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Jeudi 17 avril 2008

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Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

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Thursday 17 April 2008

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*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

STRANDHERD-ARMSTRONG BRIDGE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ontario Liberal government should immediately enter into negotiations with the city of Ottawa in order to provide assistance to finally build the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Ms. MacLeod has moved private member's notice of motion number 3.

Pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I rise today to fight for my constituents. The people of Nepean–Carleton returned me to Queen's Park because they know that I mean what I say and I say what I mean. They know that I will fight tooth and nail for them in the Legislature, and they know that their priorities are my priorities. That is why I brought forward this resolution today, calling on the Liberal government to listen to my constituents and negotiate with the city of Ottawa, so that we can get the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge built on time and on budget.

We need that bridge in Nepean–Carleton. Just yesterday, the city of Ottawa staff agreed, when they approved that bus rapid transit should run across that bridge.

I've raised this issue—the need for the bridge—in the Legislature many times. In fact, since December, I've introduced thousands of signatures on petitions, calling for this bridge to be built. I've also written several letters to the Premier and the Minister of Transportation on this important infrastructure investment—unfortunately, to no avail.

I'm disappointed that the Liberals have been ignoring my residents, my city and our local politicians because of their rigid position on transit. It is essential for members here to realize that a suburban rural riding like Nepean–Carleton needs both transportation and transit options. Our eggs can't be placed in only one basket; we need roads, bridges and transit to best serve the people in Nepean–Carleton.

Beyond that, the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge itself will be a most important link between the Rideau River communities of Riverside South and South Nepean, two

communities that are joined within a city ward, but that are disconnected by the mighty and historic Rideau River.

It will also be an important link for those living in the village of Manotick and those who reside near the Hunt Club bridge. Right now, the capacity of both Bridge Street in Manotick and the Hunt Club bridge is unsustainable, and the much-needed Strandherd-Armstrong bridge would alleviate traffic congestion during rush hours in these two communities. This, by the way, would really help out the member for Ottawa South, our Premier, whose riding would directly benefit from the decongestion on the Hunt Club bridge, which straddles the line between his riding and mine.

Not only that, but the proposed bridge will be an environmentally friendly infrastructure addition to my community. This, of course, is what makes a transportation initiative that much more appealing. It will get people out of their cars quicker. Instead of a 25-minute commute across the Hunt Club bridge or the Bridge Street bridge in Manotick, we will see my residents in their cars for five minutes, if at all. That's getting the majority of people who need the bridge out of their cars for an average of 20 minutes a trip. What's more environmentally friendly than that, I ask? I'll tell you.

The bridge will make it that much more appealing to put either light rail or bus rapid transit on its surface. That means that not only will we have people driving their own cars far less, but it also means we're going to get more people out of their cars. As I wrote to the Premier on November 25, 2007, "We both know that any rapid transit plan that deals with the southwest end of" the city "must at some point include a crossing of the Rideau River from Riverside South to South Nepean for safety reasons, environmental concerns and to ease traffic congestion." I further said to him, "I know that you understand that without the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge, any rapid transit plan that involves the southwest end of the city is irrelevant."

The case for the bridge has been made in my community since the early 1990s. In 1993, a Rideau River bridge feasibility environmental assessment study was undertaken by the former region. At the time, it pointed out that "As development commences in the new growth areas, there will be a higher rate of east-west travel, which can only be satisfied by the construction of a new east-west arterial, including a new crossing of the Rideau River."

When you think of the growth of this community—what we know as ward 22, or South Nepean and

Riverside South—you will note that according to a city of Ottawa report, census data from 1991 to 2006 shows that South Nepean has grown from 22,000 residents to over 57,000, and Riverside South has grown from 710 residents to 7,600. You will agree with the same city of Ottawa study, which says, “Implementation of the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge presents opportunities for new travel patterns.... It would reduce current and future traffic demand on the existing Rideau River crossings ... and free up capacity to address future demand.”

As you can see, the case for the bridge has been made. But now it needs to be funded. I am concerned about politics being played to the point that this bridge will not be built. Without even batting an eyelash, the Premier has refused to fund this bridge. His spokesperson, Jane Almeida, told the Ottawa Citizen that the Premier did not see the bridge as a public transit option. This is despite the fact that the city plans to unite two urban communities with this bridge and use the link for some form of rapid transit. She then says in the same paper, “We will not be funding this bridge.”

Of course, that is quite brazen, considering that the Premier once endorsed the bridge and his community would benefit enormously from the bridge, since it would take traffic off the congested Hunt Club bridge. But Citizen columnist Ken Gray offers his reasoning for Mr. McGuinty’s objection to the bridge: “A Conservative who has been a burr under the Liberal saddle would add to Mr. McGuinty’s strong objection to the project.” That’s just plain wrong. More than that, in 2005, the Premier, along with the MPP for Ottawa–Orléans and the Minister of Community and Social Services, was only too happy to support the bridge when it was part of the now-defunct light rail plan.

As I will outline, the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge is good for transit, good for the environment and just plain good for our community. As my local community paper, the Manotick Messenger, says, “Bridge Should Connect Communities Not Divide Political Camps.”

So here we are. The city has identified this as an infrastructure priority, not just in the initial feasibility study in 1993, but as recently as last year, and the federal government has ponied up their \$35 million.

A comical quote in the Ottawa Citizen says this about the federal announcement: “Steve Desroches and I said if the federal government gives us the money we’ll kiss Stephen Harper right on the lips”—quoting maverick city councillor Jan Harder. Funnier still, though, is that when MP Pierre Poilievre actually delivered the funds from existing transit money, Liberals started to backtrack on whether or not they would support the project. It’s unbelievable: They put politics before people. Liberals are good at making promises and then breaking them. The two of them, Councillor Harder and Mr. McGuinty, have given flip-flopping a good name. But I digress.

You will see why we need the bridge. On July 13, 2007, a city report recommended that a detailed design and preliminary study be undertaken. On June 20, 2007, Transport 2000’s David Jeanes said the Strandherd

bridge is important to developing the south end community. On August 29, 2007, the city supported the Strandherd-Armstrong as a priority in its top 20 list. On October 23, 2007, the city voted to request federal and provincial funding for the bridge. The next day, October 24, Councillor Harder said, “The Strandherd-Armstrong bridge is an especially important project for the residents of the south end,” while Councillor Desroches said, “The bridge will be an integral piece of the overall transit and transportation puzzle.” On November 2, the city manager and the mayor of Ottawa wrote to the Minister of Transportation: “The Strandherd-Armstrong bridge is one of the city of Ottawa’s most important transportation and transit network projects.”

Just yesterday, April 16, 2008, the city of Ottawa identified it in its new \$4-billion transportation and transit plan. Ottawa will decide in May whether or not they will proceed with this plan. But that shouldn’t stop us from affirming in this Legislature today whether or not we support this bridge, regardless of the outcome in May.

1010

Again, the city has requested \$35 million for the bridge from the provincial government. Local councillors have put together an argument for the bridge, and they say they’ve never received a response from the Minister of Transportation. Of course, despite this, I will acknowledge that the province did invest \$35 million into the city of Ottawa in the last month and a half; \$20 million of that went to another infrastructure project and \$14.9 million of it went instead to snow clearing rather than infrastructure projects. So the city does bear a little bit of the blame here. But I’m going to tell you, we still need to do it, because if you’re doing the math, the city councillors for Barrhaven and South Nepean have passed up the opportunity to fund the bridge with existing provincial money.

In any event, there is another opportunity. Last night at a city committee, they voted against accepting \$40 million in committed provincial funding for Highway 174. They said it was not a priority. The city said the Strandherd bridge is a priority. I would urge councillors Harder and Desroches, as well as the Liberals in this place, to strongly consider transferring the funds from the highway to the bridge. The bridge is more environmentally sustainable than a highway, and it is an identified city priority. Now it’s up to us to make sure that the bridge is built. Under a Progressive Conservative administration, it already would have been, because we would have committed all revenues from the gas tax to municipalities for roads, bridges and transit.

This is the crux of a philosophical divide between my party and theirs. We believe in funding infrastructure and transit; the Liberals only believe in funding transportation. My colleagues from Wellington–Halton Hills and Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke agree. They both have motions before this House which would help municipalities with their infrastructure deficits. Mr. Arnott is appealing to the Legislature to upload all municipal bridges, and Mr. Yakubuski is reintroducing his idea of

putting gas tax revenues toward what they were intended for: roads, bridges and transit.

Today the Liberals can right the wrong. They can negotiate with the city of Ottawa for the \$35 million the city has requested for the bridge in their November 2 letter, or they can ignore the transportation needs of the fastest-growing community in Ottawa.

I will be watching the debate unfold today, and my constituents will be watching this debate unfold today too. We are all asking that politics be put aside so that we can move forward and build this bridge. I encourage all of my colleagues to support this resolution.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First of all, I have to say how much this House and certainly this particular member admires the passion and the integrity of the member from Nepean–Carleton and, of course, the zeal with which she defends the interests of her own riding and constituents, which is always a good thing to see in this House.

Having said that, I have to say that the New Democratic Party of Ontario supports both infrastructure funding and transportation funding, both of which the McGuinty government underfunds. We've heard our member from Timmins–James Bay speak about the lack of infrastructure funding for bridges in his communities. We've heard this as a regular theme in this House.

This week, of course, it's centred on the infrastructure funding for recreation and sports facilities across the province; the pools in Toronto being one example of that, where millions and millions of dollars are about to be lost—a former infrastructure investment—because we don't see the money to keep these infrastructure investments up.

So it's a general and a huge problem, not just in Nepean–Carleton, but right across the province. In fact, we're looking at a \$65-billion deficit in infrastructure spending, and it's piling up year to year to year.

Again, the McGuinty government, with its head in the sand, is not facing this huge and growing problem. It's not doing anything about it, and that's a serious problem.

I know, from a Toronto perspective, we're looking at a problem with infrastructure expenses and, of course, operating expenses in the city of Toronto, to the tune of over \$700 million a year that this province shortchanges the city of Toronto. That's year to year to year, and it piles up and piles up and piles up, and the government doesn't address it, doesn't do anything about it. This is a question of political will.

Of course, we have a political spin, as well, coming from across the aisle on this very subject. We saw an example of that with Bill 35—what we call the slush fund bill over here—which was supposed to help fund infrastructure, which was supposed to help fund municipalities. In fact, the two words “infrastructure” and “municipalities” don't appear anywhere in that bill, and even if they had, all that that bill would have accomplished was the crumbs left over after the meal is finished. Because it looks like there will be no crumbs left over, ac-

ording to the budget that was delivered, with a proposed surplus of \$600 million. Again, this is a problem that compounds year to year.

You heard the member from Nepean–Carleton who talked about the impacts on her community. Personally and politically, the New Democratic Party would rather see money go into transportation in Ottawa, which by all accounts has a pretty poor public transportation system.

Surprisingly enough, when we hear the grand announcements of Move Ontario, huge amounts of money promised—of course always sometime in the future, never today—that money is for the GTA. None of that money was directed to the Premier's own city. One has to wonder why his own riding doesn't experience the zeal and the passion and the commitment that the member from Nepean–Carleton brings to hers. If it did, perhaps some of that money for public transportation might have been directed there. So I would wonder at his own constituents and them watching this debate. Perhaps they would like to contact their member of provincial Parliament, the Premier himself, and demand some action on behalf of his constituents around the issue of public transportation and infrastructure development. Again, those are two words that never appeared in Bill 35 and actually, quite frankly, don't fully appear, except in spin, on the government's agenda.

I'm going to share my time with our member from Beaches–East York, so I will leave him time. As a former mayor of East York, I'm sure he has a great deal to say about investment in municipalities and infrastructure, something we don't see from across the aisle.

Again, just to reiterate, it's good news when a member stands up for her community. It's bad news when she has to stand up and take private members' public business time to ask for something as simple as the fixing up of a bridge, the matching of federal funds with provincial funds. It's sad news when the Premier of a province can't fund public transportation in his very own riding. It's sad news when infrastructure and municipalities don't appear in the bill that purports to help both. It's sad news to have to witness private members' public business again being used for a simple request for a simple municipality funding issue, and not for the broader issues with which I think this Legislature should be concerned.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to rise in the House today to speak to this private member's motion. The Strandherd–Armstrong bridge, of course, is an important crossing in the city. It's a priority amongst many priorities. I was a member of Parliament representing Riverside South, which is the east landing of that bridge.

I worked with the Premier and with other members of the Legislature from Ottawa, in order to have the Strandherd–Armstrong bridge in that original transit project, which was so important to our city. We know the history of that transit project; it was approved. The contract, I believe, was signed. And it was a minister—I think the minister from the riding where this member from Nepean–Carleton lives now—a Mr. John Baird, the minister of increasing greenhouse gases. I think we know

him. It was meddling by this federal politician in a very important project to the city of Ottawa, a project that our Premier supported, where there was \$200 million from this province allocated towards public transit—it's still there—that meets the business case for ridership etc. But that project was signed, and now we're facing lawsuits over that project—and no Strandherd bridge. This member can go and talk to her federal cousins to find out why.

When we're looking at that project, we have to look at other projects in the city of Ottawa. Certainly a much bigger project which has been around much longer is an inter-provincial bridge to relieve the trucks and high traffic in the riding of Ottawa-Vanier, one that was pushed by Minister Meilleur for many years when I sat with her on council. That's a project that has much more importance to the province, and we're participating in that environmental assessment study. That's moving ahead well.

Ottawa-Orléans hasn't been well looked after in transportation. We have a real project that sits on Highway 417, a part where the province would naturally have a share in the cost. That's the Hunt Club extension, the interchange with 417. There's a dangerous problem on 417, so we're looking at priorities for provincial money. We certainly can put the municipal project down the line. When there are other programs like the MIII program, they took \$20 million and used it on the archives in Nepean. The archives are good for the whole city of Ottawa, but again, the Hunt Club interchange would have been a great project for that money: 60,000 vehicles through the split on a daily basis, much higher traffic.

1020

What we have to look at in Nepean and the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge is this: They've allowed a lot of growth on both sides of that river without providing for transportation. Where were the planners in the city of Ottawa when this was being done? Are there development charges that will pay for that bridge? It's not a provincial responsibility.

I was reading what an alternative for this member might be. In the *Globe and Mail* today, it says: "A Flavour of Pork. Finance Minister Jim Flaherty has an unfortunate habit of taking disproportionate care of his riding and his political pals. Pork-barrelling provisions are sprinkled through his budgets."

I suggest to the member that she write a "Dear John" letter. Maybe John can talk to Mr. Flaherty, and maybe they can come up with all of the funding. The federal funding they've put there—maybe they can come up with another third and that project could proceed.

I think that with the meddling that was carried on with that contract and with the significant losses for all the taxpayers of the city of Ottawa, it's time that that debt be paid by the so-called Minister of the Environment. I think that's where the dollars would come from, and if there's \$40 million of provincial money that the city wants to transfer, I think that's not their job to transfer that. I think they can look at the east end of the city of Ottawa and say some dollars should be left there. That \$40 million

there—just to transfer it to the Strandherd bridge? That's the normal way that Nepean carries on business in the city of Ottawa. We just lost a thousand RCMP jobs in the east of the city; again, a John Baird decision that's going to cause transportation problems throughout the city of Ottawa. The Strandherd bridge is important, but it has to be placed with other priorities in the city of Ottawa. Certainly we have to consider the east of the city as being very important as well.

I would just read that the Premier, the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing have consistently stated that this province has committed \$200 million for rapid transit to the city of Ottawa. This money is for rapid transit and not projects including the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge. That's pretty clear. That's what the dollars are for.

I feel that's important because in Ottawa-Orléans, we have ridership on public transit at 35% now. I would like us to take that up to 50%. We're talking about this part of Nepean that's been less developed. I think they have about 9% or 10% ridership or maybe slightly higher.

So I agree with the Premier, I agree with the Minister of Transportation, and I agree with the Ministry of Housing. This money must go for a project that will get more people out of their cars and get them onto public transit. That's not what bridges are for. Bridges are good projects, and you need bridges as well, but this is not a place to be putting part of our \$200 million which we have given to the city of Ottawa.

It's for those reasons: This is one project among many. It was already planned for, it was going to happen, and somebody sabotaged the agreement for the light rail in Ottawa. So I don't think that this government, who supported that project, should be in any way supporting a transfer of dollars that can be used for other, more important, projects. I think this is a federal problem. I would suggest that the member for Nepean-Carleton call up John Baird and Jim Flaherty, and see if they've got any more choo-choo trains that they could use in Nepean.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm very pleased this morning to have this opportunity to speak briefly in support of my colleague's resolution on the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge in her community. I want to congratulate the member for Nepean-Carleton for bringing this issue forward in the House this morning. Private members' time, I believe, Mr. Speaker—and I know you would agree—is an important opportunity for MPPs to bring forward issues that otherwise perhaps wouldn't be on the agenda of the government. That's why it's so important, and that's why we want to preserve it as an essential and important part of the Ontario Legislature's week.

The member for Nepean-Carleton has eloquently and passionately explained the reasons that she needed to bring forward this resolution this morning. She talked about the city of Ottawa's support. She reminded us of the many times that she has raised this issue in the Legislature in petitions and the times she has written the government in support of this bridge, to emphasize the need for it.

She talked about how important it is to have a balance of transportation facilities in her riding, including roads and transit—not one to the exclusion of the other—and she talked about the environmentally responsible aspects of this proposal and why it's important. I certainly agree with her and express support for her resolution, and I hope that the government members will support it as well.

The member for Nepean–Carleton talked about the resolution that I put forward in the Legislature, calling upon the government of Ontario, over a 12-year period, to assume responsibility for all the municipal bridges in Ontario, ensuring that these all-important links between communities are properly maintained. This is an idea that was included in our party's 2003 election platform. We knew it couldn't be done overnight, but we talked about doing it over a 12-year period. There are approximately 12,000 municipal bridges in the province of Ontario, and it could be done.

In our community of Centre Wellington where I reside, we have over 100 municipal bridges, because the Grand River and its tributaries go through our community and a number of the communities around Centre Wellington, in Wellington–Halton Hills, and some of the adjacent ridings have the same challenge to maintain these all-important structures and ensure that they are safe. They can't do it alone. They need substantial provincial government financial support to make sure that this happens. That was the point I was trying to make when I brought forward that resolution right before Christmas, and I would continue to draw attention to the need for the provincial government to assist municipalities with the bridges and their other basic and important infrastructure needs.

As I said earlier, I think that private members' bills are important, and that's why I was extremely disappointed to read the Hansard of the standing committee on finance and economic affairs. When they met on April 10—I'm pleased the Chair is in this House, and I hope he's listening—to discuss a subcommittee report on a private member's bill that was brought forward by the member from Burlington, Bill 42, that was passed by the House, referred to a standing committee of the House, a subcommittee took place to determine how the bill would be considered, and there was a decision by the subcommittee to put forward a motion to the full committee authorizing the standing committee on finance and economic affairs to meet today, this morning and this afternoon, to allow for some public discussion of an important private member's bill. The government members who were present at that committee that day voted it down so as to ensure that there couldn't be a reasonable discussion of this private member's bill. That, to me, says something about the government's lack of respect for the private members' bills that are passed by this House. There is no reason why that bill couldn't have been discussed today at the finance committee.

The government members had a number of excuses, talking about pending government legislation and busi-

ness that might have been referred to that committee, but as we know, the committee is not sitting today. The committee could have sat today and discussed that private member's bill, and yet it would appear that the government shot the process down.

I'm most disappointed in the members who voted against the motion of their own subcommittee. Obviously they were whipped to do so, but if they continue to allow the powers that be in the Premier's office to dictate private members' business, we are in serious trouble here and there are going to be serious consequences, I'm sure, for the House going forward.

And, of course, today we see in the orders and notices paper the new standing orders that the government is proposing. I would implore and urge all government members to consider the fact that these standing order changes were not included in your platform. You have no mandate to do this, and I would urge the Premier to allow a free vote on this motion and release his efforts to whip his members to vote for it. This is important for all members of this House, not just the government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Wellington–Halton Hills, I think we're dangerously close to debating a motion that is on the order paper. I'd like to get back to the motion that we're debating this morning.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I appreciate your intervention, Mr. Speaker, and of course, included in this motion is what we would be doing on Thursday, which is moving private members' business from Thursday morning as we have now, as we've had for all the 18 years I've been here and many years before that, moving it to the very last item of business in the week, which I suspect means that there will be very few members hanging around. What it does is trivialize the private members' process, and it's most unacceptable to me. It's offensive to me as an MPP who, in the past, has brought forward numerous private members' bills and resolutions, because I believe in the process and I believe that it's important that we allow for a meaningful discussion of these items. It is unacceptable that the government is bringing forward this motion to relegate private members' business to the very last Thursday of the week, where it will be neglected and overlooked.

1030

I would encourage all members of this House, especially the government members, to think about these issues as they relate to parliamentary democracy and give those ideas consideration as we move forward with debate on this government motion.

I want to congratulate again the member for Nepean–Carleton for bringing forward this resolution today and urge all members to support it.

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to speak to this bill on the construction of the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge in Ottawa. I had the privilege, as a much younger man, to live in Ottawa for about a year when I went to Carleton University. I lived in several parts—

Interjection: A fantastic university.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm hearing from one of my colleagues that he thinks it's a fantastic university as well.

I had an opportunity during that year to live in several locations, both in and around Ottawa, first of all downtown for the first few months, then out into Nepean for the next while, and then finally across the river in what is greater Ottawa, which was then the little hamlet of Aylmer and which is now part of the much larger Quebec city. So I think I understand, in part, what is going on here and what is happening in Ottawa, because I do get to go back to that city at least once or twice a year to visit friends and to do government business or whatever. It is a bustling metropolis and it is really starting to pick up.

It is, unfortunately, in my view—and I'm sure that some people in the suburbs don't like this view, but I'm a downtown guy. I would like to see the downtown of Ottawa rejuvenated a little more. I have to say that the last time I was there, it was kind of disappointing. Some portions of Bank Street, some portions of Bronson Avenue that I saw, even Elgin, which once had such vibrancy, appear to be gone. And that is moving out into the suburbs of Ottawa, much the same as the phenomenon that happened in Toronto many years ago with the expansion of Toronto beyond its normal boundaries, out into the suburbs of Mississauga, Peel, Brampton, York region and Durham. The same thing is happening to Ottawa.

The question that has to be asked by all of us: Is this what we want for our cities? There's no doubt that there is a demand for people to live outside the city cores, and there's no doubt that there is a demand for larger homes that can be built outside of the city cores in ways that they cannot be built in an urban environment, in places like Toronto or Ottawa or Hamilton. That is the question here: Does the government, or any government, want to fund sprawl and expansion and suburbia, or do they want to compact the city cores and, in so doing, help to preserve the environment and help to make urban cores transit-friendly?

This is a question of infrastructure and I guess it's a question of what should be done, given the limited circumstances of the present government of Ontario and the even more limited circumstances of the present government of the city of Ottawa. It is a question of infrastructure that all municipalities have to face. My own is not immune here in Toronto, nor are any of the 480 municipalities in Ontario immune to this. All of them have infrastructure needs. In fact, it is estimated by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities that in Ontario alone, there is about a \$65-billion infrastructure deficit and that municipalities do not have the money to do what they need to do.

I listened intently to the member as she presented her bill, and I listened intently to the member from Ottawa—Orléans as he debated the merits of the bill vis-à-vis other things that, in his belief, the city of Ottawa needs more of. We know that the infrastructures are in bad condition, not only in Ottawa but even in Essex. I believe the member from Essex is here today.

We need to find a solution to this, and I am not convinced that the solution lies within the four walls of this

bill. I admire the member for bringing it forward because she's fighting for her constituents and for what her constituents want. There is no doubt about that. But is it found within the four walls of this bill? If this bridge is built, it is built at the expense of what other infrastructure needs in Ottawa or elsewhere? If the money is to come, it is to come at the expense of what place? How much of a priority is this vis-à-vis the priorities of rebuilding the bridges in Essex, both of which have been declared unsafe? My colleague in Timmins raised the issue of a bridge that's down to one lane connecting major highways in the Timmins area. How much is this a priority? Of that, I am simply not aware. I don't know. I don't have a handle on those books. Even if I am the finance critic, the finance minister certainly won't let me see them and certainly won't let me sit around the cabinet to discuss the priorities. I've listened to only one Liberal speak, but I would hazard a guess that we can expect that most of the members sitting opposite will not be in support of this bill.

What I'm going to talk a little bit more about is the need to help the municipalities to decide what they want to do within the monies and the jurisdiction that they have. The municipalities in this province are hamstrung and remain hamstrung because there is a \$3.2-billion download that has not been uploaded. I know the government in the last campaign said that sometime in the four years, they're going to upload a portion of it. I'm still waiting to see that happen, because it didn't happen in this budget.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm hearing catcalls here saying that they've started. They can start with little tiny steps, which is all Liberals ever do. They can start with those little tiny steps and say, "We're making progress." But \$3.2 billion is a lot of money, and when that comes off the backs of the municipalities, surely the municipalities will be in a much better place to be able to deliver the goods and services that they need to deliver, and not having to fund the government here in Ontario. I'm looking forward to that happening. I'm looking forward to the government putting down a realistic plan how the money is going to be spent across Ontario on infrastructure such as this.

It was laughable, absolutely laughable, when Bill 35 came before this House. It does not deal with infrastructure and it does not deal with municipalities. We saw that a mayor, a councillor and the head of AMO were brought forward—the Association of Municipalities of Ontario; I shouldn't be speaking in jargon—to say what a wonderful bill it was. But I haven't heard a word from them since they've actually seen the bill, which, if it does not preclude them, certainly allows the government to choose any other group other than them should there be any slush fund monies available at the end of the year.

That is not the way we need to deal with municipalities. They need firm, on-time funding each and every year to set their own priorities. That has not been done. That is what I'm hoping that this government will do so

that a member like the member for Nepean–Carleton won't have to stand here and make her individual pitch for something that is needed in her riding. It needs to be on a grid. We need to see where it fits vis-à-vis all the other requirements of the province of Ontario, and then we need to make realistic assessment and realistic apportioning of monies to which is the highest priority and in which year and which time frame.

I feel very sadly for what is happening in the city of Ottawa, which I think has precipitated all of this. First of all, the whole plan for light rail has been cancelled in Ottawa. The whole city and the city council has been set into disarray now that the transit system in downtown Ottawa is no longer there, or may no longer be there. The city council is also in disarray over the legal difficulties and challenges that the mayor is encountering and the infighting that has subsequently taken place within that council. And there is the added difficulty of the suburbanization of what used to be a fairly compact little city that is causing this tension. So you have the three things: the light rail that's been cancelled, a council that is partially dysfunctional due to court cases, and the increasing suburbanization of Ottawa, all coming into play and coming to this motion that we have here today.

1040

I do not support the ad hoc way that the members opposite and the government deal out infrastructure money and, because I do not support that, I would find it difficult to support ad hoc for one municipality. But I do commend the member for standing up for her residents. She is fighting for what her residents want and for what she believes. For that, I give her credit.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this motion. At the outset, I will state that I will be voting against this motion. I will be voting against this motion based on facts, not based on political rhetoric, which has been talked about by the honourable member from Nepean–Carleton, and not based on politics, which is played through the city of Ottawa when it comes down to issues relating to public transit.

The facts are simple. This particular bridge is not a priority for the city of Ottawa. This particular bridge does not help with creating an effective public transit system in the city of Ottawa, which is very much needed at this particular time.

This government believes in working in partnership with municipalities, unlike previous Conservative governments, where decisions were being rammed down the throats of municipalities. What this government believes in is working with the municipalities, and the way one works with municipalities is by discussing projects with them, by ensuring that the dollars for municipal infrastructure resources are there, so the municipalities can make decisions as to how they are going to invest those funds.

Let's look at the facts in Ottawa alone. Most recently, in the spring 2008 budget, almost \$15 million were given to the city of Ottawa for roads and bridges in the city. Did the city choose to use that money for the Strandherd–Armstrong bridge? No.

Let's take the MIII investment. The city of Ottawa and all of the municipalities in this province had the opportunity to apply for grants for one particular infrastructure project. Did the city of Ottawa apply for project funding for the Strandherd–Armstrong bridge? No. In fact, they applied for a project to build Archives Ottawa and they received \$20 million for it.

I'll go on. In 2006, under the Move Ontario project the city of Ottawa received \$32.9 million for various municipal infrastructure projects. Did the city decide to use that money for this particular bridge? No.

It was the same thing with Millennium Partnerships: \$45 million. There are nine roads and bridges projects under that particular initiative that are taking place in the city of Ottawa. Once again, the Strandherd–Armstrong bridge is not on that particular list.

Lastly, I will mention the OIPC, the Ontario Infrastructure Projects Corp., which provides various municipalities with affordable loans for municipal infrastructure. To this day, the city of Ottawa has not applied for those loans through OIPC. In fact, they have actually received \$9.2 million and \$14.2 million respectively for two other infrastructure projects in the city. Once again the reality is that this particular project is not a priority for the city.

The relationship between the city and this provincial government continues to strengthen and continues to go. Let me just quote our mayor, a good friend of the honourable member from Nepean–Carleton and mine, Mayor Larry O'Brien, who just recently said, "The province of Ontario has never in its history been as good to eastern Ontario and Ottawa as it has been over the last two years while I have been mayor." This is the mayor of the city of Ottawa.

Let me talk about public transit. I represent a downtown community, the riding of Ottawa Centre, which is the hub of Ottawa's economy. This is where most of the jobs in that city are located. We welcome everyone from across the city to come and work in Ottawa, but what we don't want is people driving to the downtown core. What we want is fewer cars on the roads and more effective public transit so that we can maintain in Ottawa Centre the sustainability of our community, the livable, the walkable, the bikeable aspects of our community.

That's why I am very proud that more and more money from this government is being spent on transit in Ottawa: \$440 million has been committed for public transit. That includes \$200 million for rapid transit—the rapid transit project which included this particular bridge, if the friends of the honourable member for Nepean–Carleton had not derailed this project. Most recently, \$27 million was given to OC Transpo to enhance efficient public transit in Ottawa; and \$36 million in gas tax money this year alone, which now totals about \$118 million to enhance public transit.

These are the kinds of investments we need to make in Ottawa. We don't need more cars. We don't need more cars coming to downtown communities, communities like mine in Centretown, in Westboro and in the Glebe.

What we want is members from communities in Nepean–Carleton and other parts of the city coming to the downtown core, but taking the bus, taking light rail, coming into the community in an environmental fashion. More cars on the roads is not the solution for a better environment. Definitely, that’s not a solution for my own community of Ottawa Centre. Again and again and again, as I’m out there knocking on doors and meeting with members of the community, I have been told by those who live in Ottawa Centre that they want a light rail project, that they are angry at the former Conservative member from this chamber, John Baird, the current federal Minister of the Environment, who derailed, axed this particular project. The honourable member from Nepean–Carleton did not say anything. She was quiet. Where was she then, at that point—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Nepean–Carleton, I think the House listened to your speech, and we would like others to pay that same attention.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My community is consistently concerned about the fact that there is a lack of effective public transit. They were very excited about the fact that in 2006 we would have seen the beginning of a light rail project. As we know, a contract was awarded in that instance, and we would have been making sure that light rail was coming to the downtown community. We would have been bringing people from the southern part of the city of Ottawa, not in their cars but in an environmentally friendly light rail to the downtown community, helping the issues dealing with transit and helping issues dealing with the environment right here.

Sadly, when I am out there talking to people, that issue keeps coming up: “Whatever happened?” So I ask the honourable member from Nepean–Carleton that she should call her member of Parliament, John Baird, and remind him as to why he axed it. That particular bridge would have had public transit on it, if that project had not been axed by the federal Conservative member in the city of Ottawa.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I’m pleased to join the debate this morning and I will be speaking in favour of my colleague’s private member’s resolution.

I want to share the thoughts of the honourable member from Parkdale–High Park about how much we admire and respect the passion and the zeal with which our member from Nepean–Carleton represents her constituency, and how she is not afraid to stand up against the tide.

On that point, I must say, I chatted a couple of times with the new member from Ottawa Centre and I find him to be a very pleasant fellow and a very nice man. But it appears that he should have missed that first Liberal caucus meeting, because that’s where they had him drink the Kool-Aid. Now he is just messaging exactly—I thought maybe we’d see a new and kind of refreshing voice, but no, it’s just bang, same old mantra: Blame the federal government for everything that doesn’t work out; blame

John Baird. In fact, it was the city of Ottawa who voted against the light rail, not John Baird.

1050

Anyhow, let’s get back to this project. I would be the last one in the world, as you know, Mr. Speaker, to accuse the government of using partisan politics with regard to making a decision on this particular project, but the Strandherd–Armstrong bridge—let’s just look at the facts. The Premier previously endorsed this project. It would have significant environmental benefits in that it would shorten the commute, thereby reducing the amount of greenhouse gases emitted in our atmosphere, because we’re all striving to get cars to be on the road less and driving less distances, if possible. The city is ready to go. The member from Ottawa Centre says that it’s not a priority. Well, I have a letter here from the city of Ottawa indicating very clearly that it is a priority. And the feds are prepared to fund one third of the project.

The city’s in favour, ready to go; the feds are pretty prepared to fess up the money; the Premier previously endorsed this project, as did the member from Ottawa–Orléans. So there are a lot of pieces fitting together here in the puzzle. Again I say, I’m not the one who is going to accuse the government of being partisan, but we can all put those pieces of that puzzle together and we may be able to draw that conclusion. Perhaps the voters in Ottawa will draw that conclusion as well.

My question would be, if that’s the case, why? Because Lisa MacLeod, the member from Nepean–Carleton, is a particularly aggressive member who will not back down for any reason when she’s representing her constituents? Is it because she’s a burr under the saddle of the ministers who reside in the city of Ottawa? Is it because she gets publicity when they’re not doing something? Is it because she draws the media’s attention to the fact that this government is not keeping its word and is breaking its promises? Don’t be afraid because it may be perceived by you as a victory for Lisa MacLeod; this is a victory for the people of Ottawa. This would be a victory for the environment. And we all know, after last night’s fourth straight loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins, that they’re looking for victories in Ottawa. Perhaps this bridge would be one way for this government and this Ottawa Premier to say, “Look, I know you all know that I’m really a Toronto Premier, but I’m actually going to try to do something positive for the city of Ottawa as well.”

I know that people are saying that the city of Ottawa took some of this infrastructure money and spent it on snow and slush removal, but I don’t want to be too hard on the city of Ottawa. I want to ask this government, what kind of plan did you have in place that allowed those loopholes? That’s like sending your child to the grocery store without a list and then not being happy when they come home with all of the things that you didn’t want them to buy. You can’t just hand out money without having some conditions, and that’s what this government did with that particular project.

They're here. They're blaming everybody. They blame the feds. They blame the member. When is it going to be time for you people to stand up in the morning, look in the mirror and see what you can do to make it better for the people of Ottawa?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I am pleased to join in the debate. I'm afraid I missed the first part of it and it seems I should be disappointed because it's been very interesting in the Legislature this morning. But I'm pleased to stand and support the member from Nepean-Carleton.

The bill we're debating is providing assistance to finally build the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge.

There's been great discussion here this morning about the struggle that municipalities have in dealing with the provincial government. The case has been brought forward very passionately. We have a very strong advocate in the member from Nepean-Carleton for bringing the needs of municipalities in her riding forward. We're saying the city of Ottawa wants it; we're saying the federal government's ready to stand up. Where's the provincial government? That is the question. Thus, we have the—

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes. This is what we're discussing here in the Legislature this morning.

Municipalities are faced with this lottery type of system. They spend thousands of dollars on studies, on applying, trying to comply. Maybe there are rules for applications for money that's available. Maybe there's just a quick form. How do they know? They need some long-term commitment from the provincial government here, and we're seeing that they're not getting it.

The municipalities have gotten some money in the last few weeks, at year-end. They quickly filled out the form, crossed their fingers and hoped for the best. Some won, some didn't win.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, I've got a few examples from my riding that I'll bring forward too.

This is what we are hearing, the challenges we face in our municipalities, and this example of the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge is classic. I know the member from Nepean-Carleton has a stack of reports as to why this bridge is important, and I'm sure if the new member from Ottawa Centre doesn't have them, he will be getting them shortly.

Mr. Robert Bailey: He'll soon find out.

Ms. Laurie Scott: He certainly will find out so that maybe he can get on the same page with the needs that are occurring in his area of the province.

I've had challenges with some bridges myself in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I know that Algonquin Highlands has applied, in a very serious emergency bridge matter, to the local MIII program. They weren't accepted, and they weren't accepted in COMRIF for a few years previous too. But I've talked to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal to say, "Okay, I think we need to look at this a little closer. There are some emergencies going on that need to be addressed."

I'm hoping that maybe we can see some long-range infrastructure planning for the municipalities. That report is still coming up, isn't it? When is it due? Has that report on the funding been delayed? It keeps getting delayed. But I'm hoping that when this report comes forward, the Liberals will actually act on it, because one-time funding, band-aid solutions, are not what our municipalities need. They need to have long-range plans from this government, which we fail to see. They're not really great on planning.

I have the County Road 24 bridge, and the Bobcaygeon bridge too that suddenly needs some serious—there has to be a complete rebuild. There's not even a repair that's possible. So I know that the municipality of the city of Kawartha Lakes will be coming to you.

These are important economic lifelines to our communities and they have to be addressed. I'm hoping that the municipalities use this year-end money that went out the door quickly for the roads and bridges they need in their municipalities.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I hear the member from Ottawa-Orléans made a second change of direction this week when he actually supported the speed limiters. He was converted, I guess, on the road to Damascus. He kind of referenced the other evening in the Legislature that he's had a change of plans.

I just want to state that roads and bridges are about connecting communities. They are not dividing political camps. That is what the member from Nepean-Carleton is saying in her remarks, and I hope this government takes heed of those.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Nepean-Carleton, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: As I started out in my speech, people send me here because they know I mean what I say and I say what I mean, and I'll never ever stop being like that, unlike the two members from Ottawa who spoke to this, who had to be whipped in what they had to say. That's a shame. They should be fighting for the people of our community. Instead, we've got a Move Ontario plan that forgets Ottawa, and they say nothing at the caucus table. We've got a McGuinty gap, where the residents of my city receive \$519.75 less per household than they do in the city of Toronto, but the member from Ottawa Centre remains silent at the caucus table in the Liberal Party. He's a flip-flopper and he speaks with a forked tongue. Because I will tell you something: While he pretends that I don't have the response, here is what I—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I'm not sure that the term "speaking with a forked tongue" and the implications of that is parliamentary.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I caution members, as others in the chair have, to use moderate, debatable language in the House. We'll all be happier.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn, Mr. Speaker, and an apology to the member. But he did bring some serious

myths to this chamber, which I think need to be pointed out.

He says that the city hasn't identified this as a project. I have a file full of reports from the city of Ottawa: June 13, 2007, a city report about the priority of this bridge; August 29, 2007, the city supported the Strandherd bridge as a priority in a list of top 20 investments; on October 23, the city of Ottawa voted to request federal and provincial funding for the bridge. And from November 2, I have the letter of all letters from the mayor and the general manager of the city of Ottawa:

"With council direction, we are hereby requesting that the provincial government fund a minimum of one third of the amount of funding in building the bridge and associated roadworks."

I can understand that since the two previous mayors of Ottawa, including the current one, did not support him in the last election, he might want to play with the facts a little bit, but the facts speak for themselves. On Friday, November 2, they wrote to the Minister of Transportation requesting support for this bridge.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

1100

RED TAPE AND REGULATORY
REVIEW ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA RÉVISION
DES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES
ET DES DISPOSITIONS RÉGLEMENTAIRES

Mr. Hillier moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to establish political oversight over legislation and regulations to reduce red tape and unjustified regulatory burdens / *Projet de loi 57, Loi établissant un régime de surveillance politique des lois et règlements afin de réduire les formalités administratives et les fardeaux réglementaires injustifiés.*

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: The short title for this bill is the Red Tape and Regulatory Review Act. I think, without question, all of us in this assembly can agree that regulations are more and more often, increasingly, being done outside of this assembly. The unaccountable bureaucracy is making regulations passed by cabinet and never coming back to this House for oversight and review. I think that's pretty clear.

But there is a consequence to it. We are the people who have been elected to make regulations and legislation. Not the bureaucracy, not the policy wonks—we. We are accountable to our residents and our constituents, but we don't see these regulations.

Over the last number of years, I've travelled extensively across this province, and we've seen what the cost is for these regulations, the unintended consequences of

them and how they harm and hurt our residents, harm and jeopardize our businesses and our economy. We must do something to prevent this.

We have seen that these regulations have often become counterproductive. They have been intended to achieve one thing, and they actually end up doing the opposite. We've also seen how these well-intended regulations are reducing and minimizing the role of people and their judgment; not recognizing the good judgement of people.

I guess I'd like to read one thing. We've seen all kinds of examples of these nanny state regulations that have been implemented. I'll read a passage from a fellow legislator back in the 1800s, Frédéric Bastiat. He talks about, "Thus, of course, the legislators must make plans for the people in order to save them from themselves."

This line of reasoning brings us to a challenging question. If people are as incapable, as immoral and as ignorant as the politicians indicate, then why is the right of the same people to vote defended with such passionate insistence? I think that's an important thing that we have to recognize. We have to take back control over regulations, over-intrusive regulations, and prevent them from diminishing our economy and harming our people.

It's not just me who believes this. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the largest business group in the country, also agrees. I'll just read a couple of quotes from the CFIB. Their members say: "The totality of provincial regulations far exceeds small business capacity to know, understand and comply." The regs they do know about are unreasonably expensive and onerous. Provincial government has no idea of the size of regulatory workload it places on small business, and there is no attempt by government to measure it. CFIB goes on to say that, currently, this burden on small and medium-sized enterprises is \$13 billion a year in this province—\$13 billion.

We know we're moving into an economic downturn. We have to start doing something about this. Furthermore, with the CFIB, 65% of all their members identify government regulation and paper burdens as their greatest concern. I could go on with many, many quotes from the CFIB. But it's not only the CFIB. As well, it's also Roger Martin and his task force on competitiveness. This is what Roger Martin has to say about our Ontario government's regulations and policies: "Ontario has one of the worst regimes for new business investment." He goes on to talk about "a balanced regulatory environment that meets the need for worker and consumer protection and for flexibility and responsiveness in resource allocation to the best opportunities for wealth creation." We know that the current approaches are not working. That's what Roger Martin has to say about our present regulatory regime.

The present Liberal government has also talked about the need for red tape and regulatory review. Mr. McGuinty, in 2005, said he wanted "to remove the burden of process from spending approvals," a sign that he's unhappy with bureaucrats who tie up government plans in red tape. That was June 30, 2005.

Here's a recent quote from the Premier: "Ontario's goal is to lead all Canadian jurisdictions in efforts to measure and reduce the regulatory burden." That's what the Ontario provincial Liberal government has recognized: that we must reduce regulations.

There are many, many examples: in my own riding, the Lafarge plant. For four years they've been trying to get approvals that would create more employment and improve our environment, and for four years they've been stuck up in process; red tape, counterproductive regulations. We have seen church suppers, butcher shops, sawmills and farmers' markets all feel the weight of unintended consequences of red tape.

We have an obligation. I believe all members of this House have an obligation not just to create nanny-state regulations but an obligation and a duty to fix those things that are wrong, those things that we know to be wrong. That is what we are elected for: to fix what is wrong and the wrongs that we have created.

We've seen all kinds of contractors who cannot hire apprentices.

This new bill—we even want to ban Tony the Tiger from advertising to children now.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Not Tony the Tiger.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Tony has to go.

Let's do the right thing. I believe that this bill, which creates a red tape and regulatory review committee—a standing committee in this House where every regulation that is drafted comes before the House for our review. We'll review it for a number of things. Is the public purpose identified so we can measure and hold it to account? Is the regulation counterproductive, or will it meet its intended objective? Who is best suited to be the regulator? Not always is government best suited to regulate; there are others out there who do quite a fine job regulating. Finally, we also have to look at: Does it infringe upon people's use and enjoyment of their property, and does it offer compensation if it does infringe?

Those are a few of the elements that this review committee can look at and make sure that what we do in this House can be held to account, our constituents know what we are bringing forth, and that we also understand if we are going to put another church supper or farmer's market under the hammer.

1110

I really ask everybody once again in this House: Let's look at this bill and do what is right for our residents, our constituents. Let's do what will help and improve our economy. Let us work together and make sure we have oversight of all regulations that come before the people that they must bear.

I want to thank you all for listening and taking time to consider this bill. I think it's a good bill, and I look forward to it being in committee where it can come under the scrutiny of the whole House to actually improve it where it can be improved.

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 57, An Act to establish political oversight over legis-

lation and regulations to reduce red tape and unjustified regulatory burdens on the businesses of Ontario.

I was listening to the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington when he was speaking about bureaucracy and he was speaking about civil servants. I want to disagree with him, because those people do an excellent job on behalf of all of us in the province of Ontario. As a member elected four years ago, I have moved from ministry to ministry. I don't claim at any time to know all the details of a ministry. I'm not specialized in any specifics in the area, so all of us from any party, any group, rely on them for expertise and advice. As you know, this place was founded to implement bills and regulations. We send those bills and regulations to be implemented by civil servants. That's why the origin of the laws and rules comes from this place. Civil servants are in charge of advising us and also trying to implement them in a fashion that respects and protects the people of Ontario.

I was listening to the member when he was speaking about the bill. He doesn't want any regulatory bodies. As you know, we are governed in Ontario by almost 37 regulatory bodies dealing with professions from medical to pharmacists to nurses etc., because they want to enhance capacity and protect the professions in a fashion that they can enhance the ability to serve the people of Ontario and also make sure that all the people being served by their professions are protected and safe. As you know, we have the medical professions, the nurses—they cannot hire anyone from the street without credentials, which are required in order to give them the ability of accreditation to practise and also deal with the people of Ontario.

You also talk about regulations being a burden on many small businesses. You mentioned butchers, farmers' markets. If you ask them to get rid of all the inspectors—the past Conservative government fired all the water inspectors; that's why we had the Walkerton tragedy. Also, if you're asking us to fire meat inspectors—I don't know if you remember Aylmer Meat Packers near London, but that disaster happened because it was not inspected regularly. There weren't enough people on the street to inspect those facilities to make sure the people of Ontario were eating safe, healthy meat.

I also want to respond to the member when he talked about our Premier. Yes, our Premier cares about cutting red tape. I'll give you an example. Mr. Speaker, you were here in this Legislature when we introduced many different bills to work with government ministries to break the silos by creating a one-stop-shopping website for visiting all the ministry sites. You can navigate the system easily and with no problem.

We also created a toll-free number for the people of Ontario to phone and ask. We also created a live answer. Instead of navigating the system of Yellow Pages and blue pages, now we have a person on the other end to answer your questions.

We also introduced in 2007 a bill, the Regulatory Modernization Act, which became effective January 17,

2008, and enabled regulatory ministries and other regulators to work together more effectively to protect the public interest.

We are on the road to harmonizing all the services, trying to break those silos to help the people of Ontario to navigate the system and be able to be served without any problem. But our obligation, as a government, as elected officials, is to protect the people by creating some kind of system they have to go through instead of being harmed, and holding people accountable. Can you imagine that anyone can open a butcher shop? Can you imagine that anyone can open a private practice to treat people? Can you imagine that anyone could do business without any regulations and accountability? Therefore, those are in there to protect the people to make sure everyone's safe.

Thank you again for letting me join the debate on this particular bill.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to say thank you to my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington for bringing forth this bill for private members' public business. I want to congratulate him for his election to the Legislature and also commend him for the passion with which he follows his principles and represents his people.

He alluded at one point to businesses, and how businesses in this province feel strangled by the regulatory burden that is placed on them by government. That has been a growing burden over several decades, but it has reached a point—and when business is tough and when the economy is weakening, and we're in that situation right now, where everybody recognizes just how costly that is to business. It costs businesses in this province billions of dollars a year just to meet the regulatory burden placed on them by government, with no benefit to the people.

I'm going to give you a couple of examples. Back in the early 1990s, there was a regulation written in the Environmental Protection Act that was interpreted by some bureaucrats to say that sawdust was a hazardous material. This is the product that you put on your flower beds. You go to the garden centre, buy it in bags, put it on your flower beds—various reasons.

In fact, years ago, Mr. Speaker—and not to point anything out, but you might even be older than me and you would remember a time, certainly in rural Ontario, when not everybody had electric power and they used iceboxes. They had ice houses. In the wintertime, they went out and they sawed ice on the lakes, took it home on horse-drawn sleighs and stored it in ice houses. What did they store it in so that they would have ice all summer long to keep their food from spoiling prematurely? What did they store it in? That hazardous product, sawdust.

We got some overly zealous bureaucrats—they stay up at night wondering, “Okay, what can we go after next? Look, we're making six figures here. We've got to pick on something. What can we go after next?” So several years ago they decided that sawdust was going to be the target.

Two particular people in my riding, Earl Saar and Glen Gulick, were challenged by this. Unfortunately, Mr.

Saar had to go to court and ended up closing his sawmill because the legal battle was protracted and he could not afford it. Another member of my community, Glen Gulick, who runs a sawmill down in Palmer Rapids, went the distance in court. It cost him hundreds of thousands of dollars, and at the end of the day, they're not going around bothering people in the mills anymore because it was just ludicrous. Silliness; absolute silliness. But how much of our taxpayers' dollars were spent on that because somebody decided, “Hey, here's a regulation that was written in 1990. Let's have some fun with it. Let's go bother the hardworking people in the province of Ontario trying to make a living”?

That's what happens with too much red tape. I don't know exactly where the term “red tape” comes from, but I'm sure it has something to do with Liberals because they're so proud of that red colour. Every time they get into power—the master of red tape prior to this government was the Peterson government. And now this government wants to get back on the red-tape wagon.

The previous government actually established a commission to reduce red tape. That is a laudable goal, and that's something we should be looking forward to.

I congratulate the member. I'll be supporting that motion.

1120

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to speak concerning Bill 57. I listened to what my friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke had to say. I just want to tell him that the red tape has been around in this country for a long time. In fact, in my first full-time job in the immigration department back in the early 1970s, we had red tape that was issued by the federal government of Canada. We used that red tape—it was a cloth-type tape—to wrap up the old files before they were sent to the archives. That is where it comes from. It was for old government files that were wrapped in red tape to signify that they were no longer active—just for the record.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Did you nickname it?

Mr. Michael Prue: It was called red tape.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What was the government at the time? Was it Liberal?

Mr. Michael Prue: It was indeed.

Now, what is purported to happen as a result of this bill is that the House will set a separate committee. I'm not sure whether the members—no one has spoken to that yet. We already have five or six standing committees. We also have the opportunity, as a House, from time to time to set up a select committee and to send bills to any of the committees or to any select committee. What is being proposed here is to set up a new and separate committee apart from the existing structure in this House. That committee would look at the regulatory burden it would look at the freedom and ownership of property, it would look at unjustified burdens, and it would look at whether the administrative body to whom the bill was sent was the appropriate body.

I'm not sure that the vehicle being used by this bill is the appropriate one, because what this bill in effect says

is that the standing committees of this House are not doing their job. The standing committees have the obligation—each and every one of them, be they the finance committee, the legislative committee or the regulations and private bills committee—all of them have the responsibility of looking at the regulatory burden; the freedom of ownership of property, if that is an issue; the burden on the taxpayer or on business or anyone else; and they also have the responsibility of explaining to this House if the bill is in some way going to the wrong body for implementation.

I am not sure what is going to happen by simply setting up another committee. This is a committee whose sole job will be to oversee the existing committees. Because as you read through the bill, each committee will continue to do its job and then the bill will be sent to this new separate, distinct committee that will look at red tape. They will hold the bill and they will make whatever recommendations they wish and hold it for up to 60 days before regulations can be implemented.

This is an ideological perspective of many people on the right. It is an ideological perspective which I do not share. Quite frankly, in my 20 years in public life—and this is my 20th year, both in the municipality and in this Legislature—I have had the highest regard for the people who work for both municipal governments and provincial governments. As a former civil servant, I can tell you, from when I was one of the people who worked for the federal government, that there is a place in our system for bureaucracy. There is a place in our system—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm being heckled.

There is a place in our system for the men and women who do the job that they are intended to do. It is our job as legislators to oversee that. It is our job to make the bills, it is the government's job to make the regulations, and it is our job collectively to oversee what is happening.

I have heard what the members had to say. I have heard what they had to say about overzealous people out there doing their jobs, who are looking at a regulation and trying to enforce something for which there is not much practical reason. I would agree. There was the whole sushi scandal, that the fish had to be frozen first before it could be eaten. If you are a sushi aficionado at all, you will know you don't do that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's not much good for the taste.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, it's not much good for the taste. But, with the greatest of respect, although that was determined by someone within the bureaucracy, it did not take very long for either the minister or this House to raise the issue and to stop it, and it has not taken very long in all of the jurisdictions to stop the overzealousness when and if this should occur.

I do have some real problems with ideological deregulation because I have seen places where I wish there was more regulation. I look at the Ontario Securities Commission and I wish there were more regulation. I

wish that people weren't at risk of losing their money. I look at what is happening in the United States and all around—the stuff about airlines; I look at the airlines. Do you remember that we deregulated all of the airlines? Can anybody honestly tell me that you think we get better service today, that you know the waiting times have been cut or that the people are any better with whom we deal, or that we're safer or—

Mr. Tim Hudak: I like Porter.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. We have a gentleman here who likes Porter. But apart from all of that, I don't think deregulations have helped the airlines and I don't think deregulations have helped the markets.

Look at what has happened in the markets in the United States and in Canada over the last couple of months. They've been on a see-saw because unfettered deregulation has occurred. You've seen things like Bear Stearns. You've seen the whole trap that even this government got caught in with asset-backed paper—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Commercial paper.

Mr. Michael Prue: —commercial paper, because it was deregulated, because nobody is out there watching it, because no government is there, no bureaucrat is there and no civil servant is there. Quite frankly, that causes me a great deal of difficulty. It causes me a great deal of difficulty, and I do acknowledge that a farmers' market may have been dealt with inappropriately. I do acknowledge that a church supper was looked at inappropriately, but those were relatively small things that were easily cured, and cured very quickly. The big things that need regulation are not there. I think that most people in our society understand the role of government. They understand that we in this Legislature are here to protect them many, many times from forces that are beyond their control—the overwhelming, huge forces—and that regulations sometimes help. I have some difficulty with the ideological position that regulation is not necessarily a good thing. I hold the opposite view: Regulation is a good thing, and if it's excessive, then it should be taken away.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's what we're talking about.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, no, that's not what this bill does. If that's what you're saying, that isn't what I've heard. With the greatest of respect, we have had situations—and I heard howls about Walkerton, but that was in part due to deregulations. We've had real problems in this House and the government, the new government, the Liberal government, because of the partial and botched deregulation of the hydro system. We still have not recovered from that.

So, with the greatest of respect to the mover of this bill, I believe that the House has the necessary tools at its disposal at this time. With the five standing committees and with any select committee that might be established, I believe that we have the wherewithal to establish regulations that are meaningful and effective. I believe that the civil servants in this province do a very good and excellent job in enforcing the regulations that are put forward by this House and by the governments from time

to time. I do not share the concern of the mover that we should proceed in this fashion, and therefore I cannot support the bill.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I just wanted to lay it right on the table that I will not be supporting this either. One of the things I want to make perfectly clear is that when good public policy comes forward, it comes forward in a balanced manner and being respectful of the vision of where you want to go, but it's based on good public policy with the understanding to minimize the effects on those who would be affected, such as small business.

I can tell you I do come from a small business background and, as many of you know, I also come from a municipal background. I want to share a little story; as you know, I was also the warden of the county while the downloading happened. One of the things that happened the first year I was warden was the Walkerton tragedy. At that time, while the Red Tape Commission of the previous government was ongoing, we begged the previous government, from a public health policy point of view, not to take away the ability for the medical officers of health to communicate with the water providers. But did they listen? No, they did not listen. It was shortly afterwards that the Walkerton tragedy happened. What do you think happened in our rural communities after that? Now I have the honour and privilege of representing Walkerton, and I can tell you they have come a long way, have built a very strong foundation, and their future looks brighter.

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But how did we begin the Red Tape Commission? We began with words like "incompetent," "unaccountable," slamming the bureaucracy. I looked to this member's maiden speech. That language was used then; that language is used today. When we begin in that manner, we know the outcome. We've seen the outcome; we've lived through the outcome. What do you think happened in ridings like Huron-Bruce when meat inspectors were fired? We produce the largest amount of beef that is consumed in this province. What do you think would have happened if that had gone on, if there hadn't been an election? I had the privilege of running the Minister of Agriculture from there. What do you think my beef gentlemen and women wanted to talk about? They wanted to talk about that issue. Was there ever any thought about what that would do to all of our communities, as you fired water inspectors, as you fired meat inspectors? What did you think was going to happen to our rural communities?

Now, specifically, comments are made about church suppers and farmers' markets. Today in the riding of Huron-Bruce we have more farmers' markets, and by the work that has been done by this government on this side, our church suppers are strong and they're providing the financial assistance that is needed to make sure that we have a strong foundation to provide the people of Huron-Bruce somewhere to go within their churches. We understand.

But make no mistake: That regulatory framework came in when? When did it begin? They now say, "Oh, it

wasn't me," but we know it was. Then, when it all became such an issue, they just couldn't remember. Suddenly a fog—

Interjection: A shock.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: —a shock came over them.

But one of the things I do want to talk about is this government's commitment. We have made a strong commitment to reduce the regulatory burden on Ontario businesses by 20% by the year 2011. We will do this in a balanced manner that is respectful of what is needed to ensure that all of us move forward in Ontario and that we move forward in a sustainable manner.

I do thank the honourable member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington for bringing it forward. It reinforces what that side of the House is all about, and I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on that again.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Now that the fairy tale has been completed, it's time to move on with the facts when it comes to red tape in the province of Ontario. In fact, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has said that a survey of the members indicates that red tape and regulation have increased during the past three years of Liberal government and estimates that the total burden is some \$13 billion annually weighing down on the business sector. We looked this up. The facts are actually the opposite of what the member from Huron-Bruce's fiction would tell you.

Since 2003, this government has created 437 new regulations and revoked only 81. So for every regulation they revoked, they added on 5.4 more regulations, increasing the burden on the backs of businesses and working families in Ontario. I congratulate the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington for bringing forward this bill—a weighty bill, not like some of the flighty stuff we see from across the floor but something of real substance.

I know the member from Huron-Bruce is anxious to rush to the defence of the Koebel brothers in their attack on the previous government. That's a choice, I guess, she makes here in the assembly. My recollection is something quite the opposite.

As well, red tape impacts on the delivery of services; not only on business but on social services agencies. By way of example, we found out that the Best Start program offered at St. Martin elementary school in Smithville will close permanently in June. It's an innovative program that combines daycare with programs to help parents to better their parenting skills, prepare children to enter school and offer screening to determine if children are reaching behavioural and developmental milestones. If they need the extra help, then they are referred for speech and language services. So parents like the Brucculieri family and Phil Ieluzzi—there are many examples, and I back them up—from across West Lincoln and neighbouring communities like Binbrook are calling on this government to challenge the Minister of Children and Youth Services to get directly involved and restore that program in Smithville. It's part of the vast community of the township of West Lincoln.

My last point is that the Red Tape Commission in Ontario was actually a world leader. They came to Ontario to see what the Mike Harris PC government was doing to reduce the red tape burden on businesses. They helped ministries revoke over 2,100 unnecessary regulations. They were advocates and helped 200 individual businesses with their red tape problems. They had a website established in 2000 that attracted 1,000 visits a month. With 15 different red tape reduction bills, it was a regular part of business in this Legislature to remove that burden. You see the opposite, and the Dalton McGuinty Liberals in my view have accomplished one thing, and that's cutting red tape lengthwise, increasing that burden.

The member is right. I strongly support this legislation.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First and foremost, I'll say for the record that I'm also unable to support the member's bill, Bill 57. It's fascinating; I think this bill does pinpoint the ideological differences in this House. Across the aisle we have the Liberal Party under Dalton McGuinty that runs their principles based on polls. To our right, we have the Progressive Conservatives, who base this particular bill on libertarian principles. They have ideological principles but they are principles we in the New Democratic Party absolutely disagree with. I'm going to focus on why we absolutely disagree with the foundations of libertarianism which go into this bill.

I have to say that I share some of the sentiment of the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. I certainly commend him for what he's done since he's been elected, particularly around the Tibetan cause, when he showed such courage. And I appreciate the sentiment for small business. I'm the small business critic for the New Democratic Party. Karl's butcher shop is in my riding. That was the butcher shop that, in part, was forced to close because of regulations that were put in place in a most untransparent manner, I must say, by this government.

The most egregious result—I think of unaccountability, untransparency and unelectability—is the Ontario Municipal Board, which, trust me, as a housing critic, we're always up against. I introduced a motion to reform that body. We would like to see it abolished as far as Toronto issues are concerned. So I appreciate the sentiment.

Are regulations necessary? Really, what we're saying is, "Is government necessary? Is government oversight and regulation, put into place by government, necessary?" Certainly we in the New Democratic Party would say, "Absolutely, it's necessary." You can have both. You can have vibrant economies and regulation and government oversight. We see this in Scandinavian Sweden, where you have an incredibly vibrant capitalist economy and yet you still have 85% unionization, you still have regulations in place and you have a way better quality of life than we experience in Ontario.

In fact, if you go back to the days of the lack of regulation at the turn of the century, when we fought to bring in child labour laws, when we fought to bring in labour laws of any kind, those were the days of lack of

regulation as well. Those were the days when libertarianism carried the day. We've been there; we've tried that. It didn't work.

Tommy Douglas once talked about the cats and the mice. If the mice keep electing the cats, the mice never get a say. We believe that you need to elect those who represent you, not represent the interests of big business or private property alone.

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Interestingly enough, the other concern I have about Bill 57 is that Bill 57 actually adds to the red tape and the bureaucracy of this government. It's another level of oversight. We think the committees should do their jobs better and more transparently, but we certainly don't want to blame the civil servants who work hard and long hours doing what they can to actually put into place what this Legislature should be doing and of course has done, sometimes for the betterment of Ontarians, sometimes not for the betterment of Ontarians.

So there's an ideological, principled difference between we in the New Democratic Party, who are social democrats, and elements of those in the Progressive Conservative Party who subscribe to the libertarian point of view—you know, less and less and less government. I should say, they share this with the Green Party, who are also libertarians at their core. We don't subscribe to that. We subscribe to responsible government, to an elected representative who stands up for their constituency, who is supported, yes, by a bureaucracy of civil servants, whom we believe in strongly, whom we think are doing an excellent job.

All we ask, of course, from across the aisle, is that they have more principles, not less, when they defend the rights of the mice, as Tommy Douglas would have it, and certainly, for transparency's sake, that when decisions are made by committees—and we have five standing committees already—those decisions are made known, that they're transparent decisions, that they're made known to small business. Because there's no doubt that some of what this government has done has been done on the backs of small business and to the detriment of small business—no question there.

We know that the McGuinty government is really beholden—we can see this from the wonderful work done by the Toronto Star in terms of who funded the Liberal Party in the last election—to banks, insurance companies; big business, in short.

We need more spokespeople for small business in this Legislature. There's no doubt about that. So I commend any imperative to defend small business, but not at the expense of the environment, health care, education and labour laws. In fact, I have a motion on the papers that calls for more inspections of places of employment, not less. We need more regulation, not less.

For regulatory bodies, we need more transparency. For bodies like the OMB that have never been elected, that are not accountable, we need accountability. We need to get rid of bodies that exist like that, that are accountable to no one. That's certainly true.

But where this bill, Bill 57, comes into play—unfortunately, I cannot support it. I cannot support the ideology that supports it, and I cannot support the principles that support it. We in the New Democratic Party are social democrats, and we stand up for the human rights of the majority of people, not the property rights of a few.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It is indeed a pleasure to speak this morning and to have an opportunity to reflect on Bill 57.

A wise person once reflected that those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.

Last night, I took the opportunity to go to the legislative library and pull out the report of the Walkerton inquiry. There was much talk this morning about the Red Tape Commission and what it was doing during those years. I want to just make reference to page 393 of the Walkerton report. It said:

“It was also clear that the Red Tape Commission was focusing on the nature and extent of regulations under the purview of the MOE. The MOE was subject to twice as many recommendations from the commission as any other ministry. In a consultation paper, the MOE stated that environmental protection agencies in many countries were reducing their emphasis on traditional ‘command and control’ regulatory approaches. In its view, there was a trend toward using environmental management approaches that were broader than simply mandatory requirements. This paper was published in July 1996, the same month in which the routine laboratory testing” in Ontario “was privatized. In reviewing the MOE’s regulatory reform package in September 1997, the Red Tape Commission recommended that certain regulations be replaced with voluntary guidelines. In making this recommendation, the commission relied on its position that ‘as a matter of principle, when we ask businesses to be good corporate citizens and in effect to police themselves, those matters should be agreed upon through voluntary agreements, MOUs (memorandums of understanding) and other instruments outside of regulations.’”

Justice O’Connor was extremely clear. He called a number of witnesses in that period of time: the deputy minister of the MOE and several officials within that ministry. They clearly put on the record—and I tell the member, he should take the time to review this report, because it certainly looks very clearly and very squarely—it put the MOE under the light; the Red Tape Commission attacked the Ministry of the Environment, reduced regulations and brought in the privatization of laboratory testing in the province of Ontario and in Justice O’Connor’s words, “was a contributing factor to the tragedy.” Seven people were killed, and still hundreds of people in that fine community are suffering a variety of diseases today, including kidney disease and other diseases directly related to the ingestion of water that was contaminated with *E. coli*.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Koebel brothers.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I’m saying very clearly the Koebel brothers were involved, but the work of the Red Tape Commission was clearly acknowledged in O’Connor’s

report as being a contributing factor to the tragedy at Walkerton. If they don’t want to read the full version, if they don’t have time to look at that, there is the summary version of the report on Walkerton: Events of May 2000.

In fact, when Justice O’Connor finished his review, his summary said, “I am satisfied that if the MOE”—I’ll repeat that again—“I am satisfied that if the MOE had adequately fulfilled its regulatory and oversight role, the tragedy in Walkerton would have been prevented (by the installation of continuous monitors) or at least significantly reduced in scope.

“It is worth observing that since the Walkerton tragedy, the government has recognized that improvements were needed in virtually all of the areas where I identify deficiencies and has taken steps to strengthen the MOE’s regulatory or oversight role.”

I can tell you, one of the key issues in my riding in the 2003 provincial election was the need to rebuild Ontario’s public service. They have seen what happened with the meat packer in Aylmer, Ontario. They were there to witness the tragedy that happened in Walkerton, Ontario. They said very clearly that there was a need of investment in key ministries in the province of Ontario to provide the necessary oversight. Those folks over there are living in fairyland if they don’t know the ramifications of the Walkerton inquiry. They should realize that their commission, the Red Tape Commission which they set up, destroyed the regulatory framework of the Ministry of the Environment. O’Connor clearly said that that led directly to some of the problems in the tragedy of Walkerton. We don’t want to go down that road again.

I understand there is a philosophical divide in this House on this issue, but for us over here, we want to make sure that there are resources in place, that we have continuous oversight in those key ministries that people in Ontario depend upon each and every day for the protection of their water, for the protection of their air, for the protection of activities that go on in their workplaces.

That’s what we’re here for and we’ll continue to move ahead in that direction.

Mr. Norm Miller: It’s my pleasure to add some comments today—short comments, because we have a lot of speakers who want to speak to the private member’s bill of the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

I will start off by saying that the member from Peterborough can spin Walkerton any way he likes, but I think most people recognize that the Koebel brothers were primarily responsible for this disaster. I know the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke described red tape as being mainly a Liberal creation, but in fact the term itself originates from when 18th-century English solicitors tied up their clients’ papers with red ribbon to prevent them from separating. To get at the documents, they literally had to take the time to remove the ribbon. By 1736, the process of formalizing documents by tying them in red tape had come to symbolize excessive bureaucratic process. Since this government has come into power now, in 2008, we have too much red tape.

As has been mentioned, there was in the past a Red Tape Commission. I sat as commissioner on that for my first couple of years in government, and it considered a business impact test for all new regulations; it dealt with the elimination of existing red tape. Let me emphasize that the Progressive Conservative definition of “red tape” does not include measures that are truly needed to protect our health, safety and the environment.

I want to give one example of a case I remember at the Red Tape Commission. I brought in with me to the Red Tape Commission 30 rejection letters from the Ministry of Health for applications for the northern health travel grant. That was because the process required that you had to get a signature for every single trip. So if you have a cancer patient who has 30 trips to get treatment, they need 30 letters signed by the doctor. Of course, when you're a cancer patient, the last thing you want to do is deal with forms.

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Not only that, when you get rejected for your claim, they send a separate letter out for every single claim. I brought all 30 letters in to show this ridiculous process. This Liberal government did away with the Red Tape Commission, and you know what? Today, in 2008, you still get the 30 rejection letters. That is absolutely ridiculous.

I was in small business in the past. I can tell you, as a small business person, you're trying to make a buck; you're trying to look after your clients' needs. Small business is the engine of the economy. It's creating the jobs in our province, and we need to make it so they are able to do their job and create those jobs.

Things have changed in the last number of years. Government used to be helpful. My experience with fire inspectors and the Ministry of Environment was that they would come on your property and be helpful and help you meet the regulations. Now we've become the police state, where the inspectors come in and all they do is lay charges. That's not helpful in terms of meeting the regulations. It's certainly not helpful for the success of those businesses.

I support this legislation. I am very happy to see that the new member has brought it forward, and there is a great need for it. I can tell you that from speaking and meeting with people in my riding.

The issue of meat inspectors was brought up, I think by the member from Huron–Bruce. I met with the OFA and farmers in the northern part of my riding, and what they told me was that the new government inspectors were doing less work than other inspectors. So they wanted more inspection to be able to carry out their work. What you've brought into effect is actually making it worse.

I might also add that this government, as of January 17 of this year, with the passing of the Regulatory Modernization Act, has actually created 200 new inspectors.

I need to sit down to let my other members speak.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I am very pleased to be able to participate in the debate this morning. I think one of the disappointments for me, in listening to other members

speak, is that they're not taking into account what this bill actually suggests.

First of all, it suggests that it be a tri-party arrangement. It is not something that would be done in secret. It also does nothing to create the kind of ideological framework that we are being accused of here.

Several people have made reference to the historical burden of red tape. One of the things that struck me when I was looking at this was the fact that in pre-revolutionary France that was one of the burdens that, quite frankly, created the ferment that became the French Revolution—the regulatory burden, the time that it took and the kind of frustration that it led to.

The people who want to push this into an ideological box need to think for a moment about the fact that we recognize that there's a time when a regulation is a method of protection. What we're talking about is when a regulation becomes a method of obstruction of an activity, where it actually, instead of protecting the activity, has now become a method of obstruction.

I think, when you listen to the members on this side, we have given you many examples—first of all, of the growth; secondly, of the kind of third party recognition by both the CFIB and Roger Martin's group. Certainly in my own riding, I'm contacted all the time on issues where people are struggling. Frankly, it becomes such a burden that they give up. They've gone through multiple government offices and phone numbers to get answers. A businessman in my riding recently contacted me about the zoning on a piece of property he owns. The local council has told him that they cannot do anything about it because it's covered by provincial legislation. I wrote on his behalf to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. And what was the answer? “Nothing to do with us. Contact your municipality.” Those are the kinds of things that build the kind of cynicism we see around us.

A local doctor wants to set up a family health team in the riding. He wants to bring doctors to an unserved area. What did the Ministry of Health tell him? “We'll add you to the ‘expressions of interest’ list.”

Those are the kinds of things that create the kind of frustration that this member is trying to prevent for all the people of Ontario. It has nothing to do with compromising safety. It has everything to do with, are you buying apples on the roadside? There's a different classification if they're in a bag or in a bin. That's how ridiculous it is when we are talking about red tape.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Randy Hillier: First off, I'd like to say to the honourable member from Huron–Bruce that it was two drunks in Walkerton, not the Red Tape Commission, that caused the problems there.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'd like the—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order. The member for Peterborough, order. I'd like the

member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington to consider withdrawing that word.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Which one, the drunks—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): You know very well which one.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'll withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd also like to say thank you to all the members here who spoke to this bill, especially the ones who read it and understood what was in it.

It causes me some concern, though, when I hear this debate and I hear the fearfulness of members on the other side, fearful of making decisions. They talk about my wanting to get rid of the bureaucracy. What I'm talking about is having members in this House have control and oversight of the regulations that the businesspeople and members of our province have to be burdened with and have to get through. This is not an attack on bureaucracy. It's not an attack on anybody. It's blaming us for not taking our job seriously.

I would say to the honourable members, I can understand why you don't want to have ownership of regulations. If you are not going to read the legislation before you pass it, it's pretty hard to get good decisions based on ignorance. The Liberals obviously want more red tape, even though their Premier says he wants to reduce red tape. It's just more broken promises from this Liberal government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

STRANDHERD-ARMSTRONG BRIDGE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall first deal with ballot item number 13.

Ms. MacLeod has moved private member's notice of motion number 3. 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.

After we've dealt with the next item, we'll call in the members.

RED TAPE AND REGULATORY REVIEW ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA RÉVISION DES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES ET DES DISPOSITIONS RÉGLEMENTAIRES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 14.

Mr. Hillier has moved second reading of Bill 57. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will call in the members on this as well.

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

The division bells rang from 1159 to 1204.

STRANDHERD-ARMSTRONG BRIDGE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Ms. MacLeod has moved private member's notice of motion number 3.

All those in favour, please stand until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.
Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Savoline, Joyce
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Shurman, Peter
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Gerretsen, John	Pendergast, Leeanna
Albanese, Laura	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Arthurs, Wayne	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Balkissoon, Bas	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Cansfield, Donna H.	McNeely, Phil	Smitherman, George
Chan, Michael	Meilleur, Madeleine	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Milloy, John	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Mitchell, Carol	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	Naqvi, Yasir	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Oraziotti, David	Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 18; the nays are 39.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Negated.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will now open the doors for 30 seconds before the next vote.

RED TAPE AND REGULATORY REVIEW ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LA RÉVISION DES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES ET DES DISPOSITIONS RÉGLEMENTAIRES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Hillier has moved second reading of Bill 57. All those in favour, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.
Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Savoline, Joyce
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Shurman, Peter
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Gerretsen, John	Pendergast, Leeanna
Albanese, Laura	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Arthurs, Wayne	Jaczek, Helena	Ramal, Khalil
Balkissoon, Bas	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Cansfield, Donna H.	McNeely, Phil	Smitherman, George
Chan, Michael	Meilleur, Madeleine	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Milloy, John	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Mitchell, Carol	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	Naqvi, Yasir	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Oraziotti, David	Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 18; the nays are 39.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negated.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair, and the House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1210 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROBERT SHERWOOD

Mr. Frank Klees: I rise today to pay tribute to a great Canadian, an exemplary citizen of this province, a dedicated municipal councillor, a tireless community activist and a loyal friend. Above all, Robert Clark Sherwood—"Bob" or "Sherwood" to all who knew him—was a devoted husband to Sally and a very proud father to sons Philip and Michael and daughters Tiffany and Paula.

On April 7, 2008, Bob left behind a legacy that will survive not only his remarkable life but will continue to enrich lives of future generations because of his selfless contributions to people, to organizations, to his community and to our province.

Bob was a man of his word who knew what he believed and why. He was a man of action. When he saw a need, he did what had to be done to meet that need and never hesitated to lean heavily on those around him to help him get the task done. Nowhere was that more evident than in his work to provide transit access to the disabled through the Markham Mobility Foundation.

Bob was always a leader, never a spectator. His contributions as a past president of the Thornhill Community Hockey League were recognized in the naming of a rink in his honour at the Thornhill Community Centre.

In addition to his service as a Markham councillor, Bob served as a member of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal, was a teaching professor at Seneca College and was the best salesman I ever met.

Bob Sherwood will never be forgotten. He has left us with memories and a legacy that will inspire his family and his friends for generations to come.

I am honoured to pay this tribute to a good friend here in the Ontario Legislature today.

HAMILTON EAST KIWANIS BOYS' AND GIRLS' CLUB

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm proud to stand in support of a local organization in my riding, the Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club. For over 60 years, they have provided recreational and social development programs for youth in Hamilton.

This month, the Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club launched their 2008 Send a Kid to Camp campaign. This initiative will provide a summer camp experience for scores of disadvantaged Hamilton children. In support of this initiative, I'm honoured to attend their pasta dinner fundraiser tonight.

Research has shown that summer camp experience has helped children and youth develop self-identity, self-worth, self-esteem, leadership skills and self-respect. In promoting programs like Send a Kid to Camp, it is my hope that the children and youth across Ontario will have the opportunity to access summer camps in their own communities.

In our province, we far too rarely recognize the importance of organizations like Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club, who build safe and supportive environments where children and youth can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers, build positive relationships and develop confidence and skills for life.

I am proud of the Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club and their history of levelling the playing field and providing opportunities for children and youth to reach their full potential.

I encourage everyone listening to reach out and support their local Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Clubs, especially on initiatives such as the Send a Kid to Camp campaign.

WILLIAM PATERSON

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise in the House today to celebrate the 105th birthday of William Paterson, who lives in my riding of York South–Weston.

Born during the turn of the century, in 1902, Mr. Paterson has survived two world wars, has seen over 30 provincial general elections come and go, has lived through many exciting times and faced memorable challenges in his lifetime.

More recently, Mr. Paterson has been enjoying the finer things in life, like spending time with loved ones, reading a good book and enjoying a good meal. Currently living at the Harold and Grace Baker Centre, a long-term health care facility in York South–Weston, Mr. Paterson enjoys a healthy and social lifestyle that provides him

with an excellent opportunity to interact with his peers in a comfortable and social environment.

As the baby boomer generation eases its way into retirement, the need and demand for these types of facilities will gradually increase. Our government has anticipated this demand and, since 2003, has increased funding for long-term-care facilities by nearly \$800 million, resulting in at least 6,100 new front-line staff for long-term-care residents.

For his many achievements and accomplishments in his long and distinguished life, I would ask everyone to join me in congratulating Mr. Paterson on celebrating his 105th birthday.

GEORGE McCAGUE

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise today to congratulate the honourable George Raymond McCague on being named the Elgin Blakely citizen of the year at the Rotary Club of Alliston's annual Rural/Urban Night. It was in Alliston that George served as town councillor, deputy reeve, reeve and mayor between 1960 and 1973.

He served as the warden of the county of Simcoe in 1966 and served again as mayor of the newly amalgamated town of New Tecumseth from 1992 to 1994. He is the first chairman of the Niagara Escarpment Commission and is a founding member and the first chair of the board of governors of Georgian College. He's the only person to have received both a fellowship and an honorary degree from the college.

George was elected to the Ontario Legislature in 1975 and went on to serve as the chair of cabinet and the Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet concurrently for almost a decade. He also served as Minister of Transportation and Communications, Minister of the Environment and Minister of Government Services before retiring from this Legislature in 1990.

In retirement, George has remained an active member of our community, coordinating the driver program for the Canadian Cancer Society. He's also very active with St. John's United Church, the New Tecumseh Improvement Society, the Stevenson Memorial Hospital Foundation and the Nottawasaga Foundation.

I want to thank the Rotary Club of Alliston for recognizing the remarkable life of George R. McCague. I consider myself fortunate to be counted among George's many friends and I wish him and his wife, Brigitte, many more years of good health and happiness. Congratulations, George.

BAYCREST

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I rise today to speak about one of the greatest hospitals in Ontario and our government's support of the outstanding work that's done there. Baycrest has strong roots and a history reaching back to 1918, when the Ezras Noshem Society collected money door to door to open the Toronto Jewish Old Folks Home in a small semi-detached home. Today, Baycrest provides

care and services to 2,500 people a day, including wellness programs, residential housing and outpatient clinics, a 472-bed nursing home and a 300-bed complex continuing care hospital facility with an acute care unit. Baycrest has also grown into one of the world's premier academic health science centres focused on aging.

Our government recognizes the contribution that Baycrest has made to the community and to science. Through the Ministry of Research and Innovation we are investing \$10 million towards the establishment of the Centre for Brain Fitness and the development of the world's first mobile testing unit for brain diseases. The new Centre for Brain Fitness will support Baycrest and its invaluable work, which is already leading to the discovery of important new tools and approaches to treating diseases associated with aging such as Alzheimer's. The funding from the province matches \$10 million from private donors and builds on a previous \$591,000 provincial investment in the brain project.

This investment is building on Ontario's strength and international leadership in the area of health research and advanced health technologies and on Baycrest's history as an essential part of the community.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to remind the McGuinty government that my caucus colleagues and I will not be bullied out of participating in the democratic process that our constituents and this government's taxpayers have elected all of us to do.

Today, I was expecting to see every committee room in use, full to the rafters with the citizens involved in creating well-rounded legislation and interacting with their elected officials. The reality is, the McGuinty government killed my private member's Bill 42 and countless other members' legislation because they are afraid of hearing from their own citizens. The Premier's office has clearly whipped all of their caucus to vote down the hard work and the democratic initiatives of their fellow members of the Legislature. The Liberal members could barely look me in the eye as they drew the last breath from my bill.

These are dark days in our democratic system, which will go from bad to worse when Minister Bryant's cabinet-friendly changes to the standing orders take place. Once again, a committee in unanimous agreement to involve all parties in the formulation process of new family-friendly standing orders has been usurped by this government for its own purposes, the result of which will set women's rights back 20 years in terms of access to the Ontario Legislature.

Very scary precedents are being set. This is democracy at its worst.

1340

JAY FEDOSOFF

Mr. Vic Dhillon: It's with great pleasure that I rise today to celebrate the fine educators of Brampton West.

Their hard work and dedication to our children should be recognized by this House. Recently I was informed that one of our finest educators had been nominated for the prestigious Premier's Award for Teaching Excellence. Earlier this week, it was announced that one of our teachers in Brampton West was awarded this great honour.

It is with genuine enthusiasm that I recognize Mr. Jay Fedosoff, who has been awarded the Premier's Award for Teaching Excellence. He has been selected to receive this honour out of hundreds of other many worthy nominees. Mr. Fedosoff teaches at the Roberta Bondar Public School, which is located in my riding. I'd just like to say hello to all the students who may have their TVs on and are watching question period.

Mr. Fedosoff has been described by his fellow teachers as someone who goes above and beyond the requirements of an educator. His tireless effort to educate our children is an example that all teachers should follow. It will be my pleasure to attend the awards reception to honour Mr. Fedosoff for this outstanding achievement.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I rise in the House to share some great news with all members, and that is that Ford of Canada has announced 500 new jobs at the plant's manufacturing facility in the community of Oakville. This great news comes on the heels of a recent announcement of Ford's intention to reopen the Windsor engine plant, resulting in 300 new jobs for that community.

Our government is working with the auto sector so that the next generation of vehicles will be researched, developed and built right here in Ontario. A \$100-million investment from this government's auto investment strategy helped Ford to make a \$1-billion investment in its Oakville plant to a flexible manufacturing facility. That's the first of its kind for Ford in Canada.

Ford's announcement of a third shift is in response to the tremendous demand for its Ford Edge and the Lincoln MKX models, and 229,000 of those have been sold, both built right here in Ontario, right in my community of Oakville. The third shift in Oakville will bring employment in the plant up to 3,500.

I want to recognize the great work that Ford is doing on research and innovation. The R&D centre is developing a large-scale stationary fuel cell system that converts paint shop emissions into hydrogen-rich fuel that generates electricity.

I congratulate Ford of Canada on their success. I know that, moving forward, our government is going to continue to support the type of example shown here of a partnership with a major employer that leads to more jobs and prosperity in this province.

CORNWALL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Mr. Jim Brownell: I was bemused to hear my provincial neighbour the good member from Leeds–Grenville commenting negatively about our government's plan for

the Cornwall Community Hospital, in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, during debate yesterday. We know what his party's plan was while they were in government: to issue empty promises and deliver nothing.

Under the governance of Dalton McGuinty, and with the unwavering support of my friend the Minister of Health, my riding is now the beneficiary of a plan that actually involves action. With the recent announcement that the Cornwall Community Hospital's main redevelopment project has now gone to tender, and we now have three hospital projects moving forward in my riding, we have progress.

Combine these with a new community health centre, a new hospice, an increased number of procedures being performed and health care workers who are being respected, and we are in the midst of a health care renaissance that will serve my riding, which will have the most state-of-the-art health care delivery services to be found anywhere in Ontario. This is good news not just for the people of my riding, but for those families and businesses looking to settle there. Quality hospitals are a great incentive. That's our plan.

The Conservative plan, as we recall, was to cut \$3 billion out of health care in Ontario. I would remind my good neighbour that the people of Cornwall, the riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and all of Ontario had a recent opportunity to decide which plan they believed served them best, except I think perhaps his party leader is in the best position to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Brant.

WEARING OF PINS

Mr. Dave Levac: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In consultation with the whips of all parties, I seek unanimous consent to wear the pins of the League of Ukrainian Canadians in recognition of their efforts to raise awareness of the Holodomor, a man-made famine in Ukraine from 1932 to 33. The pins have been supplied in each of the galleries where required.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Brant seeks unanimous consent to don the pins. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HOLODOMOR MEMORIAL DAY ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE JOUR COMMÉMORATIF DE L'HOLODOMOR

Mr. Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 61, An Act to proclaim Holodomor Memorial Day / Projet de loi 61, Loi proclamant le Jour commémoratif de l'Holodomor.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Dave Levac: If passed, this bill will provide for the declaration of Holodomor Memorial Day on the fourth Saturday in November of each year in the province of Ontario. It will extend an annual commemoration of the victims of the Holodomor to Ontario. A memorial day will provide an opportunity to reflect on and to educate the public about the crimes against humanity that occurred in the Ukraine from 1932 to 1933, in which as many as 10 million Ukrainians perished.

I know that we'll be introducing our very special guests in the gallery shortly.

FISH AND WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION AMENDMENT ACT
(DOUBLE-CRESTED
CORMORANTS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA PROTECTION DU POISSON
ET DE LA FAUNE
(CORMORANS À AIGRETTES)

Mr. Brown moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 62, An Act to amend the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 62, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la protection du poisson et de la faune.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: This bill amends the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997, to permit the hunting of double-crested cormorants. I thank our former colleague Ernie Parsons for this bill.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Dufferin–Caledon: Seated in the west members' gallery, we'd like to welcome the board and staff from Families for a Secure Future.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Remember, we are going to hold our applause until the end—I think at the request of you.

On behalf of the member from Newmarket–Aurora: In the west members' gallery, we'd like to welcome Carol Cologne of Newmarket.

On behalf of the member from Mississauga–Erindale, we'd like to welcome Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, former president of India, and His Excellency R.L. Narayan, High Commissioner of India, who are visiting the Ontario Legislature today.

On behalf of page Georgia LaMarre: In the west public gallery, we would like to welcome Kathy LaMarre, her grandmother; Moe LaMarre, her grandfather; and Janice LaMarre, her aunt.

On behalf of the member from Brant: In the west public gallery, I'd like to welcome his guests Olexander Danyleiko, Oleh Romanyshyn, Chrystyna Bidiak, Orest Steciw, Andrew Gregorovich, Irene Mycak, Oksana Prociuk Ciz, Paul Grod, Mark Shwec, Dr. John Skrypuch, Mrs. Peggy Galan, Mrs. Zena Semiwoles, Father Stephan Didur, Mrs. Anna Lagoznik and Mr. Jerry Lagoznik.

Welcome to all of our guests here today.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like, with unanimous consent, to move a motion that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should immediately declare the day April 17 a day to commemorate Holodomor, the genocide of the Ukrainian people.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is there consent for this motion?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I heard a no.

Order, please. It's now time for oral questions.

1350

ORAL QUESTIONS

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Today, it was announced that hundreds more Ontario workers will soon become unemployed. At GM in Oshawa, 1,000 more workers have been handed pink slips; in Cambridge, at the Closetmaid plant, 500 will soon be wondering how to feed their families; and the list goes on and on.

There are economic forces at work in Ontario that employers and employees cannot control, and so they look to their government for help and guidance. But instead of reacting accordingly, the Premier stubbornly stands by his policies of patchwork patronage and partisanship.

Manufacturers are worried, unions are worried, investors are worried—everyone but this government seems to be worried. Acting Premier, without blaming anyone or anything else, why are you so lackadaisically allowing Ontario to become a have-not province?

Hon. George Smitherman: First off, I think an important point is that we, on behalf of the people of Ontario, simply don't share the pessimism and negativity that is inherent in the opposition benches. Of course, an example of the honourable member's reach is to raise the circumstance related to General Motors, where the events relate to a strike in the supply chain.

We do recognize, of course, that factors beyond Ontario's borders and control—related to softness in the US economy, as one example—do have implications in

Ontario. That's why we've been very proud to make investments in the people of Ontario, in the recognition that Ontario's economic interests are based on the strong foundation of the quality of the minds and capabilities of our people and the capacity of our infrastructure to respond. These are foundational elements of our strategy, and they stand in contrast to the negativity—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I see you couldn't resist blaming the United States. The Deputy Premier's optimism is endearing, but inappropriate when hundreds of thousands of Ontarians suffer because of his inaction.

If you were truly on the right track, would unemployment continue to grow? I say no. Would workers and employers continue to flee in record numbers from Ontario? No. Would we continue to shed private sector jobs at this alarming rate? I say no. Would the only growth exist in high-paid bureaucratic jobs? I say no. Even with your tax-and-spend policies, would teachers and nurses be laid off? I say no. And would economists be predicting that Ontario will soon be a have-not province? I say no.

Deputy Premier, your economic programs are clearly not working. Would you listen to the economists who cry for effective, wide-ranging and long-term reforms that address Ontario's lagging competitiveness? Will you read the writing on the wall and take action?

Hon. George Smitherman: Even when the writing on the wall is in front of the honourable member's nose, he still can't read it right. As an example, he wants to drive down Ontario by talking about employment. In January, February and March, job gains: 57,300, 97% of them from the private sector—29,000 in construction; 6,000 in professional, scientific and technical services; and other business services created 18,000 new jobs.

The honourable member says don't dare relate the fact that Ontario, the most trade-oriented jurisdiction in the world, might have some influence from being a border community to the United States and the softness of their economy. Of course that can't be any part of the explanation for the challenges in Ontario. Every economist knows that's part of it.

What we're looking for from the other side is a change in position from the negativity—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It must be nice to be so blissfully unaware. The Premier would rather defend his own failing promises than admit his mistakes and begin the long, hard, arduous journey to healing our economy. Handouts and welfare for giant corporations here and there will not help the 82% of Ontario workers who are employed by small and medium-sized businesses. Excessive taxes will not bring in revenues for public services when all the businesses have left town. Perhaps the Premier thinks that he doesn't need to reach out to the little guy during non-election years, but he'll be sorry when his legacy is tainted by economic failure.

Premier, will you do the right thing now and save Ontario from the McGuinty recession?

Hon. George Smitherman: Ontarians, it seems, need to be saved from the pessimism and negativity that run at the core of the opposition party in the province of Ontario. Imagine speaking about our province that way and speaking about the people of the province of Ontario that way.

On the issue of taxes, just as one example, we've taken initiatives to cut business taxes—and they voted against them—to reduce the business education taxes and to expedite that initiative, as an example, in northern Ontario. They voted against that initiative. But they come to this Legislature every day and they say, "Just give away billions of dollars in revenue that are depended upon to fund the core services in the province of Ontario." Then, in the very next breath, they talk about those areas where they would like to see additional public investment and expenditure made.

Not only are they negative, but their policies are incoherent; on the one hand, saying, "Give back billions of dollars in revenue," and on the other hand saying, "Spend more on services." We know where they took us last time when they had the chance and we're not going back.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Deputy Premier and has to do with the proposed rule changes. Given the Premier's remarks yesterday, since he's not here today, I guess he's not working.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind the honourable member that we don't make reference to if members are present or not.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Giving direction to the Speaker now—I want to read a quote for the Deputy Premier: "Your democracy should work in your best interests, not in the best interests of the party in power. The rules of the Ontario Legislature should help your elected MPPs represent you, not make it easier for the Premier and his unelected advisors and spin doctors to shut you out."

I wonder, Deputy Premier, if you remember that promise from the Liberal Party's 2003 platform? Your rule changes do just the opposite of your promise. You're shutting the public out, you're shutting the opposition out, and you're shutting the press gallery out. Will you stop, and refer it to a committee in the Legislature?

Hon. George Smitherman: In a moment, I'll look forward to the chance for the government House leader to add to this discussion on our behalf, but a couple of points that I think are very salient: Firstly, the honourable member ought to know that we have memories. We remember that when Mike Harris was the Premier, he didn't even come to question period. We remember a party that actually took the budget of the government of Ontario out of the Legislature and took it to Magna. We know the party—they sit right there—that did not even

send bills to legislative committees. So the honourable member, a veteran of this House, ought to know that people have memories as well.

On this point that they're pretending around, the honourable member misunderstands deliberately what was said yesterday. The Premier spoke very directly about the necessity of members having Fridays in their riding; that's why it was one of the alterations that was made from the earlier proposal. We recognized that the important work of members is not just here in the Legislature, but elsewhere, and it's no good for the honourable member—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think we all heard what the Premier said, and it was demeaning to anyone who serves in this place. In terms of the memory of the minister, it's what you would describe as a selective memory. He seems to have memory failure when it comes to commitments made by his party. I would suggest that's caused by a virus known as majority government.

I have another quote for the minister to forget his party ever made: "We will bring a team approach to governing. We will respect and draw on the talents and expertise of every representative, including opposition members." There's another promise lost in the ether of unfettered power with a Liberal majority government. There was no real consultation. These changes are being force-fed to serve the interests of the Liberal government.

Will the Deputy Premier explain why it's in the best interests of the public to schedule question period in the morning, making it less likely the public will attend, limiting noon-hour electronic coverage—

1400

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Deputy Premier?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the government House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I say to the member that the government believes it is in the public interest, because we are expanding debate time; we are increasing MPP private members' business, something that I believe was proposed by the official opposition already; and we are also eliminating evening sittings, which I know was a subject of great concern to the official opposition in many discussions with respect to how the Legislature ought to be run. We believe it is in the public interest, because the Legislature will be working in the morning and the afternoon, we will have more debate time and we'll have more private members' business.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: With the way the government House leader has handled this issue, he has become the poster boy for Liberal arrogance. There's been absolutely no consultation in a meaningful way with the opposition parties.

It's bad enough for the opposition to be treated shabbily, but the government is treating the media with the same disdain, and this is becoming a pattern. We saw it with the efforts of the Minister of Economic Develop-

ment and Trade to hide her trip to China from the press. We saw it with the Premier's goons chasing press gallery members away from the meeting—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask that you withdraw the comment referring to staff as you did.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: How do you know they are staff? Anyway, I withdraw.

They chased the press gallery away from a meeting the Premier had with Chinese officials. This is a government with an agenda of media manipulation and control. These rule changes will reduce media access up to 50%, and I ask the House leader to halt the process, keep his party's promises and refer this issue to an all-party legislative committee.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The facts are the opposite. In fact, access to the executive by the media will take place, obviously, before question period, during question period and, as is the tradition, in the scrums after question period. In addition to that, the executive will appear in the afternoons during routine proceedings, on the way in to routine proceedings and on the way out of routine proceedings, in addition to caucus and cabinet meetings, at which members of the executive council and MPPs will be available on the way in to those meetings and on the way out of those meetings. The official opposition seems to be describing the situation that existed between 1995 and 2003, not the situation we're seeking to create with these reforms.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is also to the Deputy Premier. His government is not fooling anyone by calling their anti-democratic changes family friendly. Refusing to convene a family-friendly legislative committee and ramming the rules through the House without committee review at all is not family friendly or democratic. When will the Deputy Premier admit that the rule changes that are supposed to be family friendly are anything but?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the government House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I say to the member that the number one concern expressed by members of the official opposition and the third party—that was focused upon—with respect to how this House runs was evening sittings. It is the crux of this proposal that the time that would otherwise be spent in evening sittings is now being spent in the morning and in the afternoon. It means that evening sittings are all but eliminated. It is in that way that the government proposal is seeking to address the very issue that the member is speaking to. I appreciate what the member has said, and listened to her caucus colleagues on the subject of a 9 a.m. or 9:30 a.m. question period start. It was on that basis that we moved it forward. Surely all members of this House can agree that getting to this place at 10:45 a.m. every day is—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think that what the government House leader would admit, which everyone in this House knows, is that the family-friendly committee never even met. The government made all these decisions without any committee process whatsoever—totally undemocratic. The rule changes are not about anything to do with night sittings; they're about pushing question period up to the first part of the day, and that is also profoundly anti-democratic. This is a direct attack on the most important accountability mechanism in the British parliamentary system, and everybody in this chamber knows it.

A government that tries to shut down opposition by undermining question period is an arrogant government with something to hide. Why is this government so adamant about getting rid of oversight and accountability in this chamber?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Again, the opposite is true. There is in fact more accountability, because there's more debate time. The member wants more accountability to the media. I say to the member, instead of stories being filed immediately after question period and there being no opportunity for any of the three parties to fact-check and make counter-arguments, now question period will be finished in time for all three parties to participate in a debate afterwards, if you want to focus on the media.

If you want to focus on the Legislature, I say to the member, we have more debate time. Surely the member isn't trying to tell me that the debate that takes place in this place in the evening is something worth salvaging. You argued for getting rid of evening sittings. You argued for more debate times. That's exactly what's in this proposal.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Depriving the opposition of the appropriate time that it needs to prepare for question period is profoundly anti-democratic and does not serve the best interest of Ontarians. In fact, as a *Globe and Mail* columnist noted today, "it's not too trite to say that democracy depends on a good grilling of ministers." Why is this government launching a direct attack on democracy?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I think it is going to be very difficult to convince the people who we represent that a 10:45 a.m. question period is an assault on anything. I remind the member that question period length is exactly the same. The certainty around when question period starts is finally entrenched.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The longest question period in Canada.

Hon. Michael Bryant: It is the longest question period in Canada, the member and the co-dean of this Legislature reminds me.

No more evening sittings. More debate time. In fact, we have more private members' business. This is an effort to modernize the Legislature. And as the official opposition has called for, there will be an opportunity for a committee to review it over the summer, and this Legislature will have a chance to review it again in the fall. That's a lot more consideration than what happened

when that party was in power, and when that party was in power.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, for many, many years, New Democrats and our sisters and brothers in the labour movement have called for an end to the perverse incentives to employers under the WSIB's experience rating program. The minister has admitted that this program doesn't work. How many more workers in this province need to be injured or killed before the minister finally does the right thing and pulls the plug on this program?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member for the question, and I wonder whether he listened to the responses in the two previous times that he's asked the question. The chair of the WSIB has, along with myself, suggested that indeed the experience rating system is in need of reform. That is precisely why the chair has embarked on a review that he hopes will come forward sooner rather than later. In the long shot—it may be, potentially, about a 12-month review. He's going to try to reduce that time because we do want to see some reforms to that initiative.

This is but one part of our efforts to try to reduce workplace injuries. The 200 additional health and safety inspectors that we have hired are doing a very effective job in increasing workplace safety. I'll be looking forward in a speech to a group on Monday afternoon or morning—I can't remember which—discussing how far we've gone in reaching our goals.

Mr. Paul Miller: The minister likes to pretend that he has a completely arm's-length relationship with the WSIB. He likes to pretend that he has no influence over the timing of the WSIB program reviews. It states clearly in the memorandum of understanding between the ministry and the WSIB that a minister can direct the auditor to do an audit of any WSIB program. If he won't end the program immediately, when will this minister use the authority he has and bring the Auditor General to review the deeply flawed experience rating program?

1410

Hon. Brad Duguid: The chair is reviewing the program. He's looking at ways to make the program better and more effective, and that's something I would think the member opposite would support. Obviously, he doesn't; obviously, he's looking for something else.

But our priority is the health and safety of workers across this province, and that's why we hired 200 additional health and safety officers; that's why the WSIB and the Ministry of Labour are working in partnership to make sure that workers and employers right across this province are aware of their rights and obligations to ensure that the health and safety of workers are protected.

This isn't a government of half measures; we want to do everything we possibly can. Unlike the NDP, we want to do everything we possibly can to improve the health and safety of workers across this province. That's why we want to look at a more effective incentive program,

that's why we're continuing to invest in enforcement like no party has before us and that's why we'll continue to work with our partners—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Paul Miller: I must say, that's an amazing statement from the minister. This has been going on for 10 years, under his watch. And he challenges me that I'm not considering supporting something? Who do you think is complaining about it?

Last week, I raised the case of Gordie Heffern, who died in 2001 from injuries he suffered in an explosion in a Sudbury nickel refinery. His employer was fined \$375,000. In the year after the incident, the employer received an experience rating rebate from the WSIB totaling \$5 million. Good safety program, Minister.

We're talking about real people here, but this government is rewarding companies with a perverse program that undermines health and safety, forces people back to work before they're ready to go back and enables companies to hide accident reports while reaping huge profits. I'll give the minister one more chance to show that he cares. Why won't he commit to the ending of this immoral—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Unlike previous governments—I think the experience rating originally came in under the NDP, and of course it was accentuated under the Tories—when we see something that needs fixing, we do it. That's why the chair of the WSIB is actively engaged in a review to fix this system.

We agree that the system needs fixing and we're going to fix that system. But we're going to ensure that as we fix the incentives and make sure that the incentives are more effective, we're also going to continue our good work in enforcement and work hard to meet the goals that were set five years ago.

I'll have an opportunity on Monday to make an announcement to indicate just how far we've gotten, but I can tell you that we're very much in keeping with meeting our goal of a 20% reduction in workplace injuries. That's what it's all about: improving the health and safety in workplaces across this province.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Acting Premier. Which part of the following from the government House leader do you disagree with?

"I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion concerning a panel of members to consider ways to make the assembly more family friendly...."

"Thanks to the House leaders for the official opposition and the third party and to the government caucus as well.

"I move that the House leaders of the recognized parties shall agree to terms, and an all-party panel composed of no more than two members from each recognized

party shall be appointed to make recommendations to the Speaker on ways to make working at the Ontario Legislature more family friendly for members of provincial Parliament."

What changed between December 11, 2007, and yesterday?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the government House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: There is a word for what the member is doing right now, but it's unparliamentary. If the member kept reading the motion, the member would know—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Anything that causes any disorder in the House—if there's any sense of that, I would just ask that members please be conscious. Withdraw.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Withdrawn.

The member knows very well—because we had a number of conversations about this, and the member's House leader knows and in fact the House leader for the third party knows—that when it comes to the standing order changes, there was a very clear understanding that discussions of those standing order changes were not going to be delegated to that committee but were rather going to be dealt with by the House leaders. The House leaders don't agree with what the government has come forward with, but the House leaders retain the discretion to discuss it. So the member knows that that committee that she is raising there and that she brought forward and we all supported in fact does not deal with the standing order changes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm not sure who he was speaking with over here, but he certainly hasn't responded to any of my letters in the last three months.

I'm not sure. What part of "unanimous consent" does he not understand? What happened between December 11, 2007, and yesterday? Is it second-term-itis? Are you complacent, a little arrogant? You don't think you have to work with us; you can dictate to us?

On December 11, the Liberals unanimously supported an all-party committee to make Queen's Park more family friendly. Yesterday, the Liberals tabled a unilateral cabinet-friendly motion to change the rules here without ever striking a family-friendly panel, even though they've used the term to hide behind.

My question again to the Acting Premier: How does the government plan to restore parliamentary democracy in this place when they abuse the rules by disregarding unanimous decisions of this Legislature?

Hon. Michael Bryant: What happened between February 11—the day after the Premier notified all members of this House of the proposed changes—and today, when that very member said, "I'm encouraged that the government is thinking outside the box and looking at ways to make the Legislature more family friendly"?

I say to the member, she is opposing it for reasons which I don't understand. I agree with her statement on

February 11. I don't know what happened to the member's view between February 11 until now, but I can assure the member that the government looks forward to this debate over the coming weeks and looks forward to the opportunity, in the event that this order passes, to have it reviewed over the summer and come back to the Legislature again.

I can assure the member, that is so much more consultation and debate than what happened when that party was in power.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Education. I used to know Minister Wynne in a former role, when she used to speak passionately against school closures—spirited in her defence of small schools. I used to know the Liberal Party on this issue as well. The minister's colleague Gerard Kennedy, a former minister, told the Conservatives on a regular basis, "You're ripping the heart out of communities when you close schools." That used to be the Liberal brand. What happened to Kathleen Wynne, the person whom trustees and parents knew and loved?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the member that we refer to ridings or ministries, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: She's right here.

I want to address the issue of the plan that the Toronto District School Board is putting forward. The Toronto District School Board has entered into an exercise. They put out a report yesterday, and I want to just read some of the things that they are considering, because I think the reality is that every board—and in this year, when there is a government in place that is putting more money into the board, this board has 31,000 fewer students and we put \$360 million into the board—and still, boards need capital plans.

Here's what the board is looking at: They're looking at ways to address capital assets and programs in the development of a plan going forward. "Is there a preferred grade structure for our schools to support student success? Should we set standards to achieve the optimal size of the school?" Those questions are exactly the kinds of questions that boards should be looking at as they plan going forward.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Here is what Mr. McGuinty used to say to former Premier Eves:

"You should know, and I'm sure the minister would be interested in listening to this"—actually, it was the minister—"that in the States today they are moving toward smaller schools, taking a large high school, for example, and cutting it into four, because they've learned that better learning takes place in a smaller school environment."

Boards in Ontario are seriously considering the closure of many schools: Thames Valley, Near North, Upper Grand, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Hamilton-Wentworth

Catholic, Toronto District, Keewatin-Patricia, Rainy River and Lakehead, among others. Will the real Minister Wynne stop the school closure epidemic?

1420

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It would be fundamentally irresponsible for us, in a climate of declining enrolment—in 60 of our 72 boards, there are going to be 90,000 fewer students next year than there were in 2003. Every school board in this province has to deal with this reality. The member opposite's former colleague, Irene Atkinson, who is the trustee in Parkdale-High Park and as good an NDPer as he is, has been part of this process. What she says is, "I'm not a fan of it, but it's something we absolutely must get on with.... We can't be like ostriches with our heads in the sand and say it's business as usual."

That is exactly where the board needs to go. They need a capital plan. They recognize that they have \$360 million more and 31,000 fewer students.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Dave Levac: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Road safety is paramount to every resident in Ontario. Nobody has a monopoly on wanting to keep our roads safe. As our population increases, we know that the number of drivers on the roads does too. I know that this government has done many things to improve road safety—along with previous governments that have done things to improve road safety—including the announcement today.

We have done stuff like improving bus safety rules, continued road and highway repairs, construction worker protection while they're working on the highway, recent truck speed regulations coming forward for to us decide on, and OPP officer protection—turning to the left when you see the lights.

I'm hoping the minister can share with my constituents and with all of us in Ontario just what the announcement was and what we are going to do for further safety regulations.

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's an excellent question from the member. Road safety, as you know, is something that is important to every Ontarian, and even though we enjoy some of the safest roads in all of North America, there is always more we can do to keep our communities and our roads safe.

Earlier this morning, I had the pleasure of joining a number of Ontario's road safety partners at a CAA driver training centre to announce an overhaul of Ontario's beginner driver education program. We understand that every single person enrolled in a beginner driver education course needs to receive quality driver education from qualified instructors, and our new beginner driver education curriculum standards have been introduced to do just that. The new curriculum standards clearly reflect our high expectations of novice drivers, with tough new standards to give novice drivers the skills they need to stay safe on the roads of Ontario.

I know that the member will want to explore this further in a supplementary question.

Mr. Dave Levac: Indeed I shall. My constituents, as well as all constituents in Ontario, want to feel confident, when they enrol their children in driving school and when family members and friends enrol in driving school, that these beginner driver education students are learning the skills they need to drive safely and correctly on our highways. We all want to have the confidence and abilities of other drivers we share the roads with every day.

I know that there are very good driver education instructors, and we cannot be criticizing those who did a great job for us over the years. There have been those, unfortunately, who have not behaved properly. We know that we want to get them away from teaching our kids bad habits, or not teaching them at all.

Can the Minister of Transportation please tell this House exactly what the new curriculum is, and, for that matter, how those instructors will be improved and how we're going to accomplish that in as little time as possible?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I certainly can. This curriculum, as you know, reflects the work of many experts in the field. My ministry partnered with the Canadian Standards Association and industry stakeholders to design and develop an effective set of curriculum standards that reflect the challenges new drivers face on today's roads. We also sought advice from several road safety organizations, including the Traffic Injury Research Foundation, the Ontario Safety League and the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

Our new curriculum requirements have been designed to zero in on the needs of novice drivers by giving them the tools they need to drive safely, which include dealing with driver distractions, responding effectively to hazards on the road, sharing the road with others, learning about the dangers of impaired driving and making responsible choices before getting behind the wheel of a car. This is the kind of skill and knowledge that new drivers need when making—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister. New question.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. This week, Dr. Dennis Psutka, a veteran ER doctor who worked for seven years as the deputy minister responsible for ER services, remarked that the long waits in the emergency room departments today are the worst he has ever seen.

In fact, according to the Hamilton Spectator on April 15, Dr. Psutka stated,

“When I came to work this morning, there were 19 holdovers (patients) admitted into ER rooms who were still waiting for beds ... I'm sitting here and watching and all I can say is ‘For shame.... We are in trouble.’”

Minister, these patients can't be admitted, because there are 105 people at Hamilton Health Sciences waiting

for long-term care and 105 at St. Joe's alternative level. When are you going to keep your five-year promise to unplug the emergency departments?

Hon. George Smitherman: I'm very pleased that in our government's recent budget we've been able to identify some resources that, alongside other resources that are being deployed at present, will be able to enhance the circumstance in some of Ontario's hospital emergency rooms.

I agree that they're not serving consistently at a level that is satisfactory. Accordingly, that's why we've asked Dr. Alan Hudson, who has very successfully implemented our wait times strategy, to move forward on that. The wait times strategy, by the way, today received a very glowing report from the Wait Times Alliance, part of the Canadian Medical Association, which gives us every hope that we can make substantial progress on what is obviously a key irritant for health care practitioners and a very sizable challenge as well for too many of our patients.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It's unbelievable that this minister would stand in his place after almost five years and not have a plan to unplug emergency rooms. He has been warned on how many different occasions by doctors, patients and everybody else in this province?

I would say to you, there was no new, immediate funding to address the emergency room problems, and that's pointed out in the newspaper article as well. In that same article, it indicates that Hamilton officials estimate that there may be about 100 times this year when there's only one ambulance, or not one ambulance at all, available to respond to emergencies. And you know why. Because the paramedics have to wait at the hospital until they can discharge their patients. There are no beds, so they can't admit them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Question.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I again refer you to Dr. Psutka's comments. The situation is the worst he's ever seen. When are you going to do more than give us empty rhetoric about doing something in the future—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, the honourable member obviously isn't able to read the budget. If she were, she would know that there are additional resources allocated for the purposes of emergency room backlogs. I look forward to estimates where I can take the former minister through the budget and show her what health care investments look like. In addition, I can say that there's an additional \$90 million for aging at home.

But to the point the honourable member raises in her very own community of Kitchener-Waterloo, we've worked very vigorously at Grand River and substantially improved the performance of the emergency room there. This is a very good example of what we can do in a variety of other sites across the province of Ontario.

With respect to the circumstances in Hamilton, with respect to some of the challenges related to 911 response calls, I can tell the honourable member that within a very

few short weeks we'll be in a position to make an announcement that should substantially benefit that circumstance. We're working very vigorously, with great leadership in the form of Dr. Alan Hudson. He's been lauded for his efforts—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

1430

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Eight-year-old Jared Osidacz was murdered by his father, a convicted spousal abuser, with whom this government actually made a deal to spare him jail time. What compelling reason has this minister received from the coroner—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The comment is not in order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'll withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What compelling reason has this minister received from the coroner, and what written explanation he has been given for refusing the stand-alone inquest into Jared's death?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I addressed the question yesterday, and let me reinforce: I am very, very confident that the inquest the coroner's office will be holding will be able to provide the answers to a hurting mother and a hurting grandfather. I am very confident that the concerns that mother has will be addressed in the inquest, as the chief coroner has certainly communicated to us, and to the public at large through the media, that the questions will certainly be answered during that inquest.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: But the question was about what the reasons were that the coroner had for not having a stand-alone inquest. However, the minister is deciding to hide Jared's death behind his murderer's inquest. That's his choice.

But if the minister even had a vestige of compassion, the slightest softening of his steely heart, he would use the powers he has under section 22 of the Coroners Act to ensure justice for the murder of this little boy, Jared. Instead, the McGuinty government is dragging the mother and her family through hell once again. Jared and his mother were victims of a horrendous domestic violence situation. The McGuinty government failed to protect them from it in the first place. Why is the minister failing them again by not ordering the stand-alone inquest?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I hope that at the end of the day the process doesn't fail the hurting mother and the hurting grandfather. I am confident that in no way will Jared's death be lost in the pending inquest. The chief coroner has provided information that questions related to Jared's death will be dealt with. I believe that it is very important that this inquest be allowed to go through the normal process and bring back the recommendations.

I look forward to the results of the inquest. I am confident. I hope, with all my heart—be it a steely heart,

as she would say; I hope it's a compassionate heart—that those questions from that hurting mother are answered in the inquest.

CHILDREN'S TREATMENT CENTRES

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. KidsAbility is a treatment centre that provides services for families and children from my riding and from a number of others in the area. KidsAbility supports children who have both physical and developmental disabilities. KidsAbility provides important services, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy.

My colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga had the privilege of meeting this week with Stephen Swatridge, who is the CEO of KidsAbility, and Gary Pooley, who is the chair of the board. I've also met regularly, as has my colleague from Kitchener Centre, over the last several years to discuss treatment services for children. Happily, they are expanding in our area. Could the minister please inform the House what our government is doing to help KidsAbility provide these crucial services for children who—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to thank the member for Guelph–Wellington for her advocacy for KidsAbility, and also all of the members in the region: the member for Kitchener–Conestoga, the member for Kitchener Centre, and also the member for Kitchener–Waterloo—although I must say I'm having a little difficulty reconciling her support for increased funding for KidsAbility and her opposition to all of the investments we've made for kids, and their continued advice to cut taxes and, presumably, services.

However, KidsAbility is a superb children's treatment centre. I want to take this opportunity to thank their board, their management and their staff for the great work they are doing. I'm proud to say we've increased funding to KidsAbility by over 30% since we were elected in 2003. They're receiving well over \$1 million more each year to help provide better services for children. KidsAbility provides essential support for children in the Kitchener–Waterloo region and I look forward to continuing to work with them.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I know that the people in my riding of Guelph and throughout Waterloo and Wellington appreciate hearing that our government places such value on the good work of KidsAbility.

I know also that this past Friday, my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga had the privilege of attending the Kids Can't Wait radiothon. Parents and community members, together with local radio stations such as 570 Talk News and 96.7 CHYM FM, raised over \$200,000 in support of KidsAbility. In June, I'm going to participate in Guelph's fundraiser for KidsAbility. They're doing a walkathon.

We know how valuable these services are, not just in our area but throughout the province. Could the minister

indicate what our government has done to support children's treatment centres across—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: In our recent budget, we provided \$15 million in capital funding for community agencies that serve children and youth, including \$3 million for children's treatment centres. This funding is in addition to \$4 million we provided to CTCs last year and \$10 million in 2006-07. In fact, since we were elected, we've increased funding to CTCs by about \$30 million.

I can assure you that we are working diligently to help provide greater access to services for special-needs children and youth. I'm proud of what we've been able to do. We've almost tripled the number of kids receiving autism treatment. We're providing 3,000 families with respite services and helping 800 kids with autism attend summer camp.

Thanks to our investments, over 10,000 more children with mental health issues are receiving services than when we took office. We'll continue to support children with special needs so they have the opportunity to achieve their potential.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, a real question. It's for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Families for a Secure Future is a provincial organization serving 80 individuals with developmental—

Interjections.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Community and Social Services. Do I get some time back for that?

Interjection: Go ahead.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Families for a Secure Future is a provincial organization serving 80 individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. They have been working with your ministry since January when they were told that the 25-year funding they had secured from a private foundation had stopped. Minister, we both know the excellent work that Families for a Secure Future has been able to achieve with three part-time staff in the past seven years. You know that the \$90,000 they're asking for wouldn't cover a single crisis bed if one of these families has a setback—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me thank the member of the opposite party for her question, and I want to thank the members of the board who are here today from Families for a Secure Future for being part of a meeting today and also for the hard work they are doing in the community.

Our government remains committed to supporting organizations that do great work like they do. That's why we provided them with the \$24,000 they requested to help them finish their year this year.

Over our mandate, the McGuinty government has provided almost half a billion dollars in annual funding for the developmental service sector. That is an increase of 34% since 2002-03. This includes the very good passport program that we have—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Minister, I know you're concerned. I'm concerned. The families who are in the gallery are concerned. But we need some action, and you're the minister and the only person in this House who can act. Your government is closing residential facilities, yet you're not providing families with the support they need in the community. You know your inaction will force some of the families into crises. Over 130 people in your ministry earn over \$100,000 a year, and you're telling me you can't find \$90,000?

Will you not provide Families for a Secure Future with the financing they need to find alternative private funding?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: We have consulted with the families and we have listened to the families. What the families want is the passport money. This is our priority. This was initiated two years ago. There is the passport money.

I'm always very surprised that this question comes from a party that cut social services by 22.7% and that also wants to reduce the budget by \$3 billion. What are they going to cut besides schools, social services and hospitals? This government has invested half a billion dollars and will continue to invest. Our priority is to create beds, and for the passport program.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Deputy Premier. This government is quick to announce new jobs or reactivated jobs—a few hundred here, a few hundred there; especially in one city, Oakville—but never to talk about the hundreds of thousands of lost jobs. The most recent casualty is Closetmaid Corp., which has announced plans to close its Cambridge plant, sending 500 more workers to the unemployment line, along with 1,000 workers in Hamilton and Burlington for Ancam.

Why is this McGuinty government allowing the Waterloo region to continue its slide into recession as workers see their wages decrease, their cost of living increase and their pensions disappear?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to remind the honourable member that in the first three months of this year—in January, February and March—there were 57,000 additional jobs.

We all recognize that there are sectors in the Ontario economy which are experiencing particular hardships, and some regions alongside that. That's why in our recent budget, as a government, we've been prepared to commit to working with the people of the province of Ontario to build up their skills, which is essential to making sure that Ontario has good economic prospects as

we go forward, alongside substantial investments in infrastructure.

Our five-point plan cuts business taxes, invests in infrastructure, supports innovation, partners with business and invests in the skills of our people. We think that that's always been the strength of Ontario, the quality of our people.

Accordingly, that's why you can see why investing in education, in retraining and in post-secondary education stand as such crucial priorities. The people in this province know that the government is prepared to work alongside them and invest alongside them to make sure our economy is strong going forward.

Mr. Paul Miller: To the Deputy Premier, 57,000 low-paying jobs in the service industry. Over the past three years, more than 6,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have been lost in the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge area. This government can take action to help the workers. How? Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Quebec all have highly successful refundable manufacturing investment tax credits. Ontario does not.

How many more workers have to lose their jobs in the Waterloo region and Hamilton before this government implements a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, on the issue of refundable, it was disappointing to watch the New Democratic Party vote against the flow of \$190 million in tax rebates, taxes paid back to the manufacturing sector in the province of Ontario. That's cash in hand to support people at a time that they badly need it.

With respect to his characterization of the jobs, the member is wrong: 55,000, or 97%, were in the private sector; 29,000 in construction. This is just one example of jobs that certainly don't classify as low wage.

To the point, we've had a very, very good investment this week from a highly regarded German manufacturer in Waterloo region that announced that it has selected that region, known for 20 years as Canada's technology triangle, for a new North American manufacturing facility.

We recognize that there are challenges in the economy. That's why our budget invested in our people, in the skills of our people and in the infrastructure of our province, so that we can make sure that, going forward, we have a strong economy that provides—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: My question is for the Attorney General. This is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. During this time, we recognize the commitment of thousands of professionals and volunteers who offer victims of crime helping hands, compassionate hearts and much-needed guidance and advice.

In the immediate aftermath of a violent incident, victims are often in shock and very vulnerable. Can the

Attorney General please tell the House what this government is doing to ensure that victims of crimes and their families receive the supports and services they need to overcome trauma and to begin to rebuild their lives?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I'd like to thank the member from Kitchener-Conestoga for her lifetime advocacy for victims of violence and her work as parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for women's issues.

We can touch on two points. We've been building, for four and a half years now, better support systems for victims of violence, in particular, domestic violence. Victim Crisis Assistance and Referral Services connect with victims in 50 judicial districts across this province. They provide them with access to counselling and other services to support them as they move through the immediate aftermath of a horrible incident.

A program that was started last year—the victim quick response program—is receiving a 150% increase this year, to almost \$6 million. That provides payment for services such as counselling, access to housing, access to living expenses and, in the most horrible cases, funeral expenses.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary. The member from York South-Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is also for the Attorney General.

We know that victims of domestic violence are overwhelmingly women and children. We also know that women suffering from domestic abuse face a number of challenges when seeking relief. While services have improved in the last few years, we all want to ensure that we continue to find ways to assist women at this most critical time.

I know that in my riding of York South-Weston, in the northwest part of Toronto, the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto operates a satellite office that works to help women in need get the support they require. Agencies working with women escaping abuse often do so quietly and without fanfare, even though their work is so crucial.

Can the Attorney General tell this House what this government is doing to ensure that women have access to assistance from the moment they report their abuse?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: This is a very important point because studies will show that when women receive access within 24 hours of an act of abuse, they are much more confident, much more able to access the type of supportive services that exist.

That's why this morning, with my colleagues the minister responsible for women's issues and her parliamentary assistant, the member from Kitchener-Conestoga, we announced a \$1.7-million increase to the victim/witness assistance program so we can provide women with access within 24 hours to that type of assistance.

This announcement was accompanied by several others. The PAR program—partner assault response program—which not only provides the abuser with counselling but the victim with support to get to a more pro-

tected, safer place: We increased the funding by 20%. The supervised access program for children: We doubled the funding for that.

It's part of our network of services to make sure that victims of domestic abuse have the assistance—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Mr. Peter Shurman: To the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration: How inclusive are we in Ontario when 30,000 new Ontarians literally have the welcome mat ripped out from under them?

Adult learners are waiting on pins and needles to find out which ministry wants to take responsibility for them and where or if they will be able to continue to upgrade their language skills. In my diverse riding of Thornhill, for example, we have hundreds, even thousands, of people who arrived years ago and are still virtual newcomers.

My question is, will you continue to allow 30,000 adult learners to fall through the cracks of your government's obvious neglect?

Hon. Michael Chan: Canada is a place of opportunity for newcomers. Every year, we have over 200,000 newcomers coming to Canada, and half of them, about 130,000, choose Ontario as their home. Helping newcomers is my ministry's service to them. We have bridge training for jobs, we have new settlement services for them, and, most important of all, we provide language training for them. And ESL training is one of the targeted services we have for newcomers. As a matter of fact, every year, we budget over \$50 million in adult non-credit training for newcomers, and, compared to last year, this year, we actually increased it by another 8%. This year, we will be funding a total of \$2,880 per ADE to newcomers—

1450

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Shurman: In the McGuinty government, it is clear that the left hand doesn't really know what the right hand is doing. The trend that this government continues to follow is to throw money—and we just heard about it—at an issue, without foresight or planning, and then simply to walk away. That is not good enough for the 30,000 adult learners and their children who are caught in the middle of yet another procedural oversight of this administration.

My question to the minister is, why does this government continue to operate its ministries in virtual silos and hurt people who need services like these adult learners?

Hon. Michael Chan: In 2003, we had schools in chaos, hospital closings and roads and bridges in ruins. Since 2003, we've had a 22% increase in adult non-credit training for newcomers. As I mentioned before, we're at 8%, compared to last year, and now the total is \$2,880 per ADE.

Our government is committed to helping newcomers—helping them to engage in employment; helping them to bridge their training; helping them to find a job; and, most importantly, helping them in their education with English and French so that they can prosper in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. That ends the time for question period.

Just a gentle reminder to members that their expense reports for election expenses are due. Make sure that you have those completed if you want to enjoy your seats.

Petitions?

PETITIONS

HOLODOMOR

Mr. Dave Levac: I have literally thousands of names on a petition, on behalf of the League of Ukrainian Canadians, the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and Ukrainian-Canadian communities across Ontario, including many non-Ukrainians:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas as many as over 10 million Ukrainians perished from 1932 to 1933 as victims of the man-made famine in Ukraine named Holodomor; and

“Whereas the government of Ukraine, the United States House of Representatives, the United States Senate, the Senate of Canada, UNESCO, the United Nations, and over 40 other jurisdictions around the world have officially condemned Holodomor; and

“Whereas Ukrainian communities worldwide will commemorate Holodomor Memorial Day on the fourth Saturday in November of this year, which will fall on Saturday, November 22, 2008;

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

“We call on the government of Ontario:

“(1) to recognize the man-made famine in Ukraine of 1932 to 1933, named Holodomor; and

“(2) to extend its respect to Ukrainian-Canadians as they commemorate Holodomor Memorial Day on the fourth Saturday in November of this year; and

“(3) to request unanimous support of the passing of a private member's bill, the Holodomor Memorial Day Act, in the Legislature of Ontario that may establish the fourth Saturday in November in every year as Holodomor Memorial Day in Ontario; and”—

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Levac: To listen to the heckling in petition time is rather interesting, Speaker, to say the least.

“(4) to accept the signed statements, bearing over 3,300 signatures in support of the passing of the private member's bill, the Holodomor Memorial Day Act, in the Legislature of Ontario.”

I respectfully sign my name to the petition in respect of the Ukrainians who are here today.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our spiritual and parliamentary tradition since it was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I affix my name in full support.

DISABLED PERSONS PARKING PERMIT PROGRAM

Mr. Michael A. Brown: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there currently exist problems of exposure to theft and the weather when displaying a disabled person parking permit on a motorcycle while parked in a disabled parking space;

"We, the undersigned, petition our members of Parliament to promote the development of a special, fixed permit as proposed by the Bikers Rights Organization, for use by disabled persons who ride or are passengers on motorcycles, even if that requires an amendment to the Highway Traffic Act."

This is signed by Ontarians all across the province, and I'm pleased to affix my signature. Again, I thank Michael Warren for his hard work on this particular petition.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of the daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

Prakash is here to receive my petition.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have five petitions today to support Bill 11—children's smoke-free cars.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas children exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk for respiratory illnesses including asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, as well as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and increased incidences of cancer and heart disease in adulthood; and

"Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present, as they have concluded that levels of second-hand smoke can be 23 times more concentrated in a vehicle than in a house because circulation is restricted within a small space; and

"Whereas the Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network indicates that eight in 10 (80%) of Ontarians support 'legislation that would ban smoking in cars and other private vehicles where a child or adolescent under 16 years of age is present'; and

"Whereas Nova Scotia, California, Puerto Rico, and South Australia recently joined several jurisdictions of the United States of America in banning smoking in vehicles carrying children;

"We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to approve Bill 11 and amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children 16 years of age and under."

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

LORD'S PRAYER

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer’s message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their ‘daily bread’ and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

“Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord’s Prayer;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord’s Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature.”

It’s signed by many people from the Haliburton area of my riding. I’ll hand it to page Jordynne.

1500

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Charles Sousa: “Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

““Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I affix my signature, and provide it to Georgia for delivery.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas GO Transit:

“—has been plagued with frequent service disruptions, often leading to trip cancellations and stranding passengers at GO stations;

“—has consistently shown poor on-time performance, which declines each year;

“—has blamed many of the disruptions on long-delayed construction projects it has recently undertaken;...

“—fails to provide accurate information when major delays occur;

“—shows little regard for passengers’ schedules or concerns; and

“—just approved a fare hike effective March 15, 2008, in spite of consistently poor performance and customer service;

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

“—to require GO Transit to provide a rebate on fares paid when GO Transit equipment failure, late arrival of equipment, staff shortage or rail congestion results in a cancellation of trains or a delay of more than 20 minutes to final destination;

“—better and more timely notification of transit cancellations, modifications and delays; and

“—More cars added to trains to ease the overcrowding, which causes safety concerns.”

This petition has 11,336 online names, although my page contains somewhat fewer than that.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, presented to me by a number of people from, among other places, Mississauga, Erin and throughout Halton region, which reads as follows:

“Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

“Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this petition, and to ask page Adam to carry it for me.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas children exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk for respiratory illnesses including asthma,

bronchitis and pneumonia, as well as sudden infant death syndrome ... and increased incidences of cancer and heart disease in adulthood; and

“Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present, as they have concluded that levels of second-hand smoke can be 23 times more concentrated in a vehicle than in a house because circulation is restricted within a small space; and

“Whereas the Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network indicates that eight in 10 (80%) of Ontarians support ‘legislation that would ban smoking in cars and other private vehicles where a child or adolescent under 16 years of age is present’; and

“Whereas Nova Scotia, California, Puerto Rico, and South Australia recently joined several jurisdictions of the United States of America in banning smoking in vehicles carrying children;

“We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to approve Bill 11 and amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children 16 years of age and under.”

This was brought to me by several students from I. E. Weldon Secondary School, and I appreciate their support in this matter.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have another petition that’s just arrived:

“Children and smoke-free cars—Support Bill 11.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas children exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk for respiratory illnesses including asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, as well as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and increased incidences of cancer and heart disease in adulthood; and

“Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present, as they have concluded that levels of second-hand smoke can be 23 times more concentrated in a vehicle than in a house because circulation is restricted within a small space; and

“Whereas the Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network indicates that eight in 10 (80%) of Ontarians support ‘legislation that would ban smoking in cars and other private vehicles where a child or adolescent under 16 years of age is present’; and

“Whereas Nova Scotia, California, Puerto Rico, and South Australia recently joined several other jurisdictions of the United States of America in banning smoking in vehicles carrying children;

“We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to approve Bill 11 and amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children 16 years of age and under.”

I’ll affix my signature to this petition.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario. I’ll read the penultimate paragraph:

“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. I affix my name thereto and give it to page Victoria.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Bob Delaney: I guess I have the last petition of the week.

This is a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It’s been sent by several dozen people, largely from the city of Toronto. It reads as follows:

“Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

“Whereas only police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

“Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

“Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver’s licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities.”

Anything that gets guns off the streets is worth signing. I’m pleased to sign this petition and to ask page Ida to carry it for me.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I’d like to rise, pursuant to standing order 55, and give the House business for next week.

On Monday, April 21, in the afternoon, it will be government notice of motion number 59, related to standing order changes.

On Tuesday, April 22, in the afternoon: also government notice of motion number 59; in the evening, a motion related to Bill 35, the Investing in Ontario Act.

On Wednesday, April 23: also notice of motion number 59; in the evening, Bill 16, third reading, day one, of the sex offender act.

On Thursday, April 24: in the afternoon, Bill 48, the Payday Loans Act, first day of second reading.

1510

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (SPEED-LIMITING SYSTEMS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (SYSTÈMES LIMITEURS DE VITESSE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 15, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 41, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act in relation to the use of speed-limiting systems in commercial motor vehicles / Projet de loi 41, Loi modifiant le Code de la route relativement à l'utilisation de systèmes limiteurs de vitesse dans les véhicules utilitaires.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 41, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act in relation to the use of speed-limiting systems in commercial motor vehicles, legislation which I think we colloquially refer to as the speed-limiting bill.

This is one of those bills that I call a win-win bill, where you're trying to achieve two purposes, two objects, in one particular bill—a two-in-one deal, as I would say. On the one hand, we're ensuring road safety, we're ensuring that our roads are safe from trucks which might speed and endanger other people's lives, but on the other hand, we're also reducing our environmental footprint. We're ensuring that we're reducing the impact of greenhouse gas emissions within our environment and doing our part in Ontario to ensure that our environment is a clean one. This is the kind of legislation that we need to work on more and more in the future, where we are trying to achieve a particular purpose, but if we can also reduce our environmental footprint along with it, we are in a win-win situation.

During the debate, I will take some time to speak to both those impacts: The impact in relation to road safety and also the impact in relation to greenhouse gas emissions. Of course, I will be remiss if I do not discuss the wishes and desires of my constituency, those who live in my community of Ottawa Centre, in terms of what they would like to see in reducing the speed limits on trucks, on large commercial motor vehicles, and in decreasing our environmental footprint, trying to ensure that we tackle the issue in relation to climate change.

Let me talk about the first key benefit of this piece of legislation, and that is road safety, something I think we've all experienced, all of us who drive. We're blessed to live in a large province that is connected throughout by major highways. Given that we live in a fairly globalized economy, we travel and drive often and we have families who live all around. My parents, for example, live in

Oakville, and I get the opportunity to drive from Ottawa to Oakville all the time.

We're faced with this dilemma of being on highways and being stuck between speeding trucks, large trucks. You're caught in that dilemma of respecting the trucks—because they're mammoth and you're in a small car—but also ensuring that you're safe and your families are safe. That problem obviously gets compounded in winter months, when there's snow, slush, freezing rain and whatnot.

This particular legislation, if passed, will require large trucks to have a maximum speed capped at 105 kilometres per hour. That is a key element in ensuring safety on our roads; that is, ensuring that trucks do not speed, that they do not try to pass each other at excessive speeds of 120 or 125 kilometres per hour; that they actually follow; they cannot exceed 105 kilometres per hour.

The research shows that excessive speed is a factor in 23% of crashes, not to mention that 100 million fewer litres of diesel fuel are used by the trucking industry because of the speed which is undertaken. I was looking at the Ontario traffic survey data, which showed that between 30% and 60% of large trucks travelling on 400-series highways are speeding in excess of 105 kilometres an hour, and 15% of trucks are exceeding 110 kilometres per hour. Studies further show that casualties would be reduced by 7% for every one-kilometre-per-hour reduction in average vehicle speed. That is a significant impact which is being achieved through this legislation.

In my riding of Ottawa Centre, Highway 417 passes right through the heart of my riding, right in the middle, and given that it's a 400-series highway, we have trucks passing through. Of course, highways are used by families, members of the community who are travelling from one part of the city to another, and folks within my own riding take the highway to quickly get to the other part of the riding.

I was looking at some statistics from Ottawa, and the estimated average daily traffic on Highway 416 was approximately 20,000 in 2007, of which approximately 10% is truck traffic. In one week in 2007, Highway 417 received, on average, 127,554 vehicles, and 6% of that was truck traffic. That's a large number, especially if you think of it in the context of a downtown community. You've got big trailers running through the heart of Ottawa Centre. This is a significant number, and limiting their speed to 105 kilometres per hour by law through speed-limiting devices is a good initiative that will protect lives and ensure there's safety on the highways. Given that this is a downtown community, a lot of times, in my riding of Ottawa Centre, homes are built right along the highway, separated by just simple noise barriers. This is the type of legislation that really ensures we do not suffer some sort of major calamity because of a traffic accident.

Let me go to the second beneficial aspect of this legislation; that is, the impact on the environment. We know that studies show that by reducing speed, we are reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 280,000 tonnes. That's the

equivalent of taking 2,700 tractor-trailers off the road each year. That's a significant impact.

I was very interested to note that one third of greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario are from the transportation sector, and 84% of that is from road transportation. We are making a significant impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions through limiting the speed of trucks.

Once again, I come back to my community of Ottawa Centre, which is right in the middle of the city, and the highway passes through it. We want to ensure that we reduce noise and air pollution caused by truck traffic on Highway 417, and this kind of legislation will ensure that.

One of the things I always like to do, and a habit I'm trying to get into when I'm looking at a piece of legislation, is to look at how other jurisdictions are treating the same type of legislation. I noticed that Ontario is going to be a leader in North America if this bill is passed. Although Quebec has speed-limiter legislation, they have yet to enact it. They're waiting for a Transport Canada study dealing with the safety impact of speed-limiting devices. Alberta has no legislation on speed limiters, Newfoundland has nothing and British Columbia is studying it. Similarly, as I understand it, there is no such legislation in the United States. Clearly, Ontario is taking a positive step forward to ensure road safety and beneficial environmental impacts through the passage of this legislation. In the European Union, we've seen that such legislation exists, and in the United Kingdom in certain instances, and Australia as well. I'm very happy and very pleased to see that we are taking a positive step and that all members of this Legislature are supporting this legislation.

The other good thing, given that we're dealing with commercial trucks, is that we need to ensure we are working with the business community. We need to ensure we're working with the trucking industry on this matter, that we are partnering and they are on board with this particular legislation. I'm happy to note that both the Ontario Trucking Association and the American Trucking Association are in favour of this particular piece of legislation, along with the Ontario Provincial Police, Pollution Probe, the Ontario Safety League, the Insurance Bureau of Canada—the list goes on and on. I think it is a significant part of this legislation that we've got the business community on board, that they recognize the necessity to enhance road safety and also help our environment and ensure we reduce the impact of greenhouse gas emissions.

I talked about Ottawa Centre, and I want to address that issue a little bit more because it is important. Highway 417—the Queensway, as we call it—is very much part and parcel of my riding. It sort of divides it right in the middle, and we notice this constant traffic. There's a lot of work which is going on in Ottawa, with the cross-border traffic from Quebec. We see a lot of truck traffic coming into Ontario which sort of rips through the middle of the city and then gets on the Queensway, and when it goes westward, it takes High-

way 417. This legislation will be a welcome sign for the people who live in Ottawa Centre who are right in the middle, next to a highway, because they will see a reduction in their greenhouse gas emissions. They will see that we are taking a positive direction towards pollution control and also promoting safety on the roads.

1520

In conclusion, I want to say that this is, like I said earlier, a win-win piece of legislation, a two-in-one deal. We're trying to accomplish two things with one piece of legislation. We're ensuring that our lives and the lives of our families and children are protected when they're on the highways. As we are going, during holidays, meeting our families, we are ensuring that we arrive home safely. Also, we're taking that active step in protecting our environment. I really encourage all the members of this Legislative Assembly to vote in favour of this particular bill.

In addition, we should look into ways in the future to create more bills like this where we can achieve a public policy objective and also have an impact on the environment, because we owe it to our future generations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I do want to commend the member from Ottawa Centre for the rendition of the bill. As I was intently listening to the presentation, there was one thing that caught my attention. It was the actual speed limit that he inferred, at least, or said was in the bill, and that speed limit would in fact solve a lot of our problems on the road. But as I read the bill, I see actually no numbers in the bill at all.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It was in my bill.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Exactly. That may bring it out. My colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock had this bill before, and she actually had the number in the bill, which people appreciated. During the debate, I know there were some people who supported the bill who said, "The number is a little too low; we should have it at 110," and there were some who said, "No, the speed limit is 100; it should be set at 100."

Maybe the member from Ottawa Centre actually read the other bill. It was, of course, the better of the two bills, and maybe that's the one he was speaking to. His suggestion that the number is in the bill is going to somewhat come as a surprise to the people who wanted to debate last time what that number should be, because this number is going to be determined behind closed doors by the Minister of Transportation, as they see fit, again taking away the total democracy of it.

The people can't be involved in the legislation, and this is such a good piece of legislation. It would have been a very good opportunity for the government to come forward and say, "Let the people decide. Let the people help us come up with the right number," rather than, "Pass the bill, take it into the office, sit there and make sure we put in the number that we want for the people we've been talking to, and don't worry about the rest of the public." I would hope that that would be an

amendment that would be introduced as we continue to debate on this bill.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: First, I want to commend my colleague from Ottawa Centre, who brings something very important to this Legislature. In a very short while, he has proven his knowledge and his capability of bringing good research to any kind of intervention he's made in here. I think we all appreciate that and will enjoy working with the member for Ottawa Centre for many years to come.

First, I want to say to the members of the Legislature that this is a bill essentially about the environment. It is essentially about reducing the amount of emissions, the amount of greenhouse gases that go into the environment; 280,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced simply by reducing the speed that our large trucks go. By reducing it to 105 kilometres in the 400 series, we will save 280,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases. I think that's extraordinarily significant.

I was going to remind members of what other people have said about this bill. I was just looking at the Manitoulin Recorder—the Manitoulin West Recorder, as it's now known. You would know, if you are a regular subscriber to the Manitoulin West Recorder, that it is located in Gore Bay on Manitoulin Island, which is the home of one of Canada's largest trucking concerns.

Doug Smith started Manitoulin Transport 35, 40 years ago with two trucks, and has built it into one of the 10 largest trucking firms in Canada. This company works across North America, and they're quoted in the Recorder as saying that they regulate the speed of their trucks at 90 kilometres per hour because it's good for safety, it's good for business and it's good for the environment.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's a pleasure to join in the debate this afternoon and comment on the member from Ottawa Centre's commentary on Bill 41.

This bill was brought in a few weeks ago. It was quite familiar to me because it had been private member's legislation that I introduced a couple of years ago. I noticed in his comments that he said Ontario could be a leader in this.

I was just wondering: A couple of years ago you actually could have been the leader. It was brought forward to me by the Ontario Trucking Association, and we introduced it. We had debate. There were some members opposite who weren't in agreement, but I can see that—I think "the road to Damascus" was used yesterday—there's been a change, which I welcome. We're debating it here this afternoon but, again, it could have been done a couple of years ago. Unfortunately it wasn't.

The member from Manitoulin also mentioned, I think, the parliamentary assistant to transportation. We're glad he's joining us this afternoon in the debate. He brought up some good points. It's safety and it is environment that this bill deals with.

There's been widespread support by a lot of groups besides the Ontario Trucking Association: CAA, Pollution Probe, and the list goes on. There are many supporters.

He also brought up a point that the trucking company in his riding—I believe it was also brought up by the member from Ottawa Centre—that since 1995 these chips have been implanted in commercial truck vehicles, and that over 50% of the trucks operating in Ontario today already use this. I think the statistic in the States is that 74% use this.

It's nice when you see industry and the environmental groups that brought this forward a couple of years ago. It's taken a while, but hopefully we're here now. We need it to go to committee just to make sure we've got all the lumps and processes out of it.

I thank you for that opportunity today.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm very glad to comment on the member from Ottawa Centre's speech. I think he makes a very critical point here.

We sometimes forget that some of the 400-series highways are major highways that are right in the middle of our cities. Those of us who've been to Ottawa understand that the 417 cuts right through the heart of the city. So this is critically important to the safety of the people who live in the city of Ottawa, with that highway right in the middle of it.

I would also say that in Toronto here we have the 427, and the 401 is now like a downtown road. You've got to start to make that road safer and take a look at how it interacts with road safety a lot more.

I would just like to talk also about private members' bills. I know the member from Kawartha Lakes–Brock there—sorry for the full name—

Interjection: Haliburton.

Mr. Mike Colle: —Haliburton—a beautiful part of the province—was talking about a private member's bill. I remember that I had a private member's bill. You were here, Mr. Speaker. It was on bringing about red light camera legislation in this province. I think it took me five years to get the previous government to finally adopt it.

I didn't bemoan the fact that it took me five years. I said, "Thank you for passing the legislation." They did. It was an innovative piece of legislation never before done in Canada, but the government of the time, after deliberation, thought it was worthwhile bringing forth.

That's how this Legislature works. If you've got a good idea, you hope you can get your private member's bill passed or get the government to adopt it, as the previous government adopted my red light camera legislation, as they adopted my Oak Ridges moraine legislation and as this present government adopted the traditional Chinese medicine legislation.

1530

It takes work, it takes explanation, because these pieces of legislation are complex. You have to get public buy-in, public awareness, and that's what this Legislature is for.

I think this bill here, with great input, is going to be much better. I think it'll make our roads safer and our air cleaner.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Ottawa Centre has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: First of all, I'd like to extend my thanks for the comments from the members from Oxford, Algoma–Manitoulin, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and Eglinton–Lawrence. Thank you very much for your comments. I do want to congratulate all the members who have contributed to the creation of this bill, which, if passed, will become law. So I think we all need to commend ourselves for the good work we're doing in this Legislature on behalf of the people of Ontario.

I share the point of view which was raised from the honourable member from Eglinton–Lawrence: that some 400-series highways are becoming like downtown roads. The same circumstance is in my city of Ottawa and my riding of Ottawa Centre, where Highway 417, the Queensway, is almost becoming a downtown corridor, a sort of local road. What we see is these trucks which pass through these roads at excessive speeds, which could jeopardize the safety and well-being of people.

I think the member from Oxford raised the issue of speed. I understand that the actual speed, the 105 km/hr I was talking about, will be set in the regulation. That way, I guess there's some flexibility in the future in terms of changing that particular speed.

I just want to reinforce the win-win element of this piece of legislation—the two-in-one deal, I call it. I think it's a good, positive trend for the future as we are developing legislation from both sides of the House, be it a government bill or private member's bill, where we try to achieve a public policy objective but also keep in mind the environmental impact, that aspect of the legislation. What we have done in this particular legislation is, we're enhancing road safety by controlling the speed of large commercial motor vehicles but also, at the same time, improving the environment by reducing the impact of greenhouse gas emissions. That is the type of policy, that's the kind of law we need to create in the province of Ontario and I'm very proud we're doing here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for his contribution to the debate. Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I look forward to contributing to the debate on Bill 41, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Speed-limiting Systems), 2008. This bill is all about limiting speeds. For those people who don't know what a speed limiter is, it is a built-in electronic microchip that allows an engine's top speed to be preset. That's what we're talking about here. This would amend the Highway Traffic Act in relation to the use of speed-limiting systems, and it would apply not to cars but to commercial motor vehicles.

First of all, I want to congratulate my colleague the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, who first introduced a very similar bill in 2006. It was a private member's bill which she brought forward. I think what's most interesting about that bill—although there was obviously unanimous support from this side of the House, there were people on the other side of the House who voted against it.

I just want to list the names of those people who voted against this bill: Mr. Rinaldi, Ms. Mitchell, Mr.

McNeely, Mr. Parsons, Ms. Marsales, and—one name that I was quite shocked to see here was the fact that Mr. Smitherman also voted against this bill. I would have thought that a bill which talked about improving the environment would have been a bill that a health minister would have supported. So I was quite shocked to see that he and all the other people had voted against this legislation. I'm going to be interested in seeing how they vote on this bill when it comes for third and final reading.

Regrettably, my colleague Laurie Scott's bill was not debated any further. The governing party didn't see fit at that time and wasn't prepared to support it. So we have it coming forward now, and we are pleased to see this bill, although I would have to say to you that there are certain parts of the bill, some questions that definitely need to be answered. I also want to remind this House that our party has a very proud record when it comes to doing everything we can to make our roads safer. We've had a couple of outstanding transportation ministers: We've had Mr. Sterling and, most recently, we've had Mr. Klees. I think that we can be justly proud of the fact that in the province of Ontario we have done a great deal in making sure that we have safety legislation that has made the roads in Ontario among the safest in all of North America. I just want to congratulate both Mr. Sterling and Mr. Klees for the outstanding work that they did as ministers of transportation in ensuring safety on our roads.

I want to remind this House that not only did we bring in road safety legislation but we also brought in initiatives that were focused on driving and drinking. I can remember, again, these two colleagues being involved in those discussions, but I also believe that one of our colleagues who no longer is in this House, Margaret Marland, had a huge role in making sure that we took the steps that were necessary to protect people on our roads from drunk drivers. Today again, as a result of the initiatives that our government, the Conservative government, put forward prior to 2003, we can be very proud of the fact that we have among the strongest drinking and driving legislation in the entire country.

As I say, we have a proud past, and we want to make sure that as we move forward with this piece of legislation, which is obviously going to set the top speed for an engine, that we do it in such a way that, at the end of the day, is actually is going to protect the public as well as focus on another couple of other areas.

Because this bill does have an impact on the public and obviously on people involved in the trucking industry, we feel very strongly that this bill should go to public hearings. With all of the questions that are left unanswered—because a lot of this is going to be decided by regulation, which means that the opposition will have no input, nor will the public or those that are going to be impacted—we believe it needs to be discussed. The safety issues related to this bill need to be given a full public hearing.

Unfortunately, the bill leaves many questions unanswered, and I think one of the questions was just referred to by my colleague, and that is the speed limit

that is going to be set. We heard one of the members of the government refer to a 95-kilometre speed limit. My colleague's bill had a 105-kilometre speed limit. Obviously, that's an issue that needs to be considered.

We also have to take into consideration that there are sometimes going to be some extenuating circumstances, such as your ability, when there is the need, to accelerate under certain conditions when you're driving on the road, in order to avoid a collision. One of the key issues is to take a look at the speed and determine what will be the most appropriate speed as far as taking into consideration the safety issue, which is very, very important.

In some respects, it's unfortunate that we have to bring a bill like this forward, because I think it does speak to the fact that we're not able to enforce the speed limits on our highways. We simply don't have enough police officers on our roads to enforce these limits and to issue the high penalties that are obviously necessary. I know that any time that you see the police patrolling the roads, it has an impact on how people drive, but they're simply not there often enough. We have to take a look at providing the appropriate resources in order that we can continue to make our highways as safe as possible.

1540

We also need to take a look at what we can do about drivers in this province who drive poorly, who are not well trained and are really a menace and a danger on the roads. I refer not just to those who are driving trucks; I really refer to those who are driving cars. I drive into this city almost daily from my home in Kitchener-Waterloo, and I'll tell you, each and every day as I come into this city and go home again, I see people who are driving in a most dangerous way. I think one of the biggest problems is people not signalling. I sometimes see trucks who—you know what? You just have to put on your brakes really fast because they're not signalling. Sometimes they're right in front of you and they're a lot bigger than you are, so you'd just better watch out. I think that's an issue that we need to address: the whole issue of people who aren't properly trained and really are very unsafe drivers.

The other issue is the whole issue of trucks in this province that need to be properly maintained. But if I'm going to talk about trucks and the need for them to be well maintained, I also want to talk about our highways. I don't know about anybody else, but I think I would get universal agreement—I don't think we've had a year like this year, where we have had more potholes. I can tell you, as someone who is, as I say, driving about 500 kilometres a day, that they are dangerous. I have seen hubcaps fly off and land in the middle of the traffic. Again, it's very, very dangerous. I hope that this government will devote the appropriate resources this summer to do the job of making sure that our roads are safe to drive, because I'm sure there already have been accidents that have been caused by people simply ending up in a pothole which they couldn't see, and it's unfortunately caused them to lose control of their vehicle. So I urge you to do that.

These are a few of the things that are all related to road safety. Of course, this bill is all about road safety and making our roads as safe as possible.

We know that if this bill were passed, and we've been informed by the Ontario Trucking Association, we could save fuel. Boy, do we need to save fuel. The price of fuel today was up to—I think \$1.174 is what I paid. I think it's the first time, that even though I wasn't on empty, I had the privilege of putting at least some \$70 on my Visa card. We've also heard that as a result of the increase in fuel, for truckers in this province to fill up, their price has gone from \$700 to \$1,000. Unfortunately, this is going to impact on the goods, the food and the services that we buy. Whatever we could do to save on fuel is pretty significant. This bill, which would limit speed, would certainly mean that we could save on fuel.

The other important benefit—and this is why I was so surprised that the Minister of Health didn't support my colleague Laurie Scott's bill—is that it would contribute to greenhouse gas reduction. I don't know anybody in this House who could have voted against a bill that would have had that type of effect on the reduction of greenhouse gases, except perhaps Mr. Smitherman. So it was really quite shocking that he wasn't more concerned, because of course this is something that causes problems with people's health and safety.

The other benefit of this bill would be a reduction in the risk of severe crashes. We know that there is a correlation between speed and the risk and severity of crashes. It's extremely important that we take that into consideration.

I just want to go back. I talked before about the fact that there's so much in the regulations, and so I guess there's an amount of secrecy again, which we're seeing in a lot of the legislation that's coming forward, where the public doesn't have all the facts.

One of the biggest facts they don't have right now is what the stated speed will be. As I said before, that is definitely a question that should be debated in committee. But I would hope that the government provides an answer, so that everybody knows, when they vote on this bill, what the speed limit is actually going to be. As I said before, my colleague Laurie Scott wasn't secretive at all. She recommended 105, and that had been recommended by the trucking association.

The other thing we don't know yet—the government has hinted that the new rules will take effect in the fall of 2009, and they've said there may be a period of soft enforcement prior to that, so I guess that means you get a warning and no ticket. But it's going to be important that we educate people, and again, we need to have a plan of implementation. A lot of the legislation that comes into this House is totally lacking as far as a plan of action and a plan of implementation, and in this case I think we need to have that answered as well.

The other thing is that they're leaving the definition of commercial vehicle to regulation. So I guess there's some concern at the current time as to what vehicles are going to be impacted or not impacted by this bill.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Maybe cars.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My colleague just said, "Maybe cars."

We need to know. This is information that should be public knowledge. We should have all of that information, and this bill shouldn't be shrouded in the secrecy that it currently is.

Interjection: Or they don't know.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: As another colleague has just suggested, perhaps, as in many cases, the government doesn't know.

For example, they've just announced and introduced a motion to change the standing orders. That's all well and dandy, but I can tell you that nobody, including the clerks at the table or Hansard or the people in this House, knows what the implications of that are going to be. We have a pretty good idea. We know that the question period in the morning is intended to avoid accountability and scrutiny, and certainly it's going to reduce the opportunity for this place to operate in a more democratic fashion.

But do you know what? The one thing they totally forgot was the impact those changes might have on committees in this House, which currently sit at times that have been allocated. Again, they've acknowledged that they don't know what impact it will have on committees, and yet they're planning to introduce these changes sometime in the spring session. The government needs to be identifying and letting the public know the answers to some of these questions, if indeed they do know.

The bill also doesn't indicate who is going to be held accountable for not following the act—a key question when you think of trucking. We have independent truckers, but we also have people who drive trucks as part of huge fleets; I have some of those fleets within my own riding and my own community. Is it going to be the driver or is it going to be the owner of the truck, the fleet owner, who is going to be held liable? We don't know that.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Who's going to pay?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: One of my other colleagues just asked who is going to pay some of the extra costs that could be incurred by the changes that are going to have to take place.

I go back to what I said before. When you take a look at some of the huge increases in fuel and the impact they're having on the trucks that are delivering goods and services to stores and throughout the country, driving into the United States, and when you see the economy in decline—we just lost another 500 jobs in Cambridge, announced yesterday—we have to be aware of any additional costs that could be incurred. They need to be announced publicly and upfront. People need to know this.

1550

I guess the final question that I have—no, I have three more—will be: Are school buses exempt? I'll tell you right now that school buses are finding it difficult. They're not being appropriately reimbursed by the Ministry of Education. In fact, there's no money that is specifically identified to be going there. Money is spent

elsewhere, and they're having a hard time providing safe transportation. I'll tell you, they work as hard as they can to do that. So again, it would be an additional cost.

Will the allowable speeds be the same on 400-series highways as on rural highways? We know that currently there is a difference.

Again, there seems to be a discrepancy between the Ontario Trucking Association, which says it will reduce GHG emissions by 140,000 tonnes a year, and the government, which says it's going to be 280,000 tonnes. Who's correct? At the end of the day, what matters is that we do reduce emissions, but we need answers.

I was pleased to participate in this debate today. I again want to congratulate my colleagues, who have all done an outstanding job in bringing forward initiatives, legislation, measures related to improving safety on our roads. I would ask this government to ensure that there is appropriate advertising before the public hearings, that all people who have an interest in this legislation have an opportunity to appear.

I would hope that those questions I have raised would be answered. I would hope that they wouldn't leave it all to regulations. There's enough secrecy in this House currently. Just because you're a majority and you have more people, I think you need to be respectful of the fact that there are others who have a need to know. If they're going to be forced to make some of these changes, obviously there needs to be education; there needs to be an implementation plan. At a time when we have the economy suffering, I think it's most appropriate that the public know what faces them in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the comments from my colleagues from Ottawa Centre as well as Kitchener-Waterloo. I stand with them in support of Bill 41. My reasons are clear: The introduction of speed-limiter legislation is expected to decrease the crash risk of trucks travelling over 105 kilometres an hour and also decrease the severity of those crashes when they occur. I should mention, however, that I've received a letter opposing the legislation, citing that recreational and reckless car drivers are also part of those truck-related fatalities, which is all the more reason to encourage defensive measures and safer roads.

Studies show that casualties would be reduced by 7% for every one-kilometre reduction in average vehicle speed. Both the Ontario Trucking Association and the American Trucking Association state that a large portion of their members already voluntarily use speed limiters. This is essential to ensure that business and industry are not negatively impacted. As such, it is important that we continue to work with our industry stakeholders and counterparts across Canada as we implement this program.

Also, there will be, and needs to be, extensive education with our stakeholders to inform operators from other jurisdictions, to ensure compliance with our legislation. Although Quebec has speed-limiter legislation in

place, neither it nor any American jurisdiction actually mandates the use of speed limiters. In comparison, the European Union, the United Kingdom and Australia each mandate the use of speed limiters. This is important because Ontario traffic data show that between 30% to 60% of large trucks travelling on our 400-series highways are speeding in excess of 105 kilometres.

As already eloquently expressed by others in this House, the potential benefits of this proposed legislation include: Tonnes of reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, to the equivalent of about 2,700 tractor-trailers off the road each year; increased road safety—research shows that excessive speed is a factor in 23% of crashes; and 100 million fewer litres of diesel fuel would be used by the trucking industry.

As such, I support, along with members from both sides of this House, the mandatory use of speed limiters legislation.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to commend the member from Kitchener–Waterloo and our opposition House leader for a job well done in pointing out the good part about the bill, and actually why the majority in this House—at least, I presume the vast majority of this House—in the end will be supporting in bill. But at the same time, I think it's very important to recognize that the bill as it presently stands is too far from right to be right. There are too many things in it that need to be changed, that need to have some amendments and clarification so that the public can be assured that what the government is saying in the lead-up to this bill is in fact what the bill is going to do.

The member from Kitchener–Waterloo talked somewhat about the bill that the member from—

Ms. Laurie Scott: Haliburton.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: —Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes–Brock introduced last year in the last sitting of the House. It defined what it was going to do, and it was quite clear that if you implemented that bill, that would be the end result. But we've heard two folks from the government side speaking here, and one says the speed limit will be 95 and another one says it will be 105. The bill doesn't say what it is, but I want to tell you that there's a lot of difference between those numbers, both in the impact on our environment and on our roads and speed, and on the impact of the support by the public.

As we go through this debate, we keep hearing from the government side, and even from the opposition side, that this legislation is supported by the trucking industry—the trucking association—and that's true. But I believe their support is based on that number being 105. As we go forward with this bill, if that's not the case, then one has to wonder whether their support would be maintained. I assure you that we should have public hearings that so those changes can be addressed.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I want to commend the member for Kitchener–Waterloo on her fine intervention this afternoon and assure her that the number we're talking about is 105 kilometres per hour. It will be in regulation, and I think the reason for that is reasonably

obvious to most of us, knowing that if we wanted to change it to 104 or 106, we don't need to come back to this assembly to do that—if that does happen.

I want to read a quote from David Bradley, the president of the Ontario Trucking Association, whom we all know quite well in here. I think I've known Mr. Bradley for roughly 20 years. This is what Mr. Bradley says about this bill: "I think this is really a no-brainer, quite frankly. I don't see how anyone can stand up and say, 'We're in support of speeding trucks.'" That's what the Ontario Trucking Association says here. What it says to people is obvious: If we control the speed of trucks, not only do we have good environmental benefits in terms of saving 280,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas but saving 100 million litres of diesel fuel, and the advantage of making sure that our roads are safer. Not one of us who travels this province—and many of the members here have significant experience on the 400-series highways, including this one, and we know that the odd trucker—most truckers are excellent drivers. They're the best professional drivers on our roads, but there are always some who do not believe that they need to abide by the speed limits.

This is a good piece of legislation that will be safe for the people of Ontario driving on our 400-series highways.

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to congratulate my colleague the member for Kitchener–Waterloo on her comments relating to this legislation. She asked some very specific questions, and we are looking forward to hearing the responses to those. She also indicated very clearly our position as a caucus that in principle, of course, we support the intent of this legislation. We want to ensure that the legislation is implemented properly, as she rightfully said. All too often we have had legislation come forward from this government without an implementation plan, so we have the initial applause but then the stakeholders find that it's impossible to live with the details of the legislation. That's why we're calling for public hearings, so that stakeholders can come forward and raise their concerns to ensure that we have a proper implementation strategy.

1600

As I've said many times, effectively what this legislation means is that we are failing in this province. We're failing to enforce the speed limits that we have. We already have speed limiters. They're those signs on the highway and the law that says you can't do any more than 100 or 80 or whatever the speed limit is. So the fact is that this government is failing to properly resource our police services across the province so that they can enforce those speed limits. And when they do write the tickets, we have a court system that isn't properly resourced, so that the majority of tickets end up actually getting thrown out.

With regard to the enforcement here, what we're doing is overlaying another level of bureaucracy and cost, and I suggest to you that it all comes down to resourcing the legislation that we have. We'll see what the government does.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Kitchener–Waterloo has up to two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to thank very much the member from Mississauga South for his words of support; also my colleague the member from Oxford for his comments; and certainly I appreciated the clarification from the member for Algoma–Manitoulin, who indicates that he believes the speed is going to be 105 kilometres per hour; and of course the transportation critic for our party and former Minister of Transportation, the member for Newmarket–Aurora. Again, I think he has enunciated the policy and the position of our party. We do support this in principle. Obviously, we have questions, as do other people, that need to be addressed. But at the end of the day, we are glad that the government moved forward with this legislation because it should improve highway safety. It obviously can make a difference in reducing emissions in this province. Whatever we can do to make our roads safe is very important.

We look forward to the public hearings. We look forward to ensuring that everybody has an opportunity to put their concerns on the table. If we have the public hearings, I would encourage the government to not just merely pay lip service to the people who appear before it, but I hope that at the end of the day the amendments that are made will reflect the will of the people and also the concerns that have been expressed, because it's basically good legislation in principle but obviously there are some issues that need to be addressed, and we've heard about them already.

Thank you very much, everyone, for moving this bill forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for her contribution to the debate.

Further debate? The honourable member from Welland.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. I'm afraid I'm a little more skeptical than some of my colleagues in this Legislature. The comment by Mr. Bradley that somehow if you don't support this bill you're advocating speeding is the sort of blackmail that's used all too often to put people in—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I'll just ask the honourable member if he wants to reconsider his comment.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Is that a request to withdraw or reconsider, sir?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Withdraw.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Withdraw.

Look, we know the tactic. If you don't support the legislation, somehow you support speeding trucks on our highways. We know the tactic—where was it used? In a federal election?—that if you supported a particular position then you were somehow an advocate of pornography. Do you remember that not-so-subtle point being made? “Oh, if you don't support the legislation,

you support drunkenness and general misconduct across the province or the nation.”

I'm not sure that this bill constitutes a solution, because I'm not sure that it adequately defines the problem. Let's understand that while the Ontario Trucking Association supports and advocates this legislation, others don't. The Teamsters don't support this legislation. You're talking about a huge number of truckers across Ontario, Canada and North America.

I know truckers. Like all of you, truckers live in my community. We represent them here in the Legislature. Truckers are my neighbours. Down where I live, down around Bald Street in Welland, there are more than a couple of owner-operators who park their rigs on the weekend—when they're fortunate enough to be home on a weekend—in front of their houses. Of course, from time to time, as you know, there's the occasional complaint in some neighbourhoods about how people shouldn't be parking those rigs, but in my neighbourhood we understand that that's the working tool of a hard-working woman or man.

Truckers are some of the hardest-working people in this country, in North America—incredibly hard-working people. As small owner-operators, as small entrepreneurs, as business people investing \$150,000 to \$200,000 in a truck, they're under incredible financial pressure to even pay for that truck, never mind generate a return on their investment.

The bill appeals to the growing phenomenon of a huge volume of truck traffic on our highways. I—like most drivers, I presume—find it a novel situation when I've got a big rig on one side, a big rig on the other side, one in front of me and one behind me—I'm in that canyon. But I've got to tell you this—and other members, to be fair, have acknowledged this as well—that professional truckers tend to be the safest drivers on our highways. They do it for a living. They drive hundreds of thousands of kilometres a year.

The New Democrat position on this bill is that it should go to committee. We've said that from the get-go. The real work around this bill isn't going to be the reading of Coles Notes issued by the ministry, by government backbenchers. The real issues are going to be addressed by the players themselves.

I speak to people like Jim Park. He's the editor of a trucking magazine called highwaySTAR magazine. He sent me a commentary from Joanne Ritchie, the executive director of the Owner-Operators Business Association of Canada. While Mr. Bradley does support the legislation, Joanne Ritchie and the Owner-Operators Business Association of Canada don't, just like the Teamsters, a large community of professional career truckers here in the province.

As I say, if you begin this debate by creating the premise that if you don't support the bill, you're in support of speeding trucks, it's a very unfortunate approach to developing public policy.

Some of the obvious observations are as follows: The normal rate of the flow of traffic on our 400-series

highways and the QEW—God bless that highway, because it takes me home every weekend. In my 1994 Chevy pickup, my little S-10, I put the automatic speed control, a governor of sorts, at 114 clicks. I want to stay just below the 15 over, but I find myself in the middle lane of the QEW, and on more than a few occasions in the right-hand lane, at 114 or 115 kilometres an hour. And it's not the trucks; it's just the overall flow of traffic.

One of the things that people will tell you, people who know about driving safely, is that you are a far more dangerous vehicle on that highway when you're impeding that flow of traffic and creating a roadblock, if you will.

1610

You'll recall that there was one gentleman here in the province of Ontario, who one presumes was miffed at the authorities, who was going to test the speed limit by travelling at exactly 100 kilometres an hour for a lengthy period of time along the 401 and found himself not only charged under the Highway Traffic Act, but convicted.

I find it passing strange when the government reconfirms and reconfirms that the speed limit is going to be 105 clicks. What it means is, you can't go faster. It doesn't mean you can go beyond 105 for a minute; it means that you can't go faster. It's called a governor. I'm concerned—because at various times of day, various points in the week, you've got a volume of trucks—when trucks, then, are forced to create a hazard for vehicles, who shouldn't but who nonetheless are going to be motivated or driven to pass them because they're perceived as blocking traffic, because they're only travelling at 105 kilometres an hour while the flow of traffic for domestic vehicles—for Chevys, Buicks, Oldsmobiles and that sort of thing—is 115, 120, 125. I mean, please.

I want to hear from truckers and the advocates of this legislation about how those truckers are going to accommodate those vehicles and avoid the dangerous phenomenon of people passing recklessly because they're frustrated and because the flow of traffic motivates them to do so. That isn't answered by the bill in and of itself, nor is it answered by the advocates for the bill. I want to hear how that woman or man driving that truck, who sees a hazard on the road and who may, based on all of their experience and based on good driving practice, has to speed up to avoid it or pass it, is going to overcome the 105-kilometre-an-hour limit should that circumstance require them to exceed 105, maybe 110, 115.

The stats that are employed are in and of themselves interesting. First of all, I've got to tell you simply anecdotally that I'm far more fearful of the trucker who's been working too long, driving too many hours, and drifts across the line, regardless of how fast they're going. You've been there, haven't you—been there, done that, honked the horn? You've seen the driver be alerted by it and then swing his truck back into the lane. I'm going to give the benefit of the doubt to that driver. I suspect that's a driver who has been working on a long haul, who's tired and who may, quite frankly, have driven a longer time in that given 24 hours than he or she

should be driving, based on regulations and controls on the number of hours.

You see, the real issue—and this has been stated already, too—is dangerous driving. The only way, at the end of the day, that you address dangerous driving is by having OPP officers on our 400-series highways in sufficient numbers to identify dangerous drivers and deal with them in an appropriate way. Quite frankly, the truck travelling at 95 kilometres an hour that's weaving back and forth, in and out of their lane, is far more dangerous than the truck with a wide-awake, alert driver doing 115 clicks when he or she is keeping up with the speed of traffic.

The Ministry of Transportation has data. There has been this whole myth around speed as a causal factor, as compared to speed as an aggravating factor, in terms of the severity of the damage. The Ministry of Transportation has data, and that's when the government was contemplating roads with limits of 110, 115, even 120 kilometres an hour. Our newest highways are engineered and designed for vehicles in proper mechanical condition with alert, properly trained drivers to travel those roads at 110, 115, 120. Is it by accident that 115 is the magic number for police officers who are stopped there with the radar gun, shooting radar at people driving past them? No, it's not an accident at all. You've got boundaries, and then you've got the reasonable area on both sides of that boundary.

I want to understand why 115 kilometres an hour is going to be the norm for thousands upon thousands of cars driven by drivers ranging from poorly trained to highly skilled, from little experience to high levels of experience, when truckers are going to be mechanically limited to 105. Do you want to give effect to a 105 rule? Then have zero tolerance in terms of speeding on our highways. That will allow that trucker to speed up to pass somebody, because no police officer is going to charge anybody—well, I shouldn't say that, because folks will be calling in saying, "I got charged merely for passing," but it's a rare occasion.

I don't understand the government members. They're so absolute about this; they're so sure. Everybody is wrong but them—pretty typical, huh? The Teamsters are wrong, the independent owner/operators are wrong, Joanne Ritchie is wrong, Jim Park is wrong. There may be a few people here who have driven rigs from here to Los Angeles, and I expect them to participate in the debate, but I don't think there's a whole lot of them. I can't think of any more demanding profession.

If you want to talk about impact on our economy, let's understand, and I'm not pleased with the fact, that the St. Lawrence Seaway, for instance, has traffic volumes that have dropped dramatically, that the federal government has allowed our rail systems to virtually disappear. Railbed is rotting while highways become busier and busier. It's part of the just-in-time phenomenon and the need for materials to be delivered in small or fixed quantities by a particular date.

The other gun to the head, if you will, is the environmental issue: the fraud of—was it Ronald Reagan?—the 55-mile-an-hour speed limit.

Interjection: Carter.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, Carter and then Reagan. The Carter-Reagan fraud of 55 miles an hour was part and parcel of an American policy designed to justify, in my view, international policy, creating a myth about oil shortages and somehow convincing people that if they kept the speed limit at 55 miles an hour, there was going to be a significant reduction in consumption of petroleum products. But if you have driven the I-90 right around Albany, you've paid your fair share to American general revenue. Been there, Mr. Shurman: the I-90 right at Albany? A lot of hills. The radar detector doesn't work worth a damn because it's only by the time you get to the top of the hill that your detector catches the radar, and by then he's already got you on the screen.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Two hundred and sixty dollars.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Two hundred and sixty bucks, says Mr. Shurman. US or Canadian?

Mr. Peter Shurman: That's US.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That was back when a US dollar cost more than 97 cents Canadian, I'll tell you.

Do you know what? There have been a couple of newspaper articles lately, columns by observers here at Queen's Park who have commented on the pompousness and arrogance of this government, the sort of know-it-all kind of attitude: They're right; everybody else is wrong. They get to engage in language that is defamatory: Jeff Leal and his reference about my colleague from Trinity-Spadina, "What were you doing in the back seat of that limo?" and the Minister of Health referring to yet another New Democrat's five-year bathroom break—this sort of infantile, schoolboy humour. These are moronic, idiotic comments from people who clearly have too much time on their hands, who have very little to contribute in terms of real policy commentary and debate, and who are prepared to be spoon-fed.

One of the functions of the opposition is to keep a check on the government. One of the functions of government backbenchers is to keep a check on the cabinet. It's a very important role, rather than sitting there with their thumbs inserted and nodding, following marching orders, little marionettes with the strings being pulled by the Premier's office henchpeople, the behind-the-scenes people, the Premier's office Gestapo, the ones who report back and keep track of members and make sure that members haven't violated any of the marching orders or misquoted or misstated any of the canned speeches they're told to give.

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The presumptuousness of this government when it comes to a hard-working profession like truckers is amazing. I, for one, am prepared to listen to the truckers, to listen to safety experts, to listen and consider alternatives, to try to identify what the real problem is. It's only until you identify what the real problem is that you start to consider what the real solutions are. I, for one,

think that one of the solutions in terms of the safety of our highways is a stronger police presence.

Look, the scofflaw who will drive at recklessly high speeds in his or her truck will also think nothing about disconnecting or disabling the governor or the speed limiter, won't they? You understand the rationale? How do you get caught with your governor or your speed limiter disconnected if you're exceeding 105? You're going to be deemed to not have a connected speed limiter. So if the person wants to drive 120 and 130, if he's one of those people who is doing it unsafely now, he's still going to do it, because he's going to take his chances. People speed every day not expecting to get caught.

This is warm, feel-good legislation that appeals to people who have concerns about truck volume and who find it, quite frankly, frightening from time to time to manoeuvre highways where there is a huge truck volume.

I understand the stats to reveal that the largest number of truck accidents are ones that occur on two-lane highways, where the speed limits are 80 and 90 kilometres an hour. You don't have to travel too far north of Barrie to understand what that means, do you, Speaker? We've got northern members in this House who remind this government as often as they can about the need to four-lane those two-lane highways in the interests of safety—just like that 406. Thank goodness we got it four-laned down to Port Robinson now. The plans are there for the extension of that four-laning further down to East Main Street and hopefully down to Port Colborne, to give effect to a north-south corridor. The four-laning of highways is going to go a long way to making those highways safer, those trucking highways that are travelled as two lanes now.

Let's put this to committee and see what the real data are, instead of what people want to pick and choose selectively based on a position that they feel compelled to take. I can't understand why people would be so absolute in their position without having heard all of the evidence. My goodness, even if your only exposure to courtrooms is Law and Order, you know that the judge admonishes people not to reach a conclusion until they've heard all of the evidence. Good advice, isn't it? It is pompous and arrogant to assume a position without having heard from all the parties and all the players, with having heard only half the story and having heard the appeals to people's fear rather than the appeals to people's logic, without having heard the broad range of solutions after determining whether or not there's a problem.

New Democrats encourage this bill to go to committee. Gilles Bisson, our transportation critic, will occupy himself with that committee work. I encourage truckers from across Ontario and others interested in highway safety to make sure they're attending it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and/or comments? The honourable Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: It's a pleasure to stand up in support of this bill, certainly because I had some participation as Minister of Transportation.

One of the very clear pieces of evidence that came forward was when I had the opportunity to meet with the independent trucking association, the truckers' association, the provincial police and regional police, all together in the same room, as we looked at whether or not this idea of speed governors was a good idea. It was unequivocal: Every one of them said it was a good idea, with the exception of the independents, who felt that because they didn't have to participate in governors, they would have an economic advantage.

We don't have accidents in this province, we have crashes and we have collisions and they take lives. The incidence of truck rollover in this province is contributing significantly, in the billions of dollars, to the economy in this province as well. It takes 235 metres to stop a truck that's going 120 kilometres an hour. That is significantly reduced when the speed is 105 kilometres an hour. So it's an opportunity for us to not only reduce the collisions but also significantly impact the economic challenges that are faced when truck rollovers do occur.

This is just a good example that came from the industry itself. It is supported by the Quebec government. It is actually supported by the Minister of Transport federally. It makes good sense. There is no reason why you have to continue to speed down the road in order to get from point A to point B, virtually taking other people's lives in your hands.

You have the opportunity instead to work responsibly. As a matter of fact, most of those truckers are doing that right now. So all we're going to do is what they asked us to do, and that's to provide a safe haven.

The member from Welland indicates that this won't have an opportunity for discussion. I do not know of any bill that hasn't gone forward to committee. People can wholeheartedly have an opportunity for discussion on this and get to those statistics that the individual would like to speak about.

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to thank the member from Welland for his contribution to this debate. I believe that he raises some very important issues that I as well have advocated in terms of allowing this bill to be more carefully examined.

The reality is that most of the crashes that relate to trucks are not caused by speed at all. They are, in fact, caused by mechanical failure. I spoke as recently as yesterday to chief Armand La Barge of York Regional Police. That police force conducted a blitz of trucks within the last couple of months. One out of two trucks was pulled off the road—one out of two—for mechanical substandard condition.

I say to the government and to the Minister of Transportation that what we need to do is focus on that, more so than on the speed. If an unsafe vehicle is travelling at 80 kilometres an hour, or at 120 kilometres an hour, the difference, I suggest to you, is not in the speed; it is the condition of that vehicle. What we need to do is ensure that there is proper enforcement for inspection of those vehicles, proper resources for enforcement of our speed limits, and that's what will get us to where we need to be.

The fact is that this is a simple solution. The next solution, of course, if in fact the logic of this government is correct, is that every automobile, every passenger vehicle, will also have speed governors, because you can't rely on people to obey the law.

Mr. Mike Colle: I was just recalling, when we were in opposition—the member from Welland reminded me of that—that almost every week there would be a flying truck tire on the 401 and other highways, and the government in power at the time said it wasn't a problem. But we had to bring to the government's attention that these flying tires were inexcusable. Thankfully, as a result of the opposition bringing that to their attention, there were some measures taken. So we haven't had this plague of flying truck tires killing people on our highways.

I think, as the member from Welland has said, we sometimes take our truckers for granted. I ask people, "Every time you go to the grocery store, how did that food from the farm get to the store so you can bring it home?" We almost think it's automatic. We forget the blood, sweat and tears of the trucking industry that ensures that we get fresh, clean food on our tables, delivered without our having to do any of the work except basically appear at the grocery store. So we shouldn't take truckers for granted.

The other thing about safety—and this is seat belt safety week. There was another incident today: a person in an accident on the 401, thrown out of his vehicle. It appears that there was no seat belt being used. Last week there were four young people thrown out of a vehicle, injured—no seat belt. We have to somehow get the message across of the fundamental defensive use of a seat belt.

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I see the young pages here. Don't even get in a car if a person doesn't have a seat belt on. Demand that everybody have their seat belts on all the time. It will save lives. It is crazy not to have your seat belt on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We have room for one more question and/or comment.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member for Welland is always very provocative and raises good points. I particularly liked his comments on this one, when he says that the government says, "Trust me." When the government says, "Trust me," antennas should go up all over the place. We should be very much aware.

I'm going to speak to this bill in a few minutes and I might use a few examples of where the government asked for that trust and it turned out that that trust wasn't warranted. So when the member from Welland talks about being fastidious about checking this bill and seeing how the people that are going to pay the freight eventually—those are the truckers of this province; let's see how they feel about this legislation.

Maybe they're supportive. Maybe the minister has the right story on this, this time. Maybe they do, but let's hear from them. Let's hear it from their mouth, not your mouth. I don't necessarily trust a government that says, "Don't worry; everything's all right."

Look at the economy. The government would have us believe that everything is just fine in the economy. We're just humming along. Everything's wonderful.

We're losing thousands, tens of thousands of jobs a month. They're going to Alberta. We're losing 70,000 to 80,000 people who have left Ontario and gone to Alberta to work. Ontario is on the verge of becoming a have-not province for the first time in the history of this great country.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Oh, and they're concerned about that. They're yelling at me, "This isn't possible." Well, it is possible. We're on the verge. Things are not all right in this province. When the government says, "Trust me; everything's okay," my antennas go up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Welland has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Klees has raised an ominous, indeed bedeviling, concern, and that is that it's this government's agenda at the end of the day to address its absence of policing on our highways by requiring every motor vehicle to have a governor installed.

I find that a very peculiar position for this government to be in. Talk about Big Brother at his—or her, Big Sister—ultimate. But I suppose if speeding is the problem, then I say to Mr. Klees, maybe the government's onto something. If speeding's the problem, maybe the government's onto something.

One of the other problems, and I see it in city traffic too, is that we don't understand that there are two types of people on our highways. There's people like you or me, as domestic drivers, and then there's people earning a living. For the same reason that we should yield the right of way to a TTC bus driver or to a commercial truck in the city who's trying to make a left turn and being bedevilled by traffic—here's some working stiff trying to make 20 bucks an hour, and I can't believe the incredibly inconsiderate people who won't cut the guy or gal a little bit of slack.

What I see on the highways all the time is people in their little Chevy Novas thinking they're going to challenge some great, big, huge multi-ton truck. For Pete's sake, give the trucker the right of way. It's like the guy in the Ferrari who was cut off by a truck, pulls him over; the guy in the Ferrari gets out and says "Ah, karate," and the truck driver goes, "Aha, monkey wrench."

At the end of the day, maybe some education about deferring to people who earn their livings on our highways would be a little better course of action.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you to the honourable member for your contribution to the debate. Further debate?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm sure it will come as no surprise to my colleagues in this House that I'm rising in support of Bill 41. Earlier today, as I was looking at some of the statistics around safety and so on, I felt, no doubt, that members of this House would be able to reach some consensus on the value of this particular bill. It provides

an excellent framework to have some regulations based on good statistics related to safety that will certainly improve the lives of the residents in my riding.

Through my riding, there is a stretch of the 400 highway through the southern part of the very beautiful township of King, and also the 404 forms part of the boundary to my riding and then it goes up through Whitchurch-Stouffville. There are numerous times when there are crashes on those highways. Obviously, there's the potential tragedy of injury and loss of life, but there's also the terrible inconvenience for those people commuting, who have to use other roads through King and through Whitchurch-Stouffville in order to avoid road closures.

As it relates to safety, I think some of the members in this House will recall that our colleague from London-Fanshawe had a narrow escape last week, a very dangerous situation on the 401. I am sure all members will be very, very pleased to know that, of course, he did emerge unscathed. He is someone who contributes to the debate in this House and relishes it. So he illustrated why this type of legislation is so important.

I think one of the very interesting statistics is that studies show that casualties would be reduced by 7% for every one-kilometre-per-hour reduction in average vehicle speed, so that's truly significant. We have some data saying that some 15% of trucks are exceeding 110 kilometres per hour. If, for example, the speed limiter was set at 105 kilometres an hour, we know that if one of those trucks had been going some five kilometres higher, that would be a 35% reduction in the risk of a casualty. To me, this is very, very important legislation.

I was also very interested to read some of the quotes that we've noted. Another colleague, the honourable member for Simcoe North, was quoted in the *Orillia Packet and Times*, Monday, March 24, 2008: "There won't be any problem for our party. We will be supporting that bill because it's a Progressive Conservative bill," he actually said. He's clearly not aware that this is a government bill, Bill 41. "It does save fuel, it saves emissions and it probably does make our roads a little bit safer."

There was another quote from someone I know very well, Brian Patterson, who is the director of the Ontario Safety League. We conversed on this particular bill, and he was quoted in the *Toronto Star*, March 20, 2008, as saying that this was a very "solid move." He actually called, and we met on this bill, and he certainly convinced me that this was something that would be extremely useful to ensure it is enacted and that it would improve safety for my residents.

I think it's important, of course, that there will be an extensive educational period where we will be working with our stakeholders to inform operators, both from here in Ontario and from other Canadian and US jurisdictions, to ensure compliance with our legislation. Again, with my background in public health injury prevention and health promotion, that educational period is extremely important to ensure compliance.

In summary, and not wishing really to belabour the point, because the merits of this bill are so outstanding, I would simply conclude by saying that I would hope all the honourable members in this House will be supporting this bill.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Questions and comments.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for the presentation. I agree with the member that, first of all, everyone would support this bill, and even though it may have some shortcomings, it goes a long way to do what needs doing in helping to create greater truck safety and reduce the emissions into our environment and, thirdly, to protect us from the ever-rising cost of fuel. The projected savings of fuel—though there seems some variation as to who is creating the numbers—is significant to warrant doing something like this.

I want to point out the importance of public participation in the whole process. The member started off in the presentation talking about, “This is a good framework.” A framework is what one sets, or what the government sets, as they go to the people during an election. What we’re debating here is a bill to be implemented. I think the public should expect governments to have legislation that will cover the fine points of the impact it will have on the public as we go forward. And the issue of not putting in the numbers in the bill of any kind: We don’t know what the speed that we are talking about setting will be, or whether it will be changed from time to time as the ministers change and as the circumstances change on the road—whether that would be raised or lowered.

The other part, as I listen to the debate from a lot of members, is that “commercial vehicle” is not defined. So far, the debate has been primarily on whether a commercial vehicle would include a bus, whether it would include just the Greyhound buses or school buses. The way the bill is written, it doesn’t prohibit or doesn’t exclude the minister from including SUVs. It doesn’t say that the minister will not include cars—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and/or comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I should tell you that the member for Toronto–Danforth, Mr. Tabuns, will be speaking to this bill in short order. So the folks who are watching and who know Mr. Tabuns’s ability to address things from a variety of perspectives, in particular strong environmental credentials, should stay tuned. It will be a short 20 to 25 minutes’ time when Mr. Tabuns will have the floor and will be addressing this bill on behalf of New Democrats here at Queen’s Park. I look forward to his comments.

I’m somewhat amazed, however, at the member for Oak Ridges–Markham’s expressing hope that everybody supports this bill. I don’t know what the magic is in unanimity. There are a variety of perspectives here. There are a number of interests that will be affected by

the bill. There will be members of the provincial community who will support the legislation, who will agree with it, who will applaud it, and there will be others who will criticize it and disagree with it. So there is no magic, I say to you with all due respect, in unanimity. What’s important is that a Parliament reflects all of Ontario, and that diverse points of view, diverse perspectives, diverse interests, be given a voice in this chamber. That’s part of the difficulty we have in a majority government: not understanding the incredibly important role that the opposition plays. The opposition’s role is to criticize; it’s to critique; it’s to speak for the people the government isn’t speaking for. From time to time, opposition members will be speaking for the minority. The minority in a democracy deserves a voice as well. From time to time the government will be grossly out of step, and it’s the opposition caucus that will be speaking for the majority. I say that there is a variety of perspectives on this legislation that has to be addressed at committee. Such enthusiastic support at this point is not warranted.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I would like to congratulate my colleague from Oak Ridges–Markham on her comments. I’ll be speaking to this bill at greater length and address some of the same things myself. My riding and hers are not particularly far apart, and when it comes to Highway 407, we share some of the same concerns. Highway 407 leads into Highway 400, the gateway to the north, and we also share a lot of cottagers. So this bill is of issue to all of us.

My colleague raises the issue of speed as it relates to accidents, and there certainly is validity there, although I’d like to call the attention of the Minister of Transportation and members of this House to the fact that that cuts both ways. One of the things that has always driven me crazy—no pun intended—is the fact that the passing lane on 400 highways in this province causes an awful lot of accidents by virtue of the fact that people seem to think that if they sit in it at 90 kilometres per hour, it’s okay. When you look at the backlogs and the way some traffic mixes, you can get into just as much trouble from an accident perspective doing that as you can from speeding.

To the point she raises regarding the fact that someone had written that this was a Conservative bill rather than what it is—indeed, a government bill—I would remind the member that my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, a Conservative, did put in a bill almost identical to this one as private members’ business in 2006 and it was defeated by virtually the same government that we sit opposite right now. I’m delighted that they’ve come around and are in support and are putting forward their own bill, and certainly we’ll support it, but the issue has to do with the details, and the devil is always in the details.

I look forward to speaking to this at greater length.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I would make comment on the member for Oak Ridges–Markham, and it’s further to the point that I made in my last comments. The member suggests that our member from Simcoe North said it was a PC bill, and the member from Oak Ridges–Markham

said obviously he was wrong; this was a government bill. Well, what is a bill and where does it come from?

I think our member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock introduced this bill some months ago, and the bill she introduced is almost identical to this bill. So the government has simply lifted what it saw as good legislation from the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and made it their own. That's all fair game in this House, but for someone to suggest that this is their bill in its exclusivity is obviously—I can't say “misleading,” Mr. Speaker, but obviously they're going down that road.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I withdraw that. But it is obviously not in the spirit of what we would like to see happening in this House.

I would suggest that the member may want to make comment on this in her wrap-up moments as to whether or not this bill originated or had its genesis in the heart of a Liberal soul or whether in fact it was a bill that was developed by the PC party, by the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, put forward by her, and was simply lifted by the Liberal government, to be made into one of their own bills. I'd be interested in her comments on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Oak Ridges–Markham has up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to thank my colleagues in this House, the members from Oxford, Welland, Thornhill and Halton, for commenting on my remarks.

I'd like to say that certainly through the debate this afternoon we've heard some very interesting history that relates to the former government's business and now this current government's business.

I'd like to assure my colleagues that I know that this government, the McGuinty government, has the health and safety of all Ontarians as one of their most important principles behind any legislation that we are introducing. So though I have heard that most members here certainly acknowledge the excellence in terms of saving lives, in terms of reducing speed in trucks over a certain tonnage and also the very important environmental consequences of this legislation in terms of reducing fuel consumption and therefore greenhouse gases, it is clear that what we are putting in front of this House is extremely valuable legislation.

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There is clearly more time for debate, as we have heard that many other members will be addressing this. I'm sure we will all be paying very close attention to their points as we consider, at the end of the day, whether to support it or not. I certainly believe that when the case is as clear as this—that this legislation is excellent—we should all support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for her contribution to the debate. Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's a pleasure to join this debate. One of the questions that we have to ask, in so

much of the legislation that is “good for us” as Ontarians—somebody has to pay the freight. All the costs of this program—the purchasing of these speed limiters, the upkeep of them, the maintenance of them, making sure they're working and all those things—have to be assumed by somebody.

In this case, it's not the government. It's not us in this Legislature. It's not the law enforcement agencies across the province. It's the truckers of this province: people who work long hours, people who obey the law, people who go home when they have an opportunity, people who have families—the hard-working people of Ontario. They represent the best of what a citizen of Ontario is. In that representation, let us be very clear that they are the ones who are going to be paying the freight for this bill. So I think it's very important for the members of this House to make very, very sure that we get this bill right and, if we're asking them to pay the freight, that we make it very, very worthwhile.

These people, particularly in these times, when we're headed into very uncertain financial times—I would say that we're headed into a recession or close to recession. The government would disagree. They would say that we're going to have a soft landing and that we're going to be okay. Whatever it is, we're headed downhill in the economy right now based on the increase of our Canadian dollar, based on the effects that our manufacturing industry is suffering, based on the cost of fuel that we're seeing slowly being integrated into our economy. For a great number of reasons, we're headed into a difficult financial time ahead. I would expect that the government would want to do something to insulate us against the worst-case scenario in that situation. I haven't seen that action taken to any degree yet. I guess that's somewhat disappointing.

But when it comes to truckers who have to work a little longer in the day in order to make up for any losses they incur or any increased expenses they incur, I think we owe it to them, through the committee process in this House, to make sure that we get this bill right when it does pass.

From the sounds of things, everybody's talking about what a great bill it is. It was introduced by a Conservative member, as I pointed out earlier. For that reason, it would be wonderful to see it be enacted in the province of Ontario, even though it is now a government bill. The fact is that we want to make sure we know what we're voting on and what kinds of issues this is going to cause to the people in the province who have to be affected by this.

It's interesting that the member from Welland talked about the Teamsters, who probably represent a significant portion of the people who drive trucks on the highways of Ontario and across this continent. The Teamsters don't support this bill, according to the member. I found that very interesting. I'd like to know why they don't support this bill. I know that Teamsters are very conscientious citizens. I know that they drive trucks extremely carefully.

For a period of time I was a salesman across Canada, and I found myself often on the roads in the three Prairie provinces, miles from anywhere, heading for a town that was perhaps 100 kilometres, 250 kilometres away—driving across the prairies, which are beautiful the first time you do it, are always a very attractive place in the world, but they become very, very monotonous. Occasionally, you would see a car that was broken down on the side of the road. Almost without exception, if that car had been there for any length of time, there would be a truck pulled up in front of or behind it. The truckers are the ones who helped people on the road. They were the ones who showed up when someone was having a problem and needed some help on the highway. I used to call them the knights of the highways, because they were the ones who would stop and help people who were in difficulties and having difficulties.

That happens in Ontario as well. It happens on the two-lane highways in Ontario; not so much on the four-lane highways. We have tow trucks, of course, that patrol those highways, and you're not long getting help from a tow truck if you have problems on the 400 highways. But if you're off those highways or in northern Ontario or eastern Ontario, if you're in trouble on the road it's probably going to be a trucker who stops and gives aid to you. So I think it's important that we remember that the Teamsters don't necessarily support this. I would like to hear in committee as to why that is.

Earlier we heard the minister make comment, and she made a quote, I think, from the member for St. Catharines, that this was a no-brainer. I don't usually heckle, Mr. Speaker, as you know, but I heckled in that particular case and I suggested that we should consider the source of that comment.

I will remember in this House when a minister of the crown not long ago suggested that the Human Rights Commissioner in this province strongly supported her amendments to adoption regulations in this province. The member is currently the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. She was the Minister of Community and Social Services at the time, and she was passing an amendment to the adoption act, allowing the opening of adoption records to anyone who cared to look at them. We were very much opposed to this aspect. Although we liked almost every other part of the bill, we were very much opposed to the fact that the province of Ontario had made a promise to the people who put their children up for adoption and we were going to break that promise.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Bill 41 contains no provisions pertaining to adoption, and I would like to ask the member to focus on the topic under discussion.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker: This is about the government's ability to ask us to have faith. In this particular case, that faith was not warranted, and I'm using that as an example.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I was listening attentively to the member for Halton. I believe he was on topic. Continue.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, the long and the short of that: We won't spend a lot of time on adoption because, as the member from Mississauga points out, this is not about adoption, but it is about trucking and speed control on our highways.

The member will remember that the Human Rights Commissioner, even though the minister suggested in the House that she was strongly supportive of the amendments—it turned out the next day in headlines across the paper that she was not strongly supportive of the legislation.

I say: be aware. When the minister of the crown and the government tells you that everything is well, everything is hunky-dory and that everybody supports this piece of legislation, just maybe it's not always so. Maybe it's just a little different than that, as it was in the case of that adoption legislation, which has since been struck down by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court agreed with this party, that it was legislation that should not be in Ontario.

When the minister says that everything is okay and everybody supports it, and then I hear that the Teamsters don't support it, I begin to question as to maybe there are some things in this bill that I don't understand. I'm certainly not involved in the trucking industry other than in a peripheral sense. I respect the trucking industry tremendously because they do work such long hours. They work hard. They're independent businessmen; a lot of them own their own trucks, and those are very expensive trucks. They take great risks, especially with the fluctuation of fuel these days being one of the major import costs they have to deal with. They don't know where that's going, and they take a number of gambles. I have great respect for private business people who take those risks and those gambles, and hopefully they pay off.

1700

Other comments that have been made are whether it's 95 kilometres an hour that the trucks will be restricted to or whether it will be 105 kilometres an hour. The minister and, I think, the parliamentary assistant suggested that, although the legislation didn't say it in print, the number would be 105 kilometres per hour. Again, the government is saying, "Trust me. It's going to be 105. That's going to be the regulation when it comes into being." As I said earlier, when the government says, "Trust me," my antennae go up and I become concerned.

I think highway safety is of concern to everybody in Ontario, whether you're a driver or not, because if you're not a driver on the roads, you're a passenger. Making sure of safety on those roads is paramount to everybody's thinking.

I think one of the things we have to remember is that the speed limit on our 400-series highways is 100 kilometres an hour—that used to be the old 60 miles an hour. When the four-lane highways developed in Ontario in the 1950s and 1960s, the speed limit on the 401 was 70 miles an hour. It was the oil bubble of 1971-72 that caused speed limits to be lowered across the United States, Canada and much of Europe. Most of the states in the United States are back up to 70 or 75—certainly 65

miles an hour—and strongly enforced. You may get a five-mile-an-hour variation before the police officer pulls you over, but you don't often get a 10-mile-per-hour difference—that would probably be about 16 kilometres per hour.

I think the same thing is true in Europe. In fact, as we know, in Germany the autobahn doesn't have a speed limit. I was on this autobahn in 1990 or 1991, and travelled from Holland to Berlin, and I can well remember travelling along that highway at what I considered to be an unsafe speed. I was probably doing about 140 kilometres an hour. I was going as fast as I felt comfortable going, but there were cars going by me at great speeds. There was just a whoosh as they went by. They were travelling at least 200 kilometres an hour, and there was no speed limit on that highway.

I thought then, as I think now, that the danger is not in the speed you are going. The danger is in the differences in speed of the cars on the highway and the changing of lanes. If everyone is going 100 clicks an hour, the highway is safe. If everyone is going 120 clicks an hour, the highway is safe. It's when someone is going 100 clicks an hour, and someone is doing 130 clicks an hour, and somebody decides to change lanes in front of the 130-kilometre-an-hour speeder that we have a recipe for disaster.

Making sure that the speed range and the enforcement of the law is such that the speed range is as narrow as possible and that switching of lanes is as restricted as possible and the courtesy of the drivers on that highway will make it a safer place—I don't think it's speed alone that dictates safety on the highway. I would think that fact would also come out in a strong way from the people who would participate in hearings on this bill.

I spoke about this bill being introduced by the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock as a private member's bill. It was voted on after that debate, one Thursday morning, and a number of the Liberal caucus, including some cabinet ministers, voted against this legislation at that time, and they've brought in an almost identical bill. Of course, I guess that speaks to the flexibility, as it were, of the Liberal philosophy: Sometimes you vote for a bill, and sometimes you vote against it; it depends how you feel that day as to whether you're going to vote for it or against it. It's interesting that so many of the Liberals voted against this legislation when it was introduced by the PCs, but now an almost identical bill is being introduced by the Liberals. I'm sure the government is encouraging their backbenchers to vote for this bill, and if need be, they'll be using the whip to encourage the members to vote in that favour.

Another aspect: As I mentioned, the speed limits that we have in Ontario and the safety on the roads are directly related to the variations of speed that you get on a highway and what speed people are comfortable driving at. There's also a philosophical question, perhaps, dealing with the law. Many states in the United States that I drive through from time to time have a very narrow margin that the law enforcement offers between the

posted speed limit and the time in which they pull you over.

There's always a debate in Ontario as to whether you can go 20 clicks or 30 clicks over the speed limit; whether the sun is shining and you can go faster; whether there is a little mist in the air and you have to go slower; or exactly how far above the speed limit you can go before you get stopped by the police officers. I have always felt, and perhaps it's my conservative nature, that we should have a very narrow range. In other words, the law is the law, and it should be enforced. It creates a respect for the law, not only on the highways but throughout our society.

I think that a safe society, a growing society, a society that is desirable on all levels, is one that is primarily, as one of its basic points, a safe society. A safe society is one in which the majority of the citizens respect the law. I don't think we respect a law when it says that the speed limit is 100 kilometres an hour and we run down the highway at 120 kilometres an hour or more. I think that promotes a disrespect for the law. So I, for one, would like to see a 115-kilometre-per-hour speed limit, with perhaps a five-kilometre margin of safety. The police officers would start laying charges at 120 clicks. In other words, if it says 115, they mean 115, not this huge variation of 20 or 30 kilometres an hour.

I think safety lies in those kinds of things as well. It's interesting that that's not mentioned or talked about in this bill, although it's very much part of the safety on the roads of Ontario.

The other thing that happens in this bill is: Who is the bill going to apply to? Is it going to apply to tractor-trailers? Is it going to apply to vans? Is it going to apply to state trucks? What about a camper hooked up to a pickup truck, a camper that is perhaps 30 or 40 feet long? Is this law going to apply to them? Is the law going to apply to a Winnebago-type vehicle that is perhaps 50 feet long? I'm always surprised that a regular driver's licence is all you need to drive those very, very large vehicles through country streets, country roads and lanes. I think that's a safety issue in the province of Ontario, and one that perhaps should be looked at as well.

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We're winding down here. I think we've covered a lot of it.

Interestingly, in Europe, where they've had mandated speed limiters, drivers are generally paid on an hourly basis, whereas in Canada they're paid on a trip basis. The differences in those two methods of payment will make a huge difference in whether or not those speed limiters affect the take-home pay of a trucker. If he's paid by the hour, of course, it doesn't really matter. He gets in his truck, he goes to where he's going and he gets paid for every hour he's there. But I live in Halton, where there are a number of gravel pits, and truckers who use those gravel pits are by and large a very safe-driving bunch of drivers. They get paid by the load, and if they can get an extra load in in a day, they can do a little bit better. They drive safely, but they drive efficiently. This legislation

may affect them in some way, and I'd like to hear from them what they think of this legislation.

All in all, although this bill has some merit on its face, I think we need some committee time with it to see how the people that it's going to affect feel about this particular bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and/or comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I thought I might be able to help my friend the member for Halton with some of the information he's requesting.

This bill will deal with trucks that weigh more than 11,794 kilograms. Those are big trucks. Any truck manufactured after 1995 already has the speed limiter incorporated in the design of the engine, and this will include all trucks in that category that operate in Ontario, whether they're from outside the jurisdiction or not.

The benefits of this legislation include 280,000 tonnes less of greenhouse gases being emitted into the environment per year. It is the equivalent of taking 2,700 tractor-trailers off the road a year. We expect that the speed limiters will help Ontario achieve 2% of the 2014 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target, 2% just by limiting.

You should also know that in monitoring the speed of trucks in this province on the 400-series highways at three different locations, the ministry has determined that 85% of the trucks already comply. We're dealing with 15% of trucks that exceed the 105-kilometre speed limit. As the member points out, the variance in speed is often the cause of the problem, rather than the actual speed.

What we are doing here is what the major trucking organizations have already done, and that is to put speed limiters on their vehicles so that they will achieve savings for the trucking company and for the shippers.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I just respond to the presentation made by my colleague and friend from Halton—a very good recitation. I think he points out some of the challenges with this legislation though. As I said earlier, it's a piece of legislation where the objectives are sound and appropriate, but there are some challenges in the way it's written.

Then, as I was listening to the comments from the parliamentary assistant, actually, rather than answering questions, it brought me more concerns. Maybe at another time, he could answer the questions, but if 85% of the trucks that we're talking about in this legislation are already complying, then doesn't that reduce the benefits that we're talking about by 85%? I'm sure the numbers used for the greenhouse gas emissions are based on reducing the number of trucks by a certain amount, but if you're reducing all the trucks, it's a different amount than if you're only reducing that last 15% that you're bringing down in speed. I think that's a very important thing.

I think he mentioned in his comments that this legislation was going to take a lot of the trucks off the road and out of the mix, because they were going to lower them down. A lot of the people that I've talked to who

are not supportive of doing this—they say that not only will this legislation reduce the emissions by the percentage that they're talking about, a lot of the people that are brokers in the trucking business believe that it will be reduced because this will drive them out of business. They will no longer be competitive in other environments. I don't say that I necessarily agree with those comments, I'm just saying that that's what the people think.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd just like to rise to congratulate my colleague from Halton on an excellent presentation.

He raises a couple of interesting points, one of which I've been publicly supportive of, with some strings attached to it, for a number of years, and that is the possibility of looking at what I call the speed of the road. Although there is a posted limit, as the member points out, on 400-series highways of 100 kilometres per hour, it does, indeed, date back to the trumped-up gas shortage of the 1970s when American states lowered their speed limits to 55 miles per hour; long since gone in favour of 60, 65, and in some cases 75 mile per hour speed limits. Why? Because automobiles in the 1970s and automobiles today are rather different.

We have to remember that, in the context of a bill that considers regulating the speed of trucks, we are in the business of sharing our highways. It's not just trucks on the road; it's cars.

Also, the point that the member raises with regard to truckers being independent business people: Independent business people, forming approximately 85% of all business being done in the province of Ontario, are a very significant part of our population, and a part of our population that we need to support in every way possible—as I have been doing on another front, the convenience store front, in this House over the past couple of weeks.

It is very important, to echo the words of the member from Halton, that in the case of Bill 41, we get it right. I don't think there is much opposition in this House to the concept of controlling speed on our highways and thereby helping our atmosphere and environment and lowering the accident rate. But getting it right is something that we can do as this bill is refined in committee, and I support the member and concur 100%. We agree where control is concerned; we don't like the bureaucratic aspects of it, but we certainly want to see the appropriate modifications made.

Mr. Mike Colle: Bill 41 is a bill that is very topical because of the increasing concern about road safety, not only for truckers but for all of our citizens around our highways. Mr. Speaker, you certainly know how important safety is as you're travelling along Highway 26, on the beautiful shores of Georgian Bay, going towards North America's longest, widest beach, Wasaga Beach. You know that so many people come from all over Ontario to go there, so you want to make sure as the summer months are coming that people are travelling safely, and you want to make sure that if they're on their way to Wasaga, they're buckled up and, in partnership

with the trucking industry, that they're also doing the speed limit. This is going to encourage, I think, more safety from everybody, and I think it's a step in the right direction.

It also is, as many have said, part of reducing greenhouse gases, because reduced speed does certainly help with air quality. The comment from the member from Thornhill about speed and the 1970s, when we had the oil crisis: It's actually one of the, you might say, silver linings in the atrocious price of gas. People are now going to hybrids, people are driving slower. There are more four-cylinder cars.

I just talked to someone who got back from San Francisco, who said that the whole city of San Francisco, if people are driving cars, they're driving Priuses—not to plug that car, but it's a four-cylinder car that gets almost 50 miles to the gallon. That's the trend of the future. So this bill is really part of the future trend, where people are not going to be driving as fast or driving as much, hopefully, and maybe using more hybrids if they have to drive. So this is going in the right direction.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Halton has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I had in my notes a question for the government member concerning the 280 tonnes of pollution that—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: It's 280,000.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh:—280,000 tonnes of pollution that would be saved. The Ontario Trucking Association says that that number is 140,000, which is half of what the government is saying. The member for Oxford pointed out that 85% of the trucks on the road already have these facilities on their vehicles. I wonder if perhaps sometime this afternoon, after further debate, the government could clarify where they came up with the 280,000? Is that for all trucks, based on the savings, or is that on the 15% of trucks that would be different? How do their 280,000 tonnes differ from the Ontario Trucking Association's estimates of 140,000 tonnes? That is a huge difference—that's half—and I would be interested in where that difference comes from, how the government arrived at their figures, and why their figures are so different from the Ontario Trucking Association's.

I'd like to thank the members very much who participated in the debate and made comments about my speech. I look forward to further debate on this bill, Bill 41, and I also look forward very much to the hearings at committee. I think that committee should be travelling across Ontario, because the trucking industry varies tremendously across this province. The trucking industry in the GTA is entirely different than it is in Thunder Bay or Barrie or eastern Ontario or western Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Those who are watching this should know that it's late on a Thursday afternoon, and any excuse to bang on the desks will be taken.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's all because of you.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm sure.

My remarks on this bill will be relatively short. I appreciate the comments of the member from Welland, who has spoken well and at length about issues that are going to have to be addressed in the course of committee hearings. I want to say that when you look at the history of this issue, Environment Canada, when it outlined a variety of options for Canada to deal with greenhouse gas emissions, noted that control of the speed for trucks was an option that should be considered in a Canadian climate change control plan.

The government of Quebec, in putting together its climate plan, listed speed limitations for trucks as one of its measures. If you go to the Internet and check on the situation in the United States, you will find that a number of large trucking companies have brought in limiters on their trucks to reduce the fossil fuel consumption—the diesel consumption—as a way of dealing with rising costs in the fuel market. So there's a general sense that controlling the speed of trucks can reduce fuel consumption and thus greenhouse gas emissions. That's a useful thing.

I think the issues that have been raised, in particular by the member from Welland, but others as well about potential safety issues, do need to be addressed in committee. The government, the minister, should look at the experience in the United States, where the trucking companies have, on their own volition, put those speed limiters in place as a way of reducing consumption. Let's find out what their safety experience is. If indeed there is no safety issue here, then the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is something that should be broadly supported. I think it's a good thing that this bill is going to committee so that people can come, speak and look for ways of addressing the different issues that have been raised and forge, in the end, a bill that will be useful in this province.

I do want to say, though, that one of the things that left a sour taste in my mouth when I heard the speeches from the Minister of Transportation and others from the government benches is the whole issue of climate change and the adequacy of their response.

It should never be forgotten that the Premier of this province 10 months ago promised a climate plan. The Premier of this province said that climate change is one of the great challenges of our time. There are ministers here tonight whose relatives, friends and constituents will face profound problems as the planet heats up, and yet there's no plan, no allocation in the budget for any substantial move forward on climate action. I cite Keith Stewart from the World Wildlife Fund and his comments on this budget.

So in fact this item, which is relatively small in the larger scheme of things, is not a substitute for a climate plan.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I hear beside me a Liberal member saying that this is a good step. Well, I have to say that 20 years ago it would have been something really

worthwhile. Things have moved on very quickly. In fact, we are facing a situation now that is evolving very rapidly. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says that we have 10 years within which to take the steps to avoid catastrophic developments on the climate front. Twenty years ago we had a 10-year window to avoid substantial climate change. Well, we blew that. That didn't happen. We now have in this province a government that is satisfied with small steps when what is really needed is substantial action.

I look forward to this bill going to committee. I look forward to hearing the arguments. I look forward to the government bringing forward the evidence from other jurisdictions. I look forward to the concerns of people like the member from Welland being addressed. But for this government in any way, shape or form to say that it is taking adequate action to deal with climate change is simply incorrect and, frankly, something that is an abandonment of its responsibility to the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and/or comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to commend the member from Toronto–Danforth for the updating, more on the climate change than on the environment part of it, as he's the critic for the Ministry of the Environment. I appreciate that he came in—it's likely not his duty day on Thursday afternoon—to speak to this bill because the government is suggesting that this bill will go a long way to meet climate change targets. I think it's important that the view of that from the opposition is also on the record to show whether it's actually achieving what the government says the bill is going to do. Of course, it really falls in that same category again about, "We know it will, but we're not going to tell you the numbers that told us that."

As was presented by the parliamentary assistant—and it bothers me somewhat: He actually stood up and listed the emissions reductions that we were going to see. He talked about the percentage of trucks that can be converted and put these on with great ado, and he was reading the numbers, the size of the truck they would apply to. I can presume that's all from a regulation that has not yet been written, because it's not in the bill. The only numbers used in the bill are the fines if somebody doesn't comply.

I have pointed out that it's in subsection (8), under "Offence":

"(8) Every person who contravenes or fails to comply with subsection (1), (2), (3), (5) or (7), or a regulation made under this section, is guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine of not less than \$250 and not more than \$20,000."

Mr. Mike Colle: I just want to comment on the member from Toronto–Danforth, and I certainly applaud him in putting in the perspective of the climate change agenda. He's appreciated for doing that.

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I just wanted to say to him that it's a matter of a number of significant initiatives that this government has

taken in this bill. The focus is obviously truck safety and road safety, but there is the climate change part of it.

If you look at what the government has done, we're the first government in Canada to dedicate gas tax money directly to municipalities for public transit. Over \$325 million goes from provincial gas tax, which some of these truckers pay, to public transit. It's never been done before in this province and in this country. We did it. It's helping public transit. That's part of climate change.

We've established one of the world's largest greenbelts, the size of Prince Edward Island, over a million-plus acres. The Environmental Law Society said that it's a world-class, world-renowned greenbelt. That directly affects our climate, because it means you just can't pave all of southern Ontario, from Wasaga to Windsor. The Places to Grow strategy means we've designated where you can build. You can't just sprawl everywhere. That's part of a definitive pro-climate, saving-our-planet agenda that we've not only talked about, but it's in place.

The \$17 billion—not million; billion—in our Move Ontario, the most extensive investment in public transit in North America, is underway right now. We should get that centre line back up to cottage country and everywhere. That's what we are doing now: We're building transit.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I listened with great intent to my colleague, the member from Toronto–Danforth. There's no question; he's always been a very thoughtful and articulate spokesperson when it comes to the issues of climate change and a number of issues related to the protection of the environment here in the province of Ontario.

I do note, though, that when it comes to chatting about how this particular initiative will have some impact on the whole issue of climate and air quality, I want to quote from Quentin Chiotti, who's the senior scientist from Pollution Probe: "If you look at truck emissions, they've gone up about 70% over the last 15 years.... So if we can make a dent in that—and this legislation will clearly do that—it's a step forward."

You have to look at, I believe, a number of initiatives over the last four years that are components of our climate change strategy. You look at the introduction, the development and putting in the greenbelt legislation: There's a process in place now to look at consultation with various stakeholders in this particular area to look at expanding the greenbelt, providing an area in the province of Ontario to protect it for future generations. It's been acknowledged by a number of distinguished planning groups in the United States that have given awards to Ontario for the establishment of the greenbelt. We see that as important.

This piece of legislation and other future pieces of legislation which we'll be bringing forward are all part and parcel of our initiative to control GHGs and to really come to grips with this whole climate change issue in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We have room for one more question and/or comments.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Just a couple of points to my friend from the third party, really in the form of questions.

One of them would be: Will the minister be guaranteeing that there are public hearings to be held in relation to this bill? I think that's one of the major tenets here. The bill doesn't specify an awful lot, so it's more an issue of what isn't there than what is. The assumption that we'll go to committee and get it all regulated is just an assumption, and we know what assuming does.

What is the government's definition—to that point as well—of a commercial vehicle? A commercial vehicle could be defined as anything. It could be a smart car that acts as a courier—and that's not a truck. I want to know if we are talking about 18-wheelers. That, again, is an assumption. We could be talking about minivans; we could be talking about cube vans, buses, school buses, whatever. Why does this legislation not specifically mention calibrating speed limiters to a maximum of no more than 105, rather than leaving it in the nebulous state that it is where you don't have anybody but bureaucrats controlling what that speed might be and if it can vary over time? So I'd like to see, whether it's 105 or something else, some fixed number there.

Also, the issue raised by my colleague the member from Kitchener–Waterloo as well: of whether school buses are defined as commercial vehicles because they fall betwixt and between, and arguably—not even arguably; they do contain what is the most valuable cargo that any vehicle could carry in the province of Ontario or, for that matter, anywhere else.

Will this act in its final form take into consideration practical issues like having the ability to accelerate under certain situations? Those are things that are left unanswered by the bill, things that most members have raised. I look forward to speaking to it as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Toronto–Danforth has up to two minutes. No? Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 115, I think it is. Oh no, that was—

Interjections.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: That's right. Obviously, the reason that I got the wrong number is because this bill is a photocopy of Bill 115, which was previously introduced by the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. At that time, it was Bill 115. I just wanted to refer to that for a moment because I think it's rather important that we recognize how we got here.

At that time, it was a private member's bill introduced by a member of the opposition. It got second reading debate, and it got support in the House to be referred to committee for review. Of course, as we know, it goes to committee and then it can have committee hearings, and when the committee refers it back to the House or the government wants to call it back to the House, it would get third and final reading and become law. But the government House leader has to call that bill back to the

House, and we remember, of course, that that didn't happen. This was prior to the election.

I think it's important, too, just for a moment to dwell on when it was passed in the House. In fact, it got a lot of support, but it didn't get the support of some critical votes, I suppose one would say. The parliamentary assistant, who generally would speak on behalf of the minister, expounding the minister's view if the minister wasn't here—for that vote the Minister of Transportation wasn't here, but the parliamentary assistant for transportation was here. The parliamentary assistant, I would presume on behalf of the government and the government position, voted against that private member's bill, because the view would be that the government didn't want that bill.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: He's an excellent member; one of the finest members.

Interjection.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Exactly. They voted against it. And the member from London–Fanshawe says, "Well, the reason we voted against it is because it was a private member's bill." To me, that doesn't make sense. That's why we have private members' business. The party one sits—

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I didn't say that.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: —the manner under which one sits in this Legislature should have no impact on private members' business. In fact, that's an opportunity for every member in this Legislature to put forward what they believe is the appropriate approach, and then members in this House vote for that and send it to committee. The protection of the party is there when the government has the alternative to call it back for third reading, which of course in this case never happened.

I remember very distinctly. Of course, the House then adjourned and prorogued. We all understand how that works. When the House prorogues, everything on the order paper disappears and falls off the table, so to speak, and that's what happened. Then, as we were leading up to the summer recess—we had prorogued early, I think three weeks early, because the government had nothing more that they deemed to need doing. So we unceremoniously were told on Thursday, "Don't come back on Monday because we have adjourned the proceedings."

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Just leading up to the election, I got a call from my local press that the Minister of Transportation had come out with an announcement—that was, of course, the Minister of Transportation of the previous government, not the present government—that, if re-elected, they would introduce this type of bill. I thought that was a wonderful thing. The press called me, and I said, "I think that's a good idea because I've supported a bill exactly like that in the past. I'm a little concerned, though, and suspicious whether we can actually take their word for it because this bill was before the Legislature, and then the parliamentary assistant, on behalf of the government, voted against it. The government didn't want this bill." I said, "They must have had what you call a bit of a change of heart."

The one thing that I think is important in that change of heart, and the reason I've gone to this length in talking about it, is that the minister, when he announced this bill, said that it was going to save 23% fewer injuries and reduce accidents by 23%—serious, disabling accidents. I think the statistics show not necessarily that we have fewer accidents; they show that we have less severe accidents if the speed limit is kept down. It was going to save 23% of serious injuries.

I think it was in June of last year that my colleague introduced that bill, and here we are debating it. Just stop and think for a moment how many serious accidents could have been saved if the government wanted to do this and was re-elected, and all this time later finally decide they are going to do it. Why not lose some of that, "We want to do it our way," and just accept that somebody else had a good idea? Had they implemented that bill at that time, all those serious injuries—23% of all the serious injuries—could have been avoided. That's taking it from the minister's own statement. If the minister has that type of documentation and that type of information, I'm really concerned as to why we would have taken this approach to have stopped this from being put forward all that time just because, "It wasn't my idea."

Having said that, one cannot live in the past. We must move forward from here. I want to say that I support the principle. I voted for the bill last time and I will support the principles of this bill again. As was mentioned by my good friend Mr. Shurman, there's nothing in this process so far on anything we've heard from the government side that the government is even prepared to hold public hearings on this. I'd like some kind of commitment that that's what's going to happen when we finish debate on it for second reading. I would hope that, as we do the rotation, some of the members from the government side would point out that yes, when we get through with the debate on second reading, the bill will be going for third reading. So I'm looking forward to that.

I want to talk a little bit about the bill and what it doesn't do.

Hon. David Caplan: You haven't done that yet.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Yes, I've talked about it extensively. The Minister of Infrastructure Renewal says I haven't talked about the bill, but I want to say that one doesn't need a lot of time to talk about the bill, because the bill doesn't have a lot to talk about. The bill is totally an enabling bill for the minister to have a regime of defining who they're going to regulate and deciding how they're going to regulate them. The only thing the bill does is impose the penalty if people don't listen.

Interjection.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: That's right. Hit them with a hammer if they don't listen.

I think the issue of what it does is important on the bill. Going back to the two main ones, there is nothing in this bill that talks about the speed that they will be limited to. I think the minister can, by his or her choice, make that decision on what they're going to set the speed at. Is it going to be 90, 95, 105 or 115? They can set it wherever they want.

The second and, I think, more critical part—and the parliamentary assistant did read from a sheet of paper that I presume is a draft regulation; I don't know that. But he read what a "commercial vehicle" was going to be. But there's nothing in the bill, other than saying that the minister can define a commercial vehicle. It just says that he can, by regulation, define "motor vehicle" for the purpose of this act. So in fact he can define a commercial motor vehicle. It may be motor homes; it may be cube vans—I suppose one could say that a taxicab is a commercial vehicle. There is nothing in there that would prohibit that type of regulation.

The other thing on the speed part is clause 68.1(11)(f) of the bill. It says that the minister can make regulations "prescribing the speed for the purpose of subsection (9)." So there is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Perhaps the honourable member can conclude when he gets his two-minute response. Questions and/or comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd like to thank my colleague the member from Oxford for some interesting comments, one of them being his pointing out that Bill 115 died an untimely death, when you consider that it was a valid bill as a private member's bill and has since returned in another form now called Bill 41, both bills having merit. It's just sad that something that seems to be somewhat universal in the House has been delayed as a result of the fact that it was private members' business and has come back to us a couple of years later as government business. I might say that it's a shame that good legislation is often lost that way, especially coming to this House as I do, being a relatively new member.

That said, the bill itself, with some specifics, has the makings of very valid legislation. Given the fact that those specifics are defined over the fullness of time, undoubtedly it will pass, and we'll wind up with a safer Ontario as a result.

I would like to underscore my prior reservations, though, which my friend seems to share; to wit, the importance of hearing from the most affected stakeholders, and they are the truckers themselves, the trucking industry as a whole. These happen to be great corporate citizens and terrific independent business people. They already do an awful lot of what the legislation intends for them to do on their own.

I'm quoting now from the Ontario Trucking Association statistics that I have. It's a fact that 55% to 60% of trucks on the road are already under the control of governors—the name for these speed controllers—voluntarily, and the speeds on them range from anywhere between 90 to 110 kilometres per hour. As a point of fact, the European Union adopted speed limiter legislation well over a decade ago. It's high time we did, but as I've mentioned and as my friend from Oxford has said, it has to be done with the appropriate regulatory balances.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Apparently the government is speechless on this issue. A couple of speakers ago, we started asking some questions where we asked the government if they would respond. Since that time, no

government member has been on their feet. Apparently, there are some questions that they would rather not answer.

We asked whether there would be hearings on this bill, which is a very legitimate question. There are a great number of independent business people in the province of Ontario who are going to be affected by this legislation. The member for Oxford brought it to the attention of the government. Will there be hearings on this bill, and where will those hearings take place?

As I pointed out at the end of my comments on the bill, the conditions that truckers face across this province vary tremendously. They are far different in eastern Ontario, where many truckers use two-lane highways and have an entirely different set of circumstances to deal with as they're travelling to the towns and villages of eastern Ontario.

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In northern Ontario they're using two- and three- and four-lane highways, and there are often long hauls involved in northern Ontario between cities and towns. How are they affected by this legislation?

Of course, in southwestern Ontario there's a different situation again from what we find in the GTA or the Golden Horseshoe, down into the Niagara Peninsula. Given the difference in the way this bill will impact the people who live in those different parts of the province, I think it would be a condition of the government that they would want to hold hearings in each of those areas to make sure that what they did in this bill wasn't misrepresented or misconstrued and that we got it right the first time we put past this legislation.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Heard enough? I just wanted to help them a bit. Two hundred eighty thousand tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions will be eliminated by the speed limiter bill. The size of the truck is 11,794 kilograms. Above that, you will need to have the speed limiter.

I represent Manitoulin Island as part of my constituency. Doug Smith founded Manitoulin Transport, one of the 10 largest trucking firms in all of Canada, operated from Gore Bay. His trucks have been limited to 90 kilometres per hour by speed limiters for a great length of time. He's telling us, as is OTA president David Bradley—who himself wants it to be clear that he's not related to Jim Bradley—that he's firmly in support of this measure. We know that it is a government commitment that this will go to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We do have room for one more round of questions and/or comments.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): That member has already spoken. Nice try. The honourable member for Oxford has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all the members who spoke in the questions and comments, particularly my two colleagues on our side of the House and the parliamentary assistant, for bringing forward some of the information that was requested.

I think it's so important that we had that as part of this debate. Obviously, if we have questions and comments, it seems important that if you have questions, someone would make an effort to answer them. In the length of time I've sat here, it's always been understood that question period was the time that should happen: when the opposition has questions, that that's when you would get the answers. I appreciate the parliamentary assistant. He decided to actually deliver that answer when somebody asked a question. So, thank you very much for that.

I do think it's very important, as I mentioned in my presentation, that we have those public hearings—the parliamentary assistant didn't answer that question—to make sure that we were going to have them. I think it's so important that there is a group of people—a large number of people who are not involved and are not members of the Ontario Trucking Association—that has some comments and some real concerns about this legislation. I think we as legislators have an obligation to hear from them, as we move forward with this legislation, why they think it will not do what it should be doing for the trucking industry, in combination with what it will do for our environment.

I thank him very much for putting that forward, and I do hope he takes that concern back to the minister as they come to the decision of how much and when we're going to have public hearings after second reading of this bill. I think that's a very important part of this bill.

The other thing that I think is important is that we actually have those numbers that the parliamentary assistant has been reading, what will be defined as a commercial vehicle. I think that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for his contribution to the debate. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: The thing that first hit me when I took a look at the draft bill was that this is about shared highways. The highways everywhere are not just for trucks, albeit that's an important aspect of what uses those roads; they're for everybody.

The best example I could recall of my first acquaintance with 400-series highways in the province of Ontario was back before I moved to Ontario 25 years ago, when my now almost 34-year-old son was a one-year-old and regulations weren't what they are today. During a trip from my native Montreal, in a low-slung sports car with no back seat, no child restraints, no place other than buckled in with my wife in the right-hand seat for young Michael to sit, he stood and watched the traffic go by. What he saw came out through the limited vocabulary of a one-year-old; what he was saying was, "Big truck. Big truck. Big truck." I could go on for a while, because he did, for about six hours. And what he did was enlighten me for a debate I never knew I'd be part of, 25 or 30 years later, in terms of making me aware of what is the primary traffic on the 401 and the other 400-series highways here in Ontario.

My history of the 401 goes back even further than that. The 401 was built in 1960; it's the spine of the province of Ontario, and, as my friend from Halton

pointed out, at that time a 70-mile-per-hour road, which, in equivalency terms today, runs somewhere between 115 and 120 kilometres an hour, at a time when cars were not built and trucks were not built the way they are today in terms of safety.

With that in mind, I'd like to record the fact that I support this bill. The Progressive Conservative caucus indeed supported this bill back when it was initially introduced in the Legislature in 2006 as a private member's bill, put forward by my colleague the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. This bill is almost identical to the one that was tabled then, and if this bill is deserving of government support now, I've got to say that it certainly was deserving of government support back in 2006.

What, I'm asking myself, caused the change of spirit in the government? I'm guessing that somebody must have been blinded by the light. It was not a good idea then, ostensibly, but it is a good idea now. Nevertheless, let's just sum it up with, "Better late than never."

There are many, many issues of practical concern that have to be addressed specifically by the Minister of Transportation as this bill moves forward, and it undoubtedly will. I've mentioned some of them before; I'd like to be very specific on them now. The for-instances include whether or not this minister will guarantee that there will be public hearings held in relation to the bill.

This is not just about the guy and his rig, referring to an 18-wheeler; this is about corporate trucking, a major aspect of industry here in Ontario. It's about independent truckers. It is about large commercial vehicles, because commercial vehicles, as has been pointed out by many of the speakers today, are not defined. It's about rental vehicles, rental trucks. It's about foreign vehicles that don't necessarily have their licences from the province of Ontario and the monitoring and infrastructure for that monitoring that has to go into that.

What exactly is the government's definition of a "commercial motor vehicle"? I've mentioned that it could be the 18-wheel rigs. It could also be buses, it could be vans, it could be courier vehicles, and it could be private cars that are used for commercial purposes. There are many things that are easily defined as commercial motor vehicles.

Why does this legislation not specifically mention calibrating speed limiters to a maximum of 105 kilometres per hour? That's what seems to be the number that people are fixated on, and it seems to be the appropriate speed. It seems to be the speed where governors or speed limiters have been put on vehicles voluntarily by the trucking industry, and that's 55% to 60% already. They are set for somewhere between 90 and 110 kilometres per hour. That, roughly, comes out to about 105 kilometres per hour. The European Union, as I mentioned earlier, has adopted speed limiter legislation, and many carriers at this point already govern their fleets at or below 105 kilometres per hour.

The Ontario Trucking Association also predicts a number of other things—benefits including a reduction of as much as 140 kilotonnes of greenhouse gas, which is 140,000 tonnes—280,000 pounds—of emissions that go into the air. It talks about less severe car-truck collisions, and it talks about less tailgating and improper lane changes.

I could go on for some time about what's happening on our roads. Suffice to say that I will, under circumstances, support this bill, as will the PC caucus, but we need the regulation inherent in it.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for his contribution to the debate.

It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until next Monday, April 21, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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