



No. 32A

N° 32A

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 23 April 2008

Mercredi 23 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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



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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 23 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 23 avril 2008

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Remember those job losses we've been talking about in manufacturing—194,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs leaving Ontario since 2006? For the first time in 30 years, Ontario's unemployment rate is higher than the national average, and the startling news is that Ontario is straddling the line of have-not status. That is the legacy of the Liberal government and their high taxes and big spending.

The latest casualty of this tax-and-spend policy is Dell. Eleven hundred Dell employees in Ottawa got pink slips today. That's 1,100 parents, recent graduates and residents of the city of Ottawa who will be jobless in three months. I need to know, and so do my constituents, what this Liberal government's plan is for the people who go home tonight to their spouses and their children and face the reality that there will not be a paycheque to pay the mortgage, the groceries or the university bill.

The Liberals need to wake up. We are now in Dalton McGuinty's recession. The economy is not as rosy as the Liberals would have us believe. They won't take these job losses as proof. Will they take yesterday's Bensimon Byrne announcement that it is indeed slowing as proof? Mr. McGuinty's high taxes, his big spending and his lack of focus have caused residents in my community, and his, to lose jobs today.

Will he own up to his poor financial planning and deliver a real economic stimulus package so the workers at Dell and so many across Ontario who have lost their jobs won't face more months of uncertainty on the unemployment line?

BLENHEIM AND DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr. Pat Hoy: Tomorrow night, the Blenheim and District Chamber of Commerce will be holding their annual awards dinner to honour four individuals for their outstanding contributions.

Shannon and Bryan Prince have been named citizens of the year. Shannon is the curator of the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum. She is involved in joint

Underground Railroad projects with York University, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati and with Millersville University and several historical organizations in Pennsylvania.

Her husband, Bryan, a descendant of slaves who came to Canada prior to the American Civil War, is a historian and author. He has lectured extensively in many parts of Canada and the United States on black history and is active in numerous local organizations.

Stan Uher is being honoured as entrepreneur of the year. Since 1989, Stan has owned and operated a classic car restoration shop in Blenheim. He has restored several pre-war funeral coaches and fire trucks and is currently completing restoration of a 110-year-old Chatham-built Gray-Dort for the Chatham-Kent Museum.

Dennis Guy is the agriculturalist of the year. He is a renowned radio broadcaster, including 15 years with the Ontario farm network, providing comprehensive farm and marketing news. I am pleased to recognize these four leaders for their contribution to the social and economic prosperity of Chatham-Kent.

TELUS CUP

Mr. John Yakabuski: Last Monday evening I had the honour of participating in the opening ceremonies for the Telus cup in Arnprior. The Telus cup, as you know, is the national championship of AAA midget hockey. Over its 30-year history, it has hosted over 180 future NHLers such as Joe Sakic, Daniel Briere, Dany Heatley and Sidney Crosby. No doubt some of the players competing this week will also be NHL stars of tomorrow.

I must tell you how proud we are to be hosting the Telus cup in the beautiful town of Arnprior, where the mighty Madawaska meets the majestic Ottawa. I want to take this opportunity to thank the town of Arnprior for their support of this prestigious event, and event chair Glenn Arthur and his committee, as well as the over 200 volunteers, giving of their time and efforts. Congratulations and thank you. You've done a tremendous job. Without those who give so much of themselves, events such as this one just don't happen.

Our gratitude goes out to title sponsor Telus and the many local businesses and organizations whose generosity and support are so very important. As I was speaking with Glenn earlier today, he mentioned that he was overwhelmed by the support of the people of Arnprior and area.

Congratulations and best of luck to all the players and coaches. You're already champions. A special thank you to the parents. Without the commitment and dedication you give your children, their participation would not be possible. I urge each and every member of this assembly and all the people of Ontario to tune in to TSN or RDS this Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock, and you will see the best midjet hockey in the world.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I recently heard a quote by John Ralston Saul referring to the importance of our public education system. He said: "We need more than ever to look at the public education system as the primary tool we have to ensure that children are able to grow up to become citizens."

I know this sums up this government's approach to our public education system quite nicely. We must ensure that our children, and in my case my grandchildren, have what they need to succeed in their education and in life.

With this in mind, I'm pleased that the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board in my riding now receives \$42 million more than it did in 2003, despite a decline in the number of students. Further, the Greater Essex County District School Board in my riding now receives over \$63 million more than it did in 2003, despite a decline in the number of students.

These enrolment declines are a fact of life for most school boards and are projected to continue for the next few years. A major factor for the decline is simply changing demography. Despite this, the McGuinty government continues to invest more in our publicly funded education system so that boards can change their operations, if necessary, but also to ensure that students have better support. This is the right approach to take, and we'll continue to take it to ensure success for the children of our province.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The McGuinty Liberals are once again bullying the opposition and not listening to experts like the children's aid society. In the social policy committee yesterday afternoon, during clause-by-clause of Bill 12, the Access to Adoption Records Act, my colleague Norm Sterling, the member for Carleton-Mississippi Mills, tabled several excellent amendments that were defeated by Liberal members.

It was obvious that by stonewalling the Progressive Conservative amendments, the Liberal members of the committee were following orders. The amendments were to ensure that children who were abused, removed from their family and subsequently adopted could be automatically protected from having their personal information disclosed to the abuser without their consent.

These amendments were defeated by London-Fanshawe Liberal Khalil Ramal; the Liberal member from Guelph, Liz Sandals; Oak Ridges-Markham, Hel-

ena Jaczek; and Brampton-West, Vic Dhillon. The member from York South-Weston, Laura Albanese, was present for the debate on the bill, then left the committee room moments before the vote on our amendments, and returned following the vote. Sometimes actions speak louder than words.

Bill 12 is supposed to be a fix-it bill needed by the Liberal government because they didn't get it right the first time and were taken to court. Our PC amendments were in your original bill, but for some reason known only to the uncaring Liberal government, victims of abuse will no longer have the protection they deserve from the abusers.

1340

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: This week is Earth Week. It is a great opportunity for everyone in this chamber, as well as across Ontario, to think about how important the health of our planet is to the future as well as to our children.

But for the McGuinty government, we don't think about the environment on one day of the year; we realize that thinking green is something that must become second nature to all of us. The environment must be a significant consideration in all that we do.

This is certainly the case when you look at Metrolinx, which is bringing together 12 transit systems in the development of a regional transit plan for the GTA, extending from the east in Durham region to Hamilton.

In this year's budget, this government announced its commitment to provide funding for the first two lists of recommended projects by Metrolinx, for a total funding of almost \$800 million. These projects will undoubtedly lead to reduced traffic congestion, reduced smog and greenhouse gases, and cleaner air to breathe.

Metrolinx makes up one third of this government's vision of sustainable growth and prosperity for the greater Toronto region and Durham and Hamilton. The other two components are made up of the greenbelt and the Places to Grow plan. Together, these three important initiatives truly signify how important the health of the environment is to this government and how we aim to think green every day of the year.

CIBC LABOUR DISPUTE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I rise today in solidarity with the 62 CIBC employees, mostly women, who have been on strike in Sudbury for over 14 weeks.

The workers have called for a modest wage increase. These women presently make \$13 an hour. The two sides are 50 cents apart; 3.8%. CIBC says they can't afford the workers' demands. Yet, in 2007, the bank made \$3.3 billion in profit and gave their shareholders 25% increases. We know where CIBC's priorities stand. The NDP believes that Sudbury's working families should be their priority.

Let's put the 50 cents in perspective. In 2006, the CEO of CIBC made over \$9.4 million for his salary. That's \$4,500 an hour. It would take a striking worker 10 weeks of full-time work to make what the CEO makes in a single hour. The previous CEO retired with a pay package of \$52 million. That's more than those 62 striking workers will make in their lifetime.

Linda Denton, a CIBC employee for 22 years, says: "I never believed it would go on this long, but CIBC has proven their arrogance. They just won't talk to us. They're trying to break the union, break the women."

I urge CIBC to sit down with the Steelworkers. It is time to treat these women fairly.

PESTICIDES

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I rise today to speak about our government's move to reduce exposure to toxic chemicals by banning the sale and cosmetic use of pesticides.

This legislation, if passed, would make Ontario's pesticide rules among the toughest in North America, and more importantly, it would replace a patchwork of municipal bylaws across Ontario. Under the stewardship of the Premier and the Minister of Environment, and with the support of organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society and the Ontario College of Family Physicians, our ban builds on the leadership shown by those municipalities that introduced bans or imposed restrictions on cosmetic pesticides over the past several years.

In my own riding of Ottawa Centre, I was pleased when in 2002 the city of Ottawa council adopted a three-year pesticide reduction strategy to encourage all community members to voluntarily reduce the use of cosmetic pesticides on private property. Although the city of Ottawa has not banned the cosmetic use of pesticides, the community has actively been working to promote a healthier, greener and safer city for everyone to live.

Yesterday alone I received numerous e-mails from constituents who expressed their support for this proposed legislation. Many constituents in my riding pointed out that the long-term health of their families far outweighs any challenges they may face in maintaining their lawns and gardens.

As we celebrate Earth Week, I want to encourage all community members in Ottawa Centre and beyond to visit the environmental registry and comment on the proposed legislation.

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Mike Colle: It being Earth Week, I would like to comment on how important it is for our government to continue to invest in public transit in Toronto and the greater Toronto area. I am pleased to join my colleague from Ajax-Pickering in supporting improved transit in Durham and area also.

It certainly underscores the importance of what our government is doing in transit. This year alone, we have committed \$393 million to transit funding in the city of

Toronto, and \$2.7 billion to help the city of Toronto improve and expand transit. We also give over \$314 million every year out of our gas tax to municipalities for public transit.

In the Move Ontario 2020 program, for the first time in the history of a project of that nature, which is over \$17 billion, our government will pay 100% of the capital cost of building the subways and light rail transit systems across the GTA, including the rebuilding of the Eglinton Crosstown light rail transit, which the previous Harris government in 1997 ripped out of the ground when the subway was already under way in my riding. Mr. Harris ripped it out of the ground. We are now going to put it back, provide jobs, clean the air and do something about gridlock, after Mr. Harris ripped the subway out of the ground in 1997.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

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

Bill Pr7, An Act to revive 827291 Ontario Ltd.

Bill Pr8, An Act to revive 719226 Ontario Limited.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 12, An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act in relation to adoption information and to make consequential amendments to the Child and Family Services Act / Projet de loi 12, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil en ce qui a trait aux renseignements sur les adoptions et apportant des modifications corrélatives à la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1348 to 1353.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol
Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza
Arthurs, Wayne	Duncan, Dwight	Naqvi, Yasir
Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Oraziotti, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Gélinas, France	Pendergast, Leeanna
Bentley, Christopher	Gravelle, Michael	Phillips, Gerry
Best, Margaret	Hampton, Howard	Prue, Michael
Bradley, James J.	Horwath, Andrea	Pupatello, Sandra
Brown, Michael A.	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Jaczek, Helena	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Kormos, Peter	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Kular, Kuldip	Smith, Monique
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Mangat, Amrit	Sorbara, Greg
Craitor, Kim	Marchese, Rosario	Sousa, Charles
Crozier, Bruce	Matthews, Deborah	Tabuns, Peter
Delaney, Bob	McGuinty, Dalton	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	Miller, Paul	Watson, Jim
DiNovo, Cheri	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.
Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Martiniuk, Gerry	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John
Hillier, Randy	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 60; the nays are 17.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the report carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I move that the Blind Persons' Rights Amendment Act, 2008, be read for the first time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): As required, we need to have a bill introduced in both languages. I would just ask that the honourable member introduce the bill tomorrow.

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (CERTIFICATION), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL (ACCREDITATION)

Mr. Hampton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to certification of trade unions / Projet

de loi 65, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail en ce qui a trait à l'accréditation des syndicats.

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. Howard Hampton: The bill amends the Labour Relations Act, 1995, to allow the Ontario Labour Relations Board to certify a trade union as the bargaining agent of the employees in a bargaining unit without directing a representation vote if it is satisfied that more than 55% of the employees in the bargaining unit are members of the trade union on the date on which the application is made.

Under the present act, a representation vote is required and those—

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

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), that the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 23, 2008, for the purpose of considering government business.

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

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1401 to 1406.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dickson, Joe	Moridi, Reza
Albanese, Laura	Dombrowsky, Leona	Naqvi, Yasir
Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Oraziotti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Duncan, Dwight	Pendergast, Leeanna
Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Best, Margaret	Gravelle, Michael	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Hoy, Pat	Ramsay, David
Brown, Michael A.	Jaczek, Helena	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Sergio, Mario
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Mangat, Amrit	Smitherman, George
Chan, Michael	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Takhar, Harinder S.
Craitor, Kim	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Horwath, Andrea	O'Toole, John
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Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
DiNovo, Cheri
Elliott, Christine
Gélinas, France
Hardeman, Ernie
Hillier, Randy

Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
Kormos, Peter
MacLeod, Lisa
Marchese, Rosario
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul

Ouellette, Jerry J.
Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.
Sterling, Norman W.
Tabuns, Peter
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakabuski, John

brought up a number of times yesterday and seemed to enjoy a degree of currency it does not usually have.

Like I am doing now, Speakers before me on numerous occasions have addressed the House concerning parliamentary language, civility in debate and mutual respect among members. Most of the time we do a pretty good job on those accounts, but there are occasions when the issues of the day do seem to provoke the House into a state that sometimes results in language being used that, in retrospect, most members would not have used or would regret having used. Yesterday, unfortunately, was one of those days.

Standing order 23 serves in a very general sense as a guideline for what is broadly acceptable speech and behaviour in this House. One might summarize its underlying philosophy in the following terms: Temperance is the hallmark of good debate. Despite the heat of the moment and occasionally flared tempers, we all have a responsibility to be mindful of this. As Speaker, I will be more vigilant and proactive on this account.

The other day I asked the House also to be mindful of the people who come to the assembly to watch our proceedings in person or who watch the TV broadcast of the Legislative Assembly. Those people also deserve our respect and are entitled to expect that the public business of the province be conducted in a civil environment where different points of view are tolerated and considered.

Standing order 23 tells us how to accomplish this, and I'm pleased that so many members had reference to it yesterday. The use of intemperate language, the making of allegations, suggesting untoward motives and generally participating in a way that causes disorder in the House are all demeaning to the institution and all of us who serve here at the will of our constituents.

As I and my predecessors have done so many times before, I again implore all members to appreciate the great privilege we have of being members of this House and to work toward making this place the best it can be, even at its most contentious times.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ELIZABETH BAIN

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier. As you know, there remain a significant number of unanswered questions surrounding the crown's decision not to call witnesses or present evidence in the Robert Baltovich murder trial. And today we learned that last fall, the crown offered Mr. Baltovich a deal of one day in jail if he would tell them where Elizabeth Bain's body was.

Premier, do you have any concerns about how the crown handled this, at first plea-bargaining a murder charge down to one day in jail, and then throwing in the towel at the start of the trial?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 54; the nays are 26.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member for Dufferin–Caledon, I would like to welcome today the grandparents of page Rheanna Kendrick: Nancy McArthur, Tom Needham, Mary and Ron Kendrick.

On behalf of the member for Wellington–Halton Hills, family members of page Laura Shum: Eric Shum, King Shum, Sui Lin Shum.

On behalf of the member of Don Valley East: Mr. Andrew's grade 4 class from La Citadelle.

On behalf of the leader of the third party, we welcome the Chiefs of Ontario today: Angus Toulouse, John Beaucage, Stan Beardy, Arnold Gardner, Denise Stonefish, Chris McCormick, Glen Hare and Mike Morris.

On behalf of the member from Durham, friends of page Michael Louws: Peter Vogel and Abegail Vogel.

Welcome, as well, on behalf of page Georgia LaMarre, to her grandmother, Gail Hawks, and her mother, Tracy LaMarre.

On behalf of page Prakash Pandya: Yogini Pandya, Kamlesh Pandya and Tejas Pandya.

As well, we would like to welcome members from OECTA as guests of the member from Kitchener–Conestoga: Warren Grafton, Mike Devoy, Patrick Etmanski, Ken Hambleton, John Payne, Judy Perkes and James McCormack.

On behalf of the member for Nipissing and the member for St. Paul's: again, Chief John Beaucage, Bob Goulais, Monica Lister and Patricia Campeau.

On behalf of the members, I take this opportunity to recognize the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane on his 60th birthday today. Happy birthday.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Yesterday, following the oral question period, I committed to review the Hansard of proceedings both in response to a point of order from the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington and due to my own concerns about the general tenor of parts of yesterday's question period. I have now done so, and I want to address the House on the issue of the tone and language that characterized a portion of yesterday's proceedings. I'm going to do so in the broad context of standing order 23, a rule that was

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will refer this to the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, remembering that this is a tragedy for the Bain family, who, years ago, lost their very young daughter. For Mr. Baltovich, after a process over an extended period of time, he has been found not guilty, and we hope he will be able to get on with his life.

This was a process that started with a trial and went through an appeal at which a new trial was ordered. That new trial proceeded. As a result of certain evidentiary rulings made by the presiding trial judge because of changes in the law, evidence was not available to the crown. The crown did what was in the interests of justice and of the highest professional standards, and advised the court of that fact as quickly as possible, and the jury rendered the only verdict that could be rendered, which was the finding of not guilty.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I didn't hear any concerns there about plea bargaining and a one-day sentence with an alleged murderer.

Yesterday, in defending the crown's decision to pull the plug on the prosecution, the Attorney General said it was "justified because of evidentiary rules based on changes in the law." We've looked at those rulings—made two months ago, by the way. It's difficult to see where they justify collapsing the prosecution.

I ask the Attorney General today to be more specific in explaining why the crown proceeded in the way it did.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I simply say this: that the crowns who were prosecuting this case have done so very diligently throughout a long process. They concluded, on the basis of the evidentiary rulings, that at the end of the day, the evidence that was available for introduction was not such as to justify further prosecution.

It is the duty and obligation of the crown to advise the court of that fact as soon as possible and to ensure that the court is apprised of that fact. The court did what needed to be done, and the verdict rendered by the jury was the only one available.

I would say that it does not serve any purpose to engage in a line-by-line analysis of who did or did not say things over the years this case has taken.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I suspect the Bain family might have a different perspective on that.

Earlier today, when the Premier was asked on a call-in radio show about a public inquiry into the situation, he said, "It's a very legitimate request." I would suggest it's more than legitimate; it's absolutely necessary. The crown has acted in a bizarre manner here: the plea-bargain deal; the collapse of prosecution two months after court rulings and after a jury had been empanelled; they're signing on to an agreed statement of fact that Paul Bernardo shouldn't be called as a witness; and on and on.

Mr. Baltovich now wants a public inquiry. Your Premier believes it's a legitimate request. Elizabeth Bain's family and friends want answers, and the public has a right to know.

Minister, will you do the right thing and call a public inquiry?

1420

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Not surprisingly, the Premier did not dismiss out of hand without further information a very legitimate and serious request in a tragic case. Before providing my advice to the Premier—I provided my initial impression yesterday—I want to say to the Bain family and to Mr. Baltovich that I am going to take the necessary time to thoroughly consider all aspects of the request and suggestion to determine whether a further review or inquiry would offer anything further than this public process already has to strengthen the administration of justice. Then I will be providing my advice to the Premier on this matter.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I want to talk to you about a mum I talked to this morning who is an adoptive parent of a child who is a ward of the children's aid society. The child—I will call her Joanna—is 12 years old. She was abused badly by her parents, violently, before she was the age of four. Her mum works with her every day to overcome the post-traumatic stress disorder which she now suffers from. Her mum tells me that her chronological age may be 14, but her emotional age is probably about five or six years younger.

Why, Madam Minister, are you not going to protect people like Joanna from their abusive parents finding out their adoptive name when they turn the age of 19?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, this question belongs to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I wanted to say to the honourable member on the other side that our government is concerned, but we believe that this bill strikes an appropriate balance between the privacy and the protection. There are indeed existing mechanisms in our new legislation that address the concerns raised by the member. For example, our new adoption bill allows for all adopted adults to register a no-contact notice or a notice of contact preference. Under the proposed legislation, there is a \$50,000 fine for an individual who breaches a no-contact notice.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I am told by workers at the children's aid society that many of these abusive parents are habitual drug users. There is much mental illness with regard to these people. With all due respect, I don't think a no-contact order will have any effect on their ability to contact or wanting to contact their child.

I understand that there is an abuser in this situation and there is a victim. Why are you on the side of the abuser?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, I think that our bill strikes a very appropriate balance. By the way, we've spoken to the privacy commissioner about our bill and she is on board with us. She is very supportive of it.

It's also important to note that provinces like British Columbia, Alberta and Newfoundland have adopted the same legislation with a no-contact provision in the act, and they all report that the no-contact notice has been a successful solution to any concern regarding the protective measures, and that this no-contact provision in the act has been respected and they are very satisfied with it.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: The Gatehouse child abuse investigation and support site here in Toronto doesn't agree with you. They understand these victims and their fears, and program director Angela Gallant told me that allowing abuser information about the victim risks revictimization and retraumatization. The victim must have the power to direct any contact themselves; otherwise, these victims will have to take steps like changing their name or leaving the country. She suggested that all legislation must be victim-centred. The victim must have the power to decide when they ever have any contact with their abuser. It shouldn't be the abuser who is making this decision.

Madam Minister, you also have not included any provision in Bill 12 with regard to multiple adoptions. When one sibling becomes 19, they may have younger brothers and sisters who may be affected by the information of the adoptive name.

Why won't you change this bill? Why would—

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

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I understand the concern of the member in the opposite party. Prior to entering into politics, I was a nurse working in the delivery room. I saw a lot of these young mothers giving their babies away. But no one gave their baby away without having the dream that one day they will be reunited with their baby.

So I want to say to the member of the opposite party that we have looked at his concerns, we have talked to our stakeholders, we have talked to the privacy commissioner, and they are on board with us. There are enough provisions, and also other measures in other legislation—other protective measures within the law—that are available to those who want to continue to be protected. I think that we have struck the right balance.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, Platinex Inc. announced that under the Ontario Mining Act, it has staked an additional 72,000 acres of crown land adjacent to Webequie First Nation, Marten Falls First Nation, Eabametoong First Nation, Neskantaga First Nation and Gull Bay First Nation.

The Premier will know that Platinex is the mining exploration company which sued Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation for \$10 billion and played a role in the jailing of the Kitchenuhmaykoosib First Nation leadership.

My question: Why weren't the First Nations I mentioned consulted and accommodated by the McGuinty government before Platinex was allowed to register these new mining claims?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I do want to address elements of the member's question. I want to start, Speaker, by acknowledging, as you have, Grand Chief Angus Toulouse, regional chief for Ontario, and grand chiefs as well as chiefs from across the province and supporters of KI Chief Donny Morris and council.

There is obviously a particular culpability that rests with the government of the day when it comes to injustices endured, and sometimes conquered, by First Nations. I would say that while there are no elected angels here, I am certainly accountable for the state of affairs, and I will say that we have worked and we will continue to work to see that chief and council are released from prison so that we can get on with finding a way to have chief and council and the entire KI community come to a resolution of this matter.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Forgive me, but I didn't hear an answer to the question. What First Nations want to know, particularly the additional First Nations who now find they will have to deal with Platinex, is: Did the McGuinty government fulfill its constitutional duty to consult and accommodate First Nations' interests before Platinex was allowed to register these new mining claims?

I know why there was no answer. There was no answer because the McGuinty government failed again to do its constitutional duty to consult and accommodate First Nations.

But my next question is this: Has the minister notified the affected First Nations that their traditional lands have been staked and are now, under the Ontario Mining Act, wide open for mining exploration by Platinex?

1430

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'm going to answer the member's question. I will say, however, that at some point the specificity may require me to refer it to the Minister of Mines. For now I will say this: The Premier has already said that a change to the Mining Act is absolutely necessary. It is the case that the Ontario Superior Court found that the government of Ontario had in fact met its consultation requirements. But it is my view and it is this government's view that the minimum constitutional requirements as a government and as a policy are simply just that—a minimum. The goal in every case has got to be to try and facilitate an agreement: an agreement so as to recognize the self-determination of First Nations; an agreement so as to recognize the necessity of, in this case, the economic opportunity for a First Nation; but at the end of the day, to try and achieve an agreement. Yes, we will pursue the constitutional minimums, of course. But the goal is to get an agreement.

Mr. Howard Hampton: This is bizarre. First Nation leaders are in jail, the mining company which is at the centre of this has 72,000 additional acres of mining rights now, equivalent to more than half the area of the city of Toronto, and the McGuinty government seems to think that all you have to do is get an agreement.

There are rights and interests here. I did not hear an answer to the second question: Have First Nations been notified? In fact, no, they haven't, because on that issue again, the McGuinty government is missing in action.

So I ask this question: With First Nation leaders in jail simply because they tried to stand up and defend their aboriginal rights, with the mining company getting more mining exploration rights, can the McGuinty government tell us why they continue to put mining interests ahead of First Nation interests in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I know that there are many First Nations leaders, chiefs, and individual supporters of First Nations and non-aboriginal descent who are here in support of the KI chief and council. We opposed the incarceration of the KI chief and council. With respect to their release from prison, as soon as the appeal was filed, which could only be filed by the parties, the Attorney General filed a motion to expedite the appeal and has already indicated that the crown will be taking the position of supporting the appeal so that they can be released. We are taking steps to see that they are released. We did oppose their incarceration. I personally made every effort to try and facilitate a resolution, however imperfectly, that would have avoided that incarceration, and I will continue to make these efforts to try and resolve the situation.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier again: The leadership of KI beg to differ with the minister about the positions that the government of Ontario, the McGuinty government, has taken with respect to the incarceration of the leadership. The question I have for the Premier is: Today First Nations leaders, environmentalists and concerned Ontario citizens gathered here at Queen's Park to voice their anger at the McGuinty government's failure to properly consult and accommodate the rights and interests of First Nations—in this case, the KI First Nation and Ardoch Algonquin First Nation—regarding mineral exploration on their traditional lands. My question is this: Why hasn't the McGuinty government issued a stop order and removed the lands in question from mineral exploration and begun the consultation that you failed to do in the first place?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think I owe to the leadership present and the people who have gathered on the front lawn some response before I refer further questions to my colleague. Let me just say this to those present and those who have a direct interest in this: We have inherited here in this province an imperfect history when it comes to the relationship between government and our First Nations and our aboriginal communities. We have

assumed responsibility hitherto not fully assumed and certainly not as earnestly as we have. We have established a separate ministry; I have a new minister in place. We have established some wins, I would argue, in terms of dealing with the aftermath of the Ipperwash tragedy. We have arrived at a new conclusion to our gaming agreement. We've also inherited an imperfect system when it comes to how mining claims are dealt with in Ontario. We have to address that, but I don't want the leadership to doubt for one instant our determination to find a better way.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, there's one problem with everything you say: These issues didn't crop up overnight. You've been the government now for almost five years, and for over five years people like myself and the member for Timmins—James Bay have been raising these issues. The McGuinty government has made announcement after announcement, but you've failed to act. Yesterday, on Earth Day, you would have received a letter from many prominent Canadians—Margaret Atwood, Sarah Harmer, Cathy Jones, Stephen Lewis, among others—and the letter states: "We do not believe that mining should supersede the rights of people to protect their homes and their health."

Premier, why has the McGuinty government failed to listen to those people? Why have you failed to listen to First Nation leaders who've asked you over and over again to make these changes? Why do we continue to see mining exploration companies getting more rights and more privileges, while First Nation leaders are in jail?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The discussion with respect to Mining Act changes is one that I have had with the Ipperwash commission implementation committee, which included and was asked for by grand chiefs, and we talked about exactly that. We talked about exactly how that consultation would take place. I indicated on behalf of the government that in fact the discussion would not be the usual one whereby the government gives, historically, over the past 100 years plus—the First Nations leader would be lucky to receive a heads-up as to what the government's intentions were. Instead, our approach is to collaborate from the beginning of this process to ensure that First Nations leadership is very much a part of how we make these changes. We've made that commitment and we're working together to achieve just that.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again there is a glaring problem with what the minister said. You showed up in Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug with a document that you had drafted; you put it down on the table and you basically said to the leadership of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, "Sign here." There was no consultation. Chief Donny Morris is very clear: It was unilateral. "Sign here and there shall be mining exploration in your traditional territory." Now, both KI First Nation and Ardoch First Nation have asked the McGuinty government to establish a joint panel to deal with the issue of mineral

exploration and mineral development on their traditional lands. The letter to the Premier yesterday, from Margaret Atwood and others, requests the same joint panel.

Can the Premier tell us: Why has the McGuinty government refused to establish the joint panel requested by the First Nations?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Firstly, the member is mistaken if he suggests that in my first visit up there with Grand Chief Beardy I put any document on the table. On the contrary: I received a proposal from the KI chief and council and I listened, and at the end of that I suggested that we could find agreement, I knew, on a number of points.

Secondly, with respect to a joint panel and entering into consultations, I just said that that's exactly what we're doing right now. I want to be very clear: This government is engaged in consultation with First Nations leadership when it comes to changes to the Mining Act. Secondly, all efforts were made first to listen and then to try and come to an agreement with Chief Morris and council. That's why he said on May 5 that he appreciated the government's efforts and the three times that I went up there, and the countless phone calls and letters that were exchanged—imperfectly, I recognize. However, we have tried and will continue to try to achieve a resolution.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Attorney General. Yesterday, as you know, the Liberal members of the social policy committee voted against our amendment to the Access to Adoption Records Act, which would have allowed a disclosure veto to victims of child abuse who are removed from their parents by the children's aid society and later adopted. This means that children who have been sexually or physically assaulted, even tortured, by their parent can do nothing to prevent that parent from—to quote the children's aid society, “To learn their names at age 19 and track them down.” This is despite the fact that one of the fundamental principles of the Victims' Bill of Rights of your ministry—and surely these young people are victims—states that, “Victims should be treated with courtesy, compassion and respect for their personal dignity and privacy by justice system officials.”

1440

Minister, why won't your government afford the same rights of privacy to these young people that you have afforded to other victims of crime in the Victims' Bill of Rights?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The Minister of Community and Social Services, please.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, it's a very difficult bill and it was a very difficult discussion. We have consulted with a lot of our stakeholders. We have consulted with other provinces. British Columbia, Alberta and Newfoundland have this provision in their act. Because of the no-contact notice and the fine attached to it—and you have to remember, those are not children;

they are 19 years old and over. So they are now adults and they are able to make their own decisions. We are told by these other provinces that the no-contact notice has been a successful solution to any concerns regarding protective measures.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again, I would like to address my question to the Attorney General because I believe this is something within his bailiwick and something I would respectfully ask him to look into.

The rights to privacy protected within the justice system by the Victims' Bill of Rights are there, but there's no right to protection within the adoption system. Why are you allowing this incredible inconsistency between these two situations when you're dealing with victims of crime in both instances, especially given the vulnerability of these people, whose vulnerability continues past age 19?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, we're dealing here with adults. We have a no-contact provision in the act, and there is a \$50,000 fine attached to it.

We have just got the e-mail from the privacy commissioner, and she is fully in support of Bill 12 as it currently reads. Also, in addition to the measures that are contained in the proposed legislation, there are other protective measures within the law that may be available should adults feel they are at risk of harm, like for instance a restraining order pursuant to the Criminal Code. Again, three provinces have this disclosure veto in their act, and it has been respected because of the fine and the no-contact provision in the act. So we are following what other provinces have done.

ABORIGINAL HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Premier. The Chiefs of Ontario are in Toronto this week for their planning sessions on health care. Grand Chief Stan Beardy is here right now. He is urging the government to invest in the existing aboriginal health access centre and to fund a new aboriginal health access centre. Why won't the Premier agree?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll refer this to the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: I thank my honourable friend for the question and welcome those chiefs and others who are here in the Legislature today.

I had a fantastic opportunity just a few weeks ago in Thunder Bay to meet with Grand Chief Beardy and many others when we announced that the Menoyawin Health Centre in Sioux Lookout, a \$100-million hospital project, is moving forward to the stage for tendering, getting very close to this substantial new investment.

I indicated in a speech that followed that certainly in the Ministry of Health's budget, in partnership with other government ministries that participate in the AWHs strategy, as an example, there are additional investments available to keep pace with some of the challenges that are being experienced by First Nations communities. Over the course of the year, in concert with the Minister

of Aboriginal Affairs and other government ministers, we anticipate being in a situation to further enhance the quality and access to health care services enjoyed by First Nations populations in Ontario.

M^{me} France G  linas: My question was specifically about aboriginal health access centres. AOHC, the Association of Ontario Health Centres, has also asked the government to eliminate what they call the second-class status of aboriginal health access centres and the community they serve. According to AOHC, the funding for aboriginal health access centres has been flatlined since 1997, limiting their ability to reach tens of thousands of aboriginal Ontarians in need of care and support. Why won't the minister agree to eliminate the second-class status of First Nations communities by investing in existing aboriginal health access centres and funding new aboriginal health access centres?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member knows very, very well about our government's investments in expanding the community health centre model in the province of Ontario, and we are in the midst of doubling those. On the particular matter where the member speaks about flatlining and this two-tier status, I don't think that the story is quite as clear as that. Certainly when we funded pay increases for nurse practitioners, we sought to do that across all the models of primary care where they are involved. But I will take a good hard look at the situation raised by the association of community health centres and by the honourable member, and I will endeavour to get back to the member and see if there are adjustments that are necessary to make sure that the investments in the aboriginal health centres are taking place at par with those investments that we've been making in community health centres.

I just want to remind the honourable member, as she knows and I've had a chance to say in the presence of the community health centre community, that while we are very committed to building those which we have announced, it's not our government's intention at present to be adding more community health centres beyond the 28 which have been announced but are not yet fully operational.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Minister, our government recognizes that we as a society have a responsibility to the environment and to future generations. We realize that natural resources are limited, and as such, we have dedicated ourselves to a wide variety of innovative energy initiatives. The Premier has often stated that there are incredible opportunities to be had as we move towards green technology and renewable energy production. Already we see companies across Ontario revolutionizing the way our society produces the energy we rely on in our daily lives.

Verdant Power, in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, is one of those companies creating

revolutionary solutions. They are taking the idea behind a wind turbine and combining it with the reliability of constant flow of our rivers by placing the turbines underwater. This is an important project for my riding and Ontario. What is the Ministry of Research and Innovation doing to help make this innovative idea a reality?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to tell the House that the world is seeking new forms of renewable energy. We have to wean ourselves away from using dirty fossilized carbon. We know the traditional ones that have been accepted: solar and wind and biomass, all of which have challenges. But there's an innovative company called Verdant, and they have a demonstration project in the fine city of Cornwall. I tell people that the wind does not always blow but the river always flows, and as a result, they have come up with this new free-flow turbine technology which is actually like trying to put a windmill in the river, underneath, and of course the current makes the turbine turn, and the turbine always turns. Unlike wind power, the turbine is always turning and producing this wonderful form of electricity. I've invested, through our ministry, some \$2.2 million through our innovation demonstration fund to prove this technology.

Mr. Jim Brownell: It was a great day indeed when you came to my riding and we together made that announcement at St. Lawrence College overlooking the mighty St. Lawrence. This technology has obvious implications for harnessing the power of the abundant rivers in the province of Ontario. This project is an example of what we can achieve through the commitments of our communities to make a greener Ontario while at the same time bringing innovative ideas to the global market. The St. Lawrence River has been a major contributor of life in my riding for hundreds of years. Thanks to some visionary thinking and timeless Ontario ingenuity, it is now also a source of clean, responsible energy. With initiatives such as these, our province can capture a leading share of the international market for clean energy production.

Can the minister outline the benefits for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry and the global ramifications of the Verdant Power project?

1450

Hon. John Wilkinson: I think the world can beat a path to the door of Cornwall. I can see that the world, looking for renewable sources of energy, will want to look at this new form of renewable energy that they can tap into.

The demonstration project that we have funded will be for 15 megawatts. It will power some 11,000 homes. It's wonderful in Cornwall, because they have the mighty St. Lawrence there, and they also have the connection to the grid because of the hydroelectric power that's already there.

I was particularly pleased, because of the leadership of the member, that St. Lawrence College is one of the partners here. We're going to have to educate a whole new generation of skilled workers who will be able to take the job opportunities that are present from the new

forms of renewable energy that the world, I say, is demanding of us in the 21st century. I would say to the young people of Ontario that Ontario is a jurisdiction that embraces the vision of Earth Day. I'm so proud to be part of a government, and to be with the member, in driving new jobs into Ontario.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. The Bank of Canada slashed its main rate again today, about 50 basis points, and warned that serious economic slowdown is just beginning. In Ottawa, 1,000 technical workers were handed pink slips this morning, adding to hundreds of thousands of recent job losses. Given these very blunt economic indicators, does the minister believe that Ontario will soon be in recession?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I would say, first off, that it won't be my place to speculate. What I will speculate about is exactly the impact that the Ontario government can have with investors who are looking around the world to invest and asking why they should choose Ontario and why now. What we recognize is that, yes, we know we have challenging times afoot in certain sectors. We also know that other sectors are doing very well. We are in net new jobs in the order of over 450,000.

I will tell the member opposite to look very clearly at the five pillars that we've identified for economic growth in Ontario, substantial investments that are targeting sectors for growth and where this government is prepared to help bring jobs to Ontario.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I wasn't suggesting that you speculate, Minister. I'm suggesting that you look at the economic indicators that we're all faced with. My pessimism does not lie with the people of Ontario but with this government, which thinks it knows best.

All the economic indicators show that your programs are failing. Every major bank is preparing for the worst. Minister, how do you justify the continuation of stale policy in light of these new realities?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: What I will say is that we had an individual in this House, followed by an entire party—the official opposition—who speculated that the advanced manufacturing strategy would not turn into jobs. In fact, in Milton, Ontario—in that very member's backyard—Roxul insulation, with our investment and their investment, is creating 100 new jobs and a great new product for sale around the world. That's what this government did.

I appreciate the pessimism on that side, but what this side sees very clearly is the level of innovation available in Ontario companies today. With a little bit of help from their friends in this government, we're prepared to help with expansion and new innovation so that we can sell products around the world. We'll take on his pessimism any time of day, because this is a government that is working for business in Ontario.

ABORIGINAL HEALTH PROMOTION

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. Why isn't the Ministry of Health Promotion involved in promoting the health of First Nations communities in Ontario?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member opposite for the question. The First Nations communities are certainly one of our priorities in this province. The Ministry of Health Promotion has many different programs that are aimed at the different communities. All our programs in this particular ministry apply equally to the aboriginal community in Ontario, because we consider the aboriginal community in Ontario to be part of the communities and part of our family in Ontario. They are no different from any other community.

In my different conversations and in listening to the opposition, I get the feeling that the opposition thinks and believes that the aboriginal people are not part of this province and are not part of the people our general program deals with. I have to let you know that my ministry is focused on all the people of—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: How can the Minister of Health Promotion talk about "We are all equal"? First Nations youth are committing suicide at eight times the rate of the rest of Ontarians. Type 2 diabetes is five times higher within the First Nations than the rest of Ontario. Heart disease is 1.5 times higher within the First Nations, and tuberculosis is 10 times higher in First Nations communities.

The Chiefs of Ontario know that they need a focus on the key determinants of health. They know that the healing requires culturally appropriate health promotion. Why won't the Ministry of Health Promotion respect its obligations to the First Nations of Ontario?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Again, I will say to the member opposite that this ministry and the government of Ontario is quite cognizant of issues that face First Nations people. We are quite cognizant that the First Nations people have a higher incidence of suicide rates and a higher incidence of many other issues that affect our population, and we continue to work. In my particular ministry, we are committed to working with the aboriginal leaders and communities to advance common goals on tobacco control, healthy eating, active living, addiction prevention and increasing aboriginal participation in sports and recreation. In fact, the Ministry of Health Promotion has invested a total of \$3.2 million in a number of programs designed to help aboriginal communities. I myself have been to many aboriginal community centres and have been involved. I have been to the aboriginal—

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

PESTICIDES

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question today is to the Minister of the Environment. Yesterday, you introduced Bill 64, legislation that would ban the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides throughout the province. But, Minister, I'm hearing concerns from my residents in our communities about some parts of your proposal. The Ontario Medical Association, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario and the Canadian Cancer Society are all saying we should reduce our exposure, especially for our children, to unnecessary toxins like the cosmetic pesticides that are used to get rid of the few weeds in our front lawns.

Minister, the residents of my community, though, want to know why, if this government says it's concerned about protecting our families from exposure to unnecessary risk posed by cosmetic pesticides, they would consider exempting golf courses from the ban. Isn't this supposed to be about getting cosmetic pesticides off our land?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, let me compliment the member for the excellent work that he has been doing in his riding for the last five years.

Yes, it is correct that the ban on the use and sale of cosmetic pesticides, which will potentially include about 80 active ingredients in over 300 products, will be the toughest legislation in North America. We are making an exception with respect to golf courses, as we clearly said in our platform commitment during the campaign last year. However, golf courses will only be exempt if they file with the ministry—and this will be set out in regulations later on—an integrated pest management plan that will clearly indicate how they intend to reduce the use of pesticides over a number of years. That's all still to be worked out in regulations.

This legislation is primarily about preventing unnecessary health risks, particularly for our children. Children are much more likely to play on their own lawns, their backyards, schoolyards etc. They need to be protected more than anyone—

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Minister, I'm sure my constituents are going to be very happy to hear that golf course operators are going to be treated in a fashion that will keep them responsible.

The other thing that I'm hearing, Minister, from my community is concern about how this whole matter is going to be enforced. With so many homes, schoolyards and parks in each of our communities, how will we know that the law is actually going to be followed? Parents in the community want certainty that their children are playing in safe places and as free as necessary from these unnecessary risks. Kids run around. They play and they explore when they're outdoors, and they're much more likely to come into contact with cosmetic pesticide residue.

How will parents have certainty that when their kids are outside playing, the environment is as safe and clean as possible and free from these harmful products?

1500

Hon. John Gerretsen: The best enforcement mechanism is the fact that we're going to ban the sale of these products as well, and as early as next spring.

I should compliment the leadership that many municipalities have shown in bringing forth some 30 different bylaws across this province, but all of those bylaws basically only deal with the use. Our new law will deal both with banning the use and the sale of these non-essential pesticides.

We will also focus on education. We have set out a budget of about \$10 million over the next four years, which will be exclusively used to educate people on the proper use of these particular materials etc.

Enforcement obviously will be part of it as well. We have included in our budget nine additional inspectors. As well, we hope to be working with the municipal world, which was going to use their own enforcement officers with respect to the bylaws that they've already passed, and we hope to use them—

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

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Your Premier promised in 2003 to unclog emergency rooms and, today, five years later, you have rehashed that unfulfilled promise without giving any details, any timeline or any implementation plan. I ask you, Minister, what are the benchmarks you have set to achieve this goal and what are the targets you have set to confirm that you have achieved success? I didn't hear them.

Hon. George Smitherman: First off, I want to thank the honourable member for her question. I really want to say that I think it's a good day dawning in the province of Ontario when opposition parties and governments alike have come to the conclusion that using benchmarks and targets is an appropriate way to drive improvement in health care. We want to thank the honourable member for her encouragement on this point.

We received great encouragement last week from the Wait Time Alliance, which gave Ontario an A rating for their efforts around wait times. That is a compliment to Dr. Alan Hudson and thousands of people on the front lines of health care who have made these improvements. Under his leadership, and using similar approaches, we have every intention of unlocking the challenges with hospital emergency rooms and building on some of the successes that we've achieved in the honourable member's own community at Grand River, where we have substantially enhanced the performance of the ER already. We have more work to do and we're getting on with that work.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: There was a lot of hot air, a lot of puffery and a lot of empty rhetoric this morning. I would say to you that I've heard from some of the emergency room doctors and staff already today and

they're not comforted, nor are their patients. Every day we read about another emergency room crisis. You've had five years. You have no plan. You have no details.

I would ask you again: What benchmarks did you provide today, what goals are you going to achieve and when will we know that you've achieved them? Because up until now, people continue to suffer. You've taken no action, and your Premier has not kept his promise.

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member, especially for her admonition about use of colourful language and the temperament of the Legislature. I do want to acknowledge that the honourable member just ran an election campaign that didn't have emergency rooms mentioned in the campaign platform and actually promised to eliminate \$3 billion of health care expenditure. We can imagine what the implications would have been.

Our objective is based on a vision of a circumstance in Ontario where patients have greater confidence that when they go to the emergency room, they will be served in a timely way. But to achieve that is to offer all the complementary strategies, like offering people a more appropriate alternative to going to the emergency room in the first place. We're going to continue to invest in community-based care, to enhance access to those things. We're going to work on issues like mental illness and addiction, to enhance the capacity of the communities to resolve these issues, and unclog those capacities in our emergency rooms with timely and appropriate measures, all of this to follow under the leadership of Dr. Alan Hudson.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. The minister recently said that he would deal with the beaching process that causes clouds of dust over Hamilton, but this will not solve the main problem. When will the minister enforce the emission laws and when will this ministry issue an order that addresses the serious pollution coming from the industrial stacks in Hamilton?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'd like to thank this member for his continuing interest with respect to the air quality in the province of Ontario and in Hamilton as well. As I indicated to the member before question period today, as a matter of fact the ministry is currently in the process of issuing an order against Dofasco to deal with this situation. That will be set out in a letter to him, in response to a letter that he wrote some time ago, within the next day or so. But I think we should also recognize the fact that over the last two years, we have introduced 59 new and updated air standards—which was the biggest move on air toxins in this province in over 30 years—to deal precisely with the kind of situation that he's talking about.

There are still issues out there. Air quality will always be an issue. It's not just an issue that's created here as a

result of the industries that are located in Ontario, but also in the Ohio Valley, as he well knows.

We have put strict limits into place. Those limits will be increased over the next number of years, and particularly, more stringent limits—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: On April 18, an article in the Hamilton Spectator suggested that the issuing of an order may address the pollution that occurs from the process called beaching, but it does nothing about the daily air pollution suffered from the lack of secondary emission control systems on the stacks that certain companies in Hamilton had promised to do before and haven't complied.

The only order that this ministry should be issuing to ArcelorMittal Dofasco and others in Hamilton is the one that deals with the emissions from the stacks, melt shops, coke ovens and blast furnaces. Why hasn't this minister issued those orders?

Hon. John Gerretsen: As I mentioned before, the ministry has issued an order or is about to issue an order with precisely the kind of issues that he's talking about. The company has been ordered to put in more effective pollution controls and improved operating practices dealing with all of the issues that he talked about here.

We take the issue with respect to air quality in the province and in the city of Hamilton very seriously. That's why we've increased the standards over the last couple of years, and that's why we're taking the action that we've taken just within the last couple of days with respect to the order. We want Dofasco and the other steel producers to adhere to these new standards so that we can have the best possible air quality for the people of Ontario and the people of Hamilton.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The Children's Hospital at London Health Sciences Centre lost two pediatric cardiologists in December, which caused a great deal of concern among families across southwestern Ontario. The hospital has been able to recruit three new doctors who will be joining the hospital by the end of the summer.

Can you please tell me and the House what you are doing to improve children's health in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: I thank the honourable member from London-Fanshawe for his keen interest in the issues related to children's health. Like many others, and particularly those individuals in London, I was concerned that in December the Children's Hospital at London Health Sciences lost two pediatric cardiologists. We congratulate them for their recruitment efforts and the news that three cardiologists will be joining, making sure that that capacity at London stays very strong.

Three initiatives that are noteworthy that we've advanced with respect to children's health are the three new childhood immunizations, which we've spoken of

often, saving families up to \$600 per child; our newborn screening, where we've gone from worst to first and dramatically enhanced our capacity; and our pediatric wait time initiative, which builds on the successes that we've had with wait time agendas, where we've got 2,300 additional procedures with about \$4 million, enhancing access for pediatric services. These are examples of improvements to children's health in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I know that my constituents in London-Fanshawe will be pleased to welcome those three new doctors to our city. As you know, good-quality health care is very important to my constituents.

While we are very appreciative of having these additional doctors, our community of London is still short of doctors. Can you tell the House and the people of Ontario what you're doing to improve the shortage of doctors across this province?

Hon. George Smitherman: I have to say to the people of London that we have to thank them because, as one of our medical schools, they've been so engaged in working co-operatively with the coming to life of a medical school satellite in the community of Windsor, which is an example of enhancing the capacity to train more doctors. We've also got many residents who are active in London and surrounding communities learning their trade and moving forward to independent practice.

1510

We had some very exciting data that came out yesterday from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. It showed that the number of doctors practising in group environments has grown by 181% since 2003-04; more than 6,600 doctors are now practising. The great news is that last year, fully 82% of them took new patients, including 265,000 new patients. Two examples in London where they are absorbing some additional capacity are the Thames Valley Family Health Team and the London Centre of Hope Family Health Team. I think it's very fitting that we see the group model coming to life in a profoundly powerful way for our patients.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, yesterday in Hansard you referenced that stakeholders were consulted regarding the amendments to Bill 12. Would the minister please share with the House which stakeholders agreed with removing the section protecting the identity of children who suffered from abuse and were subsequently adopted?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This consultation has been going on since 2004. We have consulted with adoptive parents, we have consulted with those who were adopted, we've consulted with the privacy commissioner, we've consulted with the children's aid society, we've consulted with as many stakeholders as we could, and we consulted them again with this legislation to make sure

that this time we have it right. This legislation that we're moving forward with is in compliance with the privacy commissioner's advice and also with the court decision.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Minister, are these the same stakeholders that you consulted on Bill 183, and subsequently you ended up having to go to court, which is the only reason we're doing Bill 12 now? I ask: Specifically which stakeholders consulted on removing that section? The children's aid societies have said they have grave concerns with the legislation as written.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Of course, when we consult with our stakeholders, we consult with many stakeholders. They don't all agree with us 100%. That's why we have amendments coming from the New Democratic Party and we have amendments coming from the official opposition, and of course they are opposed to it. That's why this government, after consulting, will listen to everyone, and we're coming with Bill 12, which we believe strikes an appropriate balance between privacy and the protection of everyone's rights. I'm very pleased to move forward with Bill 12. This has been waiting for—

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

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the Minister of Energy: Minister, we've had in all our ridings many energy marketers knocking on people's doors. In this particular case a senior's door was knocked on. When she said she wanted to check with her husband to see if she would sign the contract, the energy marketer said, "Why? Are you stupid? Can't you make the decision for yourself?" and tried to force her to sign. Do you think that's appropriate in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: No, it isn't. I certainly would encourage the member to give me any further information on that. It's inappropriate behaviour. It shouldn't happen, and we must take steps to stop that. I would say to all of us that there's an organization called the Ontario Energy Board. They regulate these people, as I think the member knows. But that's inappropriate behaviour and we need to find ways to stop that. These organizations are required to deal fairly with the population. So I would say to the member: Let me know about that, but particularly, if you don't mind, let the Ontario Energy Board know about anything that happens like this. The regulated responsibility is to ensure the ethical behaviour of these retailers, so let's make sure that happens.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Each and every one of us in this House has either called that particular organization or has tried to deal with the energy marketers themselves. What you end up with is always the same: More energy peddlers knocking on somebody's door, insulting seniors, trying to force people to sign contracts that they shouldn't be signing.

A simple question: Don't you think it's high time that, as a government, you change the law in this province to not allow that kind of practice so that seniors are not

preyed on and people aren't called stupid because they want to talk to their husbands about a particular contract?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I appreciate the sincerity of what you say there. The public have a right to be treated ethically and fairly on these things. They have a right for things to be explained in plain English or French. They have a right that these retailers perform ethically.

I acknowledge, by the way, that most members in this Legislature maybe have had similar experiences to the ones you've had, but the Ontario Energy Board has been given the legislated authority to deal with it. They should, and will, welcome comments from you or your constituent. I'll undertake to ensure that I reinforce with them the need to be very vigilant in terms of the practices of these retailers. Ontarians deserve fair practices and we should ensure that that happens.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

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

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

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

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

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

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

It's signed by many people from my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, and I thank them for their signatures.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: In line with your drive for increasing collegiality in the chamber, I'd like to join with my colleague from Newmarket-Aurora in this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

It's signed by many people, particularly out of the Polish community in western Mississauga. I'm pleased to sign it, support it and ask page Rheanna to carry it for me.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees: In that same spirit of collegiality, I would participate in supporting a petition that was circulated by my colleague Bob Delaney, the MPP for Mississauga-Streetsville. I'm pleased to support the petition and to read it into the record.

"Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Western Mississauga Ambulatory Surgery Centre.

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

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

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

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

I am pleased to affix my signature and support the member, as well as the member from Halton, in this proposal.

1520

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I have a petition to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles.

"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, 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 the petition. I affix my signature and ask Bethany to carry it for me.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have petitions provided to me by St. James’ Anglican Church, Central Presbyterian Church, St. John’s on the Hill United Church and St. Andrews Galt Presbyterian Church, which read:

“Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord’s Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord’s Prayer as part of its daily proceedings.”

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

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have a petition to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles.

“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, 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 I will sign it and hand it over to Marco.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: “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 opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

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

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

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

I agree with this petition. I am pleased to add my name and give it to Thomas, the page.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Mr. Kim Craitor: Thank you for recognizing me. My petition is titled “Physical Activity Petition,” and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, over the past 25 years, obesity rates have more than tripled for Canadian children between the ages of 12 and 17; and

“Whereas, in Ontario, less than half of students beyond grade 9 take gym classes, a small fraction are involved in school sports programs, and adolescents who are inactive at school are unlikely to be physically active elsewhere; and

“Whereas Canada’s Physical Activity Guide recommends that adolescents get at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity daily; and

“Whereas a second compulsory physical education credit for secondary schools would result in an increase in adolescents being active;

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

“That the Ministry of Education add a second compulsory physical education credit for secondary schools.”

I’m in support of this. I’m pleased to sign my name and give this to the page to take down.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have petitions provided to me by the Cambridge Christian School, First United Church and St. Luke's Anglican Church, which read:

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

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

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

As I agree with this petition, I will sign same and provide a copy to Ida.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"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, despite the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, its largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach \$100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, this plan now calls for the ill-advised transfer of 20 mental health unit beds from Ajax-Pickering hospital to the Centenary health centre in Scarborough; and

"Whereas one of the factors for the successful treatment of patients in the mental health unit is support from family and friends, and the distance to Centenary health centre would negatively impact the quality of care for residents of Ajax and Pickering; and

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

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

"That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service to our Ajax-Pickering hospital, which now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

"That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain the badly needed 20-bed mental health unit."

I shall affix my signature to that and pass this to Jordynne.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have received another petition. I guess it's one of those petitions that's very popular.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I will affix my signature and will deliver this to the House.

1530

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have petitions provided to me by Patricia Boughen of Cambridge, David and Karen Kovats of Cambridge, and Valley View Manor of St. Jacobs. The petitions read:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

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

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

As I agree with this petition, I will sign same and provide a copy to Prakash, the page.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd like to thank Pastor Charlie Nolting and the parishioners of St. John's Augsburg Lutheran Church, which is also my church, for this 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 opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

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

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

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

I support this petition, affix my name to it and send it down to the table with Bethany.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM RÉFORME LÉGISLATIVE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 22, 2008, on the amendment to the motion by Mr. Bryant to amend the standing orders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath):
Further debate?

M. Gilles Bisson: Je veux dire premièrement que je suis un peu triste qu’on est dans ce débat-là aujourd’hui. Je sais que dans mon temps ici à l’Assemblée—ça fait 18 ou 19 ans—on a eu l’occasion au moins à deux ou trois reprises d’être dans une situation où on était en train de changer le Règlement de la Chambre.

Je veux dire droit au début de ce débat que les changements eux-mêmes aux règlements me concernent un peu moins que ce qui va arriver à la période des questions, et je vais en parler en plus de détails plus tard.

Cette place, cette Assemblée, du temps que je suis arrivé ici en 1990 comparé à aujourd’hui, est très, très différente. Il y avait un temps où la coopération entre le parti du gouvernement et les partis de l’opposition était beaucoup plus développée, parce que les règlements du jour reconnaissaient une couple de faits très importants qu’on a besoin d’avoir dans l’Assemblée.

Premièrement, un gouvernement majoritaire a toujours besoin, et je le dis comme membre de l’opposition, d’avoir le droit de passer ses lois. Parce que le public a choisi un gouvernement majoritaire dans une élection provinciale, le gouvernement, à la fin de la journée, a besoin d’avoir le droit de passer son programme, son agenda, à travers la législation. Mais ça, c’est avec l’œil donné de l’opposition, parce qu’il y a d’autres citoyens de la province de l’Ontario qui, possiblement—et on le sait—n’ont pas voté pour le gouvernement et ils se retrouvent avec des députés de l’opposition. C’est notre

ouvrage, c’est notre tâche comme députés de l’opposition, de regarder ce que le gouvernement nous propose comme législation, de le critiquer où il a besoin d’être critiqué, et de l’appuyer où il a besoin d’être appuyé. Quand je suis arrivé à cette Assemblée, cette Législature, le droit de l’opposition était beaucoup plus important qu’il ne l’est aujourd’hui.

Par exemple, quand je suis arrivé en 1990, les députés du gouvernement ou de l’opposition, une fois qu’ils commençaient un débat, pouvaient parler aussi longtemps qu’ils avaient besoin de parler pour faire leurs points sur un projet de loi.

Les membres du gouvernement vont dire—je le sais, j’étais là—« C’est un peu trop long, ce n’est pas beau. Quelqu’un peut prendre le plancher et peut parler pour des journées. » Mais il faut que tu comprennes que l’opposition ne faisait pas ça à toute reprise et pour chaque projet de loi. L’opposition, si elle voulait avoir des amendements sur un projet de loi et négocier une amélioration à un projet de loi qui a été proposé par le gouvernement, utilisait les règles de la Chambre pour essayer d’exercer une certaine pression sur le gouvernement pour faire les amendements nécessaires.

Je peux vous dire que, entre ce que j’ai vu en 1990 et ce que je vois aujourd’hui, il y a une grosse différence dans la manière dont l’Assemblée fonctionne elle-même. Je dirais même que cette Assemblée ne fonctionne plus comme un Parlement doit fonctionner parce que, avec les changements qui ont été faits, oui, par les néo-démocrates dans le temps de M. Rae, et qui ont été accélérés par M. Baird dans le temps de M. Harris, et même avant ça dans le temps de M. Peterson, on a ôté à l’opposition un certain droit qui a été reconnu quand on a créé les Parlements les années passées. C’est pour dire que l’opposition, à la fin de la journée, ne peut jamais frustrer le gouvernement jusqu’au point qu’on ne peut pas passer un projet de loi, mais on a l’habilité, par la manière dont le Parlement a été créé, d’exercer nos droits comme membres de l’opposition pour garder une certaine pression sur le gouvernement pour améliorer des projets de loi. L’opposition, dans le passé, prenait très au sérieux cette responsabilité. Ce qu’on a à cette heure, avec tous les changements de règles, c’est que le gouvernement, non seulement avec sa majorité mais avec les règles qu’on a présentement à l’Assemblée, peut passer un projet de loi très vite à cette Assemblée avec aucune conséquence, n’importe ce que l’opposition dit. Mais même plus important, cela n’a aucune conséquence de ce que le public a à dire. Cela, je pense, est très triste, et ce n’est pas la manière dont un Parlement doit marcher. Mais c’est pour un autre débat.

Je veux dire que, pour ce débat ici qu’on a aujourd’hui, pour moi la grosse question est que le nouveau calendrier qui a été proposé par le gouvernement est vraiment fait d’une manière qui va donner au gouvernement une habilité supérieure de communiquer son agenda au public, et encore frustrer l’opposition.

Présentement, on connaît la manière dont ça marche. L'Assemblée et tous les députés sont ici de bonne heure le matin. La plupart des députés sont ici au bureau à 7 h 30 ou à 8 heures et commencent leurs travaux pour se préparer pour la période des questions, préparer leur programme et d'autres affaires à l'Assemblée et faire leur travail comme législateurs. À 13 h 30, on arrive ici et on commence les procédures avec une période des questions, d'habitude, à environ 14 h 30.

La manière dont c'était désigné avec les règles présentes était pour donner à l'opposition la chance de s'organiser, de faire la recherche nécessaire pour être capable d'arriver à l'Assemblée avec des questions qui ont été préparées et réfléchies, et qu'on a organisées pour demander au gouvernement des questions qui reflètent les sujets du jour.

Le gouvernement veut avancer cette période des questions de 14 heures à 10 h 45. C'est très simple : la raison pour cela est que le gouvernement veut avoir un plus grand contrôle sur la manière dont il organise la communication avec les citoyens de la province de l'Ontario. Donc, ils vont arriver ici à l'Assemblée, ils vont entrer pour la période des questions, les questions vont être posées jusqu'à 11 h 45 et, bang, ils sont partis. Ils sont dans leur limo, ils sont partis quelque part en Ontario pour faire des conférences de presse; ils ne sont pas ici pour répondre aux médias qui sont ici chaque jour et à l'opposition sur le programme qu'ils sont en train de mettre en place.

Donc, le gros problème avec ces règles, ce n'est pas parce qu'on va commencer à siéger à 9 heures le matin pour une session. Écoute, moi, je suis préparé à 7 heures ou à 8 heures le matin. Ça ne me fait pas peur; comme tout le monde, on travaille dans notre société, et aller de bonne heure le matin au Parlement, ce n'est pas la question. Contrairement à ce que M. le Premier ministre a dit, quand il a essayé de dire que les députés commençaient leur ouvrage très tard l'après-midi, on sait que ce n'est pas vrai. Les députés sont ici de bonne heure le matin.

1540

La question pour moi est celle de la période des questions. Si on permet à la période des questions de s'avancer au matin, ça veut dire, un, que l'opposition va avoir moins d'habileté de s'organiser pour la période des questions, et la qualité des questions jusqu'à un certain point, possiblement. Mais, deux, la pire affaire, c'est que ça bloque notre accès aux médias. D'habitude le matin, l'opposition a l'habileté d'avoir une conférence de presse et à inviter ceux et celles dans la communauté ontarienne qui ont certaines questions ou un certain dossier qu'ils veulent avancer sur le plan provincial. On a notre conférence de presse le matin, les médias posent leurs questions, on revient ici pour la période des questions pour deux heures, deux heures et demie; on demande notre question sur le sujet, et le gouvernement a besoin de répondre. Donc, il y a tout un processus où les médias et l'opposition ont la chance de garder le pied du

gouvernement au feu sur les dossiers politiques de la province de l'Ontario.

À cette heure, ça va être très difficile pour l'opposition et les médias de garder les pieds de ce gouvernement au feu. Pourquoi? Parce que, sans l'habileté de faire entrer ses groupes le matin, parce qu'on va être ici en se préparant pour la période des questions, et, deux, parce qu'on va être là de bonne heure durant la période des questions, cela va être beaucoup plus difficile de rentrer ses groupes pour avoir cet aperçu d'une conférence de presse, d'avoir les médias qui demandent leurs questions, d'avoir une période des questions où l'opposition demande au gouvernement : « Pourquoi avez-vous fait tel et tel? » ou « Pourquoi n'avez-vous pas fait tel et tel? », et encore pour permettre aux médias l'opportunité de demander au ministre, dans ce qu'on appelle les « scrums », des questions sur le dossier du jour.

Donc, je trouve que c'est vraiment triste qu'on se trouve dans cette situation aujourd'hui où le gouvernement provincial essaie encore de limiter les droits de l'opposition.

In the time I've got left, I want to say a couple of things to my friends in the chamber who may not have been listening through translation. I understand that at times people don't like those devices.

First of all, this is not about when we're going to sit. Let's be real. The Premier got up in the House the other day and said, "I met with farmers, and they thought it was ridiculous that we only start work at 1:30 in the afternoon at Queen's Park." It's a good political point scored by the Premier that sells well in the media. Everybody kind of looks at politicians and they don't like us anyway, and he tried to reinforce among the public that somehow or other provincial members of Parliament never start work until 1:30. Well, we all know that's not true.

The reality is that members are in this assembly or in their constituency offices by 7 o'clock or 8 o'clock every morning and normally are not back at home until 8, 9 or 10 at night. Between coming to this place during the week when the House is in session, preparing yourself for question period, preparing yourself for committee, preparing yourself for debate, meeting with community groups about issues that are important to them, holding press conferences and doing the things we do here, that's why the House never sat until 1:30. It was to give members the time to organize themselves and for the public to have access to members of the government and members of the opposition prior to question period.

There was some logic to it. The logic was that you have a question period in the afternoon. Why? Because it gives an opportunity, for those who may have a problem with a particular government policy, to come to Queen's Park in the morning to meet with opposition and government MPPs to talk about these things before question period starts and, yes, to hold press conferences here at Queen's Park, where that particular community group can hold the government's feet to the fire on a particular question. The media then get involved. They

ask questions of the community group or the provincial organization that comes in, and then they come into question period expecting that the opposition may ask questions on those particular issues that day. The government gets a chance to respond by way of answers to our questions—at times they give us answers; not always—but then the media get a second kick at the can, once we leave question period, in what we call scrums, which are happening now, as we speak, in order to hold the government's feet to the fire. In a democracy, it's a partnership not just between the citizens in this assembly; it's also a partnership between the media and the individual's right to know what is being reported in the papers in this province and giving the media and the opposition the tools they need to hold the government accountable.

I understand that a government, especially a majority government, at the end of the day has the right to have its agenda passed. This is not the debate. I don't care about the rules that were brought into the House around this whole issue. We'll deal with that. But the issue to me is a very simple one: For the government to be held accountable, there needs to be scrutiny, and scrutiny is done by a number of means: by question period; by the media asking questions of the government and doing investigative reporting, putting the question into the public's mind, "Is what the government proposes a good idea or is it not a good idea?" and by opposition members of the assembly standing in this House and demanding answers to particular questions of policy in the province of Ontario. This new schedule of moving question period from the afternoon to the morning is going to very much limit the ability of the opposition and the media to have the type of access that needs to be had in holding a government accountable.

I want to be clear: I don't care if the House sits at 9 in the morning. I don't care if it sits at 8 in the morning. I don't care if it sits until midnight. I've been here long enough; I've had sessions go 24 hours a day when we had the megacity debate in this place. So to me, it's not about, "Oh, you don't want to be here at 9 o'clock in the morning." That has nothing to do with it. The issue is question period. The issue is the ability and the right for the public to know what its government is doing, and there's a process by which the public finds out. First of all, community groups come to this place in the morning to meet with opposition members, to let them and the government members know how they feel about a particular issue. There's a dedicated amount of time where members are not stuck in this House, as we are this afternoon, when they can actually come and meet with us. That's why we have a schedule the way that it is.

More important, the public has the right, as community groups, to hold a press conference in this building; to go to our media studio and have somebody from either government or the opposition sponsor them in the media studio, so that they can tell their story to the media; so that they can stand in our media studio and say to the media, "We think this particular initiative is good

or bad, and here are the reasons why." Sometimes, yes, people come to say good things about government; sometimes they come to say bad things. But it's the right of the public.

So the process here has always been—and it is in every other Legislature of a parliamentary-type system—that the people come, they have an opportunity to hold a press conference, and the media scrutinizes them in regard to what they're presenting to the media by way of questions at the end of their press conference. The media asks them questions in order to make sure they're satisfied that what's being presented by this particular organization is something that makes some sense and is valid of reporting.

They then expect the opposition members to come into the House and ask questions so that they can listen not only to the question but, more importantly, to what the answer by the government is; so that the government can respond to what was raised in the morning at the press conference by the provincial organization or others who might be here.

More important, the media gets an opportunity to question the ministers as they walk out the door of this Legislature after question period, to scrutinize the answer, to scrutinize the issue, to find out what is right and what is wrong with this particular thing and then report on it so that the public is informed of what they have the right to know.

What this whole thing is about—it's not about members coming to work early in the morning, and it's not about what's in the rule changes. This is about an attempt—and they will be successful, because they are a majority—of the government to say, "We want to limit the ability of the public and the opposition to scrutinize this government by making it more difficult for them to get access to the media to tell the story."

The second thing they're going to do—I know, 12 o'clock is going to come, and you're going to see all the government limos parked outside of Queen's Park here. The ministers will be dispatched to different parts around this province in the afternoon to go out and give the good-news story of the government of Ontario.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Doing our job.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The member just admitted, "Doing our job." What about the job of the public, sir? What about the job of the opposition?

See, this is the problem. This is the mindset of the government. They think they have a God-inherent right to tell their side of the story, without allowing the media, the public or the opposition to hold them to scrutiny. If that's what you believe democracy is, sir, I don't think you belong in this Legislature, to be quite, quite blunt.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Excuse me, I'd ask you to consider withdrawing those remarks.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Madam Speaker, I withdraw.

The point I make is that government members—and I know; I was there. Go and read the speeches in 1992. I was one of those well-tamed backbench government

members like you guys, who supported Dave Cooke in probably some of the worst rule changes of this place, because I was convinced by the party apparatus and by the Premier, now-Liberal Bob Rae—

Hon. Jim Watson: And Howard.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, Howard was offside. He was one of the few people who was mad at Cooke over it.

But I understand how this place works. There's an extreme amount of pressure put by the Premier's office and cabinet on the backbench members about the right of the government to get its agenda through and why this is so important and, "We've got to do this because, by God, this is what Ontarians want," and everybody falls into place. I understand; I've been around.

What I am saying here is that this is a bad move for democracy. The public has the right to know, and there's a process that has been established that gives the public an ability to know, and that's done, as I said, in a very simple way. It's a partnership, with the government proposing an issue, bringing a bill or announcing a program that the media and the opposition have an opportunity to scrutinize and to ask questions, the government then reflecting and in the end either changing or not changing that particular policy or legislation.

1550

What this is all about is the government saying, "We want to be able to control"—not the political—"the communications agenda. We want to limit the ability of the opposition to hold our feet to the fire." What is even worse is to withhold the ability of the media to do their job by limiting the opportunities they will have to scrutinize the government through processes. At the end of the day, come 12 o'clock every afternoon, a great number of cabinet ministers and the Premier will be boarding the limos outside Queen's Park, driving down to the Island Airport or Toronto Pearson, getting on planes, travelling out in the afternoon and coming back at night in order to give the good word to the province of Ontario about how great the McGuinty government is. You know what? They've done that in some totalitarian states, and it's not good.

What is great about our system, what is wonderful about the Ontario and British parliamentary system and one of the things we're the most proud of is that we have a system of government that has inserted within the Legislature an ability to scrutinize. If you cannot properly scrutinize the government, you're in trouble in a democracy. The government may make fun of this, the backbenchers might say, "We need to do this, it's important," and the public may not even care at this point, but the point is, in the end, what we're doing is limiting the ability of the public to know what's going on. And the less information the public has, in my view, the greater the disservice the McGuinty government is giving to the public when it comes to how democracy should work.

I am going to definitely vote against these standing order changes. And I want to make it clear: I don't care—you want the House to come in at 8 in the

morning? I'll be here with bells on. You want to sit on Friday? I'll be here. Give me a question period, but it's got to be in the afternoon and it's got to be done in such a way that not only the opposition but the media have an opportunity to hold this government to scrutiny—something that I'm convinced needs to happen more and more as I take a look at how some of the files have been handled by this government, on issues such as KI and others.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of Health Promotion.

I'm pleased to take part in this debate. I would rather be talking about some of the other pressing and important issues that are facing my community in Ottawa and certainly the province of Ontario, but I do have the floor for a few minutes and I wanted to put some perspective into this debate.

I've received a grand total of zero calls, zero e-mails and zero letters on this issue. This is not a barnburner out in our community. I've checked with other colleagues and, to the best of my knowledge, none of them—or very few, if any—has actually received any calls. That's not to say it's not important, but it's not registering on the radar screen of those men and women who make up our particular ridings. It's not registering because this is not a radical proposal. We're simply asking that we modernize this institution, drag it into the 21st century, make it more efficient so that we can conduct the public's business.

Debate time is going to increase by 25% under this proposal. There will be an increase of 50% in private members' business, which is something that members have asked for for some time. We're going to eliminate evening sittings because we've heard from a number of members the challenges that evening sittings bring, particularly to those with young families. They'd like to get home to their families, if they live in the GTA, or they'd like to go to a constituency or community event. So we're going to limit evening sittings to eight days in the spring and fall sessions.

What seems to be somewhat of a point of contention amongst the opposition is that we're going to begin question period at 10:45 and finish at a set period of time, namely 11:45. I had the pleasure of working for two Speakers of the House of Commons in Ottawa as their communications director. On one of the days in the House of Commons, question period started at 11 o'clock, so 15 minutes off what we're proposing. And guess what? The system works well in Ottawa with a morning start.

The other thing is that it's very difficult for all members to coordinate their schedules, meet with constituents and individuals who want to meet with them. You're never really sure, under the current rules, when question period is going to end. It could end, perhaps, at 2:30, it could end at 3, it could end at 3:30, it could end at 4; it all depends on the routine proceedings. So we're going to make the system a little more efficient.

Just to put in perspective how many days this House sat in 2006, we sat for 106 days, more than any other jurisdiction in Canada. As individual MPPs understand, not everything takes place in this chamber and the world does not revolve around this particular institution. We have an awful lot of important work to do in our ridings and as ministers in our ministries, meeting with groups throughout the province of Ontario. While question period is vitally important from an accountability point of view, it's not going to be any less accountable by having question period start at 10:45.

Most of us start our days well before 8 or 9 o'clock. Many of my colleagues have to travel in from around the GTA, and they're up at 5:30 or 6 to make sure they get to a community event and then get back for question period. If anything, this change is going to make it more difficult for the ministries, because it's probably a lot easier to ask a question than to research the information for the answer you expect is going to come down the pipe. Unlike in the British system, we do not have advance notice of the questions. So we have to be prepared for a wide range of issues that may be in the media that particular morning and may be talked about by various groups in the province of Ontario.

Let me just quote something I saw in the Toronto Star on April 19 that really put in perspective that this debate and the sometimes feigned outrage on the part of the opposition is much ado about nothing. It's a dart to the provincial opposition parties, "For making a big deal out of the trivial; for the past few days, the Progressive Conservatives and New Democrats focused not on weighty matters such as the economy or the looming TTC strike but on the Liberal government's plans to move the daily question period from the afternoon to the morning. The move, which will accommodate the elimination of evening sittings of the Legislature (an opposition demand), was variously denounced as 'cynical' and 'undemocratic' by the PCs and NDP. Their real concern: It will give them less time to prepare for question period. The solution: get to work earlier."

I couldn't have said it better myself.

We even had the leader of the Conservative Party, who indicated that they wanted to reschedule the hours of debate. In the Sudbury Star: "Opposition reaction to the Ontario Liberals' attempt to reschedule legislative debate to daylight hours—including moving question period to 9:30 ... from 3," which has subsequently been changed, "has been unduly petulant..."

"Opposition parties need to climb down off their high horse on this one. There will be little sympathy from the public..."

"Give the new hours a chance."

Mr. Jeff Leal: Sudbury's celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

Hon. Jim Watson: That's right—a great city. I was in Sudbury last week.

What we're proposing is not particularly revolutionary. We're simply indicating that we want to make this place more efficient. As I said, I think having ques-

tion period in the morning is probably going to be more difficult for ministers than it will be for the opposition, but it's the right thing to do.

I said earlier that I would much rather be dealing with some of the more substantive issues that are facing our province, particularly municipal issues, which is part of my bailiwick. I enjoy question period; I enjoy getting questions. I'm looking forward to my very first question from my critic in the official opposition, at some point, to ask about some of the important issues that are coming forward, when it comes to the fiscal and service delivery review—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Is that the member from Durham?

Hon. Jim Watson: —the member from Durham is my critic; that's right—some of the issues we're working on with respect to uploading services such as ODB and ODSP, some of the work we've done with respect to gas tax for transit companies like OC Transpo, the TTC and Peterborough Transit. In Ottawa, my hometown, last year they received \$36 million in gas tax money. By 2010, there will be close to \$1.6 billion in gas tax money going across the province.

1600

I also want to explain to the public who are interested in this—again, I don't want to be dismissive, but I don't think there is a great hue and cry coming from the public on changes to the standing orders. This is very much inside baseball; it's the rules that govern our activities. The fact of the matter is that this is a very different approach from what the previous government did when it came about wanting to make changes.

Mr. Jeff Leal: What did they do?

Hon. Jim Watson: What they did was quite interesting because they had a stealth approach, where they simply came in and brought in the changes in 1997, for instance, in a somewhat underhanded way. Let me read the St. Catharines Standard:

"As disturbing as the content of the rules is, however, the sneaky manner—no other way to say it—in which the government tried to slide them through is more repulsive. The matter was originally raised by a low-profile, backbench government MPP, smoke-screened in a seemingly innocuous package of changes meant to improve the efficiency of the Legislature and avoid the undue wasting of MPPs' valuable time. It is now apparent that to avoid detection as much as possible the government tabled the proposed changes in the Legislature at 5 p.m. on June 12." That was the St. Catharines Standard editorial of June 21, 1997.

It was a low-profile, backbench government MPP named John Baird who introduced those. Whatever happened to John Baird? I haven't heard much of him lately.

Mr. Jeff Leal: He's in Ottawa.

Hon. Jim Watson: That's right. In fact, he is my member of Parliament and represents my riding.

What Mr. Baird did in terms of getting the legislative changes forward was a world of difference compared to what we're proposing. This has been a very open and transparent process.

Let's just put it in context. This is a pilot project that a committee of the Legislature will be able to review after the spring session. It's not cast in stone. We may come back and say, "It's not working, not what we expected it to be." But let's at least give it a fair chance so that we can recognize that this Legislative Assembly, quite frankly, needs to be modernized.

When I came here from a municipal background, which is a very pragmatic level of government, I was quite surprised at the amount of time that was wasted in this chamber. People were given speaking notes, and many individuals didn't know what they were voting on. It was not the most productive use of time. If we can better manage the time schedule of this particular Legislative Assembly and allow members from all parties to perhaps spend more time in the real world outside of the rarefied air of the Legislative Assembly, I think we will all do a better service to our community, to our stakeholders and to the taxpayers of Ontario.

What's interesting about this particular debate is that the Conservative Party once again has a different position, because during the election campaign Mr. Tory was crystal clear when he said, "You know, most people go to work starting at 9 o'clock in the morning. If you had the sittings start in the morning and finish at suppertime, I think 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 suppertime."

Mr. Jeff Leal: Those were the days when leadership mattered.

Hon. Jim Watson: That's right, when leadership mattered, back on August 29.

Fast-forward to February 12, 2008. John Tory expressed concern that a 9:30 a.m. question period was too early and that PC staff "would not have had their morning coffees." Well, I don't know about you, but the vast majority of my constituents in Ottawa West-Nepean start a lot earlier than 9:30 in the morning.

We ask our fellow citizens in our ridings to work hard, to support their families, to pay their taxes, to start early in the day and contribute to the economic well-being of this community, and people come here and say, "So you start your legislative day at 1:30?" It just doesn't make any sense in this day and age, when we're all required to work a little harder and work a little smarter to ensure that we are actually fulfilling the public's business.

I'm quite pleased to support this because, again, we are making much ado about nothing. We are simply asking that we start the day earlier, we increase the amount of private members' time by 50%, we increase the daily debate time by 25%, we start at 9 in the morning, which is a reasonable time to start, and we have question period at 10:45. I don't see this as a threat to democracy.

We hear the hyperbole and the outrage that this is going to be hard on the press. I don't think it's going to

be hard on the press. The press are hard-working and they have deadlines, the print reporters—quite frankly, it will give them more time to find people to question on government initiatives above and beyond the opposition. I understand that the opposition are going to have to share the limelight with real Ontarians who may want to express an opinion on something that came up in question period. I think the press—I was proud to be a member of the press, not for a long period of time, but in television and print—will appreciate the fact that, after question period, they will have more time to go out beyond the confines of Queen's Park and seek out differing opinions on government initiatives and issues that came up in question period.

I'm very pleased that our government has brought this forward. I would hope that we wouldn't spend an inordinate amount of time on this because, again, this is not a burning issue amongst the people in Ottawa West-Nepean. I don't know about in other ridings. I don't know if your phone lines are burning up. But I would rather have us talk about some of the pressing issues in the municipal world, in education.

I'm going a little off topic, Madam Speaker, but the national champion spelling bee winner was from my riding: Emma Brownlie from D. Roy Kennedy Public School. We're proud of her.

The work that we have to do in our community in terms of public safety and the 101 new police officers that we've added; I'd like to talk about the cosmetic pesticides ban and the good work that Barb Lajeunesse did in Ottawa to ensure that this has come to this Legislative Assembly; the work we're doing at the Queensway Carleton Hospital, the extra doctors who have been hired. All of these are issues that I get letters on, I get e-mails on and I get visits on. I don't get letters, e-mails or visits on the inner workings of the calendar of the Legislative Assembly.

I'm very proud to support this. As I mentioned earlier, I'm going to share my time with the Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: It certainly is a pleasure for me to rise in this Legislature this afternoon to participate in this debate. This is my first time participating, and I am very honoured and humbled to do so.

Applause.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Thank you.

This debate deals with the modernization of the Legislature. I'm certainly pleased to be speaking after my honourable colleague, who represents us well all the time, my colleague from Ottawa West-Nepean.

As a new member—and I am affectionately referred to as a "newbie" around here—I have become aware of the long hours that the Legislature sits. While I haven't been here very long, I'm very cognizant of the fact that many of my colleagues have issues with the fact that they have to be here in the evenings and until late at night in many cases.

I am so glad that we were able to have a discussion on this issue, and the opposition was very much involved

with it as well. They listened and discussed that it would be better for us not have any debates on Fridays. Not having debates on Fridays provides the members with the opportunity to attend various community events in their ridings.

My riding is Scarborough–Guildwood. This riding is a very, very diverse riding. I have had the pleasure of being able to attend outside of the Legislature because, as a minister, I only have to sit in the Legislature during question period. So I, in particular, have very different requirements in terms of being in the Legislature as opposed to the members who are here all the time and who have to sit every single day and every single evening.

1610

When I'm not in the Legislature, I am out in the community. As I said before, I'm from the community of Scarborough–Guildwood, one of the most diverse places on Earth—and in Ontario as well. Ontario is one of the most diverse places in the world. It represents people from every corner of the globe.

My presence in this Legislature gives hope to so many people who are here from different parts of the world, that they have an opportunity in this province and that they can be a part of this great procedure that we have here, of being involved in the government process. The people of Scarborough–Guildwood are very happy when I come out to the events that they have in their riding. I participate and am able to listen to the issues that affect them. So when we have time to get out of the House, to be able to spend time in our communities, it is very important for our communities.

Just last week when I was out in my community, I was able to speak to a young lady who had met me at an event that I was at outside of my hours in the Legislature—or outside of my hours that I am involved in duties relating to the ministry in this province. She was able to tell me that she was so pleased to have heard me speak at her church, that she felt so connected with me. She had some really serious issues that she felt she could come to sit down with me, talk to me about; that I could be a role model for her. I could help to direct the path of her life. She felt that she could trust me, speak with me.

I also go to different association events in the community—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I just remind the minister to speak to the issue on the table, which is the motion?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Yes. The reason I am speaking about these different things is because this, to me, is very directly related to time that we spend in the Legislature. When we have time outside of the Legislature, we are able to speak with the people in our community and—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Your time is complete.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I understand it was the first time that the minister participated in debate. I will just give her one little hint: Keep an eye on that clock,

because they cut you off when the time runs out. There's no warning and no grace time here in the Legislature.

Anyhow, I'm pleased to join the debate on this motion. It is interesting. I heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing speaking earlier. He seems to speak out of two sides on this issue. We'll get to that a little later.

But we certainly do want to talk about the whole issue of standing order changes and how this Legislature works. That is the crux of my concern. You see, when Dalton McGuinty was elected Premier and in his throne speech, he said, "We are going to make this Legislature more accountable, and we are going to make all MPPs more relevant."

Now let's just see what he has done to do that. I'll sum it up very quickly: absolutely nothing. That's what he has done to follow through on that promise. Nothing. He talked about making MPPs more relevant, but what do we have? We still have a committee system that works the same way: six members from the government; three members from the opposition.

Case in point: The other day there were committee hearings on Bill 12, the new adoption legislation. Did Liberal members of that committee follow what they truly believed, or did they just take their orders from the Premier's office? One by one, they voted down the amendments that would have protected victims of abuse—an amendment that was in the original Bill 183 that has been taken out of Bill 12. Did they vote to support those amendments? No, they shot them down. In fact one member, the member from York South–Weston, left the hearings during that vote.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I'd like to remind the member that we really don't refer to the times that members are in or out of—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's not an absence, Madam Speaker. She left the hearings so as not to vote, because she couldn't support that, but she didn't want to vote against what the Premier's office was telling them to do as members. That is the crux of the problem in this Legislature. We need some changes that actually do make MPPs more relevant. In the federal Parliament, the opposition actually controls many committees. They actually have the majority on committees, so those committees can be used to force the government into real, concrete action on issues.

Here, there are two kinds of people who sit on the government side—and I don't in any way say this to be hard on them or to be disparaging in any way: those who are in cabinet and want to stay there, and those who will do anything to get into cabinet. If the Premier's office tells you, "Vote this way," that's exactly the way you'll be voting. We have to ask ourselves if the parliamentary system is actually working when the power is completely centralized in the Premier's office. We have a House here of 107 members, but the government holds the majority. In fact, that ensures that they will win a vote on every bill if they choose to push it. So the power of the government is not in question, but exercising that power wisely and

fairly is something that is incumbent on the government. The more powerful the majority, the more incumbent that principle becomes. Instead of treating this institution and the role of MPPs in a more valued way, they've used that power to in fact neuter MPPs even further.

It is a complete misrepresentation of the issue when the government says that members of the opposition don't want to go to work at 9 o'clock in the morning. First of all, I would suspect that most, if not all, members are here and at work by 9 o'clock every morning, because it's an opportune time to return telephone calls, to deal with issues that have been left from the day before because debate has gone into evening, to get back to constituents and to return e-mails, voice-mails or whatever. It's an opportune time because they all know that we also have strategy sessions in the morning to prepare for question period. The implication that members of the opposition don't want to go to work is simply false and unfair, and it misrepresents what actually goes on in the life of members of this Legislature. Quite frankly, it demeans all members for the Premier to imply that you should be at work at 9 o'clock. I can assure you that most members are. I won't even speak about myself, because I'm not here to talk about what I do as a member. The people of my constituency have already passed judgment on that.

The changes that the opposition are asking for are not really different, from a timetable point of view, from what the government has proposed, save for one very significant difference. We're saying, have question period at 1 o'clock, set, period, finished; no diversion from that. It's 1 o'clock every day, Monday to Thursday. It's not going to change the amount of time for debate that this Legislature is allowed to have, because instead of question period being in the morning, the debate will be in the morning. What it does change, though—it's sure going to change the afternoons for the ministers of the crown in this province. Can you see it? At 2 o'clock it'll be just a line-up of limousines outside Queen's Park: "Hey, we're getting out of here. The other boys, they have to work." The other folks are going to be working in the afternoon, finishing up on debate. But the ministers: Sorry, 11:45, go for lunch and then they'll be out of here. If we had question period at 2 o'clock, they'd still have to be in in the afternoon. How many ministers do you think we're going to see in the Ontario Legislature in the afternoon under these new standing orders?

1620

Hon. Jim Watson: You have to have two.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, we're going to have two, but that will be it.

Do you know what the morning question period could be good for? It could be good for the golf courses. The ministers will have those cars waiting outside and maybe schedule a meeting at the local 18-hole golf course—a great place to meet some of their clients or something, you know? That's what it could be good for. There is nothing wrong with having question period at 1 o'clock in the afternoon.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Madam Speaker, I distinctly heard the member for Essex address me in a derogatory fashion. In fact, he said, "What an idiot." I ask the member for Essex, who is not in his seat, to either withdraw that—

Interjection: He's not here.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm sorry, the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Speaker, I'd ask for the clock to be held, please.

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: The member is erroneously accusing members who aren't even in this House of saying things. I would ask that the member withdraw those accusations and know who the members of the House are.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): That isn't a point of order.

I did not hear the comment by the member from Essex, so I ask the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke to continue with his debate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker.

There will be no issue with the amount of time we spend in this chamber if the question period is at 1 o'clock in the afternoon as opposed to 10:45 in the morning. For the government to package it in any way that demeans the members of this Legislature or questions their motives is simply wrong.

I'll talk about the motivation of the government. When the government makes changes to the standing orders, there's one motive involved, one motive they're following; that is, how do we make it more difficult for members on the opposition side and easier for members on the government side?

That's what these standing order changes are about. They talk about them being family-friendly—I spoke about this last night. It just speaks to the nearsightedness of the government House leader when he says, "Look, we're going to have members being able to go to their son's hockey game or to a dance recital, or have dinner with their family."

I'd like to ask any member who doesn't live in Toronto if that's an option, whether you sit here at night or not. It's just not an option. In fact, in the case of myself, I cannot take a plane or a train to the riding. There's only one method of getting home, and that's driving. There's only one way to get back to the riding, and that's by vehicle.

The Premier was going on about rapid transit yesterday, and I'm just wondering when he's going to bring rapid transit to Renfrew county. When is the subway going to be running in Renfrew county? I don't expect that to happen in the near future. But one thing they could do, if they really wanted to respect rural people: Perhaps they could give some of that gas tax to rural municipalities. They should give it to the rural municipalities that don't have public transportation systems, just as the federal government does.

I have second reading of a private member's bill next Thursday, and I hope that all the rural members on that side of the House will support that. Otherwise, I hope they can go home to their communities and say, "We don't support you getting gas tax from the provincial government."

Hon. Jim Watson: You're taking money away from Pembroke—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Municipal Affairs says, "You're taking money away from Pembroke." In fact, the city of Pembroke supports this resolution, because, you see, they don't see the world in quite the way that the Liberal cabinet does, where the Liberal cabinet wants to make sure they can defend their interests in Toronto. People in rural Ontario know that everybody should get a share of that tax, just as the federal government believes. You see, there are no options in rural Ontario, but that's for next Thursday.

I want to just go over some of the changes that the government has proposed in this amendment and see what the problem would be. I do want to talk about the address of the Minister of Municipal Affairs earlier. On the one hand, he said that the members of the opposition don't seem to want to get to work here, but on the other hand, he says we really need to spend less time here and be out in the communities. I'm just not sure what side of that argument he's on. Do you want to spend less time here and be out in the communities, or are you accusing the members of the opposition of not wanting to be here?

Our timetable that we proposed goes from 9:30 to 6, Monday to Wednesday, and 5:45 on Thursday. The other thing the government is doing is they're taking private members' business and shuffling it off to Thursday afternoon. Well, who is going to be here on Thursday afternoon?

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Health Promotion both say they'll be here. We'll be checking that out on Thursday afternoons to make sure that they're here for private members' business, because I'm sure that they wouldn't say that if they don't intend to be here on Thursdays. I'm looking forward to that.

I can tell you that unless it's a private member's bill that is of particular interest to me, I won't be here. I'll be heading home to my constituency. I'll be getting on the road to Barry's Bay on Thursday afternoon. If it's question period, that's another story. But if it's not a private member's bill that I have a particular interest in or one that another member has specifically asked me to speak to and support, I will likely be getting into my car and getting home to the good people of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke on Thursday afternoon, as opposed to waiting for private members' business.

There's no reason to move private members' business from the morning. It's an important part of this Legislature, and we shouldn't be giving it short shift by

throwing it out there on Thursday afternoon. Take a look on a Thursday afternoon under today's standing orders, what we work under today, and see how many people are here at 5 o'clock on Thursday afternoon. Hardly enough for a quorum many times, I'm sure.

So I think that those kinds of changes are something that the opposition has, in a very positive way, put forth in these amendments. They would make this chamber work just as well as under the proposal by the government.

The government just seems to want to have that question period in the morning so that cabinet ministers won't have to be around in the afternoon. What else could the motive be? What would be wrong with having those 1 o'clock question periods? We haven't heard a single constructive reason why that question period should be at 10:45 as opposed to 1 o'clock, other than for the members of the cabinet and government to throw things at the opposition and say that the reason they don't want question period at 10:45 is that they don't want to work in the morning. That's wrong; that's misrepresentative. They should have a more fair outlook about how they want to go through these changes than to make those kinds of statements with regard to the opposition and their willingness to be in this chamber.

So there are certainly some positive amendments that have been put forth by the opposition through this resolution, and—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Not afraid of hard work.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Transportation is making further interjections, but I'm going to choose not to respond to that one—unless he's implying that I'm afraid of hard work, and I suppose everybody in this chamber is entitled to their opinion. That's the nice thing about opinions: Everybody's got one. Some of them I don't happen to share, nor am I compelled to, but I certainly respect the fact that the Minister of Transportation has an opinion. In fact, I find him to be one of the most likely ministers to be in this chamber, and one who quite frankly does make a somewhat—if I could characterize it—weak attempt to actually answer questions sometimes, although it's not—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh, that's not fair.

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Hon. James J. Bradley: I was going to use it in my campaign literature.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, I'm not going to give you that much. As we know, it is the custom on the other side of the House to not answer questions. In fact, why we call it question period—I know that's an old joke; it isn't mine, but it's a standing order joke, I suppose, or a standing joke—when it isn't question period is a mystery to everybody, because it's certainly not—

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's question period; it's just not answer period.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, thank you very much. The member for Welland is always there to help me out when I start to get a little bit—

Interjection: Muddled.

Mr. John Yakubuski: —muddled. Yes, it's certainly question period, not answer period. In my four years, I can't say that I have ever gotten an answer. Although I must say, four times a day, when the Liberal members throw out the lob balls, they get an answer. Mind you, those questions are not the toughest to answer either. They should be under "short ministerial statements" as opposed to questions and answers, because they have nothing to do with anything that is troubling the citizens or the people of Ontario. It's just an opportunity for the ministers to pump—it should be called "pumping chests time" or something.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I've got to tell you, John O'Toole answered one of my questions when he was in government.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I remember that too, but he did it in the video part of it, not the audio.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's right. They picked it up on video.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Yes, I heard about that. I wasn't here then.

I want to wrap up because I am running out of time. Unlike the Minister of Health Promotion, I'm going to be keeping a close eye on that clock so that I don't actually get cut off early. I know that whenever I'm up here, the members of the government would wish that I would be cut off early, because I don't think they like what I say sometimes. At the same time, we have a responsibility here in this Legislature to ensure—you see, on the one side we've got the owl and on the other side we've got the eagle. I pay attention to those, because it is our responsibility as an opposition, particularly when the government is trying to cloud the issue and give the people the impression, as the minister says, "Well, it's all inside baseball"—he's right. Most people don't care what's happening between 9 and 6 o'clock. They just want to know that the government is working on their behalf and that the opposition is doing its job to ensure that the government is doing their job. I'll continue to do my job.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Some members have said that they're pleased to take part in this debate. I want to say at the outset that I'm actually troubled by this debate. I'm troubled by this debate because, if anything, I think that in the modern world of British parliamentary democracies, we need to put in place more measures to hold governments accountable, particularly majority governments.

The reality that I think most of us who have been around here for a while recognize is that in a British parliamentary system, a majority government can almost behave in a dictatorial fashion. They can literally bring forward any legislation they want. They can use their majority to force through that legislation. They can shut down committees. They can even shut down the Legislature when it's convenient for them and simply adjourn the Legislature and go home. Majority governments in a British parliamentary democratic system today can do a number of things to avoid scrutiny by the media

and to avoid scrutiny by the public, to literally have their way.

So I find it troubling that a government would bring forward changes unilaterally and simply say, "Well, we're going to change the way this place operates, we're going to change the way a majority government is held accountable, and we don't care what the opposition says."

I've heard a few government spokespersons say, "Well, people don't understand this, or people don't pay a lot of attention to it." You're right: A lot of people don't get into the intricacies of how a democracy works or how the mechanisms are put in place and have been put in place over time to ensure accountability and to ensure responsibility. A lot of people don't get into the intricacies of that; that's something we should get into. As members of this Legislature, we should care about this. But I think what we're seeing is government members who are going to be pretty self-serving on this, who don't care, really, if an element of accountability and an element of responsibility is removed from this place.

When I first was told that this is what the McGuinty government intended to do, that they were going to bring forward, unilaterally, some proposed changes and, specifically, that they were going to fool around with question period, I got in touch with someone who knows a lot about this place. In fact, he's written a book about this place. Professor Graham White at the University of Toronto has written this book, *The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis*. Part of the reason I called him is because he spent rather a good part of his life working here, being an analyst and a critic of how this Legislature works. He spent six years in the Clerk's office at the assembly, working mostly on procedural issues, and this is a procedural issue.

"After leaving the assembly, I kept a close connection with Queen's Park, serving, for example, as director of the Ontario legislative internship program and conducting research on the assembly. As recently as this month, one of the current MPPs was kind enough to tell me that he found my book, *The Ontario Legislature: A Political Analysis*, quite useful when he was first elected a few years ago."

I asked Professor White for his analysis of the rule changes as presented by the McGuinty government, and this is what he had to say: "I am firmly of the view that the proposal to move question period into the morning represents a serious and entirely unnecessary threat to the effectiveness of the assembly in performing one of its key functions, holding the government to account."

This is not somebody who has a partisan axe to grind. He is not someone who self-identifies as a Conservative, an NDP or a Liberal. He is somebody who has spent a lifetime either working here or analyzing and writing about this place. To say it again: "I am firmly of the view that the proposal to move question period into the morning represents a serious and entirely unnecessary threat to the effectiveness of the assembly in performing

one of its key functions, holding the government to account.”

Then he goes on, and I think it’s worthwhile for all members to hear what he has to say:

“To be sure, question period ... remains by far the most effective mechanism for fostering government accountability and, by extension, for keeping the people of Ontario aware of their government’s successes and failures. It is most certainly the only legislative proceeding to which the media pays regular attention.

“In short, a vibrant, effective question period is essential to the health of democracy in this province.”

The government says, “Oh, we’re simply moving the time.” This is what he has to say about that:

“Moving question period into the morning would severely undercut its effectiveness. I understand that the government’s initial plan was to begin question period at 9 a.m. While the revised proposed starting time of 10:45 is somewhat better, it would still leave the opposition in a very difficult position. Effective questions require planning, research and reflection. This is difficult enough when question period occurs in the early afternoon but would be all but impossible for a morning question period. It takes time to find and process the facts, to locate and contact experts inside and outside government, to solicit information and opinion from people and organizations affected by government and to organize this material into a coherent question period strategy. Some of this could be done the day before but much of it cannot; question period’s effectiveness and its attraction to the media depend heavily on immediacy. Many important questions originate in stories published in the main newspapers, all of which are published in the morning, but it takes time to confirm material from the papers and to conduct the further research necessary for effective questioning.”

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He finalizes this by saying, “Let me make three final points. First, while I do not have exhaustive information about all British parliamentary institutions, I am aware of basic procedural rules in all Canadian parliaments—federal, provincial, and territorial—as well as those in the UK. In all, question period is routinely held in the afternoon.”

The final quote: “The opposition has a duty to perform—not for nothing is it termed ‘Her Majesty’s loyal opposition’—and the government should not take actions, such as it has proposed in this instance, that would, for no good reason, significantly hamper the opposition in performing its important duty of holding the government to account.”

I say again: This is someone who has spent essentially a lifetime either working here as a clerk, working in the interns program or as an academic studying this institution. He says very clearly that what the McGuinty government wants to do here is wrong. What the McGuinty government wants to do here is anti-democratic. What the McGuinty government intends to do here is to undermine one of the basic democratic institutions: question

period, when the government has to respond and has to at least try to avoid answering the question. It’s very clear.

But he’s not alone, because recently—in fact, on April 22—the Premier received a letter from the very journalists who work here, the journalists who try to keep the citizens of Ontario informed about what their government is doing or not doing. This is what the head of the press gallery had to say:

“At the annual general meeting of the Queen’s Park press gallery today, members”—meaning journalists—“voted unanimously to raise concerns about the government’s proposed new legislative calendar.

“Gallery members”—meaning journalists—“have grave misgivings the new schedule would limit access to cabinet ministers and the Premier by reporters in the following ways:

“(1) The fact that post-question-period scrums would take place shortly before noon would make it difficult, if not impossible, for broadcast reporters to attend while they are filing for noon newscasts or doing live hits at noon.”

So the very people who are supposed to try to keep the public informed are saying that what the McGuinty government is doing would make it difficult for them to do their job.

“This creates an unacceptable gap in access between broadcast and print reporters.

“(2) On cabinet and caucus days, reporters now have two opportunities to scrum ministers, in the morning and again in the afternoon following question period. The new schedule would cut this access in half.

“The gallery considers that any reduction in access would undermine the function of a free press at Queen’s Park.

“(3) Losing the access to ministers after question period in the afternoon makes it more difficult for reporters to get reaction to new stories breaking later in the day.”

The question I have to ask is this: The reporters who are part of a free press say that this is a bad idea. Someone who worked as a clerk in this Legislature, who worked in the internship program and who now is an academic studying this institution, says that what the McGuinty government is proposing here is wrong, will undermine democracy and will undermine the capacity of people to hold a majority government accountable. If the journalists who are part of a free press say that this is a bad idea, and if an academic who has made his life studying this place and working in this place says that it’s a bad idea, why would the McGuinty government be doing this?

They’ve offered up some silly notions. They call it family-friendly. I think anybody who thinks for a moment would see that this is an absurd attempt at a cover-up. They’ve tried to say that this is going to make the place run more efficiently.

This is also about accountability, holding a majority government accountable. The public has an interest in that, as well, in holding a majority government ac-

countable. Whatever might be achieved in efficiency—and I don't see anything in these rules that would achieve anything by efficiency—should not be accomplished at the expense of democratic accountability. And that should concern all members of this Legislature.

Some government members like to think they're going to be in government forever. Let me tell you, that just ain't so in Ontario. I would urge government members to be thinking about the day when you are in opposition and you are trying to hold a majority government accountable and you are trying to ensure that a free and democratic press can also be positioned to hold a government accountable.

The media say that this is a bad idea. Academics who study this say it's a bad idea. So why would the McGuinty government be trying to do it? Let me offer you a plausible answer. It's not an answer that respects democracy, but let me offer a plausible answer. The McGuinty government would like to make question period less significant. The McGuinty government wants to engage in news management. So if you put question period at a time when it's very difficult to do research—imagine: Are you supposed to call somebody up at 6 a.m. and say, "Are these the facts as you understand them?" How many people do you think you are going to get at 6 a.m.? How many people do you think you are going to be able to contact at 6 a.m.? It makes research very, very difficult. It makes research, in some cases, almost impossible.

So here's an attempt to make question period less significant, to make question period more inconvenient for the media. It then gives the government more time in the rest of the day to engineer other media stories, hold another photo-op here, hold a photo-op there, and basically undermine question period as an effective mechanism to hold majority governments accountable. From the media perspective—and I think they are right on this. They also have to do research, they also have to check facts and they also have to do preparation work in order to ensure that good questions are asked, meaningful questions are asked, effective questions are asked, where you could do good follow-up. They say very clearly that this proposal is going to take that away.

I just want to deal with something else that I find very troubling. Despite the government's protest, this whole proposal to change the time of question period, to change the rules, was not part of a joint proposal with the opposition. Government unilaterally, on a Sunday, announced this and tried to spin it as somehow being family-friendly. The government has not budged one iota on its original position. It came here with the intention that it was going to undermine question period as an effective, democratic institution, that it was going to undermine the effectiveness of question period, and the government has continued with that agenda. I just say to government members—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Have you filed your receipts? What about the member for Welland?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Somebody who used to be the Speaker apparently wants to get in the debate. I would suggest that he can wait his turn if he thinks he has something reasonable to say now.

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The fact of the matter is, I think it's bad for democracy when governments unilaterally say, "We're going to change the rules of democracy," and that opposition members and opposition parties and even the press who cover this place have no say and their views are unimportant. I believe it is very dangerous for democracy when majority governments start to proceed in that way.

Here we are, Speaker. Academics who have studied this institution, who have studied other British parliamentary democracies, say that this is an exercise to undermine question period and to undermine the opposition's capacity to hold majority governments accountable. The media, the journalists who cover this place, say the same thing.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Not all.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Minister of Transportation says, "Not all" of them. It was a unanimous vote of the press gallery, I remind the Minister of Transportation, to write a letter to the Premier saying that this is a bad idea, that this undermines democracy and it undermines a free and democratic press.

I find this very troubling. I find it very anti-democratic. I think, frankly, it will not only undermine question period but it will undermine this institution, which is important for democracy. I think it will result in majority governments in the future being able to avoid scrutiny, accountability and responsibility, and none of that is good for this institution and none of that is good for democracy in Ontario.

Let me just finally say that this is not about whether we start debate at 8 a.m. If the government wants to start debate at 8 a.m., I'm fine with that. I was part of a caucus that forced the former Conservative government to sit around the clock, 24 hours a day, for 10 days. I was quite happy to come in here at 2 in the morning and start my shift, I was quite happy to come in at 8 in the evening and start my shift and I was quite happy to come back for question period when it would normally appear.

This is not about when the House sits or doesn't sit; this is about when question period, the most effective accountability mechanism that we have in a parliamentary democracy, is held. Both the academics who've looked at what the McGuinty government is doing and members of the free press who've looked at what the McGuinty government is doing condemn this as an anti-democratic act by a government that is desperate to avoid scrutiny by the people of Ontario.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I will be sharing my time with the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and the member from London-Fanshawe.

I would like to take this opportunity to bring some clarity to what happened yesterday while the Standing Committee on Social Policy was meeting. I am very

disappointed at the unfair accusations that were made in the House today by some opposition members—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I just interrupt the member and remind her that the debate is on the standing order changes, the motion that's before this House now, and that should be the focus of the member's remarks.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: That is on the amendment, and one of the opposition members has brought that forward. I'm answering to that and to the bill.

What I would say is that if the opposition members had just asked me, I could have told them why I left the room. I want to make it absolutely clear that I support the bill. That's why I voted in favour of it today. I did not receive any phone calls from the Premier's office. I also want to make that clear.

If the opposition is so committed to family-friendly, then they could have just asked me and I would have told them that I was assuring myself that my daughter was okay. I thought the discussion was still going on and that's why I left. So I find these accusations really insulting to me. I don't think this is an example of co-operation and I don't think it's an example of family-friendly or the way we should be acting between colleagues. Not everything should be twisted into partisan politics. We're all human beings, we all have loved ones, and we owe to each other at least the decency to find out the facts before we comment.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I want to also speak on the whole issue of “family-friendly.” As the member for York South–Weston has said, “family-friendly” is important in all of this. We are trying to create a Legislature that allows all members to address those family needs they have. That isn't just about—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Bullshit.

Interjections.

Mr. Jeff Leal: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I just heard something from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke that I believe is certainly unparliamentary.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the member from Peterborough. I also heard the remark from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and would ask him to withdraw it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Now I've lost my train of thought here. I was talking about how “family-friendly” means different things to people in this House. As chair of the Liberal women's caucus—we often think of women as being the ones who nurture and concern themselves about family. But we have members of all genders who are involved in their families. They're involved with their children. It's not just about the three-year-olds or the twins; it's also about parents. There are members who are taking care of aging parents. There are any numbers of reasons that we concern ourselves around families. We need to make sure that the Legislature adjusts itself.

For many years I've believed that change is sometimes welcome and change is sometimes resisted, but the one thing that holds true all the time is that change is inevitable. That is what's happening here: We are changing the Legislature.

I look back at some of the history, and the member from Welland mentioned tradition yesterday. We've gotten rid of some traditions. We had a tradition in this House that the women wore hats. We had that tradition till 1960. We wore hats. There was a tradition during the Depression that married women were let go from the public service. We also had a situation even in the 1950s where women who were married were given positions only as long as there was no one who was single and available to do the jobs. As soon as they found someone who was single, then the married woman was let go. We've had changes in traditions, then, and those things are very important for us to do.

As far as changing the time and getting up early, well, I was a night person until I married a farmer, and then I started getting up early. One thing that really clinched it was when my kids were born, and anybody who has children knows that you never sleep in when you have kids. That just stops right there. So for me, starting early is actually the best time of the day. I actually think clearly and I'm working and I can speak. When we go into evening debates, the quality of the debates deteriorates, and I find that very frustrating. I think we should be working in the daytime, when all of us are at our best.

Some of our constituents watch us, and I know they watch us in the evenings, when they have the reruns, so to speak, of the Legislature. They don't care whether or not we start at 9 in the morning. As a matter of fact, when people ask me what time we start in the House and I say “1:30,” I always feel a little embarrassed. I always feel like I have to add the fact that I've got meetings in the morning and I'm doing something, because in my riding most people start their day early and they are working at 9 o'clock; they've been at work for a couple of hours by that time. To them, the idea that I don't really start in the House until 1:30—they kind of look at me as if to say, “What else are you doing? You don't do anything until 1:30.” I feel I'm always apologizing for that.

1700

Yesterday in the debate, the member for Simcoe–Grey started talking about question period. He said that the media couldn't report at the noon news. That is exactly what's happening now. The media does not report on question period at the noon news. If we start doing question period at 10:45, they will have an opportunity to report it during their noon news. I fully expect that any of the hot issues of the day will probably be the lead questions and there'll be lots of time for the media to do the research and get those things out so that they become the lead item in the noon news. There's more than enough opportunity there for all of us to see.

I think, when we talk about the media and the motion they put forward—I notice they don't condemn it, they simply say they're concerned. Of course they're con-

cerned; aren't we all? Whenever there is change, we look at it very carefully, and so do they and so we all should. Change, like I say, is inevitable, but it should be carefully planned and we should make sure that it serves the purposes that we all need it to.

I want to be able to say that I can spend more time in my riding. I find, having been elected in 2003, my greatest fear is losing touch with my constituents. I find that when I'm at Queen's Park, as much as we spend the time in debate, I feel very insulated here. I talk to my constituents by phone, I read the local press, but I don't really know what life is like for my constituents until I get back there on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Sometimes the best way for me to get in touch with my constituents is to actually go shopping. Now, that can be a bit of a dangerous thing as we all know; I've been known to get stuck in a grocery store for two hours, as I try to make my way around and I keep getting stopped by constituents. On the other hand, it also tells me a lot about what their lives are like on a day-to-day basis and what's really worrying them. They're very frank; of course, in a rural area, we all know our constituents are very frank. They tell us what's really on their minds. Those things are very important to me.

I find, having been on municipal council, that we spend an awful lot of time here debating. The quality of the debate, as I say, worries me at times. Having been on municipal council, we used to do a number of items at a meeting. We made multiple decisions at one meeting. Now, we can be here and we are debating for days.

After a while, the debate becomes redundant. The points have been made and nothing new is being added. At that point, I often wonder, "Why don't we stop?" Why don't we, at that point, stop and make a decision? Why do we feel we have to add all these hours and keep debating when, at the end of the day, we pretty much all know how we're going to vote? The most critical things that can be said are said early in the debate. After that it's mostly redundant. There are occasions where there may be an issue where there's a lot of need for discussion, but we often have situations in bills where all the parties essentially agree. So the debate is actually just a formality. We could be doing more work than we are.

I feel it's important for us to start looking at how we can be more responsive. We have constituents who work in a world where things move very quickly, decisions are made quickly and they're responding to what their situations are on a very quick basis. We have just-in-time on so many things, and yet we come here and things slow down. For our constituents, we are always trying to say, "Well, it takes time in government." Does it really have to do that? Does it really have to take that much time?

I think we could be moving things along much better. I think, with the new scheduling and the new standing orders, we're going to start to address those kinds of things. We're coming into the modern world, where we start to work in the same way that our constituents do.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I don't recall there being a request to split the time with London-Fanshawe. Could I ask the clerks? Did you hear that request? I believe the member for York South-Weston asked to split the time with London-Fanshawe. Do the clerks have that on record? All right, member for London-Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity after all to speak and support the motion before us this afternoon. It's an important issue. I remember, when the House leader brought it to us at the beginning, I wasn't in support of this idea of changing the whole schedule.

Then, after we debated this issue many different times—and I guess it went to the opposition many times, two or three times—it's been adjusted, taking Friday out of the whole proposal, because, as you know, all of us come to this Legislature from Monday to Thursday. After being here, we look forward to going back to our constituencies and dealing with our constituents, reporting to them, listening to them and trying to deal with their issues every Friday. Especially for the people who are not from Toronto, they have difficulty commuting on a regular basis.

After we adjusted this proposal to be in some kind of way family-friendly, I listened to the opposition members opposing the proposal, despite all the changes done to this proposal. I hope they're not opposing it because it's proposed by the government. But I listened to their debate, their ideas, the issues and concerns about many different issues being mentioned by the opposition leaders and then the leader of the third party when he spoke 20 or 30 minutes ago about the reason he's opposing this proposed change to the standing orders.

I don't see any logic of the whole debate and concern. He was talking about democracy and talking about people not being able to do research in the morning. I want to tell you, I know the media will love to have the news before 11 o'clock on a daily basis. When we do announcements in London, we make sure we do the news before 11 o'clock; otherwise it won't be reported on the same day.

Therefore, I think it's a good opportunity for the media to participate and also to report the news about the most important issues we deal with in the House before 11 o'clock every day. I think it's very important. I don't see any problem for the media or the leader of the third party or the opposition to be upset about. I think it's a very important structure and we should all look forward to these changes.

Also, we are here on a daily basis, as the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex said before me. It's very important, as she said, that when people ask us, "What do you do during the day? What time do you start question period and come to the House?" we say 1:30. So sometimes we struggle. What do we do from 8 o'clock in the morning to 1:30 in the afternoon, especially if we come from an area where everyone wakes up early in the morn-

ing, 7 or 8 or 9 o'clock, and they go to work from 8 to 4 or from 9 to 5?

Why do we have to go against the whole structure of traditional working days? I think that I'm very productive in the morning time. By evening time, all of us—especially after supper—get tired. You have no energy to debate the issues or add to the intelligent debate that goes on in this place. So after being exhausted all day from coming at 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning, you want to go beyond 6:30 or 7 o'clock for a debate? I think it won't be productive.

Many of the media report that the debate that goes on in this place—Madam Speaker, you are one of them. You voiced your concern about the kind of debate that goes on in this place at night, because people are exhausted. People have been here all day. They cannot add intelligent debate to the whole issue, the whole spectrum of this place.

I think it's very important for all of us. When we wake up in the morning, we are fresh and able. We can gather ourselves and our mind and our intellectual abilities to add something productive to this place. I think it's a very important issue, a very important motion, and I think all of us should support it and give it a try. I don't know why people are against trying something new.

I was looking at the research here. We're not trying to impose—we're not trying something new. This place has experienced changes more than 25 times, changes to the whole procedure of this House. So I don't think we're trying something new here. We're trying something in order to enhance the ability to debate. We're trying something to engage more members to be able to debate in this House.

1710

We're increasing the private members' bills time. As you know, we have 107 members in this House. According to the procedure we have right now, I cannot present my bill in this session. I have to wait until 2009 because the number is so huge and only two items are being debated every week. So I don't have a chance to present my bills within the yearly session. I have to wait another year to get the chance to present my bill. I think this change will allow me and many others in this House to get the chance and ability to present their bills, because the number—my private member's bill will be increased by 50%.

Debate time: We're talking about democracy. The leader of the third party talked about democracy because he thinks this proposed motion will go against the democratic way we've experienced for years and years in this place. I think it will not. There's more time for debate. People will get a chance to debate many different issues. Especially when you debate in the morning, you have more of an ability to debate because you are fresh and with a clear mind, instead of debating at night-time.

We can also talk about research. You can research many different items the day before. I think, in many different jurisdictions—

Mr. Michael Prue: When do you get your morning newspaper? The day before?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: No, but the newspaper or the magazine—

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: It comes early.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: —comes early in the morning. By 5 or 6 o'clock, we receive all the papers, and we have the ability to go through them and read them, and we construct our instruction according to the news happening that day.

Journalists and media people work around the clock, 24 hours. They always have news. There are always issues going on around the globe. There are always issues going on in the province of Ontario. They always have the ability to gather the information and report it.

It's very important for all of us to understand that the changes might enhance the debate in this House, might enhance question period, might enhance the ability for many people to participate, and also might enhance the ability of our members to present their private members' bills. As I mentioned to you, according to the procedure we have, I have to wait until 2009 to present my private member's bill. It's not good for me, but it's what happened around the schedule. We have to take times, and if we present two a week, according to the schedule, I cannot present mine until 2009. When we have the changes, I think it will increase the time for all of us to have a chance to present private members' bills. I think it's a very good and important initiative.

We have to change our way of thinking. We cannot go on and on and on as we did in the past for many years, because everything changes. The technology changes. Now we live in Internet times. We live in a time of advanced communication where technology can wire the information to us within less than a second. I remember when I started here and we didn't have a way to communicate with outside of this place. Now we have BlackBerries that can receive information in a second. We can refresh our information every second.

Technology is advancing and our ability to communicate with others is advancing. According to the advance of technology and the way we communicate with others, I think the whole tradition and the whole procedure in this place should change—according to the change in technology and communications. That's why I'm supporting this. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I approach this debate with some degree of disappointment because with this motion, we see once again the power of the Premier's office usurping the authority of elected members of provincial Parliament.

With this motion, we see once again the will of the people, as articulated by their elected representatives in this place, supplanted by the will of unelected, anonymous but increasingly powerful operators in the Premier's office. This should be a troubling trend for all members because it strikes at the very heart of our parliamentary democracy.

That system of government, which has served us so well, which is superior to all others in the world and has

stood the test of time, is gradually being eroded in this place. It's being replaced by a more autocratic form of government which lacks legitimacy because its principal players have been elected to no public office whatsoever and probably couldn't get elected if they tried.

This motion, which the government House leader on Monday told us was part of an effort to make the Legislature more family-friendly, does nothing of the sort. As my friend the member for Kitchener–Waterloo said on Monday, serving as a member of the Legislative Assembly is not, and never will be, particularly family-friendly. The very nature of our responsibilities and the public expectations and demands on our time mean long hours on the job and frequent, and often unhappy, absences from home for most of us. I'm not complaining about this because I feel very privileged to serve as a member of provincial Parliament and I continue to wish to serve my communities in this capacity, as I have for many years now. However, I must acknowledge that my continued service in the Legislature implies time spent away from family, which I can never get back. My family support, especially from my wife Lisa, enables me to continue this service; without it, I would not be here. I find that, by and large, my constituents are very understanding when I tell them that I can't attend an event because of a family commitment.

Most of us, Madam Speaker, as you know very well, work very, very long hours most of the time. For example, yesterday morning I was home in Fergus. I got up, had breakfast with my family before they went to school, and I left for Queen's Park at 10 to 8 in the morning. I arrived here at Queen's Park at about five minutes past 10, five minutes late for our caucus meeting because of the traffic. Our caucus meeting went on for several hours, as it tends to do. I had time for a 10-minute walk during the lunch hour and then I worked in my office until the House began sitting at 1:30 p.m. I was in the House for question period, as I normally am, and I took the chair at 3:30 as one of the presiding officers. We sat until 6:10 p.m. I then went back to my office, called home, dropped in at the Niagara reception for some hors d'oeuvres, which was the only dinner that I had, and took the chair again at 6:45 p.m. We sat until about 9:15 and then I went back to my office and made phone calls until about 10 p.m. That was my day—about 14 hours. I know that for most members this is not unusual.

This morning, I rose at 6 a.m. and drove to Burlington for a breakfast event hosted by the regional chair of Halton, featuring Justin Trudeau as the guest speaker. I drove back to Queen's Park and have been working here ever since, and I have to plan to be here at least until 9:30 tonight because I have House duty and, of course, the House is sitting tonight.

This account is intended to demonstrate nothing more than two random days as an MPP. Again, I'm not complaining, because I feel privileged to be here, but I must say, I took great offence to the Premier's statements of last week, which implied that MPPs only work when we're in the chamber. Those comments were offensive to

every member of this House. If the Premier really believes this, it must be based on his own personal experience, which would seem to suggest that he thinks he does nothing important or he's not working unless he's in this chamber. If that's the case, Ontario is in worse trouble than we in this House ever thought possible. There would have been a simpler way of beginning to effectively address the concerns of MPPs who need to balance family and work, as we all do.

The central problem is the government's routine use of unnecessary night sittings. If today, we, as a Legislature, had simply turned down the government's daily motion for night sittings, as we could have done, would the government have collapsed? Would an election have been triggered? Would someone have had to resign? Of course, the answer to all these questions is no. We just would have not sat tonight. There would have been a panicked emergency meeting in the Premier's office and they would have scurried around, trying to decide what to do, but we would have sent a message that the government relies on the day-to-day assent of the Legislature as a whole, opposition members and government backbenchers alike. We would have said that that assent cannot be taken for granted.

It's my understanding that a few years ago the Yukon Legislative Assembly solved this problem in one stroke by ending the day's sittings every day at 5:30 p.m., initiated and supported by the women MLAs from all parties. This reform has worked, giving Yukon MLAs the option of spending more evenings with their families when their work is done at the end of the day. We could do that here, too.

I've listened to the speeches given by the government members during the course of this debate, especially those who were elected for the first time in 2003 and 2007. Many members appear to support this motion because they think it will end night sittings. I want to remind them that during the 35th Parliament, my first and formative years in this place, from 1990-95, the House almost never sat nights, except in the final two weeks of a legislative sitting, typically in June and December. The government, in the end, always got its business completed.

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In the evenings, the members close enough to home went home. Those of us from outside Toronto who had to stay in the city would occasionally get together for a game of euchre in the caucus office, if we weren't working late. Friendships were forged, often across party lines, based on our common experience of serving the people of Ontario. There is no reason I know of that this kind of collegiality couldn't experience a rebirth in 2008 if we simply ended the night sittings.

In her remarks on Monday in this debate, my colleague the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, our party's House leader, said that the government's motion fails the twin litmus tests of “enhancing the accountability of the government to the Legislature and also improving the effective and efficient functioning of the Legislature.” I

wholeheartedly agree. This surely is the most important aspect of this whole debate, not how the standing order changes affect any individual MPP's current scheduling routine today.

To this point in the debate, the government House leader has yet to establish that this motion enhances the accountability of the government to the Legislature or improves the effective and efficient functioning of the Legislature. The government House leader is a lawyer, but on Monday when he spoke to this House he would not have convinced any judge that his motion meets these objectives.

Yesterday, the legislative press gallery intervened in this debate in a highly unusual but completely appropriate manner. Unanimously, they voted to tell the government that this motion is not in the public interest and makes it more difficult for them to perform their vital role, which is to explain and interpret the goings-on here for readers and viewers, the voters of Ontario.

I have the letter and I need to read it into the record because apparently some government members have not seen it. It's addressed to the Premier of Ontario and the government House leader:

"At the annual general meeting of the Queen's Park press gallery today, members voted unanimously to raise concerns about the government's proposed new legislative calendar.

"Gallery members have grave misgivings the new schedule would limit access to cabinet ministers and the Premier by reporters in the following ways:

"(1) The fact that post-question-period scrums would take place shortly before noon would make it difficult, if not impossible, for broadcast reporters to attend while they are filing for noon newscasts or doing live hits at noon.

"This creates an unacceptable gap in access between broadcast and print reporters.

"(2) On cabinet and caucus days, reporters now have two opportunities to scum ministers, in the morning and again in the afternoon following question period. The new schedule would cut this access in half.

"The gallery considers that any reduction in access would undermine the function of a free press at Queen's Park.

"(3) Losing the access to ministers after question period in the afternoons makes it more difficult for reporters to get reaction to news stories breaking later in the day.

"We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns with you."

It's signed by the president of the Queen's Park press gallery.

Of course, when this letter was publicized yesterday in question period, the government House leader was flippant, derisive and made light of the concerns of the press gallery. I'm sure that he will, at some point in the future, regret his performance in the House yesterday.

Before I close, I want to point out the fact that this motion completely overlooks the importance of standing

committees of this Legislature. The committees weren't even an afterthought in this discussion. Their function has been absolutely ignored. Yet the committees are the formal mechanism whereby the public has a direct opportunity to address members of the Legislature, of all parties, through public hearings, providing this crucial link between the elected and the electors. This again demonstrates the government's motion contradicting the basis of parliamentary democracy.

When this debate concludes, as MPPs we have a choice—indeed we have a responsibility—to defend parliamentary democracy and send the government House leader back to the drawing board. If this motion fails, the government won't fall. In fact, the government has no mandate to change these standing orders. There was no commitment in the Liberal Party's platform during the election campaign to do this. Liberal candidates, I dare say, didn't run on this as part of their agenda. Most of them, I suspect, don't like these changes any more than we do on this side of the House.

Let's hope that the Liberal members understand the full extent of the power that they have to influence this debate. Let's hope that they give serious consideration to what they are hearing in this House with respect to this discussion, because they have it within their power to withdraw their support from the government on this measure. If they don't show up for the vote or if they sit in their places and abstain on this vote, we have a chance of going back to ensuring that parliamentary democracy is upheld and that the government House leader has a second opportunity to deal with this matter.

Of course, we as an opposition party would be more than prepared to participate in that discussion. We believe that it should be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly so as to ensure that all members of this House have the opportunity to do so.

I want to add one additional thought, and it's something that I said many times when our party was in power to anyone who would listen, when we were contemplating changes to the standing orders. Just remember that some day your party will be in opposition and you may very well regret the consequences of the standing order changes that look so tempting today.

Mr. Michael Prue: I was called in to this debate. I hadn't anticipated actually having to speak to the motion until tomorrow or the subsequent hearing. But there are many things that I would like to say. I've listened intently to the debate, both here in the last hour or so and before that on the television as other people were standing up and speaking. It's routine, I think, in this place for government members to stand up and laud a bill which I think, quite honestly, is not well understood.

It harkens back to a time in my youth when I was, of course, much younger, and I considered myself quite an expert in terms of rules of order. In fact, I taught rules of order in the university, I taught them to people on student councils, I taught them to people who were holding public meetings, and in fact, I taught them for the union the Public Service Alliance of Canada, in some of their

courses, so that people would understand how to interject in a debate, how to have themselves heard, how the democratic process worked, how they would have an opportunity to stand up in a convention or just in a meeting and use the rules of order in order to get their thought process out and onto the record.

I believed with all my heart in those days—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: Sorry. I'm having a hard time hearing myself here with the conversation. If you would be so kind, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I please ask that the members keep the side conversations down to a respectful level. I can't hear the member speaking. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I believed with all my heart that this was part of the democratic process, that people learned the rules and there were rules of order in order to allow free and open debate to take place. As I said, I taught those principles, and I taught them throughout the whole period of time that I was involved in the trade union movement.

It was upon, however, my election to the East York council in 1988 that my eyes were opened to the real purpose of the rules of order. The real purpose was not, as I had always understood, to encourage and to allow open debate. It was not to extend or to time-frame how long that debate would take place. I was asked a question by the clerk at the borough of East York when we first got there—what we thought the purpose of the rules of order were, why we have these rules of order in place. Of course, thinking myself somewhat the expert who had taught them for many years, I instantly said, "To allow for debate, to make sure that there was debate." He looked at me sternly and told me I was wrong.

You can imagine my shock when he told me I was wrong, and he went on to quote probably the all-time expert on parliamentary rules and procedure going back centuries. It was a guy called Bourinot. He quoted Bourinot and he did so brilliantly. He said that the purpose of the rules and procedures was to prevent the tyranny of the majority from inflicting its will upon the minority. That may sound very arcane and very difficult, but it was a very simple process. The rules exist to allow that the minority has a chance to be heard and to voice its objections. He went on to explain, quite frankly, that it was easy for the majority, who had the votes, who were in control of the situation, to impose their will at the end of the debate. That's what happens here in this Legislature each and every day on each and every vote. All the government members stand up and vote for every single government bill, and sometimes some of the opposition members will vote with the government, but usually not. The government, at the end of the day, will get their bill passed.

1730

But the importance of this Legislature is not for the government to pass its bill. The importance of the Legislature and of the rules of procedure is to allow the

minority to be heard. That's the importance of all of this. Anything that takes away the minority's right to be heard, even in a small way, diminishes the greatness of our parliamentary tradition. I owe a great deal to Bill Alexander for pointing that out to me. I have tried throughout my 20 years as an elected politician at the municipal level and then later at the provincial level to always make it possible for everyone to be heard, even those people whose views were different from my own, even from the minorities, because they had a right to be heard and a right to be considered.

I look at this motion and I look to it in terms not of whether it's going to speed up the process, not whether the government's going to get its bills through faster, not whether there's 6.5 hours of debate time or whether it's all on one day or another day. I look upon it as to how this is going to affect the opposition in getting its point of view across, in being able to challenge, in order to make the opposition do its job properly.

When I look at that, I have to tell you, I believe this motion fails. It fails in several regards, and I'm going to deal with them, but the one fundamental place where it fails is around the issue of question period.

Now, some of us wonder, I think, why we come here some days, with the bickering back and forth. We wonder what question period is about. We wonder whether the debate that is taking place here tonight may be important, or as important or less important. But in every Legislature in the world that follows British parliamentary tradition, all of them have question period, and question period is to hold the government to account.

I think others may have spoken of this, but we have here from Professor White, department of political science, the University of Toronto, a three-page letter, and I'd just like to quote a couple of paragraphs, because I honestly believe they are essential to what is happening here today.

After establishing his credentials as being a non-party person, having no formal or informal associations with any parties, having lectured Liberals at their conventions, having lectured Conservatives at their conventions, and having provided this letter to the New Democratic Party—that he is, above all, an academic and not a person who belongs to a particular political point of view—he writes:

"Most of the proposed changes strike me as either positive or at least open to debate as to their advisability. However, I am firmly of the view that the proposal to move question period into the morning represents a serious and entirely unnecessary threat to the effectiveness of the assembly in performing one of its key functions, holding the government to account."

Opposition members—and I have to explain this to my constituents all the time—don't put forward bills, except maybe private members' bills. They don't drive a government agenda. They are here to react, they are here to criticize, hopefully in a helpful way, and they are here to ensure that the tyranny of the majority does not always

hold sway, that there is a profound check and balance against that tyranny.

I think what Professor White is trying to say is that the role we have to play will be diminished, and I am in agreement. He goes on, on the second page, to write:

“Effective questions require planning, research and reflection. This is difficult enough when question period occurs in the early afternoon, but would be all but impossible for a morning question period. It takes time to find and process the facts, to locate and contact experts inside and outside government, to solicit information and opinion from people and organizations affected by government and to organize this material into a coherent question period strategy. Some of this could be done the day before but much of it cannot. Question period’s effectiveness and its attraction to the media depends heavily on immediacy.”

I listened to some of the speakers on the government side standing up and saying this is okay, there’s still going to be debate and it doesn’t matter what time it takes place; they were opposed to the rules, but now that several modifications have been made to the rule changes, they’re now very happy. But I want to tell the members, particularly the members of the government who have never sat anywhere except on the government side of this House, that you have to understand the difficulties inherent in putting a meaningful question before one of the members of cabinet. It is a difficult process that begins very early in the morning.

I am one of those who arrive here generally before 8 o’clock each and every day. I arrive here just before the press clippings come. I wait for the press clippings to arrive at my door, I greet the deliverer if I’m here, say hello in the morning, look at the press clippings and determine what is in the news that day. The person who prepares the press clippings gets here, I understand, before 6 o’clock and is required to read the newspapers and to make photocopies and produce hundreds and hundreds of press clippings packages, which are delivered throughout this building. That person starts at 6 o’clock in the morning. He or she starts at 6 o’clock in the morning, and there may be more than one; I’ve never gone up to see how many are actually involved in that. But for it to be at my door, it’s at 8 o’clock.

At 8 o’clock I read them and at 9 o’clock we go—the NDP, at least; I think in the Conservative Party as well—to a meeting. We call it a question period meeting. We discuss among our colleagues what potentially will be asked that day. We lobby for questions in particular places. That’s usually resolved around 9:30 or quarter to 10. I’m seeing the minister over there shaking his head because he’s been in opposition too. That’s the way it works. At about quarter to 10 everything is determined—the question that’s likely to be asked—and then it’s turned over to the researchers. The researchers take the raw data contained in the newspapers and other things and they go out and start contacting experts, witnesses and people who are concerned about it. Then the questions are usually finalized, formalized and put back

on my desk, if I am one of the questioners, around noon—noon to 1 o’clock. I get the question and look at it and, as the member asking the question, I make revisions to it to make sure that I’m happy with it. And at 1:30 we stand up here and we ask the question. What is going to happen when question period is at 10:45? Can the same process be used that’s been used here for 150 years?

The newspapers are not going to be delivered to Queen’s Park any earlier than 6 o’clock. The researcher who researches them is going to research them and probably deliver them to my door at 8, although that poor researcher may have to be in here at 5:30 or 5—I don’t know whether too many newspapers arrive before that—and is going to have to put it on my desk. The caucus staff is going to have to be here upon the arrival at 8 o’clock, if not before, and is going to have to sit down and come up with a question or group of questions and the entire caucus is going to have to be there. I don’t mind being there if it’s 8 o’clock. But the difficulty arises when the 45 minutes is spent until about quarter to 9 or 9 o’clock to arrive at what kind of questions you’re going to ask. You then have a period of time of approximately an hour or an hour and a half to develop the questions, look at your experts and try to make some rational case out of it to come into the House and ask the question.

I will tell you what’s going to happen—the same thing that the professor also warned us about in his letter, and he writes:

“Second, when I worked at Queen’s Park, the House sat on Friday mornings and question period began at 10 a.m. The proportion of silly, pointless questions was high and the proportion of substantial questions low; indeed, this was one of the reasons that Friday morning sittings were abandoned.”

1740

If the government expects the opposition to do its job—or maybe they are hoping we don’t do our job—then let’s all do this at 10 o’clock in the morning or 10:45 in the morning, to make sure that there’s no research, to make sure that the staff hasn’t had a chance to properly digest the news of the night before or to call up people who don’t start work until 9 o’clock or 10 o’clock in the morning to get advice as to the propriety of the question. Let’s have them all shoved around and let’s have members come to the office and ask the same kind of silly, pointless questions that were asked on those Friday mornings in this Legislature before the practice was abandoned. That is the reality of what is going to happen.

I’m not going to argue with government members whether 9 to 6 is a good thing. I think 9 to 6 is a great thing. I’m not going to argue that night sittings are useless because I’ve sat in this place and seen the calibre of debate, which descends hugely after 6:45 on many occasions. I’m not going to argue that people don’t go out to some of the receptions and come back and give speeches that are a little different than they may have given in the afternoon. I’m not going to argue, “Let’s not stop at 6.” I think stopping at 6 is a great thing. I’m going to vote to stop at 6.

Mr. Peter Kormos: At 6:30.

Mr. Michael Prue: Even 6:30, I don't care; some time reasonable. But what I am going to ask you to do is to reconsider the placing of question period at 10:45. It will mean a great deal, not only to the opposition in fulfilling its duty but I would suggest it will also mean a great deal to some of the cabinet ministers who have to reply. I've not heard this from anyone but I'm just saying that cabinet ministers also have to be briefed. The cabinet ministers are also briefed from the morning news on what to expect.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Some are better briefed than others.

Mr. Michael Prue: Some are better briefed than others, but they also will have to be briefed. How can they anticipate or how can their staff anticipate the questions? They get the same press clippings we do. They have to do the same kind of research to find out if it's something the cabinet minister may not have been aware of. They're going to have to stand up and defend a policy that they may not be fully aware of at 10:45 in the morning, and I'm sure that's going to make for some fun in here. I'm not sure that the government backbenchers who are standing up lauding this process are thinking carefully about their colleagues who have to field these questions. I think maybe they want to see some of the sport of all this, because they will be looking over there and saying, "Look at that cabinet minister squirm. Look at that cabinet minister not able to answer that question. Maybe that cabinet minister won't be there long. Maybe I can aspire to that position."

I have a really difficult time. I've got three minutes left. I just want to talk about a couple of other points.

If the government sees fit to move question period to the afternoon, I think this whole debate will just—

Mr. Peter Kormos: We can stop it right now.

Mr. Michael Prue: I think it'll stop right now. I think everyone else in this room, everyone on this side of the House, will concede that 9 to 6 is a good thing, that there are some flaws in it but we'll work on the flaws. We can change a few things around, but the really big issue is question period, for the opposition and I dare say for cabinet ministers who are going to have an increasingly difficult time answering pointed questions and maybe ones that aren't very well researched.

I have the whole issue about committees too, and this has been canvassed a little. I looked at this new schedule and I don't know when we're going to hold committees. Have any people on the government side thought about when we're going to hold committees? Right now we hold committees primarily in the mornings when there is nothing going on in the House.

Mr. Peter Kormos: They haven't amended the standing orders with respect to committees.

Mr. Michael Prue: There have been no amendments to the standing orders in terms of committees, so I don't know when they're going to meet. It appears to me that if the committees stay exactly where they are without an amendment to the standing orders, we will be holding

committee hearings during question period. It will mean that people will have a choice of either being in the House to listen to the questions and understanding what is happening or they will have to be in committee. The committees will have a very hard time having people show up. There will be difficulty for quorum.

I know on my committee today, we went until nine minutes after 10 until we got quorum. We came within one minute—

Mr. Peter Kormos: The Liberals didn't show up?

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes. Unfortunately, we came within one minute of having to cancel the meeting. The two deputants in regulations and private bills had come, one from Barrie and the other from Ottawa. We almost had to cancel on them.

I can only see this happening worse when the committees are during question period, when they're during voting periods. This has not been amended. I don't know when we're going to hold them, other than times when the House is in session. We deal with that now in the afternoon on some occasions, but it's after question period, it's after petitions, and it allows for a couple of hours. This is very dangerous. This government is going headlong into this and there has been no thought process on how the committees are going to operate.

In my last 30 seconds I want to talk a little bit about the ability of people to attend. It's going to make no never mind for people to attend question period if you live in Toronto. But I challenge somebody who wants to come down from Ottawa or somebody who wants to come from Sault Ste. Marie. They're going to have to come down the night before, with all the inherent expense—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Or from Kenora.

Mr. Michael Prue: —or from Kenora, from wherever, with all the inherent expense—taxies, hotel bills and everything—to participate. The level of participation outside of Toronto will decline enormously.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I will be sharing my time this afternoon with the member for Eglinton–Lawrence. This is a very important debate on this motion because it goes to the heart of how this place functions in the province of Ontario and how we must be accountable, not only the members of the opposition, but the government of the day, regardless of political stripe.

I listened with interest to the leader of the third party this afternoon. He talked about this being bad for democracy and bad for accountability. I want to remind people that the leader of the third party today was the Attorney General in a government from 1990 to 1995 that barely sat in the last year of that mandate. To come here and talk about accountability, when he was a senior member of a government that virtually did not sit in the last year of their mandate, goes to the heart of what is sometimes wrong with this place. People forget about that history and forget about accountability when they have the privilege of being in government.

This is a very serious matter and in the next couple of weeks I will take the opportunity—one of my good

friends in Peterborough is a former Speaker here, the Honourable John Turner. Mr. Turner was a Progressive Conservative member here from 1975 to 1977 and again from 1981 to 1987. He had the great privilege of being Speaker from 1981 to 1985. From time to time, I take the opportunity to discuss changes that happen with Mr. Turner and I will be seeking out his view on this reform package because he's a man with great experience. He had a wonderful reputation when he was here, both as a member of government and in his time as Speaker.

I don't particularly share the concern that moving question period to the morning will have less accountability. In fact, I think in many ways it will have more accountability. There will be a question period starting at 10:45 in the morning. There will be the traditional scrum after question period concludes. Then there will be an opportunity, I think more hours throughout the day, to hold the government to the fire, which is a term that the opposition uses quite frequently. So from that perspective, I think it might enhance accountability.

The other issue is that question period here at Queen's Park is longer than any other Parliament within the British Commonwealth. It's important that we have a very full question period, when the government of the day, the ministers of the crown, are accountable for what's happening in government.

I find the research question interesting, too. I've watched Westminster in terms of their question period. In that particular forum, of course, their questions are written, so there's advance notice. In that forum, the opposition and the third party—there are three parties in Westminster—obviously do their homework, in terms of doing the preparatory work that is necessary to provide those questions, in an advanced state. So to say that you can't get that work done—it will certainly present some challenges in terms of how one is going to prepare for this new question period, but I do believe it will address accountability.

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The other question is, this is just a pilot project. The government House leader, the Honourable Michael Bryant, had provided in writing notification to the official opposition and the third party way back in February of this year to start up a process to look at parliamentary reform and the operations of this House. In fact, I do want to stress to the public listening this afternoon that this is a pilot project. There will be opportunity to see the changes put in place, to see how they work, and to get feedback on how it might be changed going down the road.

One of the things—and this is just a personal view of mine. One of the things I think we need to adopt here in Ontario is the conference mechanism that is used in the United States Congress and Senate, where in fact the parties come together in that particular situation, where there are only two parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, they look at a variety of bills, and they say, "Yes, we have a consensus on these particular bills, so we're prepared to fast-track these bills through both the

American Senate and the House of Representatives under the conference mechanism." What that allows for is the opportunity to bring back the filibuster when there is a piece of legislation in the American Congress that is particularly contentious, when members have an unlimited time to speak.

If you look at the history of this great Parliament, there have been some very interesting filibusters on a whole variety of issues. I happen to think that sometimes that enhances democracy, when you can have that opportunity to really discuss issues of importance.

You can go back to certainly the mid-1960s, when the Attorney General of the day, Fred Cass, brought forward a rather contentious police bill. The opposition at that time of course used mechanisms at their disposal to derail that piece of legislation. In fact, the Attorney General of the day under Premier Roberts had to resign. So as a government member, I think it's important that we make sure there are an extensive number of opportunities for the opposition to hold the government accountable. That's what a healthy democracy is all about. I don't see these particular items that the government House leader, Michael Bryant, has brought forward at this time as diminishing the role of the opposition.

I want to say that I think there are a number of items in here that will allow the opposition to do its job in terms of accountability, such as extending the number of hours of debate. I think there is an opportunity, as we move forward with this reform package, to have some discussion about how committees operate. I think there is a real opportunity, again, to enhance the role of committees. Committees do wonderful work reviewing legislation, but I think there is an opportunity to look at the function of committees. But you have to make a start. The motion that has been proposed by the House leader is indeed a start to having a fulsome discussion about how this place operates.

You know, I'm struck, when I'm at home in Peterborough, by the number of people who actually do pay attention to what goes on here. You've often heard the term "inside baseball" used, and I don't think, often, that that's a fair way to describe the viewing public who take the time, each and every day, often, to tune in. They take advantage of local cable networks that display the proceedings of the House. I know as a former city councillor I was always struck by the people who watched city council in Peterborough to get insight on the happenings of the day, issues that are involving them, and I think that's appropriate to keep a democracy healthy. Again, I want to stress that it is a pilot project.

I've had my time, and I'll allow the member from Eglinton-Lawrence—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. The member from Eglinton-Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to say that the member from Peterborough really has his feet on the ground. He has his heart in Peterborough. He loves his city. He loves the people he represents and you can see it every day that he speaks, that he reminds us of that. I think he represents a

lot of the members here in their compassion and connection with the people they represent.

Sometimes, those of us who sit here and have sat here for a number of years forget that all of us are here because of that connection with our community. We sometimes undermine our own connections because we at times trivialize the things that we do as MPPs. That's why I think that this discussion on this motion gives us an opportunity to reflect on how many good things we can do in this Legislature and how to best do those good things.

Like many of us here on both sides of the House, there are a number of us who are skeptical about any change. We ask the question, "Why does it make it any better for the people we are trying to serve?" I think that a lot of us on the government side have asked a number of good, tough questions to see how this new proposal would work.

I certainly don't believe there is any perfect parliamentary legislative system. You go anywhere in the British democracies, in the British parliamentary system, and there is a wide range of opinions on which is best. But I think in putting forward these reform motions, there's an opportunity to reflect on what we do here and maybe to find ways of making some of the processes better.

Certainly, we don't expect that everyone will agree with all the changes proposed, but generally speaking, many of the members have said quite candidly that they agree with almost everything except the timing of question period. That seems to be the big stickler. I can't say 100% that I think it's the perfect time for having question period, but there is an opportunity for us to look at this change over the next number of months and to see if it is working and if there can be suggested changes and improvements.

It is totally different, because I was reflecting on sitting here through—and the member from Trinity–Spadina will recall—those days of Bill 26, when the dramatic, unprecedented, draconian changes were made

to every aspect of government, and there was no motion. There was no debate. It was brought in in the middle of the night, shoved down our throats, and basically, the attitude was "my way or the highway."

The ironic thing is that my good friends opposite were there on this side at that time when those draconian changes came forward. They never spoke out and even whispered an objection at that time. They never even got an opportunity like we have to at least debate this motion.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: They all drank the Kool-Aid, as my good friend from Oshawa said. He knows that. They drank gallons of the Mike Harris Kool-Aid on all this stuff.

But it was heavy. It was heavy-duty, draconian downloading of legislative change. This is in no way even close to the draconian changes made then.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: You know that, member from Trinity–Spadina. It's nowhere near the draconian days; you know that.

This is a modest, moderate attempt to make changes. I'm not saying they're perfect, but at least let's look at them. I will hopefully be discussing some of these and see how they work. Some may be good, some may be bad, but at least it's a reasonable attempt to change that deserves a good evaluation period.

I think that every number of years we have to maybe look at making adjustments. We can't always maintain the status quo totally. Some adjustments may be necessary, and that's what this is about. So I think it's an opportunity for us to maybe revitalize ourselves a bit, look at these changes, and come back in a number of months and see if they're working. Then we'll see.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. It being 6 o'clock, I declare this House adjourned until 6:45 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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