office. I had promised that I would share with him a bottle of wine that I had made. He was mightily impressed, I have to tell you, with the cover of a Château le Député. He told me something that I thought was absolutely amazing, and perhaps it even takes on biblical proportions. He says that he is going to share this with the entire Liberal caucus. You can see, in stories in the Bible, how not only was water turned into wine, but at the wedding feast literally one bottle was served among thousands of people. Perhaps the 68 or 69 members of the Liberal Party can all enjoy many, many tastes.

In any event, I don't know whether I have too much more to add on this bill. I spoke for most of the hour and think I made the points that needed—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): We want to hear more.

Mr. Prue: You'll have a chance to talk about it, and I'll respond.

But I do want to say that I was very proud to have caused the bells to be rung here twice today. I did so in honour of Vincent Van Gogh, who is of course one of my favourite artists. As I said, he suffered. He had ringing in the ears. I wore this tie in honour of him today because for the last couple of days we have had the bells repeatedly rung. So when I went home last night, I swear I was trying to watch the news, but I kept hearing these bells ringing in my ear. I thought, "I really have to search out this tie. I really have to wear his self-portrait. I have to be

able to say in this Legislature that his spirit is with us. It is evoked in this chamber. We remember him only too well and the sufferings that he had."

When you next hear the bells ring, as I'm sure you are going to—because I know there are members in other parties who are very angry at the lack of what they consider to be forthright answers and the lack of an apology coming from the Premier, and most of us feel we are owed one. The bells will continue to ring, and when you hear them—I'm reminded of the old Christmas movie: When a bell rings, an angel has got his wings. Perhaps in here you should remember that when the bell rings, Vincent Van Gogh's spirit lives on. Although he was mightily troubled, he produced some wonderful work. May we all aspire to do the same.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for questions and comments.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to rise today and add two minutes to the Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2007. I guess it's really one of those bills that you either agree with or you don't. You either want to see some improvements made to the way we elect our provincial officials in Ontario or you don't. Certainly I don't think there can be any argument that the proposals that are contained within the proposed bill would make the system a much better system, would make it easier for people to vote, would increase the number of advance polling days, for example, and extend the hours that you can vote.

I think quite a lot of us try to get into high schools and elementary schools. I don't think anybody around here would deny that there has been an increasing lack of interest in our political system by the young people of this province. I think what we're trying to do here is to encourage more people to get involved in the political system. We're trying to encourage young people to re-enter and have a renewed interest in what happens here at Queen's Park. We're trying to improve the integrity of the system and at the same time trying to get more people out to vote, trying to increase the turnout on election day.

I was wondering what the people in the audience were thinking when the bells were ringing a few minutes ago, whether that enhanced the reputation of this place or whether perhaps the ringing of the bells does the opposite. I don't know what the answer to that would be. I think we'd all hold personal opinions on that. My own opinion is that it doesn't do the dignity of this place any good.

I think what we should all be trying to do is to make this place work better. I've seen enough around here today and on previous days that would make people think, "Do you know what? There's a lot of room for improvement here." This is a very small step in that regard.

1720

Mr. Chudleigh: Talking about the dignity of this place, I'm surprised at the member from Oakville's tenacity and that he was able to get through that phrase without choking on it. One of the most important things that happen in this place is that the opposition and the

government have respect for the taxpayer's dollar, the taxpayer's dollar that is being shovelled out the door by the Liberals and by the Minister of Citizenship. It's totally disrespectful of the taxpayers of Ontario. I'm surprised the member from Oakville takes that attitude. In fact, that's probably the subject of a good press release.

However, the member from Beaches–East York made a wonderful presentation about this bill. He talked about Van Gogh and his wonderful tie. I've always referred to him as "Van Gogh," but I stand corrected. I will call him "Van Gogh" from here on. I've always wondered why the painter Vincent Van Gogh cut off his ear. I think it might have been because of unrequited love. I would like to believe that. I'm kind of a romantic, I suppose, at heart.

Interjections.

Mr. Chudleigh: The members of the opposition find that difficult to believe.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): You are the opposition.

Mr. Chudleigh: The members of the government. Oh, yes, I keep getting confused on that subject. I think about the future so much.

Interjections.

Mr. Chudleigh: Yes, you're still there. October 10 is coming. I wonder if in the wrap-up perhaps the member for Beaches–East York could inform us on how Van Gogh lost his ear and why. He's wearing the tie. He must know. Perhaps the bells will ring yet again for Vincent Van Gogh, that wonderful romantic.

Ms. Horwath: I'm very pleased to have a minute and a half or two minutes to comment on the lead-off speech on this bill of my colleague and our critic in this area, the member for Beaches–East York. I have to tell you that, notwithstanding some of the ringing of bells, our critic has done a very good job of putting some of the substantive issues on the table in regard to the problems with this particular bill. The thing that's difficult for me as a member to watch happening is the government waxing eloquent about all of their intentions on this or that or the other thing—in this case, democracy and democratic renewal in this province—and then to see them bring legislation that really does nothing of the sort. It's kind of disconcerting, to say the least.

I know the member from Beaches–East York, over tonight and last night when he had the opportunity to speak to the bill, raised issues such as the permanent voters' list and the fact that the government purports to try to address the reduction in voter participation by putting some pieces of this bill in place that would require, for example, ID to be presented, that would require certain other things to occur, on the one hand saying that they were actually doing this for the purpose of increasing voter turnout, when in fact everyone around this chamber would know that we need to have enumeration. We need to make sure that we are enumerating on a regular basis. That's what has a much greater impact on people's ability to vote and their ability to go to the polls

and cast their ballot without having to worry about the rigours that are described in the bill.

I want to congratulate our member and critic for the work he has done. I look forward to speaking to this bill on my own behalf fairly soon.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): It's a pleasure to add my comments. I have to be fair. I guess I was supposed to make comments on what the member for Beaches–East York said, but I was having difficulty concentrating because of the number of bells in between. While we're supposed to be here, I really try to listen, and then we get interrupted. He's right: Those bells keep on ringing. As much as I would like to have some retention of what he said, it made it very difficult.

Having said that, though, I think we should be really proud that we're making a step forward to look at different ways to engage the public in the democratic process. I'm a strong believer in the democratic process, and I want to take the opportunity to congratulate and thank the citizens' assembly for the work they did. Here's somebody totally independent—I met the person in my riding. She phoned and wanted to talk with me. She really got engaged. I think they're coming forward with some good ideas, and the public will decide.

Just last week I met with representatives of Fair Vote Canada, and they had some very good ideas. I think it's really interesting that these folks are coming forward. At the end of the day, whatever this legislation—although it has been criticized by the opposition that it's missing this, it's missing that, it's no good for that or whatever—we're engaging a certain portion of the citizens to think about elections. I attended the meeting they had in Belleville. I was recognized and was asked to make a comment. My comment was that at the end of the day, whatever process we use, whatever's out there, whatever the people of Ontario decide, we need to make sure that people come out and vote. At the end of the day, that is really what counts.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for a response.

Mr. Prue: I'm getting a little history lesson here from the member from Halton, but I would like to thank the member from Oakville, the member from Halton, the member from Hamilton East and the member from Northumberland.

Just to answer some of the questions: The member from Oakville talked about the ringing of the bells. The ringing of the bells unfortunately is the only application which the opposition still has to show its displeasure. There are no longer opportunities, as you might know, to filibuster; there are no longer opportunities to do those kinds of things that were done in past Parliaments. The only opportunity that is still left to the opposition is this. Would that we had another thing to do, because I would admit to you that it may be counterproductive but we have to somehow impress upon the members of the government that the opposition needs to be listened to. That is in fact what makes parliamentary democracy work. That's why we have a Speaker. The Speaker is there not to protect the majority but to protect and enhance the

rights of the minority so that they may be heard. All we are trying to do is to be heard, and we are trying through the only avenue left; that is, ringing the bells to make the ministers come to heel.

On the question of the member from Halton, he likes to think it's unrequited love. I wish him all the best. My own understanding is that it was ringing in the ears that eventually drove poor Vincent Van Gogh mad and caused him to take his own life. It was very sad, but he did leave us a legacy of some of the finest paintings of the 19th century.

I thank the member from Hamilton East for her comments. She hit on all the points, so she must have been listening to my speech.

In 15 seconds, I don't know whether the member from Northumberland listened or not—perhaps the bells did interfere—but there is nothing in this bill that deals with the citizens' assembly, MMP or anything else. I thank you for your comments all the same, but it was not included in my speech at all.

The Acting Speaker: Time for further debate.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I want to preface my remarks by commenting about what Speaker Brown was saying, about how it really is important, if we're going to set a new tone in this place, that we always address all of our comments through the Speaker. I just want to let you know, Mr. Speaker, that I agree with that ruling. I think that's very important in this instance, that that is something we need to do.

I want to preface my remarks again. I was listening to my colleague Bill Mauro, the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan. Mr. Speaker, you know him well. I thought he gave a wonderful speech last night about how the question of democratic participation is dealing—

Interjection.

Mr. Wilkinson: I'm going to get to that in a second—with the question of—well, first I'd better say that I'm sharing my time with my good friend the member from York West, Mario Sergio, a wonderful chap who has much more experience.

As I was saying, my good friend the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan—I'll just refer to him by his riding name, as we should do in this place: speak through the Speaker, talk about members by their riding name. I think it is important to say that he talked about the fact that if we want people to respect the democratic process, we have to be able to respect ourselves. That's very important.

1730

I was very glad to hear that because I say that this bill is all about driving change. It's very important that we drive change, because the people of Ontario have said to us that they want some reforms, and if you're not part of a government that's willing to drive those changes home, it doesn't happen. That's why it is so important that we on this side of the House believe that this is electoral reform that really needs to be driven home—always, always, always.

I have some concerns as a rural member. I think some of the changes we're talking about are good. We're

talking about extending polling hours on election day by an additional hour. I think that's very important in a rural riding where you have to drive so much. I know as a member I have to drive a great deal within my vast riding. I don't have the biggest one, but I have a very large riding and I have to drive. If I have to drive, it means my constituents have to drive. If they have to drive on polling day, an extra hour is important.

I also know that we're increasing the number of advance poll days, Mr. Speaker. I say directly to you that we're increasing those days from six to 13, again making it easier for people to vote—very, very important because of the vast differences in our ridings. We've even said that in by-elections the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Hollins, a very respected officer of this Legislature, will be able to look at new technology as a way of piloting some new technology. This is the 21st century, and it is important that we contemplate that.

I look at my own riding, and on this very theme about driving—let's think about it. We have our good friend the leader of the third party, the member for Kenora–Rainy River. How large is his riding? Mr. Hampton's riding is 336,000 square kilometres. It's huge.

Interjection: The size of France.

Mr. Wilkinson: I think that's bigger than Italy, almost the size of France. My own riding of Perth–Middlesex is—let's just see. I know my friends at the legislative library have helped me. My riding is just one one-hundredth of that size; 3,730 square kilometres. That's a big riding in southwestern Ontario.

Then we have, say, a riding that would be a middle-sized riding—

Interjection.

Mr. Wilkinson: I'm not going to get into that. I'd say, something in between my kind of rural riding with an urban centre like Stratford, just like a city riding. Then we have cities like London. The riding of Barrie, for example, is a good one. That riding is only 664 square kilometres. That's a very interesting riding, though it has a lot of people in it. Then we have the member from Toronto–Danforth. His riding is only—how big is that? His riding is only 12 square kilometres. So obviously distance is a factor of all of these different ridings.

Some of us as members get reimbursed for our expenses in our ridings because we have to drive a lot. Mr. Speaker, I know that in your riding of Halton you have that as well, the need to drive. Some members drive more than others, which means our constituents have to drive more if they're going to be able to get to the polling station. That's very important.

There are some members—and I say to you with all due respect, Mr. Speaker, if you have, say, 664 square kilometres and you get a payment from the House of some \$22,000, that's about 66,000 kilometres driven in a riding of 664 square kilometres. That means you visit each and every square kilometre some 10 times in a year. That's amazing.

This House is very good. We support those things because we believe in democracy and the need to do that.

Those numbers are vastly different among members. I know that in regard to the minister's bill, I want to say to the member for Hamilton Mountain, the Honourable Dr. Marie Bountrogianni, our Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs—and she's in charge of the Democratic Renewal Secretariat—that she has brought forward a bill that I support. My only concern is about the size of the ridings. I know the citizens' assembly has a report that's coming, but they've already decided to talk about the mixed member proportional system. My understanding is that it would reduce the projected 107 seats down to 90, and then there would be additional seats, another 30 or so, which would mean that particularly rural ridings would be even bigger. Mine would be bigger. I can tell you, my constituents have to drive sometimes over an hour to see or I have to drive to them—an hour in one direction, an hour in another direction, an hour in yet another direction. It's so good to see the Speaker back because I know he believes in this more than others about the need of the various sizes of those ridings. I'm so glad I was able to put on the record for all, using examples of how many square kilometres there are in a riding and how often people drive—it's so important. But we have to drive change. It's very, very important that we do that.

One of the suggestions in this bill is that we put the names of our political parties, or the fact that we are an independent, right on the ballot. That has been debated in this House for a long, long time. There are members who are on different sides, but I know that in the federal House, the candidates and their party affiliations are there. That's a pretty important thing for a voter to know when they go into the ballot box. Disclosure is a hallmark of our voting system, particularly if we're going to have to vote on a number of things.

They may have now, under the new system, if it were to pass, two votes, not one. Every time they vote, they will have to vote twice. So it's important for us to drive home change. As a rural member—and I'm sure we have some members that are mixed city and somewhat rural members. They understand how important it is for us to get out there and constantly drive within our ridings, seeing our constituents over and over again. It doesn't matter how much money you spend, the Legislature and the taxpayers will pick up that cost. They will reimburse that cost every time.

We have a great system. If the ridings get bigger, those expenses are going to go up too. There's no doubt about it. If you look at the records, there are extremes about some who don't drive much within a riding and others who are constantly on the road, working on that. That's so important. A good public needs to know that. If we look at this, we have even bigger rural ridings. If we have even bigger rural ridings, that is going to be a challenge. I know I'm going to want to get some more information.

How will I get that information? Under this act, there will be a public education campaign paid for by taxpayers and administered by a neutral third party—no political interference whatsoever—to talk about the pros

and cons of that. I look at this and it says here that Elections Ontario would be given the responsibility of running a neutral public education campaign in advance of any referendum. For example, there is one that could be happening on electoral form on October 10, and it would be run by the Chief Election Officer, who is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. John Hollins, a wonderful chap, is doing a fine job, as are all the officers of this assembly.

It's a good fit with the general communications authority of the Chief Electoral Officer because his job, or perhaps one day his successor's job, her job, is to ensure that votes are held fairly. Despite my reservations as a rural member—and probably even from urban members who drive constantly within their ridings, over and over again, reaching each and every square kilometre maybe 10 times in one year, which is amazing. I know I can't do that. There just aren't enough waking hours in a year to be able to do that. It is so important that we drive home that change.

Now it's important for us to listen to one of the longest-serving members in this House, my good friend the member from York West.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from York West.

Mr. Sergio: I'd like to compliment my colleague Mr. Wilkinson from Perth-Middlesex. He's not so new himself in this House and he did a wonderful job addressing some of the contents of Bill 218.

This is a good bill, not because of the contents of the bill, but this is a very important bill that we've been talking about in this House. We are doing second reading now, but I wonder how many people are really tuned in to the content of the bill, with the intent of the bill and with the wonderful work that the citizens' assembly has been doing in getting all kinds of information and in bringing some changes to the way we elect people to this wonderful House.

What did they do? They have delivered, very recently, their opinion. They have delivered one opinion and they delivered a final report.

Ms. Horwath: The bill's not about that.

1740

Mr. Sergio: Oh yes, it is. It's all part of the bill. On the 15th we are going to have another, final report.

But what does Bill 218 really say? It would be unfair to say that we have sifted through every word of the bill. Certainly, I cannot do it justice in 10 minutes, but let me say some of the important things that this bill contains. I do hope that prior to October 10, the people of Ontario will have a fairly good reason why, when they go to the polls, they will be aware that they will be going to the polls for two very important reasons. One is, yes, to vote for the member and the party of their choice. This is one of the very few times that the democratic system allows the members, those able to vote, to go and exercise their right.

The other, very important, is the so-called referendum. The people listening and watching today may say, "What

the heck are they talking about, referendum?" They know the date, or they should know the date by now, when the next provincial election is, which is October 10. Originally it was October 4 and now it's October 10, but I wonder if the mass of the people in Ontario will be wondering and saying, "What is the referendum and why? When did this come out?"—and so forth.

Sometimes governments are accused of not listening to the public or the opposition or whatever. We have to say that some time ago the government said, "All right, let's look at it." I think we made it part of our previous campaign to say, let's look at it and see if we can bring some improvements to how people go to vote and to see why, for a number of reasons, people don't go to vote. Never mind those that go to vote, what about those that don't go to vote, period?

Part of this bill deals with that as well. When we say, okay, now we're going to give the powers to the Chief Electoral Officer to take the power on and to make sure that he will initiate this wonderful campaign telling the people of Ontario, those eligible to vote—and, especially, an extra-good campaign, and I think it's a good point in the bill—approaching especially the schools and those students that are nearly of voting age, passing along all the information as to why they should go to vote and provide them with all the information. I think that's important.

I think the second part of my presentation would be on this referendum. An election is an election. We know that. We know what goes on prior to the election. We know what goes on the day of the election. But the referendum I think is very important, because this will change, perhaps for a long time—or maybe it won't change anything at all because the referendum will call for a percentage of the voters who will have to exercise their right. Unless we get a particular percentage, you know what? Nothing is going to happen. We go back to the existing system, which I have to say has been serving Ontarians fairly well.

The committee has travelled far and near, investigating other ways of getting our people to vote. Yes, we have heard those saying, "You know, we should give more voice to everybody and so forth." I think the committee has addressed that particular aspect of the bill. There are a number of points. I will try and identify at least some of the most important points in the bill, because I only have about four minutes left.

The important points are these: how to make it easier for people to go to vote and how to encourage more people to go to vote. I think this is one of the things where people say, "Well, maybe this, maybe that." I think the bill will be addressing that.

Improving the electoral process per se—more integrity, if you will, to the process. Often during particular campaigns, we hear a lot of negativity that does go on, so I think we have given direction to the Chief Electoral Officer to really delve into that and bring some good recommendations.

Make some improvements to the voters' list: God forbid, we have heard all kinds of accusations with respect to voters' lists and so forth.

One of the important parts as well is to regulate advertising by third parties: who is running the campaign, who is paying for the campaign, who is paying for what, and transparency. If we're going to make some changes, I think we have to really look into who is paying. We want to know—transparency. I think the bill looks at that as well.

Yes, it's nothing new, but I think it's time to look at improving the system of voting as well, not only when you go to vote in the poll itself, but the counting of the votes as well. I come from the municipal sector, where we had the automatic voting system. While we said, "Hey, everything went well. It was wonderful, it was speedy. The polls closed at 8 o'clock and at 8:30 we knew already who won and who lost," there were some hitches. I think that's one area to be addressed.

One important aspect is this so-called blackout, or up to when you and I or the political parties are allowed to go to the radio, newspaper, TV and stuff like that. I think the bill calls for maintaining a blackout during the voting day and the day before and so forth. In our case, it's already known because we already know the voting date. We already know the voting day, so I think everyone should be aware of that and take it from there. So there is no reason to get into an argument with respect to advertising and so forth.

It is a good piece of legislation. A lot of this goes into the polling station itself on election day. The Chief Electoral Officer can't be in every poll on election day. There are people doing their work, and I think one aspect of that we'll have to look at is to have those people well qualified, that they understand the work they have to do. We've told the other scrutineers in the polling station that indeed the best of the job is done, because a lot of the so-called hanky-panky goes on exactly in the voting station—either inside or immediately outside the voting station.

I think what's important from now until—hopefully the House will approve everything and we'll get on with this Bill 218.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Second and third reading today.

Mr. Sergio: Yes, indeed. We get on with it and then we can initiate this wonderful educational campaign and tell the people of Ontario really not what's expected on October 10, which is voting day, but with respect, more importantly, with this referendum. I think that people watching should be starting to ask themselves, "What is it? I want to know more." I think it's a very important piece of legislation. The consequences—we're not going to go into the various details because we haven't got time, but pros or cons, I think there are consequences. People should be well aware why we have done so, why we will have a referendum on October 10. I would hope that indeed we can move on and allow the Chief Electoral—

The Acting Speaker: Time for questions and comments. The Chair recognizes the member from Halton.

Mr. Chudleigh: Thank you very much for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? The Chair recognizes the member from Hamilton East.

Ms. Horwath: I don't think the member spoke to the bill, but I'm pleased to make a comment on it.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Prue: Thank you very much. I think it was quite a tag team.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The Chair recognizes the member from Guelph–Wellington.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): Thank you. I'm delighted to comment on this speech. One of the things that has been, I think, a challenge for people who are new to running in a riding is that it often happens that people in an urban riding don't know what party that candidate may represent. So I think, as the members both pointed out, that it will be very helpful to have the identification of that candidate's party on the ballot, so that people who are new to the riding, or for candidates who are new to the ballot, have an opportunity to have a look at which party that person actually belongs to.

1750

I think it's also very important that as we look at this whole issue of the referendum—and certainly one of the things that people commented on following the referendum in BC was the whole question of whether or not people really understood, when they were looking at an electoral system, what they were really choosing. It was a complicated system, but there seemed to be a lot of confusion around what the decision was that they were making and what the consequences were of the decision.

If this act we are discussing now passes, the electoral officer, the Chief Election Officer of the province of Ontario, will be explicitly charged with running an advertising campaign that will be neutral but that will give the people of Ontario information about the current system of government that we have and about the proposed system of government. It's very important that people get out and participate. This is really quite—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. It's time for the response.

Mr. Wilkinson: I want to thank my colleagues. I know the opposition were particularly brief in this round. It makes you wonder. Perhaps they are eager to get home. Perhaps, but I know that it's important for us to get to the government's business, so I want to talk particularly about my colleague the member from Guelph–Wellington.

I was doing a bit of a review and I know, for example, that the size of the riding of the member for Guelph–Wellington—we're talking about sizes of ridings and the requirement—is almost identical, for example, to the size of your riding, Mr. Speaker. The square kilometres are almost exactly the same, so I think it's a very good com-

parison. The member was telling me that it helped her to understand the relationship between that, because as I mentioned before, it's all about the size of the riding. My concern, valid that I think that it is, the size—I know the good member from Oxford and I have about the same size of riding. It's a bit smaller—I understand that—and mine is a bit bigger, but these things happen. It's important that if rural ridings get bigger, and I'm sure the member from Oxford would agree, it's harder and harder for us. There are more hours that we must spend in our cars, driving and driving around those ridings over and over again, and it means that our constituents have to spend more and more time. It's great that the Legislature pays us to be able to drive within our ridings, drive back and forth between our ridings and actually do legislative business around, but when I look at ridings like Barrie–Bradford–Simcoe—or is it Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford?—and the riding of Guelph–Wellington, both of which are about the same size, I think that's very important.

Mrs. Sandals: I'll look it up for you: Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford.

Mr. Wilkinson: Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford. That is the riding; absolutely. They are about the same size, about one fifth the size of my riding—but then with Mr. Hampton's riding being 100 times larger, how important that is. The record stands. It's important. So I think it's very important to the good people that if we're going to have bigger ridings, we have to take a look at that.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): I have a few comments on Bill 218. One of the things that bothers me about this bill—

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): On a point of order, Speaker: I rise to correct my record. Back on April 2, 2007, I had the occasion to be here in the House answering questions from the member from Lanark–Carleton. I refer specifically to minute 7,613, where I believe at the time I was indicating that the member from Lanark–Carleton in fact assumed a position in the Legislature as a member of the executive council with responsibility for the lottery and gaming interests. I believe I indicated here in the minute that the member from Lanark–Carleton was the minister during the period of 2002–03. I rise pursuant to the standing orders in order to—

The Acting Speaker: I think you've had your opportunity.

The Chair recognizes the member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Wilson: It's a dirty, dirty trick that you're trying to do over there.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker: What's your point of order?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I rise pursuant to standing orders to correct the record.

The Acting Speaker: I think you went on plenty.

The Chair recognizes the member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Wilson: It's just a clearly dirty trick that you guys are pulling over there, your absolutely dirty tricks, and it's one of the reasons I'm going to move adjournment of this debate, because you guys are dirty-tricks Liberals.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Simcoe–Grey has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour of the motion, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. It will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1755 to 1825.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Wilson has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

The Clerk of the Assembly: The ayes are 3; the nays are 17.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

It being well past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday, May 7, 2007, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1826.

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