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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 21 April 2008

Lundi 21 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 21 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 21 avril 2008

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FAMILIES FOR A SECURE FUTURE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to speak on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus about the organization known as Families for a Secure Future. As you may know, Families for a Secure Future is a unique organization which is dedicated to creating circles of support around people with disabilities and their families. The goal is to allow the disabled person to reach his or her full potential and to promote inclusion in our society. It also allows parents the comfort of knowing that those supports will be there for their child when they are gone.

My colleague the member for Dufferin–Caledon just last week asked the Minister of Community and Social Services for \$90,000 to allow this highly effective group to continue to provide its services. One of the responses received from the minister suggested that the PC Party would like to reduce the social services budget. I would like to make it clear that the official opposition is not asking to take services away from anyone in need of them. The party looks only to spend government dollars in a way which would be most fiscally responsible.

Families for a Secure Future is a perfect example of fiscally responsible spending. Giving \$90,000 to Families for a Secure Future would save our province millions of dollars in reduction of hospital, crisis and long-term-care beds being accessed by those who would, with this organization's assistance, be able to remain in the community with effective supports. I urge this government to reconsider their decision to deny Families for a Secure Future this \$90,000, which will save our government millions and provide those with disabilities the priceless dignity of living in the community.

BÉNÉVOLES

M. Gilles Bisson: Cette bonne fin de semaine, on a eu la chance à Mattice de donner les honneurs à ceux et celles de notre communauté qui ont fait du travail volontaire.

Vous savez que dans les communautés telles que Mattice et autres, ce sont les bénévoles qui font le cœur de la communauté. Sans les bénévoles, ceci voudrait dire

que les services qu'on prend pour acquis, tels que ce qui se passe au sous-sol de l'église, ce qui se passe avec le club de hockey, ce qui se passe avec d'autres organisations, dont le baseball, les louveteaux et autres, ne marcheraient pas. C'est eux qui font le cœur de la communauté.

Donc, ce dimanche, on a eu l'honneur, avec le préfet de Mattice, le conseil municipal et autres, de donner les honneurs à ceux et celles qui ont travaillé dans cette communauté pendant des années pour donner à cette communauté le cœur qui est Mattice.

J'étais très fier d'être là de la part de tous les députés de l'Assemblée législative pour reconnaître cet ouvrage que ces gens ont fait et de dire bravo et chapeau à tous ceux et celles qui ont fait du bénévolat dans la communauté de Mattice. C'était un honneur, et on regarde à continuer ce bel ouvrage dans la communauté, parce qu'on sait que Mattice est ce qu'elle est grâce aux gens qui demeurent là.

RIDING OF NORTHUMBERLAND–QUINTE WEST

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'm proud to rise in the House today, proud to tell you about the constituents in my riding of Northumberland–Quinte West.

When Mayor Hector Macmillan of Trent Hills declared a state of emergency due to flooding from the Trent and Crowe rivers, he sent out a plea for volunteers to help. Well, help he got. I had an opportunity, with the warden and the mayor, to visit the site and see these volunteers roll up their sleeves, fill sandbags, and even deliver them to those in fear of being flooded. These volunteers, friends and family came from all parts of the riding and from other communities to help their neighbours.

I could not be more proud than I am today of the amazing people who live in Northumberland–Quinte West. They willingly dropped everything to lend a helping hand. Through steady contact and updates from Mayor Macmillan, I'm happy to report the worst is over.

This weekend has reaffirmed to me that I live in the best riding in the best province in the best country in the world, and that is Northumberland–Quinte West.

JOHN DIGBY

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to recognize an outstanding resident of my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, Dr. John Digby.

This weekend, Dr. Digby was recognized as the 2008 Volunteer of the Year by the Huntsville Hospital Foundation. Dr. Digby has given generously of his time and energies to the community for many years. He was co-chair of the capital campaign for the Huntsville District Memorial Hospital Foundation day surgery project that raised more than \$5 million. He has just started his third term on the board of directors for the Huntsville Hospital Foundation. And John is now the hospital foundation chair of the planning committee for the upcoming capital campaign. Dr. Digby believes strongly in supporting the Huntsville District Memorial Hospital Foundation and does all he personally can for this cause.

John is a member of the Huntsville Probus Club and an avid golfer. I also happen to know that he previously belonged to the Huntsville choir. Dr. Digby practised in Toronto as a rheumatologist, and continues today to work as a physician consultant. He and his wife, Donna, reside in Huntsville and are very active in the community.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. John Digby for his outstanding volunteerism and support for the hospital foundation and the people who are served by the hospital.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Bill Mauro: I rise today to say how pleased I am about this morning's announcement that was made by the Trillium Gift of Life Network. As you are aware, Ontarians will now be compensated for out-of-pocket expenses when they become living organ donors.

As an addition to this morning's announcement, our Minister of Health, George Smitherman, has announced a new \$500,000 program that our government will fund to reduce the travel costs associated with organ recipients who must travel for transplant surgery. The TGLN will administer the fund and will solicit/accept donations from others wishing to enhance our government's contribution.

This announcement ties in with an event I attended this past Saturday in Thunder Bay. I had the pleasure of participating in the 10th annual Run for Life to raise awareness about organ donation. This fun 5K run/walk was a huge success, and to my knowledge it may be the largest organ donation awareness event in the province. It included approximately 500 people, many of whom are organ recipients and donor family members.

I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize some of the committee members responsible for organizing the Run for Life, including Gary Cooper; Sandra Petzel, the organ donor coordinator of the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre; and Janet MacLean, the vice-president of the Trillium Gift of Life Network.

I'm thrilled with the new additional funding our government is assigning for organ donation, and I want to reiterate how proud I am of the volunteers who participated in this year's Run for Life.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Tomorrow, April 22, is Earth Day, and as we approach Earth Day, the citizens of

Simcoe North are aware that the county of Simcoe has applied to the Ministry of the Environment for a permit to pump hundreds of millions of litres of water per year to dewater the future location of landfill site 41.

My office has received thousands of letters and e-mails from constituents who are horrified to think that this government might even consider pumping good, clean water into a ditch so that the landfill could be constructed above an aquifer—an aquifer that feeds two municipal water systems, Elmvale and Wyevale, each less than five kilometres away.

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This permit to take water presents a huge problem for the Minister of the Environment. First of all, as the previous Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Minister Gerretsen would like to think that he has developed a close friendship with the county of Simcoe. He made an appearance at the county of Simcoe where he promised nothing and received a beautiful painting. As well, Minister Gerretsen was the architect of the so-called inter-governmental action plan, that would see a growth plan of a minimum of 240,000 additional people in the county of Simcoe over the next 25 years. There are hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure investment required to accommodate the growth, but not one cent is guaranteed by this government.

When the county of Simcoe narrowly passed a vote last year to proceed with site 41, I suspect the Minister of the Environment would have hoped that the opposition to site 41 was over. However, the water-taking permit application has only fuelled the fire. The opposition now is greater than ever. The minister is in a difficult position, but he should do what is right and either pass my bill, Waste Disposal Site 41 in the Township of Tiny Act, 2008, or bring in his own legislation that parallels the Adams Mine Lake Act passed by this government in the last Parliament.

ONTARIO PRODUCE

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I rise in the House today to remind my colleagues and fellow Ontarians of our wonderful Pick Ontario Freshness strategy. It's aimed at building awareness of, and demand for, the fresh, high-quality foods grown and produced right here in Ontario.

The best part of this strategy is that everyone can participate in Pick Ontario Freshness, from the restaurant industry to agrifood producers as well as grocery stores and consumers. The Pick Ontario Freshness strategy includes an expansion of the Foodland Ontario program to include deli-fresh meats, dairy, baked goods, as well as fruits and vegetables, boosting the Savour Ontario program to promote Ontario food in our restaurants.

The strategy also includes an advertising program, which I'm sure most of us have seen on television, with that catchy jingle that goes, "Good things grow in Ontario." Those ads are definitely working because a recent Foodland survey reported that 94% of grocery store shoppers recognized the brand, and 87% of the shoppers

preferred Ontario product when they were given the opportunity to pick it.

Because of its success, the government has invested an additional \$56 million over the next four years into the Pick Ontario Freshness strategy. This strategy not only benefits the environment, but it ensures that Ontario farmers have a successful and sustainable future.

I encourage everyone to take part in this initiative and Pick Ontario Freshness. Ontario farmers are outstanding in their fields, and good things do grow in Ontario.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's with great pleasure that I rise today, on the first day of Earth Week, to speak to what the McGuinty government is doing to address climate change. We know that we need to address climate change from every angle. The causes and effects of climate change are all around us, but so are the solutions.

With all the information out there, one would think by now we could move beyond the rhetoric of the climate change skeptics. Unfortunately, one of those skeptics is the new member of the Conservative Party, who said last year, "I don't see greenhouse gases as the terrible evil that some others see." This was said when arguing in favour of keeping Ontario coal plants open.

This government is getting rid of dirty coal and closing our coal plants by the end of 2014. We have introduced a \$1.15-billion Next Generation of Job Funds to partner with businesses who create green jobs.

In order to address climate change, we have to change how we think about our planet's limits. We have to embrace an economy that will bring forth innovative ideas for a green and sustainable future. That's what this government is doing, and will continue to do for the sake of our collective future.

Thank you for allowing me to speak and address this issue, because it's very important for all of us.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise today to speak about a transit issue that has been the cause for significant community concern in the riding of York South–Weston: the air-rail link from Pearson airport to downtown Toronto. I have been working hard, together with the community, to fight against any proposal to put a non-stop, high-speed train through Weston.

Since my election as MPP, I have met with the chair of Metrolinx, with representatives of the airport authority, with many local residents, as well as the government ministers. My message to them has been the same: There can be no high-speed train running non-stop through Weston Road. Any rail service travelling through Weston must stop at Weston Road, therefore eliminating street closures.

The community must benefit and have access to any new service. Any such service cannot impede the priority by the TTC or Metrolinx to move forward with important

transit project in York South–Weston, such as the Eglinton LRT. Any environmental impact must be no greater than that of GO trains, which are a common service through Weston.

Fortunately, the Ministry of Transportation indicated last summer that if the air-rail link project selects the Georgetown corridor, its preference is to have the trains stop in the community, providing additional service to local residents.

I remain confident that government and transportation agencies will recognize the needs of our community and that we will continue to work together to find the best solution to the proposed air-rail link.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUILDING CODE AMENDMENT ACT (STORM WATER HARVESTING), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE CODE DU BÂTIMENT (RÉCUPÉRATION DES EAUX PLUVIALES)

Mr. Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 63, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 with respect to storm water harvesting / Projet de loi 63, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment en ce qui a trait à la récupération des eaux pluviales.

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: This bill, if passed, will prohibit the chief building official from issuing a construction permit if the proposed building includes or is served by a storage garage, as defined in the act, and does not include a storm water harvesting system. It reduces the demand on water supply from the municipality, it allows for storage of rain water during urban water bans, and it minimizes property erosion and flooding. Importantly, storm water harvesting reduces treated water consumption, conserving electricity in the process. This bill will benefit homeowners, the environment and, most importantly, future generations of Ontarians.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EARTH WEEK

Hon. John Gerretsen: As we all know, this is Earth Week. At the heart of Earth Week is the fundamental realization that this planet is home to us all and we share a responsibility to care for it.

In the face of the immense environmental challenge of climate change, Earth Week is taking on more significance and importance every year. We know that climate change will affect every nation in the world, and we are moved to act not only for ourselves, for our well-being and health, but even more so for the sake of our children and grandchildren, people who have no say in the actions we take today but will inherit the results of those actions.

From young to old, Ontarians across our province are taking steps to help our environment during Earth Week and beyond. Our government understands that it's at the community grassroots level where involvement leads to real action and measurable results. That is why we are investing in the great work that is being done by Ontarians at the local community level. This year, we're providing \$2.6 million to support 24 community-based greenhouse gas reduction projects across the province. The support is also coming from our community go green fund, a four-year, \$6.6-million program. Every program is designed to meet the local needs of the community and to help people reduce their carbon footprint.

In honour of Earth Week, I'd like to highlight some of these programs today. Here in the greater Toronto area, FoodShare is developing a pilot project called Putting Our Best Food Forward. This project will result in the planting of organic school food gardens and a composting program to promote sustainable food practices in 10 primary and secondary schools across Toronto.

In Waterloo, Reduce the Juice is a youth-led community initiative to encourage vehicle owners to pledge their commitment to reduce idling, and surveys will measure action and greenhouse gas reductions. In Woodstock, Forests for Life is a community tree planting program for youth and developmentally challenged volunteers focusing on the importance of carbon sequestration and energy conservation through a healthy tree canopy. These are just a few of the community groups who are taking action and making a difference, and our government is proud to support them on behalf of the people of Ontario.

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In my own ministry we are dedicated to Project Green, with the goal of being the greenest government ministry, from using renewable energy through Bullfrog Power, to enhancing recycling efforts, to video conferencing, to purchasing more hybrid vehicles for our fleets; we are trying to lead by example. Since the beginning of our mandate, our government has made environmental stewardship a key priority. We have set ambitious targets for greenhouse gas reductions: 6% below the 1990 level by 2014 and 15% by 2020, and we're taking action. We passed the award-winning Greenbelt Act, which protects 1.8 million acres of land across the GTA. We have set out tough regulations and limits for the largest industrial sources of smog-causing emissions. We are making an unprecedented \$17.5-billion investment in transit to help clean the air and encourage people to leave their cars at home more often.

Just recently, Premier McGuinty announced the creation of Ontario's Next Generation of Jobs Fund, which

will provide \$1.15 billion for companies, institutions and individuals to encourage the innovation and invention process for green technologies. We are working on many different funds to protect our environment. We have taken actions that some might say were difficult, if not impossible, but we did them because we think, and know, it's the right thing to do. We will continue to be aggressive and ambitious about our environmental stewardship.

On Earth Day tomorrow, I encourage all Ontarians to reflect on how they can, as individuals in their communities and in their businesses, do the right thing for our environment. Last Friday I had the opportunity to visit Rideau Public School in Kingston, and this morning St. Paul Catholic School, and I cannot tell you how impressed we all can be with the students' know-how about environmental stewardship. They are much more aware than we were at their age. Credit must go to the students, teachers, staff and their parents. When we all do our part, we build a brighter future for our earth and for our children's children.

SMOKING CESSATION

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Today, first of all I would like to take the opportunity to recognize Mr. Peter Goodhand, the CEO of the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario, who is in the east gallery today.

This morning I had the pleasure of participating with Mr. Goodhand and Smoke-Free Ontario partners in announcing the winners of the 2008 Driven to Quit Challenge. The Driven to Quit Challenge is a health promotion campaign, hosted by the Canadian Cancer Society, that encourages Ontarians to quit for the month of March with the support of a buddy. We are working closely with our partners, including the Ontario division of the Canadian Cancer Society, our several regional tobacco control coordinators and the province's 36 public health units.

This year we have had more than 26,000 participants. Our government has funded the Driven to Quit Challenge as part of the Smoke-Free Ontario strategy for the past three years. This is because tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario, and it is one of the toughest addictions to break. Every attempt to quit is an important, courageous step for smokers, and we applaud these successes. We are making progress. These latest figures tell a powerful story: Tobacco use is down more than 30% since 2003. Our success is a sign of what can happen when you build a true partnership between committed advocates and a committed government.

The Smoke-Free Ontario Act is an example of this shared commitment. The tobacco display ban, which comes into effect on May 31 of this year, will help smokers who are trying to quit by banning the display of tobacco products at points of purchase. There will be no more impulse buying triggered by promotional displays of tobacco. As the saying goes, "Out of sight, out of mind."

Just as important, the display ban is a critical step in protecting youth from being influenced by tobacco mar-

keting tactics. Selling cigarettes when you buy candy and milk only makes cigarettes seem normal to young people, and that is just plain wrong.

It is also wrong to force children to breathe second-hand smoke when they are helpless passengers in a motor vehicle. As the Premier announced, we have proposed legislation to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. If passed, it would prohibit smoking in motor vehicles with children present.

As the name suggests, the grand prize for the Driven to Quit Challenge is a car—not just any car, but one that symbolizes healthy choices: the environmentally friendly Toyota Prius hybrid. The lucky winner of that car is Dianna Watson from Copper Cliff, just outside of Sudbury. Today I had the pleasure to meet Diana, who advised me that three close family members died of lung cancer: her mother, her father and her brother. So she was especially proud to be able to quit smoking and to have had the resources to help her to quit.

The seven regional winners of the challenge, who won \$3,000 gift cards, are: Richard Pare, Maureen Richardson, Kyle Lilley, Gary Ashbee, Tim Miller, Dale Gervais and Ian Maytum.

Since this is Earth Week and tomorrow is Earth Day, I am especially pleased to congratulate the winners as we celebrate healthy choices for Ontarians and for our planet—a choice not to pollute your body, a choice that reduces pollution of our environment and a choice that saves lives.

Congratulations should also go out to all the buddies. They were there for their friends who were trying to quit.

Everyone who registered and took up this challenge should be congratulated. Just participating makes them all winners, because each attempt that a smoker makes to quit is a step in the right direction. Research tells us that it usually takes several attempts to quit smoking, and we will continue to support and encourage smokers to butt out. That is why in the 2008 budget, our government committed to a permanent retail sales tax exemption for nicotine replacement therapy to help Ontarians to quit smoking.

I would like the House to join me in congratulating all the winners.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

SMOKING CESSATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the official opposition to the statement by the Minister of Health Promotion. At the top, I want to recognize the amazing work done by the Canadian Cancer Society. We take this time to applaud the society especially in the month of April, which is Daffodil Month.

We owe it to all the people in the province of Ontario to promote healthy choices, including smoking cessation. I'm just not sure where to go from here, because this minister, who has been silent when it comes to the protection of the health of young people in communities

like Caledonia—I guess that's what she means by the statement "Out of sight, out of mind" that she just made.

In the minister's bio, it says, "In her capacity as Minister of Health Promotion, Minister Best will champion health and wellness for all Ontarians. It says "all Ontarians." Apparently, if you live near an illegal smoke shack on government-owned property, you aren't part of the "all Ontarians" that the minister claims to be responsible for. Apparently, if you are a parent of a child attending school near an illegal smoke shop, your child does not count as part of Minister Best's version of "all Ontarians."

1400

And here is the real issue: The minister can read pre-written statements and pose for as many photo ops as her car and her driver will take her to, but if this government and this minister are so driven to help people quit smoking, why are there illegal smoke shops throughout the province selling illegal tobacco products and not paying provincial taxes? And why on earth is this minister silent when asked why she is allowing these illegal, life-threatening products to be sold to schoolchildren?

This illegal smoke shop in Caledonia is happening on government-owned property. I just wonder if the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal is even aware. Is he collecting any rent? I wonder. The Minister of Revenue can't talk enough about how her officers have seized illegal products and fined convenience store vendors, but can't say a word when asked about the double standard when it comes to the enforcement of Ontario's revenue regulations.

As the opposition in this House, we have full confidence in the work of the police officers across Ontario. Where we don't have confidence is in the McGuinty ministers who say one thing and do another. I am amazed that these ministers can sit idly by and be silent and imperil the health of children in the name of political correctness.

So the Minister of Health Promotion has the nerve to stand in this assembly today and talk about being "driven to quit." It's clear, when it comes to being driven, that the minister is driven to do anything but answer questions and take on the real responsibility of her job.

EARTH WEEK

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of the Environment on behalf of my colleague Mr. Barrett, who is delayed today. I want to say how pleased I am to comment on Earth Day, even though we have had earlier-than-ever smog days in the province of Ontario this year.

I want to also congratulate all of the learning facilities, all of the elementary schools in particular, that are celebrating Earth Day. My three granddaughters go to the Marchmont Public School up near Orillia, and I can tell you that they have a phenomenal program for Earth Day each year as they celebrate environmental awareness.

But I think there are many questions, and I know, particularly in my riding, that I've got a lot of concerns

with some of the actions of the government and some of the inactions of the government. One of the things that doesn't seem to reach this House very often, though, and I'll point it out to the Speaker today, is the declining water levels in Georgian Bay, Lake Huron and Lake Superior. This is something that I hope all of us, no matter what level of government we're at or what jurisdiction, can start to address. That is a major concern to people, particularly around the lakes.

We talk about environmental education. In my riding alone we have the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre. They receive absolutely no money to manage over 3,000 acres of provincially owned land, and at the same time, they educate; approximately 20,000 students a year go to that particular facility. I hope that we can get some funding for that.

I applaud the government on the Lake Simcoe protection resolution and on the legislation. However, something that's important is that the federal government has come to the table with over \$30 million to this point. I'm hoping that we can see matching funds come from the province and not have the two governments work in silos but work together to improve the quality of the water in Lake Simcoe. It has been a long time coming, but this last Parliament and this Parliament we've addressed water quality in Lake Simcoe.

Finally, I'm very concerned about the water-taking permit that is before the minister on site 41 in my riding. It's an issue we're concerned about, as we pump hundreds of millions of litres of water per year into Georgian Bay.

And I want to welcome everybody to the Elmvale Water Festival this year on August 16.

EARTH WEEK

Mr. Peter Tabuns: New Democrats join with Ontarians in celebrating Earth Day. In 2008, I wish we had better news for the present and for the future. I wish the McGuinty government were more interested in progress and reducing the provincial footprint on the planet than in obfuscation and photo ops.

The planet is facing an environmental crisis that will define generations. I'm speaking of climate change. Yet, despite New Democrats calling for the introduction of a plan detailing how reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will be achieved and detailing the funding that will be allocated to get the job done, there's only silence from the government benches.

Not long ago we came through an election, and during that election there was a leaders' debate in which Dalton McGuinty didn't mention the words "climate change" or "global warming" once—not once. So I suppose it's not surprising that we sit here today, the 2008-09 budget is behind us, and there is still no detailed climate plan from the government and no funding allocation to make it all happen.

Instead of plans to reduce greenhouse gas reductions, we're getting plans from the McGuinty government to increase greenhouse gases, such as their embracing of so-

called energy from waste incinerators over recycling and extended producer responsibility provisions.

Studies show that per kilowatt hour of power produced energy from waste facilities produced 33% more greenhouse gas emissions than coal-fired generation.

What government could claim to be concerned about climate change and then turn around and embrace a technology that is dirtier than coal? Unfortunately for Ontario and the planet, that's what the McGuinty government has done.

SMOKING CESSATION

CESSATION DE FUMER

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to add my voice to congratulate Dianna Watson from Copper Cliff, who won this year's contest. It is a little bit ironic that Mrs. Watson and her family have been on a citizens' committee in Copper Cliff to try to bring a community health centre to Copper Cliff. Hopefully, her luck will continue and we'll see a community health centre there too.

We all agree that smoking is harmful to your health, and we, the New Democrats, certainly support the good work of the Canadian Cancer Society to help people stop smoking. Strategies that encourage Ontarians to quit smoking are important. I have said, and I will continue to repeat, the more times you try to quit smoking, the higher your chances of success.

Le plus de fois que tu essaies d'arrêter de fumer, le meilleur sont tes chances de réussir.

But I must say that it is ironic that the Driven to Quit prizes are awarded the day before Earth Day. Why? Because Ontarians who have successfully quit smoking—we're not talking about people in the pre-contemplation stage, to use a little bit of health promotion lingo, but people who have gone through the stages and have reached the action stage, who have been successful in doing something that is extremely difficult. And what does the Ministry of Health Promotion give those people who are making real changes to live healthier lives? The Ministry of Health Promotion awards them cars and TVs—hardly the tools needed to live a healthy lifestyle. What a missed opportunity for the Ministry of Health Promotion to actually promote health.

It seems that over and over again, we're reminded that the Ministry of Health Promotion is hardly in the business of health promotion.

Last week, when questioned about the high number of illegal cigarettes sold in the province—37%, according to the Ontario Convenience Stores Association—and the fact that the smoking rates by First Nations people are the highest, the Minister of Health Promotion said, "Go visit the website stupid.ca." You'd think if the government really wanted to help Anishnawbe communities, they would work on the key determinants of health that lead First Nations people to smoke, instead of telling them to go to a website.

Also last week, we saw the Minister of Health Promotion stand by while dozens of pools in Toronto were

closed. You'd think that the Ministry of Health Promotion would figure out ways to keep sports and recreation facilities open. We know that the most effective way to prevent disease and fight obesity is by keeping people active.

The NDP has put forward a communities-at-play proposal which would provide much-needed financial support for sports and recreation. The plan is simple: If you build it, they will come.

Tommy Douglas said it best, that "the ultimate goal of medicare" is "to keep people well." I wish the Minister of Health Promotion would lead us to that goal.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member for Toronto Centre, in the east members' gallery: the grandparents of page Michael Thomas-Fulford, Lois and Douglas Thomas.

Also in the east members' gallery, on behalf of the member from Windsor West: Mr. Justice Douglas Phillips, and Melissa Phillips, a law clerk from the Ontario Court of Appeal.

1410

On behalf of the members from Don Valley East and Willowdale, we'd like to welcome Hamid and Soraya Mahmoudi, parents of page Ida, as well as Golnarjes Tirdad, grandmother of page Ida, in the east members' gallery. Also in the east members' gallery are Chris Jones and Michelle Seger.

On behalf of the member from Don Valley West, I'd like to welcome to the west public gallery the father and brother of page Adam Laskaris: Sam Laskaris and Michael Laskaris.

Guests of mine in the Speaker's gallery today: Ian, Ruth Anne and Ken McCallum from Elgin county.

Welcome everyone to Queen's Park today.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Before we begin question period, there are a couple points I wanted to raise with the members.

First, last week I indicated to the House that I would consult with the table on the issue of the introduction of bills and, specifically, the allowance of a brief explanation of purpose. I'd like to now take the opportunity to clarify the meaning and principle behind that proceeding.

The introduction and first reading of a public bill is intended to allow the bill to be received so that it may be printed and distributed to members who are yet to be familiar with its contents. Often, the title of the bill is insufficient in terms of shedding any light on what the bill is intended to do. For example, legislation requiring a certain speed limit on 400 highways might be simply entitled, "An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act."

The intent of the brief explanation is to provide a more specific indication of the purpose of the bill. It is not, however, the beginning of the debate on the bill. It

should not contain any argument or justification; rather, it should outline in the most succinct terms what the bill will do. Any additional information, such as why the member's introducing the bill, who supports the bill or how it will benefit the citizenry, constitutes debate and is more properly part of the second reading stage of consideration.

Members are greatly aided in determining what the brief explanation of the purpose is, in that each bill contains on the inside cover an explanatory note. It is the essential contents of that note that may be shared with the House during introduction of bills.

It's my view that except in a case of an extraordinarily complex piece of legislation, the purpose of the bill can most often be explained in less than 30 seconds.

Members now have the benefit of this clarification, and I am certain that in the future they'll be mindful of the rules respecting the brief explanation of the purpose that attaches to the introduction of bills.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): A second issue I wanted to raise: It's interesting, at home or in the Speaker's office, the number of what I would call arm-chair Speakers who watch question period regularly, and who—and I thank them for that—will call or send e-mails offering advice to the Speaker in the chamber. There was an e-mail that I received last week. I'm not going to shed any of the details. Some of you may recognize some of this; many of you were copied on this e-mail. But there are just a few things from it that I want to highlight, because hopefully it will benefit all members, specifically in regard to thinking as we speak in this chamber. It's not so much for the people at home, because the people at home don't often hear the heckles and the side comments, but it's people who are visiting the chamber, whether it's in the galleries today or in any of the galleries. So I'm just going to read some excerpts from the e-mail. I'm not going to pass judgment or comment, but hopefully it will make each of us stop and think:

"I am writing to express my extreme disappointment at the behaviour of some MPPs during question period on" a certain date. On this day a delegation ... were present in the visitors' gallery to show their support.... The delegation was introduced by our MPP....

"This should have been a great moment for these students to be recognized in this fashion. It is unfortunate that one MPP chose to destroy this moment by heckling the students from the floor of the ... Legislature....

"As an individual who watches question period from time to time on television, I am aware that opposing MPPs regularly attack (verbally) and insult each other in the Legislature.... In addition many MPPs showed extremely disrespectful behaviour by engaging in loud conversations with colleagues as" the member "was making the introductions.

"This was clearly a bad civics lesson for our students and it actually reinforced some of the negative stereo-

types that exist about our elected officials and government in general.”

I just leave that with the members.

I was just passed a note today from a member making comments about certain heckles that take place within the chamber, and I just ask that we be respectful of one another. Both sides have a job to do and I recognize that, but we also need to make sure that we set an example for those people who are in the galleries and set an example for those people who are watching at home.

The member from Welland?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Speaker, with great respect, I want to thank you for your assistance in these matters and appreciate your addressing them in this style so that people have basically been forewarned and people aren't then embarrassed or caught short. I also look forward, of course, to the invocation of standing order 36(d); I await that enthusiastically.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Because I'm sure that the individual is watching, on behalf of the House to that classroom I'd like to extend an apology on behalf of all members.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. It has to do with a rather interesting poll which appeared in the media today, sponsored by your old friends Bensimon Byrne, the ad company that produced your infamous “I won't raise your taxes” ad. The poll indicates that 25% of Ontarians are worried that someone in their family will lose their job in the coming year, the highest number the pollster has seen since that newly minted Liberal Bob Rae was in your seat.

Premier, over the past three years you've consistently dismissed concerns from the official opposition that Ontario's families and businesses need meaningful tax relief. You are now hearing it from worried families through Liberal-friendly channels. Are you going to continue to ignore these very real concerns?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to receive the question, but I can't agree with the comments offered by my honourable colleague. We're very concerned about families and their outlook on the economy, and they have some real justification for concern at this point in time.

I was just asking the Minister of Finance if he saw last week's Economist magazine; I believe the title was “The US Economic Slowdown: Its Impact on the World Economy”—so the world is feeling what is happening south of the border, not just us here in Ontario, who happen to be one of its greatest trading partners.

I think where I disagree with my colleague is in terms of what we need to do in the face of this economic slowdown. He argues that we should put forward a one-point plan, which is simply to cut corporate income taxes on corporations that are profitable. We've got something

more comprehensive, and I believe to be more effective. We're investing not only in tax cuts but, as you well know, in infrastructure, innovation, partnering with business, and investing in the skills and education of our workers.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The Premier says he's very concerned, but his comments seem to be a continuation of what I would describe—or at least some would describe—as an insensitive response to a recent media question about the state of the economy, when you stated, rather offhandedly, “This too shall pass.”

Under your watch, since July of 2004 close to 200,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in this province. Those are real communities and real families being impacted. Yet, in many ways you remain strangely serene; some would say, even detached. Premier, if that's not the case, when will you take meaningful action, address the tax burden and provide the leadership that worried families in this province deserve?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, there's a marked contrast in the approach the Conservatives would bring, had they the honour to serve Ontarians in government, and the one we ourselves are bringing on this side of the House. We believe it's really important to continue to maintain quality public services for Ontarians: their health care, their education, protections for the environment and so on and so forth. The tax cuts that the leader of the official opposition would have us adopt would lead to hospital closures, would lead to firing nurses, would lead to underfunding our schools, would lead to higher tuition and would lead to cuts to important services that families have to be able to count on.

I think life is more complex at the beginning of the 21st century in a global, knowledge-based economy than to say that you can approach a US slowdown with a one-point tax-cut plan. That's why we're investing heavily in the skills of our people. Beyond that, we're investing in tax cuts, infrastructure, innovation and in continuing partnerships with business. We think that's an effective, intelligent way to deal with this slowdown.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary? The member from Burlington.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Mr. Premier, if you won't listen to this side of the House and you won't listen to your pollsters, will you listen to Mr. Morris Bradley of Burlington? Mr. Bradley supports a family of four. In the last two years, he has twice lost a manufacturing job due to plant closures. Next month, after a long wait, he's finally going to have major surgery. When he gets out of the hospital he'll have no income, he'll have no benefits and he'll have no way to provide for his family.

Premier, what are you going to do for Mr. Bradley and his family? Your empty platitudes won't put food on his table.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The first thing we'll do is guarantee the best possible public health care for this individual, to make sure it's there for him.

The second thing we will do is continue to invest in the skills and education of our people. One of the pro-

grams that we've put in place—the first of its kind in Canada—provides for new training opportunities, long-term training opportunities, for up to 20,000 Ontarians who have recently lost their jobs.

It's not all bleak. Some 455,000 net new jobs have been created in Ontario since 2003. In this individual's case and others, we're proud to say that we have long-term training opportunities available, funding up to \$28,000 worth of tuition, perhaps child care, transportation costs, housing costs, those kinds of things, because one of the challenges connected with this new economy is that we have about 100,000 jobs that are going begging today. A lot of those demand high skills, and that's why we're investing for the first time in a determined way in long-term training, especially for folks who have recently lost their jobs.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety. In the members' west gallery today are the parents, friends and family of 25-year-old Aju Iroaga. Aju, a 25-year-old engineering student, was recruited on the campus of McMaster University to work as a tree planter for the summer of 2006. He was last seen on May 15, 2006.

Aju's parents have lived with the grief of not knowing what happened to their son for more than two years. The OPP investigation is inconclusive. The Ministry of Labour has not done a full investigation. Aju's parents are appealing now to the minister to order a full investigation.

My question is this: Will the minister respond to the appeal of these parents today and order a coroner's inquest so that they might have closure and so that we might know the circumstances surrounding his disappearance?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Certainly my sympathy and our thoughts are with the Iroaga family. There is currently on ongoing police investigation taking place by the OPP. There is also a full coroner's investigation being conducted into this matter. I look forward to the results of those investigations.

Mr. Frank Klees: My concern with the OPP investigation is that it is passive. They have indicated that they will respond to new information. There's no indication that it is active. The Ministry of Labour has not investigated, although there are many workplace issues at stake here.

It has been two years. I would say to the minister that if this was his son—in fact, I say to all of us in this place: If it was our son who was missing and government has taken two years and still has not ordered a full investigation, would we be satisfied that justice has been done? So I would ask the minister to use the authority that is his to order an immediate inquest so that we can have these answers and ensure that tragedies like this will be prevented in the future.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: There isn't anybody in this House or anywhere else who didn't wish that the family

had all the answers that they want. I'm confident that the investigation—it's a full investigation by the chief coroner's office which is under way under subsection 15(5) of the Coroners Act—will provide the information necessary for the coroner's office then to determine if an inquest into the disappearance should be called.

Mr. Frank Klees: This goes beyond this immediate case. The government is ignoring the appeal of the president and the vice-chancellor of McMaster University as well, who wrote to the minister and to the coroner's office asking for an immediate inquest, because the implication here is that students are being recruited in our colleges and on university campuses, and we want to be sure, students want to be sure, and parents want to be assured that they are being recruited to job sites that are safe.

I would ask this of the minister: To this point, he has refused to meet with the parents. Will the minister agree to meet with Mr. Iroaga following question period today so that this becomes more than just another file for the government? I would like the minister to hear directly from the parent. I would like then for the minister to take it upon himself to work with the parents to ensure that the right action is taken.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Just to clarify the question a little bit, I've never been asked to meet with the parents before, so let's put that on the record. Clearly, we have parents who are hurting. I would more than willingly meet with the parents after question period so that we can exchange in a way that is suitable to their needs, because at the end of the day, there is no one in here who doesn't have concern for the lack of closure for these parents.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Minister of Community Safety: Is the OPP covering up a botched investigation when it refuses to let Aju Iroaga's family see the OPP file on Aju's disappearance?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I have every confidence in the OPP. I don't believe for a second that there is a cover-up to a botched investigation. In fact, there is an ongoing investigation by not only the OPP but also the chief coroner's office.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Why didn't the OPP interview all of Aju Iroaga's coworkers after Aju vanished from that very remote worksite?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The member knows full well that operational matters of the OPP are not subject to ministerial involvement. I would suggest that we will ensure that that process always is in place. But at the same time as the OPP investigation, there is also a full investigation by the chief coroner's office.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The minister knows that there was a failure to comply with the section 10 notification requirements. Why did it take two years, then, for the coroner's office to commence its section 15 investigation, after evidence has dried up, washed away and been buried?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I think the important thing for everyone to know here is that there is still an open police investigation. There is a full coroner's investigation taking place. I look forward to the results of both of those investigations.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Early detection and treatment of children's mental health issues are the keys to avoiding huge health costs down the road. The latest budget, however, does precious little to address this.

Why did the McGuinty government essentially flatline the funding to Ontario's lead agency for the provision of children's mental health services?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Children's mental health issues are obviously of great importance to families touched by this, so that makes it important to us.

I think it's important to put this in a little bit of perspective. We actually ended the 12-year freeze in terms of funding levels for children's mental health which dominated the two governments prior to us. Since 2003, we have invested \$106 million more in new funding; 10,000 more children are now being served.

There is more work to be done, but I think, given the facts—in particular, we put \$106 million more in new funding; 10,000 more children are being served—I think we're making some real progress.

1430

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The reality is that the sector has certainly been long underfunded. In Ontario, only about one in five children is getting the mental health services that he or she needs. Local agencies in places like London, Niagara, Welland and Hamilton are forced to cut programs and services due to a lack of government resources at a crucial time when children's mental health needs are on the rise in this province. Why is the McGuinty government basically ignoring the crisis in these communities and across the province when it comes to children's mental health?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, together with our continuing commitment to health care—generally it's up, in terms of funding, \$11.1 billion more: a 37% increase since 2003. In addition to funding more opportunities for children who are affected by mental health issues, we've also dramatically expanded tests for our newborns in Ontario. We are now funding insulin pumps for first time for young people. We are now funding vaccinations that were never funded in the past and that save families \$600 per child.

Not only is our commitment to children's health issues to be found in new funding for mental health but also in a number of other areas, which demonstrates our commitment to public health generally but to children's health issues in particular.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think everybody in this room knows very well that now is the time to invest in these

services because the costs going out, whether it's health care costs, whether it's education costs, whether it's criminal justice and youth criminal justice costs, simply go through the roof.

According to Dr. Rod Evans, the head of the child and youth program at McMaster Children's Hospital, Hamilton is one of the worst-served areas in all of Canada for children's mental health. A lack of specialized psychiatrists means Hamilton's children can wait over a year for the kind of help that they need. Suicides are up. Case-loads are up. Waiting lists are up. When will the McGuinty government's funding be up enough to serve the people of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know it's getting a little dated, but I think it's important to keep in mind that in 1993, the NDP government cut funding for children's mental health services by 5%. It was then flatlined throughout the Conservative government years. So I'm proud of the fact that we've brought significant new dollars.

The member is right: There is more work to be done, and she is right about this being an important issue for prevention of other illnesses and social challenges that are created over the long term. But we are making some real progress. We have 10,000 more children who are now being served. Last year alone, children's mental health received a 5%—that's another \$24.5 million—increase in funding across the board. In our recent budget, we had another \$2.5 million to fund 100 capital projects to support children's mental health services. There is work under way. But the member is right: There is more work to be done.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Premier. Premier, I want to address the standing order changes which your government is trying to ram through this House. In October 1999, comments were made about the changes that were made at that time, and I want to quote from some of the members in your party who were sitting in opposition.

The member from Thunder Bay–Superior North said: “I ... want to compliment all three House leaders.... I am pleased that there has been such co-operation and such understanding....”

The current Minister of Transportation said: “I want to commend the government House Leader and the other two House leaders for making an effort to reach a consensus....”

I say to you, Mr. Premier: These are not the remarks that we're hearing this time. There has been no attempt to reach consensus. Why have you refused to hold meaningful discussions on these very dramatic changes?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Just to add to the voices on this subject, I want to add a quote as well: “You know, most people go to work starting at 9 o'clock in the morning.... I think, if you had the sitting start in the morning

and finish at suppertime, it allows moms and dads and young families to be home more often with their family and to have the thing just a bit more family friendly. So I think it means you'd look more often to start in the morning—the Legislature—“and have your day proceed so that you could use those hours and finish by suppertime.” It was said in August of last year by the leader of the Conservative Party, Mr. John Tory.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I think the Premier was afraid to deal with the standing order changes which he's initiated. Personally, I'm disappointed. I would say to the House leader: You didn't respond to the question in any way.

I'm going to say to you again: Your current finance minister also said, “We were, through a course of sometimes difficult negotiations, able to come up with a package of compromises.” That's what's missing here today: There were never any face-to-face negotiations. As you said, “I received a counter-proposal from both parties and provided a counter-proposal back.” That's it. End of story. No discussion; no debate; no attempt to reach a settlement.

I ask you today, and I go back to the Premier, who's the leader of this party and should be prepared to defend them: Will you immediately refer these changes to a legislative committee so that we can reach a true consensus?

Hon. Michael Bryant: If we're going to talk about how changes ought to be made, I can assure this House that the government has not followed the route taken by the Conservative Party when they brought through changes in 1997. This was subject to how many House leader meetings? Zero. The initial vote to time-allocate this took place at midnight. Another vote took place on August 20, 1997, in order to pass those changes. The member who's asking the question was one of the people who voted in favour of the time allocation motion at midnight.

We did engage in discussions and we did talk at length in several meetings about how this ought to work. The debate will continue again today and then it will be referred to a committee over the summer.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

While the minister was in China last week for ribbon cutting and sightseeing, more manufacturing jobs were lost in Ontario. These job losses added to the 200,000 that we've lost over the past four years. Since media coverage was scant at best, could the minister tell us how many jobs we can expect will be created in Ontario as a result of her trip?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I do appreciate the question. I know that this member from Hamilton is as concerned as this government that the people of Hamilton have a very bright future. I hope that that means he'll be very supportive of the number of initiatives that we have for the Hamilton area in the area of jobs.

As it relates to my trip, which I did just get back from this weekend, I can tell you that the trip went very well. It was exactly as we expected. We had some great meetings, both at a corporate level and a governmental level. We hope, as was the case with previous visits around the world where this government has offices, that it does result in jobs here in Ontario.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm glad she mentioned Hamilton. I was hoping for at least a few more specifics on those announcements. Since they're lacking, I would like to suggest a few specific things that the minister can do right here, right now, to protect and create jobs. An industrial hydro rate would be of enormous assistance to Ontario's hard-hit forestry, steel in Hamilton, and chemical sectors. A refundable manufacturing investment tax credit would also be helpful, as it has been in neighbouring provinces all over this great country. A real Buy Ontario transit vehicle policy that would require 50% content would be welcome in communities like Thunder Bay, Mississauga and Hamilton. Why does this government continue to refuse to introduce these measures?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: As you know, this government has embarked on a five-point plan to meet issues in the economy today. Many of our manufacturers in particular are struggling, due in large part to factors that we wish we could control but we can't. That compels us, as a government, to come forward with key initiatives to make a difference for companies now.

1440

That's why I'm hoping this particular member from Hamilton will in fact be in favour of the business education tax cuts that were already announced by this government, but he voted against those; the \$190 million that were a part of the last budget, but this member voted against those cuts to business that could actually help—as a matter of fact, the \$1.5 billion set aside for skills training for people who have to change jobs, potentially, into a whole new sector. We would expect this member from Hamilton, who should know better than most the trials and tribulations of manufacturing, to support those measures being delivered by this government and to support them time and time again. But you once again have disappointed the people of Hamilton.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Energy. I was pleased to see a local project highlighted in the Toronto Star today. Today, SkyPower and SunEdison will break ground near Kingston on the first of many solar farms that have been contracted under a standard offer program. I understand construction will begin this week on the 19-megawatt First Light solar park located just east of Kingston. Not only will the solar park provide enough power to supply 2,000 homes annually; it will bring us one step closer to shutting down our coal plants by 2014.

Minister, what are we doing to encourage investment in renewable energy in our communities and in our province?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I thank the member for Northumberland–Quinte West. I'd just say to all of us and the public that we have a 20-year plan on energy. It always starts with conservation. We're going to cut our demand by about 20% through conservation. But the second part is to double our use of renewable energy so that in 2025 we'll have almost 45% of our electricity produced by renewables.

This project that you talked about was one of the steps we took. We announced a renewable energy standard offer program designed to guarantee a price. That's what this program was all about. I'm pleased to say that the people of Ontario responded. We've achieved our goal in the first year, a goal that we set over 10 years. In other words, we thought it would take us 10 years to get it; we got there in one year.

I'm very pleased to say we will continue to accelerate that program. The only limitations are on transmission and distribution. We've got to make sure we've got that available. But it's a program that has been proven to work.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: The RESOP has helped make it easier for small renewable power producers in our communities, such as farmers, rural land owners and community groups, to sell their energy to the grid. It's great to see solar and wind farms creating investments in small communities across Ontario such as Stone Mills and Sault Ste. Marie. Not only do they contribute power to the grid, but renewable projects provide significant investment in our communities during their construction.

Our government has shown significant leadership in committing to close coal plants. Would the minister tell us the role new green renewable power will play in replacing coal plants by 2014?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: We will replace all coal production in 2014, and this program is helping us to achieve that. Again I say to the public that conservation is crucial, but on renewables, I'm pleased to say we now have—when we first came into office four and a half years ago, I think we had 15 megawatts of wind. Today, up and operating, we have 500 megawatts. We've signed contracts for another 1,400 megawatts of wind power.

So we are aggressively moving forward to double our reuse of renewables. That's an important criterion for being able to close coal production in 2014. As I say, we'll be restricted only by our ability to have distribution and transmission capabilities. Renewables are on track and an important part of the long-term solution for clean, reliable, environmentally sensitive energy in the province of Ontario.

NURSES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Minister of Health. Today, the Toronto Sun reported that an emergency room patient at Rouge Valley hospital grew frustrated after waiting hours for a bed. He entered the nurses' lounge, grabbed a knife and injured himself. This comes the day after the local representative of the Ontario Nurses' Association had met with the hospital presi-

dent to express concerns about what effects the cutbacks on security the previous year were having on the safety of nurses.

As you know, Minister, this hospital and others are having to make further staffing cuts this year to eliminate their deficits. What guarantees can you as health minister make today to the nurses that the balancing of these budgets isn't going to impact their safety and security?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to say first, in the circumstances particular to Rouge Valley, as I've had a chance to say several times in the House, that the speculation and spectre of layoffs is not the same as people actually having been laid off. The member will know that the local health integration network, working with the hospital, is engaged in substantial community consultation, which we think is an important opportunity for people from the community to let their views be known.

With respect to the issue of safety of nurses, our government has taken several steps in our first term in office which have enhanced the safety of nurses. We've installed thousands of ceiling-mounted bed lifts. We've introduced the precautionary principle. We have moved to the N95 masks. These are all in response to the concerns of nurses.

By way of supplementary, I'll be very pleased to let the honourable member know of the work that I'm engaged in alongside my colleague the Minister of Labour to further enhance the safety of the nursing workforce in Ontario.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: As you know, the article in the Sun was written by Linda Haslam-Stroud. She's president of the Ontario Nurses' Association. The concerns being expressed are hers on behalf of her membership.

We know that nurses are feeling stressed because of their increasing workloads, but also we hear about these increasing incidents of violence in the workplace. I say to you, today, Minister: The coroner's inquest into the workplace murder of Lori Dupont, a registered nurse, made a number of recommendations. What is your government doing to make sure that these recommendations are fully implemented? Give me the time lines and tell me what you're doing.

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to say to the honourable member that in addition to initiatives that we've taken to date, we've also mandated the use of safety-engineered sharps in hospitals; that will be implemented on September 1 of this year.

As I said to the honourable member in my earlier answer, in our party's platform in the recent election, there was a commitment to work decidedly on behalf of and in co-operation with Ontario's nurses to look for ways in which the nursing workplace, and indeed all health care workplaces, can be enhanced from a safety perspective.

The coroner's inquest into the circumstances in Windsor highlighted a very, very sad day for all in health care and gives us very many lessons which we are carefully analyzing and reviewing to determine what the

most appropriate way would be to move forward. We will do that in co-operation with Ontario's nurses, and I would look forward to any opportunity where the honourable member might wish to discuss this matter further to receive her suggestions as we contemplate the way to go forward. We understand that we can make improvements to enhance further the safety of the workplace.

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Will the Premier commit to providing 50% provincial operating funds for municipal public transit?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: As the member would well know, we made a commitment before the 2003 election as a government that we would share with the municipalities two cents of the gas tax. You know that the gas tax is 14.7 cents, no matter whether it's a dollar a litre or 50 cents a litre. Whatever it happens to be is what the provincial government gets. It is not an ad valorem tax. We decided that we would share with the municipalities those funds for transit purposes; that is, to enhance, to expand, to improve upon public transit in those municipalities.

This year, somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$314 million of funding was transferred to the municipalities. In addition to that, you will know that our government made additional funding available in March of this year to municipalities because they were facing special challenges in regard to their transit systems. With this money, they've utilized that for very good purposes. This has allowed them to spend the money that they need on operations while we assist very significantly with the capital end of things.

1450

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Although I appreciate the technique of the minister for not addressing the question, I have to come back: When will you make that commitment and restore that funding—50%—for operating?

Hon. James J. Bradley: You would be aware, for instance—there's a note coming in here. It says, "Gas tax at tab 17 and TTC note at tab 39."

Hon. Gerry Phillips: He should know that.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Yes, I should know this.

Let me say this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Speak to the question, please.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I will definitely speak to the question. The question I'm speaking to is one where you will see the unprecedented investments being made by the provincial government in Move 2020. The area in which you have a specific interest in particular, that of the greater Toronto area, you will know that we have committed a plan that would involve the expenditure of some \$17.5 billion, the largest in the history not only of Ontario, but the largest in the history—

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

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Last Wednesday, you hosted, along with the Premier, the fourth annual Premier's summit on agri-foods. These Premier's summits, over the past four years, have provided excellent opportunities for farmers from across the province to sit down with our Premier and yourself to discuss the many challenges and opportunities that exist in the agricultural sector in this province.

The Premier has always been willing to listen to farmers, and our government has provided support for them in their time of need. Our government is on the right track in encouraging innovation in the agri-foods sector through the Premier's award for agri-food innovation, which is presented at the annual summit. The McGuinty government knows that Ontario farmers have made significant contributions to our economy through innovation, new market opportunities and value-added products. Since 2003, this government has also provided over \$1.2 billion in farm income support programs.

Minister, what are some of the accomplishments that have been achieved at the Premier's summits on agri-food over the past four years?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I want to thank the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, who's particularly interested in agriculture, I think maybe because the president of the OFA, Geri Kamenz, was a student of his. His former student should be very proud of him.

With respect to the summit, our government is very proud to be led by a Premier who is the first Premier in the province to ask, every year, the leaders from the agriculture industry to come to this place and bring their ideas and advice on innovation, in terms of how to make this industry sustainable going forward.

Last year, particularly, we received input from the strategic advisory committee made up of stakeholders. They told us that the five areas they wanted our government to continue to invest in are bioeconomy, organics, marketing and branding, reducing regulations and Buy Ontario.

Mr. Jim Brownell: Again to the minister: Your hard work and dedication in hosting these summits, along with the Premier, are very much appreciated by the farmers from my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and from across Ontario. They put the spotlight on agriculture in this province and allow to us keep track of the progress we have made and the steps we need to take as we move forward in helping strengthen the agricultural sector through innovation.

Our government has stepped up to the plate when farmers have needed us. We announced \$150 million in the fall economic statement that was provided this spring in support of cattle, hogs and horticulture producers, who are facing the challenges posed by the high Canadian dollar and rising input costs. Our government also introduced a three-year risk management program for grain and oilseeds producers to give them more support and be in a better position to deal with the challenges ahead.

Minister, can you please tell this House about some of the highlights from last week's fourth annual Premier's summit on agri-food.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm sure the Premier would agree with me when I say that what has become the highlight of the summit is when the awards are presented, both the Premier's award and the minister's award. This is very important information about people from the province of Ontario.

Last week, the Premier's award was provided to William and Caroline Nightingale of B&C Nightingale Farms for their work in improving fresh vegetables. They are doing this with a new technology called tunnel tech. This is an innovation on a sand plain near Delhi, land that formerly produced tobacco.

The minister's award recipient was David Freeman and his family from Freeman Farms. They have developed a freeze-dry technique that makes their garlic product, particularly, more marketable. They have a state-of-the-art processing process, and they're being recognized around the world for the good work that they are doing in conjunction with the University of Guelph.

This is definitely a highlight of the Premier's summit, and we're very proud of the people who have been successful.

DEVELOPMENT FEES

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs: Today I want to talk about expansion. This expansion is not good news. It's about the expansion of the HDI. Over the past few days, native protestors have turned their sights on the Ancaster fairgrounds. The Ancaster Agricultural Society received a letter from Six Nations asking for a donation plus a \$500 fee.

The city of Hamilton, according to the Spectator, has said the issue is not a municipal one. I quote the director of planning: "It's ... between the agricultural society and the HDI."

Minister, your government told homebuilders during work along the Haldimand tract that they're on their own—and that was just two days before Sam Gualtieri was almost beaten to death. Will you now intervene, or are fair boards in Ontario now on their own?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I think, as the member knows, the discussions between Haudenosaunee Six Nations, the province, the federal government and the local municipality do cover a broad range of issues, and are still under way.

The desire is to create a provincial side table that would allow for a whole host of issues to be addressed. I think it would be in error to imagine that every single individual would be speaking on behalf of Haudenosaunee Six Nations on issues such as that. I will continue to work with Chief McNaughton and members of the council, as well as the municipality and the federal government, to try and come up with solutions.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Minister, your government is talking with HDI, and I'm sure you feel you're making

progress as they continue to shut down local economies, site by site. Again, according to the Hamilton Spectator, HDI says, with respect to the Ancaster fairgrounds, they're exerting their authority under the Nanfan Treaty of 1701 regarding hunting and fishing rights in southern Ontario, northern New York State, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan.

As you know, HDI feels their mandate now ranges beyond the former Haldimand tract to encompass, and I quote HDI's interim director in the Spectator, "the whole North American continent." Now I know that's a little out of your league, Minister, but in your deliberations with HDI, do you feel that are you progressing towards a meeting of like minds? Do you know about this treaty? Do you agree with HDI using the Nanfan Treaty to now justify protesting outside the Haldimand tract?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The member knows that the main discussions take place with respect to land claims that have been filed with the federal government. Where there is an appropriate provincial role, we play that role. That covers land claims certainly that do not extend as far as the member has suggested with respect to some individuals, who have suggested that in fact the land claims are larger.

The history is laid out in the Haldimand Proclamation of 1784, which I believe the member makes reference to. It was particularly unfortunate that in debating this issue, the member saw fit to mock the Haldimand Proclamation of 1784, which was seen, I should tell you, by the community as a major insult and affront to that community.

Our approach, in fact, is to negotiate with the parties on matters in which we believe we can come to a resolution. We'll continue to do so.

1500

FLOODING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources.

Last week on Tuesday, in response to a question from my colleague the member from Hamilton Centre, you said that there were 4,000 people employed by the province of Ontario to monitor flood levels. Do you stand by that comment?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I actually said that there are 4,000 monitors, not people—4,000 monitors; 1,200 stations.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To my good colleague the minister of whatever, I do have the next question, and the next question is based on the Hansard.

The Hansard reads, "There are 4,000 monitors in 1,200 stations across this province. They work through the water monitoring station..." Clearly, you were saying to this member that there were 4,000 people employed by the province of Ontario to monitor flood levels. Will you now come clean and tell this province how many people you actually employ, or were you misleading the House?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask the member to withdraw that comment, please.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I withdraw.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: A monitor is a gauge as well as an individual. In this case, a monitor is a gauge, of which we have 4,000 deployed around the province at approximately 1,200 stations. That information is then fed through to the Peterborough surface water monitoring system, and then we go back to the conservation authorities and we give the information out to the different municipalities and regions.

If the member would like, I could give him the Webster's Dictionary definition of what a monitor can be.

SNOWMOBILING

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question for the Minister of Tourism. The minister would know that snowmobiling is an important and significant recreational pursuit for thousands upon thousands of Ontarians and thousands upon thousands of visitors to this province. Snowmobiling is an important and significant pursuit, especially in my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin.

The success of this sector is largely influenced by the thousands of volunteers with the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs and the work they do to maintain over 40,000 kilometres of trails across the province. I'd like to ask the minister to tell us what the McGuinty government has done to support this highly valuable and entirely volunteer-based organization.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'd like to thank the member for Algoma-Manitoulin for the question. Everybody who knows the member understands what a wonderful champion he is for snowmobiling in Ontario.

We are coming into spring, and we're done with the winter season, but so much happens in the out-season in snowmobiling.

I'd like to recognize the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs for all the work they do. This important organization provides so much leadership and support for snowmobiling clubs across the province. Through snowmobile clubs, over 6,000 volunteers help make Ontario the premier snowmobiling destination in the world. This is why I announced last week to the OFSC that they will be receiving \$3 million from the McGuinty government. This is going to bring jobs and benefits to communities across Ontario: to our rural communities, to our northern communities, all—

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

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Over the years, approximately 20 members of this chamber have accompanied me on snowmobile trips across Algoma-Manitoulin.

I want to pay tribute to the many, many volunteers of the OFSC in my area, including GroomerGuy from Dubreuilville, Luc Levesque, who does a tremendous job for us all.

I want the minister to tell us what the \$3 million that you announced will do to promote snowmobiling and to help the volunteers do a good job, and give us some idea about the impact on the Ontario economy to come from snowmobiling.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Once again, I'd like to thank the member for the question.

Snowmobiling contributes \$1.2 billion to our economy annually. This encourages job growth and economic prosperity across the province.

Our government committed to this investment in the fall, and we're following through on that promise. By providing this money at the end of the season, we're supporting the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs so they can maintain and repair their trails—that trail infrastructure is so important and it's so extensive: over 40,000 kilometres; the most in the world—to keep them in good shape for the upcoming season.

We announce this now to help keep snowmobiling at the front and centre of people's minds as they begin to plan for next winter's snowmobiling season and vacation season.

DRUG TREATMENT PROGRAMS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Premier. Despite numerous requests last year, both during the election and after the Legislature resumed, the Premier has refused to meet with Ottawa Police Chief Vern White regarding the near-crisis level of drug use, particularly of crack, in the national capital, our own backyard. Will the Premier be calling Ottawa Police Chief Vern White this week to discuss solutions to what is now a national embarrassment in our hometown, which is the drug problem on Ottawa streets?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm more than happy to meet with the chief, but I can tell you that I have assigned responsibility for this on the ground in Ottawa to Minister Watson. He's met with the chief, I think on at least three occasions now.

The chief has a very real concern, shared by many of us in Ottawa, and that has to do with the adequacy of treatment opportunities for young people who are affected by drug addictions. With that in mind, we came to the table with \$25,000, and we are co-funding a study together with the city of Ottawa. We're waiting for that report, and on the basis of advice that will flow from the report, we look forward to laying out an action plan. But again, I know the chief has a real and genuine concern about this, as do I.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: With respect to the Premier, you are the MPP for Ottawa South. I appreciate the work that the member from Ottawa West-Nepean is doing, but he's not the Premier of Ontario, and he's not the chief political lead in this House. You are.

On March 17, I raised the need for a drug treatment centre in Ottawa in this House. Since then, a report has been released recommending the same. While this government's philosophy is simply to pass out crack pipes

and exchange needles, Ottawa police suggest we must prevent and rehabilitate before harm reduction and enforcement. They too support a drug treatment facility.

Again, will the Premier meet with Police Chief Vern White to immediately implement solutions to get crack off the streets in Canada's capital, and immediately commit to a residential drug treatment facility for eastern Ontario drug addicts?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll extend this to Minister Watson.

Hon. Jim Watson: This is an important issue in our community, there's no question about that. This is the reason why, in my former capacity as Minister of Health Promotion, I secured the funding—one half of the funding for the study; we were the first at the table. The mayor of Ottawa and city council approved the second half of the funding. I've met, as the Premier indicated, on a number of occasions with the chief, as well as with Mayor O'Brien and Dr. Rob Cushman. As the member knows, the LHIN is taking the lead in putting together the report, and we anticipate having a report within the next couple of weeks at the LHIN board.

As Minister Smitherman has indicated on a number of occasions, as has the Premier, we're very much committed to ensuring that there will be a residential youth drug rehabilitation centre in the city of Ottawa. We want to get it right. We want to make sure we have the right plan for our community to deal with this terrible situation.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. The Minister of Transportation is currently renovating 23 highway service centres. Most highway restrooms meet disability codes and are accessible to people using a wheelchair. However, these restrooms do not meet the needs of adults with disabilities who are incontinent. Minister, will you agree to ensuring that adult-sized personal care areas and change tables are built in all 23 highway service centers that the Minister of Transportation is presently renovating?

Hon. James J. Bradley: We're not supposed to say they're good questions when you're in government—I can remember that over the years—but that's a good question. I really think that the issue that you've brought to the forefront is excellent.

We're going through a procedure now where we want to do complete renovations and substantial changes. This is exactly the time we can do that. When those services have not been available in years gone by, it's been more than an inconvenience. It is removing a right that people with disabilities have to services of this kind and other services that are available.

I want to assure the member that when we are looking at the criteria to be established for those who will be operating these service centers, the one criterion that she has mentioned will be included in that, and a second criterion she mentioned as well. So I'm glad you raised

that, and those who will be answering the procurement papers that we put out should know that.

1510

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to read you an e-mail that I received recently. It goes, "I have an 18-year-old daughter who is a quadriplegic. She is also incontinent. The problem we face everywhere we go is where to do her personal care. Baby change tables do not meet our needs. All we require is a long countertop five to six feet long in a private area."

With the service centre renovations under way, we have an opportunity to make highway washrooms more accessible and to make it possible for adults with disabilities to enjoy our great province and travel around. Will the minister agree to build adult-sized personal care areas?

Hon. James J. Bradley: In all of these circumstances, we want to be able to serve all of the citizens of the province of Ontario who would use these service centres. Again, I think the e-mail that you have read brings to our attention—and sometimes our society as a whole doesn't realize it, but it is extremely important to have these kinds of facilities available. You're right again. This is exactly the time we're able to do it, when we're putting out the requests for tenders—"tenders" is the wrong word; requests for proposals—in this particular case for the service centres. Not only the items that you've brought to my attention, but if you're aware of any other items that may be helpful in this regard, I would be more than—

Mr. Mike Colle: Some good food.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member mentions good food as well—but healthy food choices. We're trying to encompass as much of that as possible.

So I invite members to send suggestions to me. I thank the member for her suggestions in the House today.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. On Friday, I had the opportunity to join my colleagues the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in Thunder Bay for a joint federal-provincial funding announcement on affordable housing. As many of the members know, affordable housing isn't just a problem in big cities like Toronto or Ottawa. I have to tell you, it was a thrill for me to have the opportunity to meet at that individual event in Thunder Bay three of the recipients who received funding under this program.

Minister, can you please inform the Legislature about the affordable housing funding you announced in Thunder Bay on Friday?

Hon. Jim Watson: I was delighted to be in North Bay as part of the Northern Ontario Municipal Association—

Interjection: Thunder Bay.

Hon. Jim Watson: Thunder Bay—with my colleagues the Minister of Northern Development of Mines

and the Minister of Natural Resources. At an announcement in the morning, I was joined by Iain Angus, the chair of the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board, where we announced a \$900,000 contribution as part of the affordable housing program, money that was reprofiled into the northern repair program.

I too had the opportunity, like the member who just asked the question, to meet with some of the homeowners who have benefited from this funding. It has given their homes new life and it has given these individuals from an economically challenged background new hope living in these beautiful new renovated homes, thanks to the affordable housing program.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you, Minister. The flexibility and additional funding are greatly appreciated by the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board. We know housing repairs are a much-needed facet of what needs to be done to improve affordable housing in the north. Past governments have underfunded affordable housing and we are just now starting to make up for lost time.

Minister, while we appreciated the announcement on Friday, we all recognize and acknowledge that more needs to be done. Can the minister please tell me what else our government will be doing for affordable housing in the north?

Hon. Jim Watson: Just prior to the budget, the Minister of Finance indicated that for the first time in a long time we've actually put a substantial amount of new money into a repair program—\$100 million, in fact—and that was the single largest contribution of rehabilitation repair money in the history of the province of Ontario.

In the northwest, Kenora DSSAB received \$488,000 of that; Rainy River DSSAB, \$248,000; and Thunder Bay, \$1.5 million. This will go a long way to repairing homes, social housing projects, in the northwest. I want to thank my colleagues from Thunder Bay, Mike Gravelle and Bill Mauro, for their lobbying and insistence that the northwest gets its fair share in this very important investment in public housing in the province of Ontario.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. As the health promotion minister, will you enforce the tobacco display ban at the Caledonia smoke shop on Argyle Street?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I refer the question to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Our government has a real strategy to combat illegal cigarettes. It's a three-fold strategy: The first strategy is the cessation strategy; the second strategy is the Tobacco Tax Act; and the third strategy is a very, very aggressive policing strategy, and that's been very, very successful. The OPP, on their own and in partnership with other forces, has been very, very successful at getting contraband cigarettes off the streets. We support that strategy. We support all three strategies and we ask you to support them as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. It's now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Provincial Animal Welfare Act calls for the Ontario SPCA, a private charity, whose objective is to facilitate and provide for the prevention of cruelty to animals and their protection and relief therefrom; and

"Whereas every inspector and agent hired and trained by this private charity has and may exercise any of the powers of a police officer; and

"Whereas this private charity does not answer to the Ombudsman or the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Ontario SPCA is not subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and no external mechanism of accountability exists; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refused to investigate the desperate plea of 29 resigned directors demanding that the Ontario SPCA be stripped of police powers; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government proposes sweeping reforms to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act granting further extraordinary powers to the Ontario SPCA, including the power of warrantless entry;

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

"(1) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to investigate allegations of abuse of police powers and charter violations by the Ontario SPCA investigators; and

(2) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to explore the need for an external mechanism of accountability for the Ontario SPCA; and

(3) that the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to ensure that proposed changes to the Provincial Animal Welfare Act do not violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

I've signed this.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from SEIU and the people of Toronto, Brampton and Etobicoke:

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care

delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

“Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

“Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract;...”

So they ask the Ontario government:

“(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

“(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients’ needs.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and give it to page Ida.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here from the people of Eglinton–Lawrence. It’s to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles, in support of Bill 56.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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.”

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

1520

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Christine Elliott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Ajax-Pickering hospital should have full funding for mental health, including beds;

“Whereas this would affect the mental health programs and mental health beds at the Ajax-Pickering hospital;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Fully fund the mental health beds and programs at Ajax-Pickering hospital.”

I certainly agree with this petition, and I’ll affix my signature to it in support.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today, “Stop Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles—Bill 56,” from citizens in the riding of Eglinton–Lawrence.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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.”

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

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Ajax-Pickering hospital should have full funding for mental health, including beds;

“Whereas this would affect the mental health programs and mental health beds at the Ajax-Pickering hospital;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Fully fund the mental health beds and programs at Ajax-Pickering hospital.”

I’ll give it to Thomas to pass over to the table.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Helena Jaczek: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the citizens in the riding of Ajax–Pickering:

“Whereas the Central East local health integration network (CE-LHIN) board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System’s deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

“Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a \$20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

“Whereas with the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach \$100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

“Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

“Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

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

“That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

“That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

“That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity unit.”

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas over 50,000 people visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year; and

“Whereas over 20,000 students from across Ontario visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year, receiving curriculum-based environmental education not available in schools; and

“Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from any level of government;

“We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to establish a reasonable and stable long-term funding formula so that the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre can continue to operate and exist into the future.”

I’m pleased to support this petition, and will affix my signature thereto.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas 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, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities.”

I’m supporting the petition, I’m affixing my signature and I’m sending it through Rheanna.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition 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 we may fall into; 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, 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.

HIGHWAY 138

Mr. Jim Brownell: While I know that measures are being considered for the highway in question, these petitioners have asked me to present this in the Legislature. It says:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas provincial Highway 138 is one of the province’s only two-lane roadways within the region and provides the main connection from the international bridge at Cornwall through Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry to Highway 401 and Highway 417. Speed and traffic volumes are of particular concern and may have been contributing factors in numerous collisions and fatalities;

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

“To urgently consider measures that will address the serious public safety and traffic hazard concerns on provincial Highway 138.”

I shall send this to the clerks’ table.

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas over 50,000 people visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year; and

“Whereas over 20,000 students from across Ontario visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year, receiving curriculum-based environmental education not available in schools; and

“Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from any level of government;

“We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to establish a reasonable and stable long-term funding formula so that the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre can continue to operate and exist into the future.”

It’s signed by a substantial number of constituents from my colleague’s riding of Simcoe North, and I’m pleased to support it as well.

DISABLED PERSONS PARKING PERMIT PROGRAM

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have petitions 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.”

I agree with this petition. I will sign it. I thank Michael Warren and the Bikers Rights Organization for their assistance.

STRANDHERD-ARMSTRONG BRIDGE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I have a very important petition for the people of Nepean–Carleton.

“Whereas the close-knit communities of Barrhaven, Riverside South and Manotick combined have a total population of well over 50,000 people; and

“Whereas the only link between Barrhaven and Riverside South across the Rideau River is a lengthy commute either across the congested Hunt Club bridge or

through the village of Manotick, which cannot sustain the traffic; and

“Whereas the city of Ottawa has identified the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge as a viable alternative to the traffic congestion created at the Hunt Club bridge and on Bridge Street in Manotick; and

“Whereas the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge is a much more environmentally sustainable option for south Ottawa commuters across the Rideau River than either the commute through Manotick or via the Hunt Club bridge; and

“Whereas the city of Ottawa has identified the cost of the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge, including all ramps, road widening and bridge work, at \$105 million; and

“Whereas the city of Ottawa has requested that a third of that funding, approximately \$35 million, be provided by the Ontario Liberal government, and further, that one third from the federal government has already been committed; and

“Whereas the previous Liberal MPP for the community of Riverside South did not act on the need for this bridge and the current Liberal Premier of Ontario has refused to enter into negotiations with the city of Ottawa over sharing the cost of the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge;

“The residents of Barrhaven, Riverside South and Manotick call on Dalton McGuinty to build the bridge now.”

I agree with this petition and I’ll sign it. I will present it to our page Lucas.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today.

“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 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 I will affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Bryant.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that the standing orders be amended as follows:

Standing order 2 is amended by deleting the definitions of “Sitting day” and “Sessional day” and substituting the following:

“‘Sessional day’ means any day on which the House meets.”

The word “sitting” in standing orders 37(b), 38(i), 42(c), 58, 69(b), 69(c), 97(d), 106, 113, 116 and 134(a) is replaced with the word “sessional”.

Standing order 4(c) is deleted and the following substituted:

“4(c) At the commencement of every Parliament, or from time to time as may be required, the House shall appoint 3 Deputy Chairs of the Committee of the Whole House, to be known respectively as the First, Second and Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House, any of whom shall, in order of precedence, whenever the Chair of the Committee of the Whole House is absent or otherwise unable to act, be entitled to exercise all the powers vested in the Chair of the Committee of the Whole House including those powers as Deputy Speaker.”

Standing order 5 is amended by deleting the number “2” and substituting the number “3” and by deleting the number “4” and substituting the number “5”.

Standing order 6(a) is amended by adding the following clauses:

“(a.1) With notice, the government House leader may propose a motion to extend the hours of meeting during the last 8 sessional days in the fall and spring sessional periods provided for in clause (a), and during any extension thereof.

“(a.2) Such motion may stipulate that the House shall meet, as the case may be,

“(i) Between the hours of 6:45 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., or

“(ii) Between 6:45 p.m. and another specified time not later than midnight, or

“(iii) Past the adjournment time set out in clause 8(a) and continuing to a specified time not later than midnight.

“Such a motion may apply to one day or to more than one day and, in the latter case, shall specify whether subclauses (i), (ii) or (iii) apply to different days. The question on such a motion shall be put forthwith and without amendment or debate. If a recorded vote is requested by

5 members, the division bell shall be limited to 5 minutes.”

Standing order 8(a) is deleted and the following substituted:

“8(a) The weekly meeting schedule for the House when it is in session shall be:

Day	Time	Proceeding
Monday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day
	10:45 a.m.	Introduction of visitors
		Oral questions
	Following oral questions	Petitions
	Following petitions	Recess
	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings:
		Members’ statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Deferred votes
Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day	
5:45 p.m.	Adjournment	

Tuesday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day
	10:45 a.m.	Introduction of visitors
		Oral questions
	Following oral questions	Petitions
	Following petitions	Recess
3 p.m.	Routine proceedings:	

		Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Deferred votes
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	5:45 p.m.	Adjournment

		Oral questions
	Following oral questions	Petitions
	Following petitions	Recess
	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Deferred votes
	Following routine proceedings	Private members' public business
	Following private members' public business	Orders of the day
	5:45 p.m.	Adjournment

“	Wednesday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day
		10:45 a.m.	Introduction of visitors Oral questions
		Following oral questions	Petitions
		Following petitions	Recess
		3 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Members' statements Reports by committees Introduction of bills Motions Statements by the ministry and responses Deferred votes
		Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
		5:45 p.m.	Adjournment

“	Thursday	9 a.m.	Orders of the day
		10:45 a.m.	Introduction of Visitors

Standing order 8(d) is deleted and the following substituted:

“8(d) The House shall not meet during the week prescribed by the regulations made under the Education Act for the school holiday in March or on New Year's Day, Family Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Victoria Day, Canada Day, the day fixed for a civic holiday in August, Labour Day, Thanksgiving Day, Remembrance Day, Christmas Day and Boxing Day. When Canada Day falls on a Tuesday, the House shall not meet the preceding day.”

Standing order 9 is deleted and the following substituted:

“9(a) Except as provided in standing order 6(a.2)(iii) and in standing order 37, at the points each day when the House arrives at a recess or adjournment, as set out in standing order 8(a), such recess or adjournment shall, without motion, be ordered from the chair.

“9(b) If on any day the House has not completed its morning proceedings by 12:30 p.m., the Speaker shall interrupt and immediately recess the House until routine proceedings.

“(c) At the points each day when the House arrives at a transition from orders of the day to another proceeding as set out in standing order 8(a), the Speaker shall adjourn the matter then under consideration and shall call the next proceeding.

“(d) Except in the case of motions to adjourn the House or the debate, the Speaker shall cause any recorded division required upon any proceeding held during orders of the day on any morning to be deferred to the routine proceeding ‘Deferred votes’ on that same day.

“(e) When the House adjourns, the members shall keep their seats until the Speaker has left the chamber.”

Standing order 11(e) is deleted.

Standing order 24 is deleted and the following substituted:

“24(a) Except where otherwise expressly provided by the standing orders, or by unanimous consent, no member shall speak in the House for more than 20 minutes.

“(b) Notwithstanding clause (a), the first speaker for any recognized party in the House may speak for not more than 60 minutes in the following circumstances:

“(i) debate on second reading of a government bill;

“(ii) debate on third reading of a government bill;

“(iii) debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne;

“(iv) debate on the budget motion;

“(v) debate on any other substantive government motion.

“(c) Notwithstanding clause (a) no member shall speak for more than 10 minutes after 7 hours of debate on second or third reading of a government bill.

“(d) At any time during a debate governed by this standing order, a member then speaking may divide his or her time among a member or members of his or her party. Such speeches shall be given consecutively without rotation among the parties and shall be deemed to be a single speech for the purposes of standing order 25.

“(e) In any debate where the available time is apportioned equally among the recognized parties, the speaking time limits on individual members shall not apply.”

Standing order 25(c) is deleted and the following substituted:

“25(c) debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne, but no such questions and comments shall be allowed following the speeches of the mover and the seconder of the motion for the address, or the speeches of the members speaking first on behalf of the official opposition and the other recognized opposition parties.”

Standing order 30(a) is deleted and the following substituted:

“30(a) The routine proceedings are comprised of the following in the order that they appear under standing order 8(a):

“Members’ statements

“Reports by committees

“Introduction of bills

“Motions

“Statements by the ministry and responses

“Deferred votes

“30(a.1) In addition there shall be further proceedings called ‘Introduction of visitors,’ ‘Oral questions’ and ‘Petitions’”.

Standing order 30(b) is deleted and the following substituted:

“The time allotted for routine proceedings each day shall not exceed 1.5 hours. At the end of that time the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the routine proceeding currently occupying the House, and any deferred votes, and immediately call orders of the day.”

Standing order 34 is amended by striking out “9” in the third line and substituting “6(a.1)”.

The following new standing order is added:

“35.1 Any member who wishes to have guests recognized shall provide the relevant information about the guests to the Speaker at least one hour prior to the commencement of oral questions each day and, at the Speaker’s discretion, such guests shall be introduced under the proceeding ‘Introduction of visitors’. It is out of order for any other guests to be introduced by any member.”

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Standing orders 37(b) and (e) are deleted and the following substituted:

“37(b) Where notice has been given and reasons filed, as provided in clause (a), at 5:45 p.m. on any Tuesday or Wednesday, the Speaker may deem that a motion to adjourn the House has been made, whereupon the matter in question may be debated for not more than 10 minutes, 5 minutes to be allotted to the member raising the matter and 5 minutes to the minister or to his or her parliamentary assistant to reply if he or she so wishes. No more than 3 such matters of which notice has been given and reasons filed shall be debated on any single sessional day. At the conclusion of such debate or debates the Speaker shall deem the motion to adjourn to be carried and shall adjourn the House to the next Sessional day.

“....

“(e) When the House continues to meet past 5:45 p.m. on a government motion as provided in standing order 6(a.2)(iii), the adjournment proceeding under this standing order shall not apply.”

Standing order 37(f) is amended by deleting the words “the next sessional day” in the 5th line and substituting “6:45 p.m.”

Standing order 38(b) is deleted and the following substituted:

“38(b) A member may present a petition in the House during the proceeding ‘Petitions’. The member may make a brief statement summarizing the contents of the petition and indicating the number of signatures attached thereto.”

Standing order 41(a) is amended by deleting “6 sessional days” and substituting “12 hours”.

Standing order 42 is deleted and the following substituted:

“42(a) In each of the 2 periods provided for in standing order 6(a), there shall be 5 sessional days to be known as opposition days.

“Opposition day debates:

“(i) Shall be limited to one per meeting week;

“(ii) Shall be designated to take place on either a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon;

“(iii) Shall be distributed among the recognized opposition parties in proportion to their membership in the House;

“(iv) Shall be taken up upon the commencement of orders of the day in the afternoon on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, as the case may be, the time available being apportioned equally among the recognized parties in the House; the time for a reply by the mover of the motion shall be included in the time apportioned to the party of which the mover is a member;

“(v) Shall be limited to 2 hours if held on a Monday;

“(vi) Shall be prohibited during the last 8 sessional days in each of the 2 periods provided for in standing order 6(a), and during any extension thereof.

“Opposition day motions:

“(i) Shall be printed on the Orders and Notices paper of the last sessional day of a week, and setting the day in the following week for its consideration;

“(ii) Shall contain the text of a non-amendable motion to be debated;

“(iii) Shall indicate the minister of the crown to whom it is addressed;

“(iv) Shall not be a motion for second or third reading of a bill;

“(v) Shall not be considered on any day on which the Minister of Finance has given notice of his or her intention to present the budget;

“(vi) Shall not be a motion of want of confidence in the government.

“(b) If more than one notice of an opposition day is filed on the same Wednesday, the Speaker shall select which one will be considered.

“(c) After 2 hours of debate on an opposition day held on a Monday, or at 5:35 p.m. on an opposition day held on a Tuesday or Wednesday, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and put the question without further debate. If a recorded vote is requested, the division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes. Such vote may not be deferred.”

Standing order 43(b) is amended by deleting “5:50 p.m.” and substituting “5:35 p.m.”

Standing order 45(a) is deleted and the following substituted:

“45(a) Motions to adjourn the House or the debate do not require notice, but a motion to adjourn the House may not be moved until following routine proceedings, except upon unanimous consent of the House.”

Standing order 45 is amended by adding thereto the following paragraph:

“45(c.1) When a motion for the immediate adjournment of the House and a motion for the immediate adjournment of the debate have been defeated neither

such motion shall again be made by the same member in the course of the same debate.”

Standing orders 46(b) and (c) are deleted and the following substituted:

“46(b) 2 hours of debate, apportioned equally among the recognized parties, shall be allotted to debate on the motion, at the end of which time the Speaker shall without further debate or amendment put every question necessary to dispose of the motion. If a recorded vote is requested by 5 members, division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes.”

Standing order 46(d) is deleted and the following substituted:

“46(d) A time allocation motion may not be moved until second reading debate has been completed or 6.5 hours of debate have taken place on second reading consideration of any government bill or on a substantive government motion. Upon completion of 6.5 hours of debate, or when the member who has the floor at that point has completed his or her remarks, the Speaker shall deem the debate to be adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.”

Standing order 57(a) is amended by adding the following:

“(a.1) On the day designated for the presentation of the budget, the Speaker shall recess the House immediately following routine proceedings until 4 p.m., except that if routine proceedings have not been completed by 4 p.m., the provisions of standing order 30(b) shall apply.

“(a.2) In any week when the budget is presented on a Thursday the weekly meeting schedule of the House shall be altered such that private members’ public business will not take place in that week.”

Standing order 57(b) is deleted and the following substituted:

“57(b) There shall be 8 hours allotted to the debate on the budget motion and any amendments thereto, at the end of which time the Speaker shall without further debate or amendment put every question necessary to dispose of the budget motion. If a recorded vote is requested by 5 members, the division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes.”

Standing order 62(d) is deleted and the following substituted:

“62(d) There shall be an order for concurrence placed on the Orders and Notices paper for each of the estimates reported from the committee. There shall be 2 hours, apportioned equally among the recognized parties, allotted to the debate on the orders for concurrence, at the end of which time the Speaker shall without further debate put every question necessary to dispose of the order for concurrence in supply for each of the ministries and offices named in the committee’s report. No amendment to any question may be moved. If a recorded vote is requested by 5 members, all divisions shall be stacked, and there shall be a single 10-minute division bell.”

Standing order 63 is deleted and the following substituted:

“63. Adoption of orders for concurrence shall constitute an order to bring in a supply bill founded on the resolutions contained therein, and founded on the resolutions contained in the deemed concurrences made pursuant to standing orders 60 and 61. 2 hours, apportioned equally among the recognized parties, shall be allotted to the debate on the second reading stage of the supply bill, at the end of which time the Speaker shall without further debate or amendment put all questions necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill. A supply bill given second reading shall be ordered for third reading, and the order for third reading shall then immediately be called and the Speaker shall put the question forthwith without further debate or amendment, no deferral under standing order 28(h) being permitted. In the case of any division under this standing order, the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes.”

Standing orders 66(b) and (c) are deleted and the following substituted:

“66(b) 2 hours, apportioned equally among the recognized parties, shall be allotted to debate on the interim supply motion, at the end of which time the Speaker shall without further debate or amendment put all questions necessary to dispose of the motion. If a recorded vote is requested by 5 members, the division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes.”

Standing order 79 is amended by adding the following clause:

“(b.1) No government bill shall be called during orders of the day on both a morning and afternoon meeting of the House on the same sessional day without unanimous consent.”

Standing orders 96(a), (b) and (c) are deleted and the following substituted:

“96(a) 2.5 hours shall be allotted to the consideration of private members’ public business on Thursdays, apportioned equally among 3 items of business as follows:

“(i) 12 minutes for the member moving a motion;

“(ii) A period of 12 minutes to be allotted in rotation for a representative or representatives of each of the recognized parties in the House. The mover of the motion may speak a second time during the time provided for a representative or representatives of the party of which he or she is a member;

“(iii) 2 minutes for a reply by the member moving the motion;

“(iv) The Speaker has the discretion to permit an independent member to speak for up to 5 minutes on the motion of another private member. In exercising his or her discretion, the Speaker shall have regard to the opportunities that members of recognized parties have to participate in debate on other members’ motions. An independent member shall give the Speaker notice of his or her intention to participate in the debate.”

Standing order 96 is amended by adding thereto the following paragraph:

“96(d.1) Subject to subsection (g), members may exchange places in the order of precedence on the ballot list by providing to the Clerk of the House written notice of

their arrangement to this effect, such written notice to be duly signed by the House leaders of the affected members and to be provided by 5 p.m. on the Thursday of the week preceding the week in which the item of business is to be considered.”

Standing order 96(e) is deleted and the following substituted:

“96(e) When the time allotted for the consideration of private members’ public business has expired, the Speaker shall put all questions to the House. Divisions under this standing order shall be deferred and taken in succession. In such cases, the division bells shall be limited to 5 minutes. The House will continue to meet for the consideration of private members’ public business until the necessary votes have been completed.

“(e.1) If consideration of private members’ public business under this standing order is concluded before the expiry of the allotted 2.5 hours, the Speaker shall suspend the House for the balance of such time before putting the questions to the House.”

Standing order 106(a) is deleted and the following substituted:

“106(a) Standing Committee on Justice Policy

“106(a.1) Standing Committee on Social Policy”

Standing order 106(g) is deleted and the following substituted:

“106(g) Standing Committee on Public Accounts which is empowered to review and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the report of the Auditor General and the public accounts, which documents shall be deemed to have been permanently referred to the committee as they become available; and”

1550

Standing order 106(h) is amended as follows:

By deleting the words “section 12 of the Regulations Act, and having the terms of reference as set out in that section, namely” in the 6th, 7th and 8th lines of the first paragraph and substituting the words “section 33 of part III (Regulations) of the Legislation Act, 2006, and having the terms of reference as set out in that section, namely: to be the committee to which all regulations stand permanently referred; and”;

and

By deleting the words “section 12(3) of the Regulations Act” in the 2nd and 3rd lines of the last paragraph and substituting “section 33 of part III (Regulations) of the Legislation Act, 2006”.

Standing order 109(a) is amended as follows:

By deleting the words “clauses (a) and (b)” in the first line and substituting “clauses (a), (a.1) and (b)”.

Standing order 124(a) is amended as follows:

By deleting the words “standing order 106(a) or (b)” in the 2nd and 3rd lines and substituting “standing order 106(a), (a.1) or (b)”.

At 12:01 a.m. on the first Monday following adoption of this motion, the standing orders as amended shall come into force on a provisional basis until 11:59 p.m. on

the fourth Friday, following the resumption of the House in fall, 2008.

The provisional standing orders shall be deemed to be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, which is authorized to conduct a review of the standing orders during the 2008 summer adjournment of the House. The committee shall present its report to the House containing its opinions, observations and recommendations on the standing orders of the assembly no later than the first Thursday following the resumption of the House in fall, 2008.

Any government substantive motion to extend or permanently adopt the provisional standing orders, and any amendments thereto, shall be called for debate no later than the third Thursday following the resumption of the House in fall, 2008. The debate on such motion shall be limited to 1 hour, to be apportioned equally among the recognized parties, at the end of which time the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the motion.

The Clerk of the House is authorized and instructed to print a revised and re-numbered edition of the standing orders, integrating the provisional standing orders and making any necessary amendments in consequence thereof.

Is it any wonder, Mr. Speaker, this should be broadcast on the Web?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Bryant has moved government notice of motion number 59. Mr. Bryant?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sharing my time with the member for Huron—Bruce.

I appreciate, for those aficionados of legislative procedure, that in fact the reading of the full standing orders amendment is required; either that or this is a bad April Fool's joke being played late on me, but the Clerk assures me that's not the case. I appreciate people's patience also in allowing me to read it in as quickly as possible. It's hardly self-explanatory, and that's exactly why we're here debating it today, in addition to the debate that takes place through question period itself.

These changes were proposed in February of this year and the proposal was initially provided by way of a letter to the leader of the official opposition and the leader of the New Democratic Party of Ontario, as well as the House leaders. It was signed by the Premier and myself on February 10, and it laid forth, in general terms, a proposal to make changes to the standing orders, something that had been contemplated post-election, in part by efforts made by the official opposition to make changes not only to the standing orders, but also to what one might call the legislative infrastructure, the way in which the Legislative Building and the precinct worked.

Issues were raised by opposition members with respect to the need for daycare facilities, even something as straightforward and obvious as a high chair. These issues, it was agreed upon unanimously, would be addressed by a committee with representation from all parties, and they would address not the standing orders but in fact all of

the other infrastructure issues, you might say, that would eventually have to be considered by the Board of Internal Economy as well as this Legislature.

The standing orders, on the other hand—it was very clear, in my view, in the motion, and it was certainly clear in the understanding amongst the three House leaders—were a matter that would provisionally be considered and discussed by the House leaders and would then be brought to this Legislature for debate.

The response of the February 2008 letter was, amongst other things, a desire for the House leaders to get together and have discussions. My experience, without any question, in those House leaders' meetings was that we were having discussions, that we were trying to find consensus. It was at some point acknowledged that there were going to be differences between the government approach and the opposition party's approach.

I will say, and I'll have an opportunity to speak to this specifically, that the House leaders discussions that took place around these standing order amendments were substantially—I would even say radically—more fulsome than the previous standing order amendments of this type. The previous standing order amendments brought by the Conservative government, in fact, involved no discussions by the House leaders, and, as was covered in the media at the time, involved what many considered to be—well, let's just put it this way: a contrast to this. There was no letter to the leaders. There was a discussion amongst House leaders. There was a motion tabled at 5 p.m. in the afternoon, a midnight vote, and then in August, a time allocation motion passed by many members who were in the official opposition expressing concern, as is their right, about the process that has taken place today.

In order to try and confirm as best one could the efforts that had been made by the House leaders, I wrote to the House leaders, in a letter dated April 16, and laid out the changes that had been made to the initial proposal at the behest of the recommendations made by the official opposition and the third party. The changes were quite significant. In particular, 9:30 a.m. had been the original proposed start time for question period, and the standing orders that have been presented in this House see a 10:45 start.

If this motion passes, there would be a spring trial of this new plan, this new set of rules, and then it would be considered by a standing committee over the course of the summer with a report back to this House.

The proposal would, if passed, eliminate evening sittings except for the last eight sessional days of a sitting. The point of that was not to suggest that there will be evening sittings in the last eight days; on the contrary, it has got to be the exception. In fact, I would bet that no matter who's in government, all eight days will not be used. It would be my hope that none of them would be used, but the government of the day, no matter who the government is, has got to have some flexibility at the end of a session in order to address matters that just have not been completed, in order to do the people's business. But

the point of that provision was to guarantee, subject to unanimous consent by the House, that there would be no night sittings, and that is a crucial part of these changes.

Under the revised proposal, if passed, a bill could not be passed in one day without all-party consent. Under the original proposal, there was some argument as to whether or not, if you added up all of the hours of debate, a bill could be passed in a day, which is something that happens only where there's consent by the House to do so. On rare occasions, where there is consent—matters of either public urgency or for other reasons—a bill gets passed in a day. It very rarely happens. It's probably happened a handful of times or two handfuls of times over the past nine years that I've been here. It is very rare, and, more importantly, under these rules, it certainly cannot take place.

Let's begin by acknowledging that there have been changes to the way in which this Legislature works, and changes to question period in particular, over the years. Real historians will speak to this certainly far better than I. I know members of this House will be able to speak to this who have served longer than I. Questions, for example, were always submitted in writing up until the 1960s. It's only been since the 1960s that there has been an oral question period. So I must say, the suggestion that this changes centuries-old parliamentary tradition—I would say no; it actually marks, in my view, an evolution. The opposition will say “a devolution.”

1600

Question period is still the longest question period in Canada, maybe in the Commonwealth—certainly in Canada. In the UK, questions are still sent in writing. In the late 1970s, question period was extended from 45 minutes to an hour, and by the 1980s legislative question period shifted to sometime between 1:45 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. There has been a lot of discussion about this movement of question period from this 1:45 range to the 10:45 range. It is, firstly, consistent with the approach that we are proposing here in this motion that the hours of legislative debate better resemble the working hours of most Ontarians. Certainly all members of this House are working early in the morning until late at night in almost all cases and on many days. But in the Legislature, while there are people here working very hard, doing a wide variety of things, in terms of MPPs conducting legislative business, question period, petitions, debate in this chamber, that doesn't happen until 1:30 and on Thursdays from 10 until noon to address public members' private business.

What that means is that when people come in here at 9 a.m., 10 a.m., 11 a.m. or 12 or 1 p.m. as part of a tour—and I've seen this. Anybody who has been in the Legislature at that time or been a part of the tour, they will be brought in here and they'll say: “The Premier sits there. The Speaker sits up there.” You have to imagine—here you are, it's 10 a.m.—how the Legislature works. Instead, someone will come here at 9, 10 or 11 or at 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5, and they won't have to imagine. They'll see the Legislature working at that time.

In contrast, the evening sittings have become increasingly abysmal not only in content and, one might say, quality of the debate, but also I think in terms of decorum as well. Nobody from the press gallery, to my knowledge, regularly covers the evening sessions. I'm not aware of it. I certainly stand to be corrected. You can expect that while there is debate during the morning, as is the case during the afternoon, you will have media coverage. Yes, some people watch the evening sittings. I know that. Similarly, some people will watch, if this passes, morning sittings as well.

We're expanding the amount of time available for debate. I would submit that this is a good thing: more debate in this Legislature, more opportunity to debate government bills, private members' public business, as well as resolutions, opposition day motions—all of that has been extended. Private members' public business is extended by adding an extra bill, resolution or motion. Right now, it's two a week. It will go from two to three a week. In addition to the increase in private members' public business, there is an increase in debate as well.

The idea of having the hours match the working hours of Ontarians was actually something that was raised by the leader of the Conservative Party, Mr. Tory, in remarks he made, you might say, during the election; it was the end of August, during our pre-election time. He made the case—I'm not going to read the quote again; I read it in question period. He said that it just makes sense. We should have working hours. It's going to match the hours of most people, the point being, I suppose, that not only does it make the Legislature more accessible to people, but it also allows the Legislature to operate at times that most Ontarians can relate to. It makes it more accessible. It makes this place not seem as if it is foreign or different in terms of its operations compared to the working hours of most people, and part of that was reflected in Mr. Tory's comments. In the discussion that took place immediately after the Premier brought forward his proposal in early February, one of the opposition members said, “This is the government thinking outside the box. This is positive.”

The criticism with respect to the 9 to 5:45 hours—I say to the member, we're going to get there—the criticism, thus far, has been a level of, I would say: “Wait a minute; why doesn't it start at this time? Why doesn't it start at that time? Petitions should be moved up earlier.”

There's no question that there's an effort to try and fit X number of hours of debate, X number of minutes of petitions, an hour of question period as well as two items of public business—and they are public business—that take place every week when the Legislature is in session. Caucus meetings—it's a gathering of all members of provincial Parliament in their respective caucuses: the government, the official opposition and the third party—in the past, have taken place in the morning. Now it will take place in the time between adjournment after question period and the resumption of debate in the afternoon. So too of cabinet meetings. Obviously, that's going to affect, in a majority situation and I guess under any cir-

cumstances, the government only. However, I think everybody would acknowledge the important business that takes place on behalf of the people, the need to hold these meetings in an appropriate fashion, in a timely fashion and on a regular basis. It's something that all three parties in the past over the years have addressed as particularly important that they take place on a regular basis. I'm sure that the opposition parties would not begrudge the opportunity for cabinet meetings to take place—and I know they would not begrudge the caucus meetings from taking place, because it affects their caucus as well.

So instead it seems as if the focus has been upon—and I'm going to assume without siding—that the official opposition and the third party are not expressing their outrage with regard to these proposals as being focused on the hours. I say that only because I know that the leader of the Conservative Party himself said he thought that that made sense. Those exact words, he used in August of last year, and words arguably to that effect were in their platform: “No, the complaint has not been about the morning to evening; it has been about question period.” It has been about the 10:45 a.m. start of question period.

To go back and reiterate: There have been changes in the past to question period. Yes, we are talking about a 48-year-old tradition in this House—oral questions, at one point for 45 minutes; then they became 60 minutes. Yes, they have taken place near the beginning of the opening of each legislative day. That was one of the reasons why the original proposal had question period start at 9:30, which was the original proposal for the Legislature to sit, the idea being, “This is very important business; we want this to be front and centre.” It was moved because concerns were expressed that that was just too early; 9:30 was just too early to hold question period, for a variety of reasons, some of which included family and some of which included distance to travel by members in this Legislature. That is why the time was moved from 9:30 to 10:45.

Why not in the afternoon? Why not at 1? Why not at 2? Why not at 3? Again, the goal here is to move it up as close to the commencement of the legislative proceedings as is possible and reasonable. The chief complaint seems to revolve around this idea of preparation. I should tell you that in the discussion that took place, probably in all three caucuses—but I can only say with respect to the government caucus—that there is a distinct opportunity that this may be to the disadvantage of the government of the day. Why? Because the government of the day has got to provide a response. I will say in answer that the opposition will say, “There are no answers coming.” I say to you: Within the rules, in responding in question period, the government, far earlier in the day than previously, will have to provide a response.

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Then some concern was expressed by the official opposition and the third party that in fact this was going to be really tough on staff; this was going to be really

tough on the people who worked in the ministers' offices, the people who worked in the official opposition and the third party offices, the people who worked in all MPP offices, and the people who worked for the government of Ontario—concern for staff and civil servants.

Mr. Ted Arnott: And accountability.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Okay, we'll get there.

Again, it's going to obviously affect all three parties. It's going to affect the government, official opposition and third party equally, in the sense that we all have the same amount of preparation.

On question period, I think it needs to be said—because I'm sure most members in the Legislature would probably make this characterization of how question period operates. This would be my own personal, general observation of the categories of questions, and we'll see if people listening at home would agree.

There's the question that basically jumps out of the headlines. The opposition parties, whoever they may be, in their morning question period, take a look at what the morning news is, take a look at what seems to be the issue of the day, which is to some extent looking in the rear-view mirror: “This was the issue of the day.” In some cases, it is going forward, and the questions are based around that. That's the first category of questions.

The second category of questions is one where the opposition or the third party has engaged in some research, and they've been working on something, not for a morning but for a number of days, and in some cases weeks. It may flow from a freedom-of-information-act request. It may flow out of the gathering of information and statistics. It may involve a particular issue that involves an individual or a family or a group, and that individual, family or group has a point to make, and a concern is raised in question period, and the official opposition or the third party has to arrange it in a way so that the individuals are present in the Legislature. We'll call those the research questions. Those are not questions for which there is an intensive period in the morning requiring some preparation; on the contrary, those are ready to go. In other words, once they have that information, they're going to ask that question. So whether the question period is at 10:45 or at 1:45 makes no difference. Why? Because they've been working on this for a number of days.

The third category of questions is constituent questions: “There's somebody in my riding who has a particular concern, and this is important to my riding, this is important to this constituent and it's important to this member, and I want to raise it in the House, and I need some assistance from the executive council.” Again, those questions are there. They're there whether it's 1:45 or 10:45.

So one asks oneself, “What is it about the nature of these headline, already-made, news-gathering questions that requires that extra one, two, three hours of preparation?” It's an interesting question for the official opposition and the third party to answer. What do they need those extra two hours for, when in fact the subject matter is right there in front of them?

The leader of the official opposition asked a question about a poll. I'm presuming it's a poll that was published or broadcast by one of the major media organizations today. Based on that information, the member stood up and, within 60 seconds, offered a question.

Remember, this research that the official opposition and third party are calling for is research to advise a question of 60 seconds, with a 60-second supplementary, and, if it's a leader's question, another 60-second supplementary. Decisions are made, yes, early in the morning by the official opposition and third parties as to exactly what that question is going to be. Is there a need to have an extra two hours of research?

Again, I say it works both ways. If it is that headline-grabbing question, if you like, if it is a question by the opposition that is flowing from the news, if it is a tragedy or if it is a controversy, both the opposition parties and the government are going to have the same amount of time to prepare. If it's a headline or if it's a leading story, if it's within the purview and jurisdiction of a particular minister, that minister is going to be aware of it, aware that a question may come. And members of the official opposition and third party, many of whom have served in governments past, know well that you get prepared for questions that sometimes don't come. You're prepared for that question—and yes, we will have the same amount of time to prepare as others.

But here's one of the problems with the argument. It's that twice a week—two out of the four days that question period takes place—members of provincial Parliament and members of the cabinet, the executive council—ministers—are in fact in a position where they are being questioned in public, scammed by the media, typically with an opposition member and no doubt a researcher at their side, to answer the questions of the day. Members and cabinet ministers have to be prepared at 9:30 a.m. two out of the four days, so we're talking about the other two days.

One of them is Monday. There was concern expressed by the members that it is very important that MPPs be able to spend Sunday night at home, in their constituency, with their family. I could not agree more; I agree. I don't think, though, that everybody should assume that every member of this House is not able to get to the capital in time for question period at 10:45 a.m. With respect to cabinet ministers, it is part of the responsibility of being a member of the executive council; with respect to those who are asking questions, if you want to ask a question on Monday, it means that the members—not all of whom, obviously, live within a short driving distance of the capital region. I'm very, very aware of that. As the member for St. Paul's, I'm personally very privileged and fortunate that I am in a riding and represent a riding that is a very short distance from Queen's Park. So I, unlike the House leaders of the official opposition and of the third party, do not have the same commute to Queen's Park as they do; I certainly acknowledge that. Nonetheless, I would say with respect that it comes with the territory, in that if you're going to be a member of the

executive council or you're going to be asking a question in question period on Monday, you will need to be here in time for 10:45.

These changes are not, obviously, being proposed in a fashion that amounts to constitutional changes that would require a supermajority reversal in order to undo them. The idea here is to change the way this Legislature operates, try out a new system, if it passes, over however many weeks would be left in the spring session, have a committee of this Legislature with representation from all parties review what's happened and come forward with maybe unanticipated consequences, renew major objections—it's an opportunity for the opposition or the third party to say, "See? I told you so." I can certainly commit that the government won't do that. But it will be an opportunity for all three parties, in fact, to look at what happened and see if changes need to be made. Within the standing order changes that are being proposed, the mechanism is in place for it to be returned to the House and potentially undone.

Is this question, concern or expression of outrage with respect to what's happening to our parliamentary democracy through these changes, are these allegations made by these opposition parties really in fact going to unfold over whatever it may be, a four-, five-, six-, eight-week—I don't know—term of implementation in which there is a trial period? I say no; I say that is a hyperbole at its worst.

Traditions are important, and there are some traditions here that we all respect. But those traditions that have abandoned the original principles—that's tradition, as Chesterton said, that "is the democracy of the dead." Tradition for tradition's sake—"Well, we've always done it at 1:45"—is not a good enough reason for us to clutch onto the tradition that the deans of the Legislature, I know, are particularly concerned about because it is a significant change.

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It is my view that this will result in more scrutiny. You're going to have the government's feet held to the fire—people talked about the effect on the media—on the noon broadcast and news. You're going to have an opportunity for opposition members, by which I mean the official opposition and the third party, to continue to move forward on an issue on which the government is under fire throughout the course of the day, whereas now, the way it works—as members of the gallery, I'm sure, would attest and members of the official opposition and third party will confirm—when question period is over, there's a scrum and that's it. C'est tout. It's time to file. That's it. Now there will be an opportunity for all sides to add facts, to be questioned about facts. I say that's more scrutiny. More debate time: That's certainly more scrutiny. More private members' public business: That's certainly more scrutiny and certainly more time for debate.

I am going to again emphasize that one of the pernicious elements of the current legislative situation that came under intense criticism was these evening debates. If we are going to have a sufficient amount of time to de-

bate bills and it's not going to happen in the evenings—and I think we're all in agreement on that—then it has to happen at some point, and that is the mornings. Whether question period happens at 10:45 versus 1:45 and on, whether or not you get more or less scrutiny arguably is in the eye of the beholder. But, more importantly, logic does not bear out that there is a disadvantage to one side or the other side. It does not bear out in that fashion. It may be that the government is able to provide exactly the same answers at 10:45 that would be provided at 1:45. It may be that the same amount of preparation for question period will take place for the opposition as would take place at 1:45.

If this injects an element of spontaneity in the questions and in the answers, I say that would be a good thing. The demise of the script would surely be to the benefit of our democracy if it added an element of balance, as opposed to the question that involves reading and the answer that involves, as the Minister of Transportation said, "Turn to tab sub 4, sub 6." He said, "I don't want to do that." He also had no idea where to find it.

The point is that preparation is important, but sometimes the most dramatic questions or those which have the most impact on public affairs are those that are in fact spontaneous or those that could not be addressed by any research. In fact, if this allows the government to have their feet held to the fire that much earlier, then all the better.

I look forward to this debate. This is an important debate. Nobody should doubt that it's an important debate. I will remind members of this House, and I remind anybody tuning in—by the way, I made reference to the webcast. I was more than happy to confirm that I thought the leader of the official opposition, Mr. Runciman, came forward with a good idea to have these proceedings webcast. They are not currently webcast; they are telecast. He spoke to the level of scrutiny that's taking place. It's an opposition idea, a good idea, something that the Speaker supports and something that the government supports. I want to thank the leader of the official opposition for that important contribution.

So I'm not able to say this to people who are watching live on the Web, but I would just remind everybody that when the official opposition, the Conservative Party, changed the standing order rules and they had the opportunity to engage in discussions with the House leaders, they didn't do that. They didn't do any of it. They didn't meet five times, exchange letters and proposals, and have a discussion about the principles and merits—not for five days or six meetings or four meetings or two meetings. Zero meetings. They didn't forecast that they were going to introduce these changes by way of an open letter to the public. They filed it at 5 p.m. The time allocation of that particular bill took place at midnight.

Of course, time allocation itself is an item that was brought in by the New Democratic Party when they were in government. I know that the House leader for the third party, Mr. Kormos, expressed objections to it. He wasn't

able to show up and vote against it, but he did express objections to it when the matter came forward and the New Democrats legislated time allocation.

Is this place working as it should? No, it's not. Is it the culture of the place? Perhaps. Do I have answers as to how to make this place more decorous? It is something that I would hope all members of this House would want and that I should say our Speaker and all our speakers are attempting to contribute to.

This is an effort to address the pernicious evening sittings, to allow for a modernization of legislative hours—something that the leader of the Conservative Party said he supported—and allow for more hours of debate and more question period time. It's for those reasons and more, which will be far more intelligently and articulately made by the member from Huron—Bruce, that the government puts forward these standing orders in good faith, in a desire to improve the way in which public legislative business is done.

We look forward to the debate. If it passes, we look forward to the opportunity to try it out. If that takes place, we look forward to having it reviewed over the summer.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): the member for Huron-Bruce.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: It really is my pleasure to rise today to talk about very important changes. I know that change is difficult. One finds that change, whether it be in your home or in your workplace, is always difficult. But one of the things we do know is that change is a constant, and it really must be. Look at how much we have changed over the years when the Legislature was first formed to where we are today. It's incredible when you think about it.

When you have the opportunity to go into our long-term-care homes—and I've heard members from both sides of the House talk about when they have the opportunity to celebrate someone's birthday who's 105. What do they talk about? They talk about how they began their lives in a horse and buggy and how things have advanced so much.

So when we see reforms coming forward, and reforms that are not only important to allow the public the transparency and the accountability that they expect from their government, but also the reform that will allow the members to have a workplace that truly does reflect the people of Ontario—and I think about the first term, when I was elected in 2003. Consistently, the third party voted, every day that there was a vote on evening House duty, No. There was a vote: No. There were about two members from the official opposition: No to House duty. Then that ball increased. There were three from the official opposition; then there were four; then they were split. Then they would sometimes vote one way; then they'd vote somewhere else. But the third party was consistent: "No go. No evening House duty. We aren't interested."

But now, after the election in 2007—and I think it's important that I also add to the record that Mr. Tory is very clear. He was crystal-clear during the last election: "You know, most people go to work starting at 9 o'clock

in the morning. I think, if you had the sittings start in the morning and finish at suppertime, it allows moms and dads and young families to be at home more often with their family and to have the thing be just a bit more family friendly. So I think it means you'd look more often to start in the morning and have your day proceed so that you could use those hours and finish by supper-time."

After the third party voted consistently, "No evening hours," and then there was a ball rolling over on the official opposition, then their leader said, "No House duties in the evening."

1630

So then we come to today. Today we see that what is before us is accountability, transparency, extension of private members' business, extension of debate time. I know that this House sometimes can be confusing, but you would think that there would be support. But there isn't. So we know that the next vote that comes up on evening House duty, we're going to have the third party and the official opposition vote against it, while they also will probably vote against the reform.

Why is reform important? I've had the opportunity to speak to members who represented Huron-Bruce for a number of years. Let's just talk for a minute about how constituency offices have evolved. When the honourable Murray Gaunt was here, for many years he worked out of his home, and that was what was available for constituency offices. He received all of the calls to his home. His wife was not only his partner but also his receptionist, his secretary, the bookkeeper and everything else. A number of members were experiencing difficulties in their homes.

As time evolved, we came forward with global budgets. We came forward with room within the budgets of the members to have constituency offices. Why did we do that? We did that so that people would have the opportunity to come in and we could work with them, as all members in this House do. That's why, when the first orders came forward, Fridays were included. There were concerns raised, so that was removed. This was done in a manner to be accepted by all members of the House, because there was a recognition of how important for all members the constituency work is, that we represent our constituents in this House.

When we think about how that's changed, how has the role of MPPs changed? To my mind, there have been some very inappropriate comments. I would even equate them to being the bully in the sandbox—when you kick sand and then you call members bad names, and that somehow takes away the focus of the discussion. So I do want to bring it back to a point of discussion when we talk about the role of MPPs.

As you know, I have a very large riding. I don't have the ability to do anything other than drive because I don't have—

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: A chauffeured car.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: That's very true. I can only drive. I cannot get a plane. I cannot get a train without a

long drive to get to that, and by then, I'm almost three quarters of the way to Toronto.

Just for anyone who is listening today, I'd like to give them a sense of what it means to be the member from a rural area. It's a three-hour drive one way and so, of course, six hours round trip. You can see that adding that on to a normal workday, which is eight hours—my workdays don't reflect that, but I think it is fair to add the six and the eight; that means 14.

As a result of that, a number of the members from distances—I think that this also needs to be brought forward—have the ability to have accommodations in the city of Toronto to allow those members to come to work on a day-to-day basis without the drive time included, quite obviously because of the hours. When I think about the ability a member has to represent their people—and I can see the members of the opposition; I don't know whether or not they find it amusing that I'm driving, or they find it—

Mr. Ted Arnott: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm just wondering how the comments that the member's putting forward with respect to this debate relate back to the actual text of the motion. I was wondering if—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm listening very carefully, and I'll draw members' attention to that, but all members should keep that in mind. Thank you.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I just want to be very clear so that the official opposition understands what I'm speaking about. What I'm speaking about is reform to the Legislature, and I'm also speaking about the role of the MPP. Just to remind the official opposition, we are the Legislature. The way we conduct ourselves and how we represent our constituents, in my mind, does represent all of the government of Ontario, and they should be mindful of that.

I look at the ability to represent your people and the tools that we are given by this House to make sure that we can do that to the best of our ability. That is a part of it, the accommodation. I know that there has been a lot of discussion about the members having to come in on a Sunday or having to come in on a Monday. I know that a number of the members today come in on a Sunday and a number come in on a Monday. In my mind, it reflects the scheduling that we have today. I'm quite confident that that scheduling will go forward, being respectful and reflective of the times that people do come in. It's just different with every member, depending on where they are from.

I think about how, in the past, previous governments have treated the Legislature and how respectful they have been of members. That simply has not happened. I know that often, when one is opposed to change, what one does is then rely on partisan politics in order to prove their point and bring forward a different perspective.

To bring it back to where all this started, this started with a number of members who wanted to see the Legislature adapt to the way society conducts its business today. I believe by bringing forward the modernization, it

in fact does that, while being very respectful of tradition and respectful of the members' time. I look at how we can conduct our business and do it in a manner that we can still allow for the constituent work to be done, because quite clearly, that is the important part of our roles. I believe that by condensing our day and allowing for full debates, the question period and also with respect to private members' time, this really does accommodate that. It lets us have our evenings free to do constituency work or other meetings that we would choose to have, or also to be apart, with our families. I do want to speak about that for just a minute.

When I was elected in 2003, at that time my youngest daughter was 14 years old. What one finds as a mother being elected into the House is that you do a lot of homework over the phone. You do a lot of scheduling over the phone. And I can tell you that juggling evening hours and juggling, "Where's mom? She's not packing my lunch. She's not helping me with my schedule," or "I've had a bad day," or "I've had a great day and I want to talk to my mom about that," is very difficult, as it is for dad as well. So I really do believe that this will give us the opportunity to have what I would call more balance in our lives while still ensuring that we have the time frame to do our jobs in the Legislature.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Everyone here is unbalanced. It's part of the prerequisite.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Well, it's very difficult to juggle. Certainly the member has been quoted a number of times on how difficult it is to juggle.

But if we never begin to bring about the change, then we never get on a different page. Clearly, evening House duty time is the biggest issue because it has been voted on for four years by the third party, and voted on for one year and four years the other. So clearly that is the issue. That is what the reform brings forward.

When I think specifically about the member for Nepean-Carleton, I know that she has been beating her chest and making very inappropriate comments about—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: That's a—

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Well, those are her words; she said those words. I'm only repeating what the member for Nepean-Carleton said, and I do thank you for allowing me to speak to that.

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One of four things that she spoke to on the reforms she would like—I know people want to know—was reducing evening sittings. That, in fact, has been done.

This is Hansard that I'm quoting from. Another point was bringing in a daycare, another point was a prayer room on-site, and another point was creating a spousal association. We can see that the reduction of evening sittings in fact has been achieved by this reform. Some of those others might be something that she would like to work on with her party as well, and some others—you know, the work is never done. There is always much more work to do. But just specifically on the evening sittings: Evening sittings will be limited to the last eight

days of the spring and fall session—so quite clearly, much of what she has asked for.

This clearly requires the greatest change within this House. It requires a change in legislation, and that is what we are speaking about today.

I also feel that we need to talk about it so that everyone understands what is before us today. I know that question period is something that people like to turn their TVs on to watch. There have been comments made that if it's at 2, then they wouldn't be able to, but I would argue that if you are available at 2, you're likely available at 10:45, or you can also watch the reruns coming later in the day, as I know many people do, because I certainly receive many comments from my constituents.

At this time I also bring forward, with regard to question period and the ability to watch the Legislature, that it is important that we ensure that our telecommunications keep the Ontario Legislature on their channels. I know that this has been difficult in some areas, so I did want to bring that to the forefront.

I look at the bullet point here, that daily debate time will increase by 25%, making evening debates unnecessary. Mr. Speaker, you know that I come from a municipal background. Quite frankly, I do want to share with the people of Ontario that when I arrived here in 2003 and saw the quality of the evening debate, I did not see how that was moving the province of Ontario forward. The people just felt we could do better, and quite frankly, I believe that we can do better. Around our area, "Early to bed and early to rise" is a saying that is often shared in our communities, so I really do embrace the early morning debates.

I think that having the evenings to not only work on constituency work—I really do believe that it give us time to reflect. We reflect on the discussions that have happened during the day. We have the ability to reflect on novels or books that we would like to read. It also gives us the opportunity to just think about the province and the directions that people want to go. It's just time to reflect. I think that's very important, especially with the busy lifestyles that we lead today.

We think that the 50% increase in private members' business, from two to three items per week—so that is an increase—is very important. I have the opportunity to hear private members' bills from week to week, every week. There is so much work that goes into the private members' bills, and they are such thoughtful, well-researched documents. So often, when we hear about what is happening in other ridings, they are often reflected in the private members' business.

It really is an opportunity for all members to speak to new directions. The opportunity is certainly there for private members' business. I know that I have been moved beyond words at private members' business. As I said to my constituents, "If you want to hear from the members, the best time to come and listen is private members' business." You really do hear, from the members, their viewpoints of what they are interested in and what is of importance to them.

Also, the evening sittings: I just can't speak to that enough. We know; we've seen the votes. But we also understand that the government must go forward and get business done. So the reform that has come forward is a balance of evening sittings, the shift away from the multiple-evening sittings, but it also is very reflective of the work that the government needs to do in a manner that will also allow for our constituency work to go forward as well.

The other thing that is simply not talked about by the opposition is that this is the pilot project proposal. In fact, that is what it is. This will give us the opportunity to try it on, see how it goes, give it a trial run. It will also give us the opportunity to fine-tune it. I know that it's not something that is traditional. But quite frankly, I really do think this will give us the time. Maybe there are some things that we can do that will make it better.

After all, the Legislature is to ensure that the government works for the people of Ontario. It should reflect how the people of Ontario conduct themselves as well. So this is a trial project. That's how, by going to committee, it will give the opportunity for input from both. All the members and the committee members will bring forward the concerns. So it is a spring trial implementation.

I just want to reinforce that Queen's Park sat for 106 days in 2006. That represented more than any other jurisdiction in Canada. So this demonstrates the commitment we have made to the people. Clearly, from each step, accountability, transparency, listening to the people and acting has been the order of business.

I also want to remind people that the standing orders have changed more than 25 times since 1976. The most recent changes—and we certainly have heard a lot about that, and I know we're going to hear more about that. Let's remember: 25 times is how often it has changed. So this is not something that has not been, in the past, the order of business.

There's the member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I was listening to you upstairs.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: That's great.

I did want to reinforce that the modernization legislation, I believe, is an important component of ensuring that the people of Ontario's voices have the ability to be heard and continue to be heard. By moving forward to business hours that are reflected by the people, it will happen.

I do want to share a couple of stories. People have been asking me in my constituency, "Why? Why are you bringing this forward?" We then go through the discussion about why it is important. The next thing that they want to know is, "Why is the opposition opposing it? What is it that they're opposed about when they vote consistently to—which is part of the reform." That's when it gets a bit difficult for the people who are watching this channel. Quite frankly, I find it a bit difficult too.

I really do believe that by coming forward with the modernization to the standing orders, we can conduct the business of the government in a manner that is not only

respectful of the traditions of this House but is also respectful of the members' time and the needs from their constituencies, and will give them that opportunity—in fact, will give more opportunities to debate and to bring forward the concerns and also allow for greater debate at private members' time.

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I look forward to the modernization. I am very proud to be part of a government that is bringing change forward, change that the people of Ontario understand is important for the business of government. These changes, I believe, will appeal to all members, as this change has been something that the opposition and the third party have clearly demonstrated that they feel a need for as well. So by moving forward this piece of legislation, we will resolve many of the outstanding issues.

I know that as there will be more private members' time—as a member who will be bringing forward more private members' business—I'm quite anxious to bring forward more legislation and have the opportunities to debate even longer. It's certainly something that I look forward to.

So thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on this very important piece of legislation. I look forward to the official opposition's comments.

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

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm pleased to join the debate on this motion. I also want to say at the outset that I will be splitting my time with the member for Nepean–Carleton.

It's been most interesting to listen to the House leader and the member from Huron–Bruce. Certainly, their take on what's going on and what's happened is a little bit different when you're sitting in the opposition benches, and I do want to speak to that.

First of all, I want to begin on the manner in which this legislation was introduced. It was done in a very clandestine manner. If you will recall, the information was first leaked to the press on a Sunday afternoon, as opposed to presenting it to the House leaders. This, despite the fact that for almost two months, I had been asking the House leader for a meeting in order that we could begin our consultation and our negotiation and hopefully reach a consensus—because everybody did agree that the standing orders needed to be changed. Obviously, we were hoping that we could have some influence and some impact and have an opportunity to reflect the will of our constituents. That didn't happen. As I say, the press got it first, and we got it after. Of course, that's the way this issue ended as well: The press got the information first and the House leaders got it second.

I would say to you that despite the efforts that we made to initiate this conversation, this dialogue, early in the new year, it didn't begin for almost two months. We did come together on several occasions, as I say, after it was first leaked to the press as to what the government was proposing. But I was shocked. I'm a new House

leader, and I actually thought that we were going to have a meaningful debate, that we were going to have a meaningful discussion. I've certainly participated in many other committees and sat on many boards where people actually do try to reach a consensus. There was never any meaningful discussion on the proposed changes that were presented to us by the government. We had meetings. I would say the discussion was very limited, perhaps five minutes at times. Other times, we presented our proposals to the government and were told that they were going to go back to the powers that be who were going to make these decisions. We asked the House leader why the changes were being made, and could the individual please tell us the principles behind it. Never were we provided with any information as to why these very, very significant, huge changes were being made—not that we objected to the changes. But what was the rationale? What were the principles behind them? In fact, I was surprised today to hear the House leader go on at length, because this is the type of information that he could have presented to us in the House leaders' meeting; I'm surprised there was so much to say. We were always promised a response in those meetings but, unfortunately, we never got it.

The House leader was even quoted as saying—and acknowledging—"I received a counterproposal from both parties, and I provided a counterproposal back." That's it; that was the end of the story. We gave him this; there was no response. He gave us this; there was no opportunity for us to respond. In fact, in the last weeks of the debate, we thought they were going to go to three weeks on and one week off; they held that out to us, and that went nowhere. It's very disappointing that, on very significant changes, there was no opportunity for productive, three-way discussions on these issues.

I want to say that we don't object to change. Change needs to happen. We don't object to the hours—and I am going to speak to what it is we do object to. But we really are very concerned that there is no opportunity for discussion.

I feel that these proposals fail the litmus test of enhancing the accountability of the government to the Legislature and also improving the effective, efficient functioning of the Legislature. I think if you take a look through—and I'm going to refer to that point—they just simply don't measure up, if that's the litmus test we choose to read.

But I want to go back to this whole issue of consultation. If we take a look at what happened in 1999, we have the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North saying—and this was the Conservative government that was in charge—"I'm pleased there has been such co-operation and such understanding." Well, you won't hear that this time. We have Mr. Duncan saying, "Certainly there was give and take. I welcomed the comments of the government House leader today, his willingness to cooperate and to work together to make this place once again the kind of relevant legislative body it was when my colleague from St. Catharines began his career

several years ago." He's praising that. Then we have Mr. Bradley saying, "What I think was absent previous to this was any meaningful negotiation between whoever was the government House leader of the day and the opposition House leaders." There was all sorts of positive praise for the Conservative government in 1999 when this was brought forward. In fact, Mr. Bradley concludes by saying, "I want to commend the government House leader and the other two House leaders for making an effort to reach a consensus" and, you know, make things better. That is what was missing from this debate: There wasn't any; there was no discussion. There was simply an exchange of proposals, no more, no less. We were always left with the words, "I'll have to go back to" whoever they report to.

Our leader did want to see discussion; he did want to see further debate take place. John Tory wrote a letter on February 11 to the Premier: "These types of changes deserve far more study and attention than a unilateral, Sunday-afternoon communication by the government," which of course was to the press first, and then to us. Then he goes on to say, "However it appears, though, many of these changes proposed by your government, without any advance consultation, are designed to avoid scrutiny rather than improve accountability." Again, he recommends that the committee that's established to look at how other Legislatures work focus on best practices, ensure that the debate and proposals happen in public view and invite public comment, rather than having the debate behind closed doors. There was never any opportunity thus far for that to happen.

Again, on February 28, our leader, John Tory, acknowledges that the changes are needed, but in light of the dramatic impact the changes are going to have, they should be referred to a committee before they are introduced. We want to make sure that the Ontario Legislature is a more meaningful place for everyone, not just Ontario's governing party.

1700

So we're not averse to the changes. We are averse to the manner in which they were introduced. We are averse to the lack of consultation. Twice, as you can see, we requested in writing that the Liberals refer the matter to committee.

We do know that when the motion passes, it is the plan that the changes will be referred to the Legislative Assembly committee during the summer adjournment, but I guess we all know that by that time, the show really is all over. If the governing party does what they've already done, it's simply a farce to think that there are going to be any changes whatsoever after the fact. If you wanted to make changes, why would you do it after you introduce it, rather than before?

I think it's a feeble attempt by the government to give the impression that they're going to be consulting, when the process should have taken place before the motion was ever debated today. I don't think that the government is fooling anyone. This is a unilateral decision made by them without any input or consultation, and it is a very significant change.

I want to speak a little bit about the committees, because it appears the government lost some steam. They don't seem to have recognized that changes they are making are going to impact the committees of the House, and there's no indication as to what's going to happen.

There are currently nine standing committees. They meet during the day on specific days and at specific times while the House is in session. The addition of the four morning debates now means that in the mornings, there are going to be members in committee and members in the House at the same time.

It's a bit of a disadvantage to the opposition, because you stretch your human resources. We only have 26 members, the NDP have 10, so obviously it's going to place the opposition at a distinct disadvantage if these committees continue to meet in the morning. For example, if you take a look at the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Bill Murdoch, he's not going to be able to sit in the regulations and private bills committee and the House at the same time after these changes are passed. It's going to complicate things for the opposition, but it appears that the government didn't take this into consideration.

It reminds me a little bit of the decision to bring in Family Day. We all know what chaos there was around Family Day. Some people got the day off; some people didn't. Unfortunately, this government sometimes has ideas but they haven't carefully considered a plan of implementation or the consequences of the actions that they're taking. And that's obvious.

What is it that we object to? We don't object to the changes. We don't object to the workload. Folks, when you take on the job of an MPP, you know it's going to be long hours. It's going to be seven days a week, any time of day between 6 o'clock in the morning and 12 at night. We take exception to the change in time of question period. We believe that it is an attempt on the part of the Liberal government to avoid public and media scrutiny.

I guess the reality is, if you are in opposition and you don't have the same resources and the same staff that the Premier has, that the cabinet ministers have, opposition members are going to be at a disadvantage, no matter what anybody tells you.

I was a minister of the crown from 1995 to 2003. It was great. When I got into my office, the ministry staff had reviewed all of the clippings in the whole province. They'd identified the issues. My staff had worked with them. They had the briefing notes and the pages all ready, because you had to be prepared. You had to be prepared first thing in the morning because you never knew when there was going to be press who wanted to speak to you about an issue. But you had great staff and you had great resources.

Unfortunately, when you are in opposition, you maybe have one person who is able to assist you, and they clearly can't do the reading of all the clippings and they obviously can't do all the research or follow-up that might be required. So we are clearly at a disadvantage.

I think somebody talked about the fact that if we have question period and even if you can't prepare—I think

the last member who spoke—maybe then there'll be some spontaneity in the questioning. Well, I hope that if she thinks there's going to be spontaneity, the hope on our side would be that maybe this is going to actually lead to the cabinet ministers giving us an answer.

Interjection: Just once.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: As my colleague just said, maybe just once we could get a response.

Anyway, we are concerned about the moving of question period to approximately 10:45. Question period is actually going to be shorter under the new standing orders than it is today. I will be tabling several amendments at the end of my remarks, which, if passed, would move question period to a set time and a certain time of 1 o'clock every single day the House is sitting—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. It would move it up, but there'd be certainty. Because right now, under the proposed changes, question period is not going to start each and every day at 10:45. At 10:45, we're going to have the Speaker introduce visitors and then we're going to start. So we're going to be shortchanged each and every day for question period. I think we all agree that it's great to introduce visitors, but it is going to cut into the question period, and it will mean an unpredictable start. It's rather ironic because the government House leader talks about creating certainty around question period and there's not going to be any real certainty.

We have introduced amendments. Our amendments keep the routine proceedings together, unlike the Liberal proposal. Their proposal splits routine proceedings, potentially creating a little bit of legislative chaos—it's in the morning and it's in the afternoon, question period and routine proceedings. I hope that the ministers are going to be here for question period as well as routine proceedings. I hope that the Premier is also going to be here for both of those times of day. It is important. Routine proceedings are equally important as question period. But really, what the government is proposing here, with a schedule where they split up routine proceedings from question period, somebody—I think my colleague the member from Leeds-Grenville, when he first saw the proposed changes in chart form, noted that it looked a little bit like a dog's breakfast. It's quite chaotic and it will be very confusing to the public because it doesn't provide any certainty about routine proceedings. Again, people do like to come and participate, and routine proceedings now will not be held at the same time as question period; they're going to be split. The debate times are scattered throughout any time of the day, and the overall schedule is quite unpredictable. So we are going to make a motion to move question period to 1 o'clock, a set and certain time every single day the House is sitting.

I want to move now to night sittings. A government that says it wants to get rid of night sittings isn't setting a very good example by sitting two nights this week. It's interesting, because this Legislature only sat about two weeks in a period of nine months. The House was adjourned early last June and we then only sat for two weeks between early June to the end of the year, and we

didn't come back until just recently, as you know. Suddenly, now we're going to have to sit night sittings. If the government wanted to be active and doing things, I don't know why they didn't sit in the fall and I don't know why they didn't sit earlier in the year. You know, folks, after an election, you don't need to take a holiday for two and a half months, almost three months, as this government did. They say that we should be able to get ready for question period at 10:45, but they weren't able to get ready to govern over a period of time.

1710

Let's go back to night sittings. The first proposal that was leaked to the media gave the government the power to sit evenings and midnights, even though they said that they were going to change that. It's very interesting that their original proposal came from a government that was trying to proclaim that the changes were family friendly. I think we were able to help convince the government that we noticed what they were doing and that there needed to be a change to that proposal.

The Liberal's second proposal, the one we're debating today, will now only allow the government to sit evenings and midnights during the last two weeks of the session or during a calendar extension. However, it is during these last two weeks of the session that the most damage can be done to democracy. Under the changes which we have today, under the cover of darkness, the Liberals will now be able to force bills through in record time, because we're changing the calculations in how much time we devote to debate to hours instead of days. Again, it's very worrisome that they are proposing this, and we're going to try to introduce an amendment to provide some certainty and to allow for people to have an opportunity to thoroughly scrutinize legislation.

Right now, it takes a minimum of six days to pass a bill; under the new rules, it will take a minimum of five days to pass a bill. But during the last two weeks of the session with night sittings, it could take as little as four days to pass a bill from introduction to third reading.

This is important: Six to four. That's why I go back to what I say should have been the litmus test. Does this enhance the accountability of the government to the Legislature, to give them the opportunity to pass bills in four days instead of six? No. Does this improve the effective efficient functioning of our province? Again, I would say no. So I think you can see that much of what is here is to avoid public scrutiny and accountability.

Let's go to the issue of work. I've heard the government say that the opposition doesn't want to work. I think that is utter and pure nonsense. I think our leader, John Tory, works as hard as any other person in this province, if not harder than most MPPs. The fact that the government talks about this new schedule resembling the working hours of ordinary Ontarians is rubbish. The reality is, folks, the working day of an MPP is never going to resemble the working day of an ordinary Ontarian by the nature of the work that we do.

By the way, we choose these jobs. We don't have to be here. The reality is, I know for myself, you're up at

five o'clock, you're driving into Toronto, you're on your way. The drive now takes you probably two and a half hours, as it did this morning. People work at the end of the day. They have events they go to. In the morning, oftentimes people have events that they go to in their own ridings. You get home on Friday, Saturday or Sunday, and you have constituency appointments. You usually have events all day Saturday and Sunday. In fact, our lives are such that you could avoid eating with your family seven days of the week. But that's the nature of our job. We chose this job. And so for us to think that this revised schedule is going to make it mean that we resemble and have the same working hours as ordinary Ontarians is rubbish. We never will. We didn't sign on to it. We knew it was going to be different, and so be it.

I heard one speaker say that this is going to give her more opportunity to read books. Well, God bless her. I don't know about her, but the only time I read books is when I go on holidays. There's so much signing and so much constituency work to do when you're not here that there's very little time for leisure. You usually have to make a choice: Is it going to be my family instead of my friends? The nature of the job is such that you don't have much free time, but that's okay; we chose it.

Yes, the opposition wants to work. We are prepared to work. We were insulted when the Premier made comments last week about the fact that we didn't want to work. That was why we opposed these changes. That is simply not true. But you have to remember: We have a responsibility not just at Queen's Park but also in our constituency, in our riding. For anybody to say, as the government has said, that "Unless you're at Queen's Park, you're not working," unfortunately promotes that false stereotype that people have about the work we do. It discounts the reality that MPPs work countless hours in their ridings every week, at all hours of the day, including weekends. For the Premier to suggest that if members are not in this House they are not working is absurd.

I hope that we see the cabinet here on a more regular basis all day long. I hope the Premier is going to be here for more than question period. I hope he'll come for routine proceedings in the afternoon, but I guess we'll wait and see.

We have come forward with the counterproposal. Our counterproposal has this Legislature sitting not 27 hours per week, as the government is suggesting; our proposal, based on the amendments that I'm introducing, would have us sitting for 27.5 hours per week.

Let's now take a look at private members' business. Again, this is really quite insulting. What has happened is that the Liberals have moved private members' business from Thursday mornings to Thursday afternoons. I'll tell you, at that time of day on a Thursday afternoon, at the end of the day, during rush hour, there are not going to be people who are able to always come to Queen's Park. In fact, at that time of day on a Thursday, with no government business being debated, you'll be able to roll a ball through this corridor, because this place is going to be virtually deserted. This is going to mean less and less opportunity for private members' bills to get the respect,

the debate and the discussion they deserve. The only people who are going to be here on a Thursday afternoon are going to be the MPPs speaking to the private members' bills and resolutions.

Private members' business, instead of being elevated and given a higher stature, has been relegated to the end of the day, Thursday, when everybody flees this House, to bottom-of-the-barrel status. Are we now going to see cabinet ministers here? Are we going to see the Premier here for private members' business? I don't think so.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: They'll be here for the vote.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Who's going to be here to listen? Who's going to be here to vote? And is it going to make any difference? Few private members' bills today ever see the light of day. We can't even get this government to agree to allow private members' bills that go through committee to be automatically brought back to the House for a vote, so why should we think that this proposal is going to change things for private members' bills? Is it going to ensure that more of them are passed? Is it going to meet the litmus test of accountability and more efficient, effective government? I don't think so. There's no change whatsoever, and that's the type of change the opposition was looking for.

If you take a look at the changes that have been proposed, the manner in which they were introduced, the lack of opportunity to attempt to discuss them, debate them, reach some sort of consensus, you really come to the conclusion that the Liberals had a set agenda. There was a purpose for the timing of all of the events, and it is not to increase government accountability. They are not designed to increase public scrutiny or media scrutiny. The changes, in many respects, are going to weaken the opposition's opportunity for keeping the government in check. This, in turn, is going to undermine parliamentary democracy.

1720

Our caucus and the NDP caucus, obviously, with some of these changes—particularly question period, and the fact that we simply don't have the same human resources as the government does—are going to find it much more difficult to prepare for the 10:45, and that is something that the government isn't prepared to change. So even if they set up a committee, I don't think that we're going to see any changes to that time period.

I want to table a couple of amendments that we think would enhance accountability, and that would make for the more effective, efficient operation of this House. We believe they would achieve two main objectives: (1) They would move question period from the approximate start time of 10:45 to exactly 1 p.m. each day the House is sitting; and (2) the second one would slow down the stealthy, late-night passage of government bills during the last two weeks of the session or extended calendar sitting.

I'm going to now move our amendments.

I move that the proposed new standing order motion be amended as follows:

The proposed new standing order 8(a) is struck out and the following substituted:

“8(a) The weekly schedule for the House when it is in session shall be:

Day	Time	Proceeding
Monday	9:30 a.m.	Orders of the day
	12 noon	Recess
	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Oral questions Members' statements Deferred votes Introduction of bills Reports by committees Statements by the ministry and responses Motions Petitions
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	6 p.m.	Adjournment

Tuesday	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Oral questions Members' statements Deferred votes Introduction of bills Reports by committees Statements by the ministry and responses Motions Petitions
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	6 p.m.	Adjournment

Wednesday	9:30 a.m.	Orders of the day
	12 noon	Recess
	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Oral questions Members' statements Deferred votes Introduction of bills Reports by committees Statements by the ministry and responses Motions Petitions
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	6 p.m.	Adjournment

The proposed new standing orders 9(a), (b), (c) and (d) are struck out and the following substituted:

"9(a) Except as provided in standing order 6(a.2)(iii) and in standing order 37, at 6 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, the Speaker shall adjourn the House without motion until the next sessional day.

"9(b) At the points each day when the House arrives at a recess or adjournment, as set out in standing order 8(a), such recess or adjournment shall, without motion, be ordered from the chair."

The clause "standing order 11(e) is deleted" is struck out and the following substituted:

"11(e) If on Thursday morning the House is adjourned for lack of quorum during consideration of private members' public business, it shall stand adjourned until 1 p.m. of the same day."

The proposed new standing order 30(a) is struck out and the following substituted:

"(a) At 3:30 p.m. on any day on which the House has not commenced orders of the day, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the routine proceeding currently occupying the House and immediately call orders of the day. However, routine proceedings shall continue past 3:30 p.m. to permit the Speaker to put every question on the deferred votes."

The proposed new standing order 30(a.1) is struck out.

The proposed new standing order 35.1 is struck out.

The proposed new standing order 37(b) is struck out and the following substituted:

"37(b) Where notice has been given and reasons filed, as provided in clause (a), at 6 p.m. on any Tuesday or Thursday, the Speaker may deem that a motion to adjourn the House has been made, whereupon the matter in question may be debated for not more than 10 minutes, 5 minutes to be allotted to the member raising the matter and 5 minutes to the minister or to his or her parliamentary assistant to reply if he or she so wishes. No more than 3 such matters of which notice has been given and reasons filed shall be debated on any single sitting day. At the conclusion of such debate or debates the Speaker shall deem the motion to adjourn to be carried and shall adjourn the House to the next sessional day."

The proposed new standing order 37(e) is struck out and the following substituted:

"(e) When the House continues to meet past 6 p.m. on a government motion as provided in standing order 6(a.2)(iii), the adjournment proceeding under this standing order shall not apply."

The proposed new standing order 38(b) is struck out.

The proposed new standing order 42 is struck out and the following substituted:

"42(a) In each of the 2 periods provided for in standing order 6(a), there shall be 5 sessional days to be known as opposition days.

"Opposition day debates:

"(i) Shall be limited to one per meeting week;

Thursday	9:30 a.m.	Private members' public business
	12 p.m.	Recess
	1 p.m.	Routine proceedings: Oral questions Members' statements Deferred votes Introduction of bills Reports by committees Statements by the ministry and responses Motions Petitions
	Following routine proceedings	Orders of the day
	6 p.m.	Adjournment

“(ii) Shall be distributed among the recognized opposition parties in proportion to their membership in the House;

“(iii) Shall be taken up upon the commencement of orders of the day following routine proceedings on the designated day, the time available to 5:50 p.m. being apportioned equally among the recognized parties in the House;

“(iv) Shall be prohibited during the last 8 sessional days in each of the 2 periods provided for in standing order 6(a), and during any extension thereof.

“Opposition day motions:

“(i) Shall be filed on a Wednesday, to be printed on the next day’s Orders and Notices paper, and setting the day in the following week for its consideration.

“(ii) Shall contain the text of a non-amendable motion to be debated;

“(iii) Shall indicate the minister of the crown to whom it is addressed;

“(iv) Shall not be a motion for second or third reading of a bill;

“(v) Shall not be considered on any day on which the Minister of Finance has given notice of his or her intention to present the budget;

“(vi) Shall not be a motion of want of confidence in the government.

“(b) If more than one notice of an opposition day is filed on the same Wednesday, the Speaker shall select which one will be considered.

“(c) If a recorded vote is requested on an opposition day motion, the division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes.”

The clause “Standing order 43(b) is amended by deleting ‘5:50 p.m.’ and substituting ‘5:35 p.m.’” is struck out.

The proposed new standing order 57(a.1) is struck out and the following substituted:

“(a.1) On the day designated for the presentation of the budget, the House shall recess immediately following routine proceedings and shall not meet again until 4 p.m., when the order of the day shall be for presentation of the budget.”

The proposed new standing order 57(a.2) is struck out.

The proposed new standing order 79(b.1) is amended by adding the following thereto:

“If the House is meeting pursuant to standing order 6(a)(i) or (ii), a government bill shall not be called if it has previously been called during orders of the day on that same sessional day.”

The proposed new standing orders 96(e) and (e.1) are struck out and the following substituted:

“(e) When the time allotted for the consideration of private members’ public business has expired or at 12 noon, whichever is later, the Speaker shall put all questions to the House. Divisions under this standing order shall be deferred and taken in succession. In such cases, the division bells shall be limited to 5 minutes. The House will continue to meet until the necessary votes have been completed, at which time the Speaker shall leave the chair until 1 p.m.”

Those are the motions that we are suggesting.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Witmer has moved an amendment to government notice of motion number 59.

1730

Interjection: Dispense.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I have it in my hands, and I’ve heard “Dispense.”

Now the member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like to thank the official opposition House leader for her comments. I appreciate her total frustration with the government House leader and I support all of her amendments.

This substantive government motion requires serious thought among my colleagues on all sides of the chamber, and my comments today are designed to provoke that kind of thought. I also have some suggestions for the government which I hope they will consider so we can truly call these standing order changes family friendly in the context of real parliamentary reform. I say this because what is decided on when we vote on this substantive government motion will not only govern our work life here in the assembly, but will also impact what we do in our constituencies, as well as our family life.

Each member here is a steward of this Legislature. We are the conscience of this place, and we are expected to modernize Queen’s Park to help it adapt to the changing times so we can best represent the people who sent us here. We must do this together. One member or one party deciding how we proceed is not enough. Our collective ideas will be what makes Queen’s Park more representative, more functional and more democratic.

Pardon my idealism, but that is where my disappointment comes in with the rule changes that are being thrust upon us. The government’s rule changes are an insult to those of us who have been working on a non-partisan basis to make Queen’s Park more family friendly. In this era of democratic reform or democratic renewal, we have an opportunity as legislators, not just as Conservatives, Liberals or New Democrats, to work together to make changes that will reflect the generational, gender and ethnic diversity that we now celebrate in this chamber. But what that means is that we need to work together—not alone, as the government has done in this case.

Queen’s Park was created over 200 years ago, long before women had the right to vote, long before men took on greater parenting roles at home, and long before the diversity we now celebrate in this chamber was represented in the seats that were created to represent Ontarians. We now have 107 members representing regions that are each as different as us. That is why these major rule changes should have included all of us.

It is very well known that I have long advocated for making Queen’s Park more family friendly; indeed, all of politics. Some believe in this quest and others balk at it. But just as I decided long ago that I was elected to become a fighter for the residents of Nepean–Carleton, at the same time I became what I think is an unlikely fighter for parliamentary reform. I realized shortly after I was elected that the voters in Nepean–Carleton gave me a

very unique opportunity in this chamber. I am the youngest, I am a woman and I am a mother. This combination in politics is very rare. It is made even more rare when you consider that I am the youngest woman to ever represent my party, either federally or provincially.

When I came to this place over two years ago, I thought I could either shut up or put up with the obstacles that I felt were placed in my way. But I decided differently. I decided that I could either complain about something or I could do something about it. So, true to my nature, I did something about it with my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative caucus.

Over a year ago, I made my first recommendations to achieve a better standard at Queen's Park, such as eliminating evening sittings, refining standing orders and considering an on-site daycare so parents like me wouldn't be forced to choose between being a good parent and being a good MPP. I was persistent in raising this issue in the chamber, and my first resolution as a re-elected MPP was calling on the assembly to create an all-party committee of past and current members to make Queen's Park more family-friendly. I believed then, as I still do, that we have an opportunity to really reform Parliament, but we can only do it right if we learn from each other's mistakes and from past mistakes and we engage one another. Even the slightest change here could potentially help us represent our constituents that much better.

I admit to being humbled on December 11, 2007, when the government decided to adopt my resolution and sought, then received, unanimous consent to create an all-party panel to look at ways to make Queen's Park more family friendly. I remember that day well; I thought I had set the stage for real change, real reform in this Legislature. But I was wrong. After months of writing unanswered letters to the government House leader and raising the need for the family-friendly panel to meet, I was surprised and taken aback to learn he was tabling substantive changes to the rules here under the guise of family friendly, after he outright ignored my requests for meetings. Of course, I learned this from the media and not from him, which made these changes even more insulting.

There is nothing family friendly or democratic about the way these rules were devised. For him and the Premier now to suggest that these rule changes are in the interest of making Queen's Park more family friendly is, at best, disingenuous. It is troubling that the government chose to undermine the very democratic institution which it is supposedly trying to reform. That's the real irony here. In order for the Liberals to achieve democratic reform, they stomped on democracy. The Liberals refused to put to work the very committee it helped to create in making this institution a more democratic, representative and family-friendly institution.

The biggest problem with these rule changes is that they were decided on unilaterally. The Liberals think they can dictate to us. They think that they know best. That is why these rule changes should not be taken lightly by any member of this chamber, because they don't know best; we all, together, do. This is particularly im-

portant for members of the opposition, as I will remind the members of today's government, who could be tomorrow's opposition. It is the rules in this place which protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority. That's why I want to outline to you some of my concerns and suggestions.

I must say at the outset that I do support the new hours that are recommended, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., but there are far more flaws in these changes than there are strengths. I think our House leader, the honourable member from Kitchener-Waterloo, aptly outlined the deficiencies in this substantive government motion, and I fully support the resolution that she put forward in order to improve this.

But with respect to Mondays, while 9 a.m. is a perfect start time for every other day of the week, it must be noted that if you live in eastern Ontario, like I do, from time to time you may need to take the train to Queen's Park, in which case you will not arrive in Toronto until after 10 a.m., or you will have to arrive the night before, which will cut into constituency and family time. You should note that those of us representing rural ridings cherish Sunday afternoons for their church suppers, golden wedding anniversaries and major sporting events. The rule changes before us are Toronto-centric and play into the hands of the governing party, who, by their numbers, can easily get the majority of their members to the provincial capital, compared to Her Majesty's loyal opposition. But I digress. The reality is that a 9 a.m. start time on Monday potentially limits commute options for all members outside the GTA. That's regardless of political party, whether that's Liberal, Conservative or NDP, and regardless of region. Therefore, I recommend that the House begin its proceedings slightly—but not much—later on Mondays, and continue with the 9 a.m. start on each subsequent day of the week.

I've also called these reforms cabinet friendly as opposed to family friendly. I've done so because of two major issues and concerns that I have.

The first is question period. I'm disappointed that we will once again be placed in the same situation we are now in, which is inconsistency, without a permanent start and stop time for question period. In fact, the entire day, as outlined by the government House leader, is a crapshoot, with more moving targets than you would find in a video game. The daily timetable is so uncertain that it lends itself to being manipulated by its own rules.

I, then, reiterate my public call for question period to begin each day at 1 p.m. for one hour, with no possible interruptions. Everyone knows that question period is the opposition's greatest tool. It should be consistent every day with respect to length and certainty.

The introduction of guests and the possibilities of ringing bells and debates can only lead to interruptions of what is the so-called main event of provincial politics, and that's our question period. I urge the government to consider changing question period to a stand-alone hour, with members' statements, at 1 p.m. This should be a firm commitment so that all members can properly plan their legislative day.

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I might also point out that, as a mother of a small child, the way that the rules have been explained to me from the experts at the table suggests that there is no strict timetable that we will be adhering to. That is the biggest problem for any of us who are trying to take a child to a dentist or doctor's appointment. It is very unfriendly. I would suggest that they reconsider how they've laid out the day—to make the stop and start times very, very firm, because as my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo mentioned, it is a dog's breakfast at this point in time and there is a lot of uncertainty in the day. We need to grab hold of that so that we can actually firm up the time.

My second cabinet-friendly concern is private members' business. I urge the government to reconsider relegating private members' business to Thursday afternoons, because if Mondays limit the commute options for out-of-town MPPs, then Thursdays will highlight the free ride of the cabinet.

With private members' business taking place on Thursday afternoons, the cabinet, under the current rules, with an early morning question period, can spend afternoons throughout Ontario travelling around cutting ribbons and handing out novelty cheques, as the rest of us debate bills and resolutions that will have no cabinet audience and no chance of succeeding. My colleague suggested that they go into the legislative black hole. That's indeed where they go, and we've seen the signs of that so far, early on. My own experience last Thursday suggested the same.

With private members' business taking place, it's not fair, in the interest of democracy and in the interest of parliamentary reform and renewal, that we relegate the one opportunity each of us has here to represent our constituents without having a partisan label attached to us to the very end of the day.

But my overarching concern is that these unilateral rule changes do not take into consideration the larger issues of making Queen's Park a more modern institution. It will take more than simple rule changes on how we govern our day. I still believe we need to consider some form of child care, a centre or a family room for members with small children; some form of spousal association; and some form of prayer room, as my colleague from Huron–Bruce so aptly highlighted earlier when she was talking about my efforts to make Queen's Park more family friendly.

I also believe we need to make Queen's Park more accessible to our constituents. Last week, I tabled a resolution calling on the Legislature to broadcast Queen's Park on TVO and TFO, place our proceedings live online, and to negotiate with Bell ExpressVu. That call was followed up today by the leader of the official opposition, the member for Leeds–Grenville, and was supported to some extent. What that means or not, by the government House leader, I'm not sure, so we'll wait and see. But if the experience of trying to get these proceedings placed online through webcasts or on TVO and TFO were up to the government House leader—well,

through this experience, I won't hold my breath. Our constituents have a right to know what we are doing here. They have a right to know and they have a right to access our debates.

The government has a golden opportunity to make real, positive change, and I mean change: change that is good for our Parliament, change that is good for our democracy and change that will lead the way in our country. We can really become family friendly here, and we can lead by example for the rest of the country. Or we can play politics as usual, which is what I saw earlier when the government members spoke.

We have an opportunity. In this very important age and era of democratic reform and democratic renewal, which I think every member in this House will agree has taken on a new importance in Legislatures and in the House of Commons—right across this land—it's up to us to get it right.

As I conclude, I want to remind members that this is not the government's choice. What we do on these resolutions—and this is a substantive government resolution—and how we debate the amendments put forward by my colleague: I remind everyone that it's our choice. I speak to government backbenchers, as I look at them right now: It's also your choice.

As I conclude with a little bit of time on the clock, I'd like to reiterate the fact that I do appreciate, as a mother, that we'll have an opportunity to work in this chamber from 9 until 6. Having said that, I have a few concerns, based on geography and based on the travel times on our Monday morning commute. We should consider what they're doing in the federal House, which is starting a little bit later on a Monday morning.

I also want to reiterate my call and the call of many others here in this chamber, particularly those of us in the opposition, for a consistent question period in the afternoon. It's not much to ask for. If they truly want to be here, extending an olive branch and working with the members of the opposition, there are a few easy ways to go about that, and I encourage that.

Finally, I just want to say that, in terms of private members' business, if we really want to enhance the role of private members in this chamber, then the time for debate on private members' business should not be relegated to Thursday afternoons. I know the member from Huron–Bruce. I know she cares so much about her constituency. She often has private members' business and I know, like me, that she enjoys being in this chamber to speak to legislation, but I respectfully disagree that Thursday afternoon is the best place for that debate. I think we really must consider what we are voting on in terms of what is happening between 9 and 6. It's not so much a "why" as it is a "when": When are we debating things? I know that with respect to routine proceedings, they should be kept together. I think that is important.

This is not new. Debating parliamentary reform has gone on for years. In fact, it was the former Liberals federally, under Paul Martin, who coined the phrase "democratic deficit." They also coined the phrase "democratic renewal." You'll remember at the time that they actually

had two ministers responsible for changing Parliament. They had Belinda Stronach responsible for democratic renewal, and Mauril Bélanger, who's a very good friend of mine from the city of Ottawa, was the Minister for Democratic Reform—democratic reform and democratic renewal. I'll tell you: Only Liberals could figure out how to put more bureaucracy on reforming government.

In any event, it's very important that we get this right because we can be a leader in this nation by actually taking seriously the task before us, which is renewing Parliament and making it more family friendly through modernizing what we do here and how we debate. I take that role very seriously because, as I indicated, when you're elected at a young age from very far away, there are a few obstacles in your way. I happen to be a woman on top of that. It's in no way to make this a gender debate, but I can tell you, I would never have fathomed in a million years what my colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo went through between the time she was first elected and now until I actually walked a mile in her shoes for two years.

As I close, I just think that we may not want to rush this. We may want to do it right. We may want to consult our colleagues at the table, who can give us the best expert advice in this country. We may want to consider the impact and the ramifications not just on party politics but on how we represent the people who sent us to this place to have meaningful debate.

On that note, I respectfully conclude my time here to speak to this substantive government motion. Again, I urge all members of this place to do the right thing, not the easy thing. Don't be whipped into changing these resolutions or the way we conduct our business without seriously considering what these changes will mean.

I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I believe we have consent to stand down the lead of our House leader.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is there consent to stand down the lead speech? Agreed? Agreed.
1750

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It gives me great pleasure to have an opportunity to talk a little bit tonight—unfortunately, not for very long; there are about 10 minutes left in tonight's debate. I certainly do have some remarks that I'm going to put on the record.

I have to tell you that when I was listening to the government House leader in his leadoff debate tonight, I was sitting here, my lonely self, and I started to imagine that I was listening to one of the fish tales of my very good friend who sits beside me from the riding of Timmins-James Bay. Of course, everyone knows that there's no fishing like the fishing in his riding. But some of the stories that he comes back with are pretty—well, some of them are kind of unbelievable. I was starting to get this sense of *déjà vu*, that I was listening to the member from Timmins-James Bay on a fish tale when in fact I was listening to the government House leader describe not only the intent but the content of the rule changes that the government motion this afternoon describes.

I say that in all seriousness because really, the House leader set out this premise that from day one, the family-friendly committee was not going to deal with standing order changes and that standing order changes were going to be shunted off to the House leaders to decide or to some other process.

First of all, anybody who is serious about the issue of family friendly is going to be informed by discussions that would happen by said committee. It only makes sense. Why set up a committee to have a broad look at the issues of making this place more family friendly, and then turn around and not even discount what they say but not even put the committee together; don't even have the pretense of putting the committee together and giving them the opportunity to have that discussion?

Who knows? It could be that the family-friendly committee, had they ever had a chance to meet—which they have not, because the government refused to bring a person forward to put on that committee. The member for Nepean-Carleton and I had a couple of conversations, eagerly awaiting when it would be that we would have that committee meeting. If the government was serious about family-friendly changes to the standing orders, then they would have given that committee not the opportunity to make recommendations on the changes *per se*, but given that committee an opportunity to talk about what things were barriers to good family life and participation, what things were perhaps positive around here in regard to the opportunity to keep your family connections alive and well, and other kinds of issues. But no; that general conversation wasn't even facilitated by the government. The family-friendly committee—I guess you can call it that, even though it really doesn't exist and never has—could have been a good opportunity to raise some issues that might have informed the government. It's the height of arrogance and really it speaks to whether or not this is all about what the government pretends it's about, which is family friendly, when, in fact, we know that it's not. It's really obvious that this committee was not given any opportunity whatsoever to do its work.

Anybody who would imagine that the moving of question period to the morning, but more importantly, the moving of the debate period to 9 o'clock in the morning, particularly for me—I come in on a Sunday night and I end up spending much of the week here. And I live close by; it's just that during rush hour it takes two and a half hours to get here, and the train service to Hamilton is still not such that it's easy to get back and forth with so few trains running. It's different for me than for other members, even members who are in the GTA. I know that for my own staff, it often takes a significant amount of time to get here. And God forbid there's a problem with the TTC or anything else. I'm not talking strike; I'm just talking breakdowns, because we know those things are happening as well. So that's an issue that I don't think the government has taken into consideration. It's not just about the question period; it's about the 9 o'clock start for debate time.

Take that back even another layer, and there's a whole infrastructure of people who make this place operate. I'm not just talking about the staff of political parties. I'm not just talking about our staff or ministerial staff or anything like that. I'm talking about the framework, the structure that makes this place operate. I'm talking about, for example, the Hansard people, the people who do the Hansard for us, who do research, and the people who are part of the Legislative Assembly staff. Those people are going to have to adjust completely. Some of them might be single parents. How do we know? They're going to have to be getting here a lot earlier than they were before. Maybe they're accustomed to taking their kids to child care or taking their kids to school before arriving here because they don't have to be producing Hansard until later in the afternoon.

But back to the beginning of my remarks, when I was thinking that I was hearing a fish tale by the government House leader, one of the other things that he raised—I was shocked; really, I was shocked. For him to pretend, for there to be any pretence at all, that the members in this place are not working all hours of the day and night is, I think, bizarre. Pretty much every morning of the week, there's a committee meeting. Every afternoon of the week, there are often committee meetings. I know today I had a committee meeting and I'm looking forward to the next couple of Mondays to continue to have committee meetings, because guess what we're doing? We're trying to hire an independent child advocate, and that doesn't get done willy-nilly; that takes a lot of hard work, and that's one of the obligations of the people in this House.

I think the government House leader used language like—something about undertaking public business or business that was in the public interest or serving the public interest. I would say that not only do question period and debate time serve the public interest, but certainly the hiring of an independent child advocate or the meeting of the justice policy committee or the meeting of the regulations and private bills committee or the meeting of the finance committee—I mean, give me a break. All of these pieces of work that we do in here are taking place between 9 o'clock—in some cases, 8 o'clock or 8:15—right through until about 6 o'clock at night. So I think it's a little bit disingenuous, at best, to suggest that, first of all, members aren't here very early—often well before 8:30; sometimes well before 8 o'clock—and also that the work that we are doing during that time is anything but serving the public business or doing public business.

I don't have very much time left at all, but I do think it's important to indicate that we're not the only ones who are concerned about the anti-democratic nature of this proposed rule change, this standing order change. There's a landmark study of the Ontario Legislature that was done by a pre-eminent expert on the Ontario Legislature, a professor named Graham White. He has written, "Question period is arguably the most significant proceeding in the Ontario Legislature." I certainly hope that

we'll be hearing from him in a more fulsome way around this debate, but it makes me think of an article that I read in the weekend clippings from Christina Blizzard. One of the things that she said in the *Toronto Sun*, in describing the actual process that was being undertaken here, is that "what is happening here is a manipulation of the House rules in a most despicable fashion." She goes on to say, "Having it early in the morning,"—meaning question period—"before the news of the day has even circulated, is simply a way of hiding cabinet behind parliamentary procedure."

She goes on to talk about how that will affect the ability of the reporters—not only the opposition, and we've had some debate about that already—to be able to have access to cabinet ministers in order to ask them questions during scrums. She indicates quite clearly in her remarks, and I would agree with her, that the opportunity to have those discussions is truncated significantly by the standing order changes that the government is putting forward. She goes on to say, "This is arrogant and manipulative and it is not in the best interests of democracy and open government." And that's certainly something that New Democrats are saying about this change.

The sad thing is that we all know, or at least—I don't know if the government members know; I don't know what they're privy to in terms of the process here. But certainly our caucus is aware, and I'm sure that the PC caucus is aware, that there have been other suggestions and other models that have been brought forward, models that do change the time of question period, but they also provide enough flexibility in the day that we actually have time for committee meetings and that we're able to actually function appropriately, and that don't turn the whole backbone of this place into complete disarray.

I have to tell you that all four of those proposals that were brought forward—and the government House leader and opposition House leaders were all made aware of these proposals—were summarily dismissed. Instead, we have this proposal that has so many holes in it, it's like Swiss cheese. How do you like that? That's what my dad used to say about my brother. My brother was a goaltender all his life, and still is, and when he had a bad game, my dad used to say, "Jeez, you were Swiss cheese out there." Well, this is Swiss cheese too, I think, when it comes to whether or not these standing order changes, first of all, will function in a way that brings greater scrutiny and greater democracy to this place and, in fact, whether these standing orders have anything at all to do with being family friendly. I think if the government actually stuck to our calendar, for example—that's another thing they could do to make it more family-friendly, because it's predictable and members can plan around it.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 1:30 of the clock on Tuesday, April 22.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
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Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
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Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	

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