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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 30 April 2008

Mercredi 30 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 30 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 30 avril 2008

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FIRE IN BOWMANVILLE

Mr. John O'Toole: Less than 24 hours after the announcement of the tragic layoffs at General Motors in the car and truck plant, my hometown of Bowmanville was hit by a fire that damaged four stores in the historic area of downtown. Thankfully, there were no injuries. However, the blaze left 15 people homeless. The businesses directly affected by the fires were Lange's Photo, the Second Chance shop, which is an extension of Bethesda House women's shelter, the Vienna Café, a new business of a young person, and Leisure Lady, a very popular women's shop.

Our thoughts are with all those who suffered any loss in terms of their home, business, employment and property at this difficult time, as was expressed by Mayor Jim Abernethy and council.

I would like to pay tribute to Fire Chief Gord Weir and the Clarington fire department. About 60 firefighters were on the scene in moments, assisted by colleagues from neighbouring Oshawa and the Ontario Power Generation plant at Darlington.

I'd like to thank the Salvation Army and the Red Cross for coming to the aid of those who are victims of the fire. Thanks also to the Durham regional police and emergency medical services.

The Bowmanville business improvement area, the BIA, has a popular event scheduled for this weekend. The Maplefest will go ahead as planned. Bowmanville is also this year celebrating its 150th anniversary of the founding of the town of Bowmanville. None of these will be obstacles for such a strong community.

Fire is just another piece of bad news for the local economy. However, I am confident that now more than ever the community will work together to support the historic downtown of my community. You can't keep a strong community down. I extend my sympathies.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mike Colle: Why is it that all Ontario workers pay into employment insurance yet most of them cannot collect EI when they need it most? EI ought to be the first

line of defence for workers when they lose their jobs, but the system is failing Ontario workers, as only 75% of them qualify for EI benefits. That's because the federal government's eligibility rules ignore the reality of the times and assume that jobs in this province are easy to get.

An Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers. The average Ontario worker, in fact, gets \$4,000 less by way of employment insurance than Canadians living in other provinces.

We want the federal government to ensure that our unemployed workers qualify for the same types of benefits as unemployed workers in the rest of the country. If one does not qualify for EI, they're also ineligible for many job retraining programs.

The federal government's employment insurance surplus, on top of that, now stands at \$54 billion.

In 2006, the average regular benefit paid per unemployed person in other provinces was \$9,000; in Ontario, it was \$5,000.

On behalf of Ontario workers, we must demand that the EI system be changed and reformed to stop the discrimination against Ontario workers. We need to end the discrimination and unfairness so that Ontario workers get their EI benefits when they need them most. I hope we can all stand together and ask the feds to reform the EI system for our workers.

PLANT CLOSURE

Mr. Tim Hudak: As you saw yesterday, I asked the Minister of Economic Development and Trade what offers the McGuinty government had put on the table to help save CanGro in Niagara, and sadly, there was no answer. Obviously, that meant that the province had put no offers on the table to save that plant. Niagara residents and Hamilton businesses—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I'd ask the member from Niagara to withdraw the comment that he made, please.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I apologize.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Now Niagara and Hamilton businesses have been given that picture of tender fruit trees being pulled out of the ground as we speak.

While the Minister of Economic Development and Trade was in China cutting a ribbon, they were handing

out the pink slips at CanGro to 100 workers, and now 150 tender fruit growers are without a market.

The McGuinty government gave \$50 million to Magna while its CEO, Mr. Stronach, was making \$40 million. The McGuinty government gave \$14 million to Sanofi Pasteur, a French multinational that has \$4 billion in international sales. Yet they couldn't find a single dime to save these jobs at CanGro in Niagara or support a bid by Niagara business people.

Dalton McGuinty locked this land into the greenbelt and then he walked away. He is an absentee landlord.

I ask the minister: Are you going to work to save this plant? And if you've already given up on CanGro in Niagara, then help the tender fruit farmers and displaced workers find new jobs and new markets for our tender fruit growers.

PLANT CLOSURE

Mr. Peter Kormos: At the end of the day, the real issue is that the peach and pear producers in Niagara wouldn't need to change their crops if this government had come to the table meaningfully in support of maintaining CanGro as the only fruit processing plant in Canada east of the Rocky Mountains. This government came to the table, but they didn't bring anything with them.

Minister Papatello skedaddled off to China on the walking tour of the Great Wall while her bureaucrats sat silent and empty-handed at the so-called negotiating table, knowing full well that she was scuttling the deal by doing that.

There were two legitimate buyers of that operation: workers with a great deal of experience, and fruit producers who need a fruit processing plant. It is the last chance that this government has to save a made-in-Ontario, value-added fruit processing plant.

For this government to somehow explain or complain that there was nothing they could do is beyond naive.

This government wants a greenbelt? A greenbelt ain't worth the paper it's written on if you don't have farmers earning enough working their property, producing peaches and pears to sustain that property as agricultural land.

This government talks about jobs? It just turned its back on over 120 hard-working women and men down in Niagara at CanGro.

This government wants to see made-in-Ontario agricultural produce? Hell's bells, what we're going to be stuck with is imports from China. Maybe that's what the minister was doing over there—arranging for those imports—because there ain't going to be no fruit produce coming out of Niagara.

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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES STRATEGY

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I rise in the House today to speak about how the McGuinty government is helping

Toronto youth from high-needs neighbourhoods gain valuable work experience. Some of the youth in these neighbourhoods may not always have the same opportunities as other teenagers. These opportunities are crucial when young people are attempting to gain confidence and skills for the workplace.

This summer, the McGuinty government is investing \$5.3 million to help approximately 850 youths from high-needs Toronto neighbourhoods through Ontario's youth opportunities strategy. This investment will help youth in Scarborough–Rouge River with summer job programs, youth outreach workers and school-based programs to help youth in conflict with the law.

One hundred of the job opportunities will be with the Toronto Police Service in the areas of forensic and traffic safety units. I am quite confident that the young people involved in Ontario's youth opportunities strategy will enjoy success this summer, simply based on the great results that came out of the strategy in Scarborough–Rouge River over the last three summers. In fact, almost 1,800 summer jobs were created in cities across Ontario as a result of this strategy. This strategy provides a chance for our youth to make a positive contribution to their communities and a chance to explore opportunities for their future so that they can be successful.

LISTOWEL ECONOMY

Mr. John Yakabuski: While the Minister of Research and Innovation opts for a photo op at the Economic Club, things are not going well in Listowel, a small town of only 6,500 in his riding, where about 500 people who have spent their lives producing products for the Campbell's Soup Company will soon find themselves on the proverbial soup line. Five hundred people are losing their jobs and their livelihood, but the truth of the matter is that we're talking about financial devastation for at least twice that number.

The statistic does not speak to the fact that most of those laid-off employees have families who will be seriously affected; to the chicken farmers who have one less place to sell their product; and to all other businesses in Listowel, because up until now, they've been doing business with those 500 families.

The residents of Listowel—indeed throughout Ontario, where we've recently seen losses of more than 190,000 manufacturing jobs—are asking themselves if the Premier has any advice other than what he recently offered to Hamilton residents, saying, "Steel yourself; this too shall pass." This is cold comfort to those who are undoubtedly experiencing one of the darker days of their lives.

I have asked the Premier to face up to the fact that our economy is deteriorating under his leadership, and that he needs to take action to protect other towns in rural Ontario from Listowel's fate. This was a factory that for 48 years made food to nourish Canadian families.

The Premier's policies are hitting us all below the belt. His suggestion that we tighten it simply won't help.

Campbell's might want to reconsider the viability of producing soup in Ontario, because the way this government is leading us, there will soon be thousands more on that soup line.

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: There are some great high schools in my community of Oakville. We're joined today by the students from McLaughlin College; they're in the west public gallery.

I'm rising today because I recently attended one of the student breakfasts at another great high school, St. Thomas Aquinas, in my riding, put on by a group called Halton Food for Thought. I was completely impressed with the nutritious foods and substantial information that this organization is providing students. Research studies support the existing link between nutrition and a student's ability to learn. The Halton Food for Thought program promotes a connection between healthy food choices and improved learning. Student accessibility is a top priority for the organization. Regardless of income level, all students participate in the programs. The program highlights the importance of healthy food choices and always includes a fresh fruit or a vegetable.

I'd like to recognize all the individuals and businesses who make this program a reality: Catherine Wright, the program coordinator, and Pat Daly, the principal at St. Thomas Aquinas. I also applaud all the businesses that help sponsor the program and note the role played by the region of Halton, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The recent 2008 budget provided an additional \$32 million over three years to double funding for the student nutrition program in Ontario. We're really making a difference, and I thank all those involved.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to rise today during Education Week to highlight some of the amazing progress that has been made in my riding of Mississauga-Brampton South. Thanks to our government's investments in public education, investments made by this government have led to a dramatic reduction in class sizes across Ontario, and schools in my riding have benefited greatly.

Shortly after this government took office, only 11% of primary classes in the Peel District School Board were operating with 20 or fewer students. Today, 91% of Peel primary classes have 20 or fewer students.

As a former educator, I can tell you that a smaller class increases a teacher's ability to meet the needs of individual students in their classroom. This allows each student to reach their full potential. I am proud to be a part of a government that has reduced class sizes and has helped our students reach higher levels of achievement across Ontario.

JACK GORDON

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: We have a very important employee to recognize today: Sergeant Jack Gordon has worked with the Legislature of Ontario since 1974.

Applause.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Sergeant Jack has spent the past 34 years in ensuring the safety of government employees and the citizens of Ontario. Jack began his journey as a special constable with the Ontario Government Protective Service. He advanced to the rank of sergeant and served in both operational and administrative portfolios before leaving to join the security services at Queen's Park in 1997.

Over the years, Jack has touched the lives of hundreds of officers, many of whom serve to this day on police services across our great province. Jack has forged a legacy of professionalism and dedication that makes us all proud to be his friend and colleague. Jack has been a moral compass for the men and women of the law enforcement services for which he has served. His commitment to the values that guide him remain intact after 34 years. Jack's philosophy of treating those around him as he would like to be treated has served him well.

Best of luck, and enjoy your retirement, Jack. You will not be forgotten. Bonne retraite, Jack. Merci.

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 Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Katch Koch): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill Pr5, An Act respecting Madresa Ashraful Uloom.

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

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments, dated April 30, 2008, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI FAVORISANT UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE

Ms. Best moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 69, An Act to protect children from second-hand tobacco smoke in motor vehicles by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act / Projet de loi 69, Loi modifiant la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée pour protéger les enfants contre le tabagisme passif dans les véhicules automobiles.

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 minister for a short statement.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I will make a statement during ministerial statements.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO STRATEGY

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I am pleased to be here today to tell you about the government's proposed Smoke-Free Ontario Amendment Act, 2008. The primary objective of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act has always been to protect people from second-hand smoke, both in enclosed public places and enclosed workplaces. This amendment would extend province-wide protection to children in motor vehicles.

An important part of our government's efforts to promote health and prevent illness is the smoke-free Ontario strategy. Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario: It kills 13,000 people every year in our province. Thanks to the hard work of this government and our partners, Ontario is recognized as having one of the most comprehensive smoke-free strategies in North America.

Legislation is an integral part of this strategy. Equally important are our investments in programs and public education to prevent children and youth from starting to smoke and to help smokers quit. In our government's last mandate, we had a commitment to reduce tobacco consumption by 20%. I am happy to say that we have surpassed that target. The proposed amendment that I am bringing forward today builds on our commitment to a healthier, smoke-free Ontario.

Children are especially vulnerable to second-hand smoke because they have higher respiration rates than adults. In addition, their respiratory, immune and nervous

systems are still developing. A study by the Ontario Medical Association found that children exposed to second-hand smoke are more likely to suffer health problems such as sudden infant death syndrome, asthma, cancer and cardiac diseases later in life. Exposure to second-hand smoke among children has also been linked to lower cognitive test scores compared with children who were not exposed.

There is growing evidence that second-hand smoke in vehicles is particularly harmful. Recent studies suggest that the concentration of toxins in vehicles can be up to 27 times worse than in a smoker's home. A 2005 Health Canada study estimated that in a one-month period, 144,000 children in Ontario were exposed to second-hand smoke in vehicles.

Over the past year, health stakeholders have increasingly called on the government to act. In fact, several of those partners are in the east members' gallery today. I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and welcome them: Rocco Rossi from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario; George Habib and Joanne Di Nardo from the Ontario Lung Association; Michael Perley, Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco; Carol Timmings, Ontario Public Health Association; Irene Gallagher and Rowena Pinto, Canadian Cancer Society; and Gail Beatty from the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

On December 6, 2007, David Oraziotti, MPP for Sault Ste. Marie, introduced Bill 11 with solid backing from the OMA, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the lung association. Thank you once again, Mr. Oraziotti, for bring this issue to the attention of the public and myself.

Ontarians are strongly supportive of a ban: 80% of Ontarians, including the majority of smokers, have said they support this type of legislation. The medical science is clear: Second-hand smoke is dangerous to our children's health. As with seat belt legislation, we owe it to our children to keep them safe and healthy. Based on our experience of high compliance with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act and the support of Ontarians, we anticipate a high level of voluntary compliance.

In closing, I want to acknowledge all of our stakeholders for their ongoing commitment to this very important cause. The people of Ontario have spoken, and we have listened. Now we are taking action. Ontarians are ready for legislation to protect our children from being exposed to second-hand smoke in motor vehicles. This is about the safety and well-being of our children, our future. It is about making families healthier. It is about a smoke-free Ontario. I hope you agree.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING SUBVENTIONS POUR LES ARTS ET LA CULTURE

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: Speaking about the success of Ontario's creative industries and building on that

success is a key priority for the McGuinty government. As the Minister of Culture, I am proud to champion Ontario's talented arts and culture community.

Our artists create vibrant communities. They help us exchange ideas, images, stories and experiences that reflect our province and who we are as a people.

Nos artistes créent des communautés dynamiques. Ils nous aident à échanger des idées, des images, des histoires et des expériences qui sont le reflet de la province et de sa population.

That's why I was pleased to announce yesterday in Kingston that the McGuinty government is investing an additional \$20 million over four years in the Ontario Arts Council. In our government's recent budget, we announced that we are increasing the Ontario Arts Council's total annual funding to almost \$60 million by the year 2009-10. This builds on already substantial funding increases in the past four years. By next year, funding from the McGuinty government to the OAC will have increased by 140%. Indeed, our government is committed to helping Ontario's arts and culture community succeed by investing in the OAC. Last year, the OAC funded almost 900 arts organizations, and this funding reached over 1,200 artists in over 200 communities across Ontario.

Arts and culture are more than just a cultural benefit to our province; they are also a major economic driver in communities across our province. Ontario's cultural industries generate nearly \$20 billion to the provincial economy, and in the last eight years, Ontario's entertainment and creative industries created over 80,000 new jobs in our province.

In this context, it is clear that arts and culture are a vital part of the new, innovative economy, so investing in arts and culture is part of our government's five-point plan to strengthen the economy and enhance Ontario's competitiveness. Through key investments in growth sectors such as the entertainment and creative industries, the government is bolstering our economy and enhancing the quality of life of all Ontarians.

I am pleased to tell you that in the past 10 years, employment in the entertainment and creative cluster has grown at twice the rate of the overall Ontario economy. In fact, Ontario's cultural industries are the third largest in North America by employment, after California and New York. Culture is also a major driver of tourism, generating more than \$4.5 billion annually across Ontario.

The McGuinty government is taking bold steps to ensure that this sector continues to thrive, and in our government's recent budget, funding to the Ministry of Culture has been increased by \$63 million over the next four years.

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Le gouvernement McGuinty prend des mesures audacieuses pour veiller à ce que ce secteur continue d'être florissant. Le récent budget du gouvernement prévoit une augmentation de financement du ministère de la Culture de 63 \$ millions au cours des quatre prochaines années.

This increased funding allows our government to support organizations that improve the quality of life for Ontarians both culturally and economically. By investing in Ontario's arts and cultural industries, we are creating more opportunities for our talented artists to flourish and succeed at home and around the world.

MUNICIPALITIES

LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Hon. Jim Watson: Later this week, representatives from Ontario's small urban municipalities will gather in Collingwood. I look forward to joining these representatives, along with my colleagues David Caplan, Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, and George Smitherman, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, at the provincial ministers' forum. During their annual conference, they will be conducting sessions on each of the four pillars of sustainability.

The interconnection of environmental responsibility, economic viability, social equity and cultural vitality is key in the building of sustainable communities.

Sustainability has been embraced as a core long-term planning principle by both the province of Ontario and Ontario's municipalities. Since taking office, our government has taken a number of steps to support sustainable development. We've created the greenbelt, we have produced a new building code with higher energy efficiency requirements, and we've helped develop the growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe. Nous avons apporté des réformes à la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire et à la Commission des affaires municipales de l'Ontario, et nous avons publié une nouvelle Déclaration de principes provinciale.

We're now implementing \$1.4 billion in new funding to build strategic infrastructure. This includes the \$450-million municipal infrastructure investment initiative, or MIII, a program designed to help communities restore and revitalize public infrastructure.

This strategic infrastructure funding is at work for several OSUM members. Penetanguishene, for instance, is receiving \$1.5 million for reconstruction of Church Street. Cobourg is getting \$537,000 in funding for the restoration of its Midtown Creek sanitary diversion project. Brighton is getting \$1 million for an arena expansion and community centre project.

The infrastructure funding has been appreciated by municipal leaders across the province. For example, Hanover Mayor Kathi Maskell told her local paper on April 4, "The province obviously recognizes the value of investing in our community and that's great news for us."

Sustainability has been embraced as a core long-term planning principle by the province and by municipalities of all sizes, urban and rural, north, south, east and west.

Everyone is learning how best to balance environmental, social, cultural, and economic imperatives. Many municipalities are currently dealing with how to best implement new authority given to them through amend-

ments to the Municipal Act and under recent Planning Act reforms.

Pour la première fois, elles peuvent songer à exiger si l'extérieur des nouveaux bâtiments devrait intégrer des éléments de conception comme les toits verts ou les panneaux solaires.

Municipal councils, when approving new subdivisions, may take into account how plans maximize energy efficiency and require that they incorporate public transit routes.

The concept of sustainability has become an important principle in long-term community planning. Planning for sustainability is now regarded as good business practice. Good land use planning is not only about economic factors. Social, environmental and cultural considerations must also be taken into account. Our challenge is to find the best means to improve the health and social well-being of our communities while preserving, protecting and enhancing the natural environment and contributing to a strong economy.

I look forward, with my colleagues, to taking part in this very important conference in Collingwood. Through our strong partnership with Ontario municipalities, we are working to achieve that goal of sustainability at the municipal-provincial level.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO STRATEGY

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the official opposition on the bill brought forward today by the Minister of Health Promotion.

The opposition members on this side of the House certainly believe very strongly in the protection and safety of our vulnerable members of society, especially with respect to children. It would be challenging for anyone in this House to find something that trumps the importance and safety of children.

There is a bit of history to the bill we see before us today. Over a year ago, the Premier himself denounced what the Minister of Health Promotion has introduced today. He used carefully crafted language, something like "a slippery slope."

Let me quote the head of the Ontario Medical Association from January 23 this year:

"I ... hope it's at the top of their docket.

"Sooner is better for the health of the children that are involved."

What's concerning is that the same article says that the "Minister of Health Promotion ... said she's content to ... debate a ban at the end of the year." So I certainly hope that the minister is sincere in what she says about moving forward with this legislation.

The Ontario Medical Association, the lung association and various other groups, whom I thank for being here today, have been calling for this type of legislation for over three years now in provinces such as British Columbia and Nova Scotia, which have already taken action. So neither the minister nor the Premier should be taking

credit for this. They're leading from behind the pack on this issue, for sure.

We all want to protect our children; there's no question. It shouldn't matter where they are in Ontario, and certainly this minister wants to be perceived as doing the right thing. So I ask the question, why did you allow your Liberal colleagues to vote against the protection of children in Caledonia from smoking illegal, illicit cigarettes yesterday evening? You know the sale of these illegal cigarettes is being facilitated by the Liberal government on crown land metres from schools, but they were silent on this.

Where was the Minister of Health Promotion when my colleague and health critic brought forward a resolution calling for the Premier to initiate an educational campaign for parents?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock, please. I'd just remind the Minister of Finance that saying a word that is unparliamentary or offering an action that is unparliamentary is not acceptable. Thank you.

Member, please continue.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you very much for that, Mr. Speaker.

When my colleague brought forward a bill calling for an educational campaign for parents and others on the dangers of smoking in vehicles with children inside, this government was silent yet again. When asked why children can purchase cheap and dangerous cigarettes without so much as being asked for identification, she is silent. Why should some children in this province be excluded from protection from smoking, both first- and second-hand ways? It's two-tier protection of children.

Is the minister going to plan to police the automobiles as they drive away from the many illegal smoke shops we have in Ontario? Is she going to enforce that? The member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills brought forward amendments that would protect children who have been physically or sexually abused by parents. The Liberal members voted this down too. My colleague from Burlington brought forward legislation that would amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. The Liberal government killed that again. Again, the minister was silent.

I look forward to debating the merits of this bill if it's the government's will that it actually move forward this time.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mrs. Julia Munro: I want to add a couple of comments with regard to the announcement made by the Minister of Culture today. First of all, obviously we are glad to see funding announced for the Ontario Arts Council. I think all of us recognized, certainly when we were in government, the importance of investing in the arts. It's interesting to note the kind of employment this has created and the fact that the creative cluster has grown at twice the rate.

I wish this minister would also have the same enthusiasm with the heritage side of her ministry as we look at the spectre of the wrecking ball on Alma College in St. Thomas. There is concern within the community that this minister is not using the power she has to save this building. I think that the people of Ontario would appreciate her leadership on this part of her portfolio.

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. John O'Toole: The Minister of Municipal Affairs talked about sustainability. I just want to remind him that sustainability starts with a strong economy. Think of the people in Trenton and United Food. Think of the people in Listowel, with Campbell Soup closing. Think of the people in Niagara and Exeter, with CanGro closing. Think of the people in Chesterville, with the Nestlé plant closing. Think of the people in northern Ontario, those small communities engaged in the forestry industry. Think about the economy and the sustainability of our very province of Ontario and the little job plan that you have.

Minister, you should be ashamed to be standing up and having this conference with Ontario's small-town communities. All you've done is download to the municipalities.

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MUNICIPALITIES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Minister of Municipal Affairs, New Democrats have great respect for the women and men who head Ontario's small urban centres. The challenge of running municipalities increases greatly, however, when governments only talk about supporting small urban centres and don't deliver. We saw this with Mike Harris, and we see it with Dalton McGuinty as well.

Downloading, development charges, sustainability and the environment make for precarious situations for municipalities, small and large. They have to pay their own bills and they have to pay the McGuinty government's bill as well. In fact, the Development Charges Act works against municipalities and their ability to ensure orderly, well-supported, sustainable development.

We've joined other municipalities in asking for the McGuinty government to reform the Development Charges Act here in Ontario. New roads, sewer and water and other services have to be paid for by developers, not municipal taxpayers, in real time and real dollars. The McGuinty government has done nothing to end the free ride land developers received under Mike Harris. Reforming development charges and protecting property taxpayers from subsidizing developers is long overdue in this province and needs to be dealt with. New Democrats have raised these issues in the past and will continue to call on the McGuinty government to make sure that this government stops subsidizing developers in the province of Ontario. Growth must pay its own way or else municipi-

ties' ability to invest in infrastructure continues to be undermined, along with Ontario's competitive position.

Despite so much fanfare—speaking of infrastructure—around Bill 35 helping the municipalities with the infrastructure deficit, the Liberals have nothing to crow about on this file. Bill 35 is not going to result in a dime of infrastructure investment in municipalities, and everybody knows it. In fact, the legislation doesn't even talk about municipal services at all. It's a scam and it's a sham.

We see waste management and environmental stewardship are on the agenda for this conference; that's good to know. Wouldn't it be great if we had a government that actually helped municipalities achieve more than 30% waste diversion in their waste streams? Wouldn't that be an important thing, an actual provincial strategy that helped them to make it happen? I say to this government: Talk is cheap. Let's see some real action.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: In response to the Minister of Culture and arts, we certainly support the funding for the Ontario Arts Council. Council support for independent artists across the province is invaluable. We know how vital arts funding is to energizing communities and building their economies. While the \$5-million increment will help the arts community, we need to keep in mind the outstanding need. In their most recent submission to the province, the Ontario Arts Council requested \$35 million in additional provincial support. By 2009-10, Ontario will have provided about 60% of the amount requested. So we still have a long way to go.

We need serious long-term arts funding. If we want to make sure the arts are here for the long run, they need to have predictable funding. While I speak about this minister's portfolio, I also urge her to look at the need to preserve Alma College in St. Thomas.

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO STRATEGY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I will be talking about the smoke-free Ontario strategy. As the NDP, we certainly support legislation that will decrease the exposure to second-hand smoke and programs that help people quit smoking. But I have serious worries. If we are serious in wanting to protect our children, then we have to be serious about health promotion. We need a comprehensive, integrated, sustainable approach that includes community-based programming, such as the motion from the Sudbury and District Health Unit sent to this government, which clearly states: "Health promotion best practices tell us that punitive strategies alone do not work. The proper order for health promotion strategy is, first of all, you target health promotion education and you follow it by legislation."

I hope to see funding coming through for Best Start programs in health units so that every single parent of a newborn child in Ontario gets education about smoking

in cars. We also want to see funding for Early Years programs, so that those parents also get educated as to the drastic effect of smoking in cars. We want community health centres to receive funding so they, too, can work with their target population. Above all, we want to see resources going to aboriginal health access centres so that the aboriginal population also gets the education they need to prevent second-hand smoke from going to aboriginal children.

Although we agree that the rate of tobacco consumption has gone down, it has not gone down for the First Nations, which is three times higher. It's a good goal, but not so good a strategy.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There are a number of guests we'd like to welcome today.

On behalf of the member from Burlington: from Newmarket–Aurora, students and their teachers from Sacred Heart Catholic High School.

In the west public gallery, on behalf of page Vanessa Chiarello, we'd like to welcome her mother, Vincenza Chiarello, here to the chamber today.

On behalf of the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, in the west members' gallery: Ms. Cecilia Smith, Mark Smith and Luke Smith. They're here to visit their son and brother, page Peter Smith, who's also one of our page captains today.

On behalf of the member from York South–Weston, we'd like to welcome the students and teachers from St. Fidelis School who are visiting Queen's Park.

On behalf of the member from Hamilton Mountain, in the west members' gallery: Carol Wiggins and Vic Vinerskis. Welcome today.

On behalf of the member from Nickel Belt, in the accessible gallery: Sonia, Tony and Alessia Commisso, and Seema Sidawi, a family friend.

On behalf of the member from Oakville: the McLaughlin College students from grade 10 in the west public gallery.

In the east public gallery, a former colleague and good friend of ours: Gary Malkowski, member from York East in the 35th Parliament. Welcome to Gary and his friends today.

I'd also like to acknowledge, in the Speaker's gallery, some guests of mine today: First, the Honourable Thandi Modise, the Speaker from the North West Provincial Legislature of South Africa, a very interesting lady whose political career began with fighting apartheid. She spent 10 years in jail and was elected in the first democratic elections in 1994—one of the first members elected.

With the Honourable Speaker are the honourable Nogolide Nojozi, South African consul general, and her husband, Anthony Mokhele; as well, Seth Mompei, political officer of the consul general, and Sarah Ledwaba, protocol officer.

Joining them today is the Honourable Jean Augustine, the Fairness Commissioner for the province. Welcome.

Applause.

JACK GORDON

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There was a statement read earlier this afternoon recognizing Jack Gordon. Jack is seated in the Speaker's gallery. But now that all members are present in the chamber, I can make this comment: I just want to say thank you on behalf of all of us for your 35 years of commitment and service to this Legislature, not only looking out for the interests of us as members but looking out for the interests of the staff, as well as looking out for the thousands of visitors who visit this building every day. Jack, we want to thank you for your fine, dedicated service since 1974.

There's a reception this afternoon, and I encourage members to join in the celebration of Jack's retirement. Jack, we wish you all the best and we just want to say thank you for everything you've done for all of us.

Applause.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm sad that Jack's leaving because he finally realized I'm old enough to be here this year.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That is not a point of order.

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ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question to the Premier is about Ontario's impending and reputation-damaging attainment, if you will, of have-not status. In 2003, Ontario led this country in economic growth. Today, we're virtually dead last. Up until 2003, Ontario led in private sector job growth. Today, Ontario is last. In 2003, Ontario's economy was healthy, robust and secure. In almost five years, Premier, you have put Ontario on the brink of have-not status. You are going to be looked at in history as the welfare Premier of Ontario. That's going to be your legacy. I asked you yesterday and received no response. I ask you again: Is this a legacy you will be proud of?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to a very important issue. There are a couple of things in mind that I ask Ontarians to consider.

We have two separate issues. The first one is the rate of our economic growth. It's being challenged. The leader of the official opposition knows well that when it comes to the price of oil, the high loonie and a sluggish US economy, those are real constraints on our economic growth here. That was well spoken to in the Toronto Dominion Bank's report released just yesterday. That's one issue, and I welcome the opportunity to debate that.

There's a second one, and that is: What are we doing with the wealth we are generating here in the province of Ontario? Every single year now, for some time, we've been sending about \$20-plus billion to the rest of the country. It's one thing for us to do that in the best of times, but in challenging times, I think that's a real issue. I think it's time for us to debate that. It's time for us to decide who's on whose side when it comes to that particular issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to remind the members—because in the question that was asked, it may have been close. I just want to remind the members, from the House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Marleau and Montpetit, page 522:

“Remarks directed specifically at another member that question that member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order. A member will be requested to withdraw offensive remarks, allegations, or accusations of impropriety directed towards another member. The Speaker has no authority, however, to rule on statements made outside the House by one member against another.”

Again, I just want to remind everyone that it's one thing to be critical of the government or the opposition, but to direct anything directly at a member is not proper.

Start the clock, please.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I appreciate your concern, Speaker, but I don't think that what I said in terms of that question falls within that category at all.

We agree that there are external causes for some of the challenges that the province is facing, but the Premier continuously takes no responsibility whatsoever for the state of the economy. The Premier yesterday was blaming the new equalization formula to explain why Ontario is on welfare, but on March 22, 2007, after the new formula was announced in the federal budget, the Ottawa Citizen reported: “‘Ontario has scored three significant victories when it comes to our fight for fairness,’ Mr. McGuinty crowed to reporters.” Your then-finance minister was equally thrilled.

Premier, you keep twisting in the wind, trying to find someone or something else to blame, but the buck stops with you. Will you accept responsibility for putting Ontario on the dole?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that the leader of the official opposition knows better. The way that our fiscal arrangements have been established means that somehow we could end up being a recipient province, notwithstanding the fact that we're sending \$20 billion to the rest of the country. If we were found technically to be in need, we would supply the money. There's something patently absurd and Kafkaesque about this.

There are going to be a lot of numbers floated around the country over the next few days, I am sure. But there's one that I'll ask Ontarians to keep in mind. Every year now, for some time, we have sent \$20 billion to the rest of the country. I think that's unfair. I think Ontarians want to know where the opposition party stands on this issue. I think we should be keeping more of that money so we can invest in our economy and support Ontarians

as we struggle together in this challenging economic time. Ontarians want to know: Whose side are they on?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Spending money like drunken sailors, slushgate, high taxes, increased regulation—the Premier takes no responsibility. If we are going to be the recipients of this money, is the Premier saying that we're going to turn it down? Is that what he's saying?

The Premier keeps trying to spin Ontarians on this crisis in the hopes that they won't be able to pin the tail on the donkey. But ask the thousands of people who've lost manufacturing and auto sector jobs; the small-business owner who's facing bankruptcy; the young people who hold a one-way ticket to Alberta. They know where the bull's eye is, Premier; it's in your office. Again, when will you start to accept some degree of responsibility?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it's worthwhile taking a brief look back at their legacy. They had oil at \$30 a barrel, they had the dollar at 60 cents, they had a US economy that was firing on all eight cylinders. Their legacy was a \$5.5-billion deficit, cuts to our schools, cuts to our health care, cuts to valuable supports for our most vulnerable. That's their legacy.

We have balanced our budget every year, we've made record levels of investment in our health care and education, we're working together with our business partners and we're cutting business taxes.

There's another important issue that's brought to bear at this time. We're sending \$20 billion to the rest of the country. We can't afford to do that, and Ontarians want to know who's going to stand up for them in their hour of need. What about their side?

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: Now we know why it is Ontario's time of need, because your tax-and-spend economic policies have laid this once-mighty province low. It's the last in growth in all of Canada: dead last in job creation; some 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have left Ontario because of your tax-and-spend policies.

Premier, tell us it's not the case. Tell us that TD Economics is wrong. Is it Premier McGuinty's intention to put Ontario on the dole? Are we or are we not about to become a have-not province under your leadership?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What TD Economics said, if the member would read it, is that the price of oil is affecting our status. The value of our dollar is affecting our status. The state of the US economy is affecting our status.

The truth of the matter is, Ontario continues to contribute \$20 billion to the federation. It is expensive now, and Ontarians need a government that will stand up for Ontario's interests. That's what this Premier and this government are doing. Will you stand up for Ontario and defend the interests of our citizens starting here and starting now and going into the future?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Those 200,000 people who have lost their jobs and the 150 individuals at Plastech in Leamington are going to get pretty sick and tired of this Abbott and Costello routine we see across the floor. I wish the Premier had stood up to answer my questions. He delivered three lines and he sat down and passed on the question about Ontario becoming a have-not province.

We have always been the lead, the economic engine of Canada, number one in the country. Dalton McGuinty has laid this province low and he won't even answer questions about it.

I ask the finance minister then: What do you say to the families in Leamington who found out that the 150 jobs at Plastech are gone because of Dalton McGuinty's tax-and-spend policies? They think we're in a have-not status. Are they right?

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Hon. Dwight Duncan: Actually, we've talked to those families, and what they would like is equal access to employment insurance benefits, number one. What they want is a federal government that treats Ontario the way it treats other provinces. They know that tax cuts alone are not going to bring back their jobs.

What they need is a federal government that will work with Ontario, in partnership, to build a stronger federation by building a stronger Ontario. We need a federal government that will help make the investments in jobs that this government's made: the new Toyota plant, \$7 billion in automotive sector investment. Our plan is the right plan. What we need is a federal partner that will make sure those unemployed workers have equal and fair access to employment insurance benefits. Will you call on them to do that?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I say back to the finance minister, you have got to be kidding me. They're asking for employment insurance access? They want their damn jobs, in Leamington and across the province of Ontario, the 200,000 that you have chased out of this province.

Let's put this in perspective. In 2002, Ontario's GDP per capita was \$2,000 above the national average. Now, under Dalton McGuinty, for the first time ever, Ontario is below the national average when it comes to per capita GDP. You chased out 200,000 jobs, and under Dalton McGuinty, welfare rolls are up some 11% since you came into office. I ask the minister, why are you bound and determined to similarly put Ontario on the welfare roles of Confederation?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker, 540,000 net new jobs in four years, in spite of \$117 oil; in the last year, 101,000 net new jobs, in spite of a dollar at par.

There are challenges in our economy today. One of the challenges is that Ontario is spending \$20 billion a year, each and every year. TD has pointed out that that represents a 4.4% drag on Ontario's GDP, each and every year.

Our plan for Ontario's economy is the right plan. What we need is a federal partner that will respond and work with us to meet the challenges of the world price of

oil, of a dollar at par and of the state of the US economy. That's what we need. And we need an opposition that will support us in protecting Ontario in these challenging times.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: Yesterday, TD Economics said that Ontario is about to become a have-not province, and the loss of more than 200,000 good manufacturing jobs is a large part of Ontario's economic decline. Can the Premier explain why the economies of manufacturing provinces like Manitoba and Quebec are doing much better than the McGuinty government in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question, but on the basis of some of the questions put by some of my colleagues opposite, I'm not convinced that they have in fact read the report. There is a lot of great information found in this report. One of the things it says is, "Ontario's projected move into equalization-recipient—at least temporarily—would suggest to many Canadians that the province is no longer a net contributor to federal coffers. However, this is not the case." In 2005, "Ontario residents contributed a hefty \$21 billion more to federal coffers than what was returned to the province in federal spending." It goes on to say, "In actuality then, Ontario residents will, in effect, be paying the equalization tab with their own money." So if there was anybody to be rescued, we would rescue ourselves.

We can talk about the best way to grow this economy, but there's a second issue, which is brought to the floor once again by the TD report, and that is whether or not it's appropriate for us, especially at this point in our history, to send \$20 billion to the rest of the country. I think it's—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, I didn't hear an answer to the question. I think what I heard is that, yes, the federal government has a tax rate and the federal government applies that tax rate in British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Ontario, and they collect taxes in Ontario. Is the Premier suggesting that the federal government stop collecting taxes in Ontario? If he wants to make that case, good luck. Go out and make it.

But the issue here is this—and the TD Economics report makes it clear: A big part of Ontario's decline is the loss of manufacturing jobs in this province—in Windsor, Chatham, Sarnia, London, St. Thomas, Hamilton, Kitchener, Oshawa, and the list goes on. Manitoba and Quebec have taken action to sustain jobs in the manufacturing sector. Why is the McGuinty government missing in action on that front?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The loss of a job in a family is a terrible event. It's something that we are working to address. When it comes to the employment insurance regime, for example, we are asking the federal government to treat Ontarians fairly. Our workers are coming up

\$4,000 less in terms of their employment insurance benefits in comparison to workers in other parts of the country—\$4,000 would be used for groceries and rent and mortgage payments and basic necessities. It's not the kind of thing that people would sock away as part of a savings plan. That's just one example of an unfairness that continues to obtain when it comes to our relationship with the federal government.

It's one thing for us to send \$20 billion to the feds in good times, but these are challenging times. I think, again, what Ontarians want to know is, can we close ranks, can we come together and say to the feds, "It's unfair"?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm amazed at the lengths that this Premier will go to to find someone else to blame. I don't remember Dalton McGuinty saying anything when Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien took the axe to the unemployment insurance system in 1994 and 1995. I don't remember your saying anything, but, suddenly, now, as we lose manufacturing jobs in Ontario, the Premier will bend over backwards to find someone to blame.

Premier, here's what Manitoba and Quebec have done: They've introduced a reasonable industrial hydro rate to sustain jobs; they have buy-domestic policies to sustain manufacturing jobs; and they've introduced a refundable manufacturing investment tax credit to sustain jobs.

Why won't the McGuinty government do some of those things, rather than looking around for someone else to blame?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I was wondering when he was going to come back to the manufacturing tax credit, but he finally did in the third question.

We could entertain those kinds of questions and those kinds of propositions. By and large, the Conservatives would have us cut taxes, and by and large, the NDP would have us spend more. There is probably some element of merit in each of the proposals, distilled to their essence.

There's probably some element of merit there, but we can't engage in that kind of a discussion in any kind of an intelligent way, because we send \$20 billion to the federal government on an annual basis for them to distribute to the rest of the country. They're doing those kinds of things in Manitoba, they're doing those kinds of things in Quebec, and they're doing them with Ontario money: \$20 billion is going to the rest of the country. Every once in awhile we have an opportunity to close ranks, to come together, and say: "That is unfair."

On behalf of Ontarians, what our government is saying is, sending 20 billion bucks elsewhere is unfair.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question, the leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I guess the Premier's response is that the federal government should stop collecting taxes in Ontario.

HOME CARE

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question to the Premier is this: Here today in the Speaker's gallery is the Comisso family. Five-year-old Alessia is fighting an extremely rare illness called Leigh's disease, which affects her heart, lungs, liver and muscles, resulting in her loss of mobility.

Premier, could you tell me this: In January, why did the McGuinty government slash Alessia's home care from 54 hours a week to 15 hours a week?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health

Hon. George Smitherman: I think the member knows that the Minister of Health is in a position legally where speaking about a specific case is not appropriate.

I can tell the honourable member that with respect to home care, we've increased funding for home care by 47%—\$575 million in additional funding—that supports almost 100,000 additional Ontarians each and every year.

Of course, when there are adjustments in the care because of altering circumstances with respect to the patient, this is part and parcel of the ongoing relationship, and case managers are involved. If people wish to appeal, there is a mechanism. I'd be happy to tell the honourable member about that further.

1440

Mr. Howard Hampton: This is also about all kinds of other people across Ontario who are having their home care hours cut. In Alessia's case, her mother, Sonia, is her primary caregiver. A few years ago, her father, Antonio, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, which has since worsened such that he has also lost his mobility. This means that Alessia's mother provides basically all of her care. The home care that was cut was home care that allowed Alessia's mother to get a few hours' sleep at night, a few hours when she could rest because the rest of the day she was caring for her daughter. Again, I say to the Premier and to the Minister of Health: Can you explain to this family, who desperately need this home care, why it was cut, and cut radically, under the McGuinty government?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, in the individual circumstances, I do mention to the member again that the work of a case manager is to make these evaluations. From time to time, there are alterations in care which relate perhaps to alterations in clinical circumstances. I am not a clinician and I'm not on the front lines making those assessments.

The Health Services Appeal and Review Board stands as a mechanism and does allow anyone who feels that they have been inappropriately or unjustly circumstanced to bring those forward, and an independent organization has the capacity to order alteration.

But on the assertion that the honourable member makes about home care services overall, he's off the mark. Tens of thousands of additional Ontarians—just under 100,000—have had access to home care. Last year alone, there was a \$100-million additional investment in home care. I think that the honourable member knows

well that community care access centres are delivering substantial increases in care overall.

Mr. Howard Hampton: We'll bring case after case of people who've had their home care hours reduced. But this is about this family. This family cherishes the time that they have with their daughter Alessia, but they know that they cannot continue with only 15 hours of home care when her care involves 24 hours a day around the clock. Alessia's two pediatricians wrote to you. The social worker wrote to you, pointing out that this is just not a sustainable situation, that the family and especially the mother cannot go on. I ask again: Why is Ontario's home care system under the McGuinty government failing families like this who need home care the most?

Hon. George Smitherman: If the honourable member wishes to bring forward cases to my attention, this is fine and fully appropriate.

Overall, the assertions that he makes are incorrect. Substantial increases in home care are resulting in substantial additional people who are able to be served.

He raises a particular circumstance. Of course, on the face of it, it's concerning to all of us, but the Minister of Health is not making the clinical decisions in that case. Across the breadth of the province of Ontario, there are other people who do that. Whenever a decision is made that people don't feel is appropriate, there is an independent mechanism which they can utilize.

I would make my services and those of my staff available to assist the family if that was necessary in bringing forward such an appeal to the Health Services Appeal and Review Board. This is a long-standing mechanism that gets past the idea that a Minister of Health is having discretion over these cases. Instead, there's an independent capacity to analyze any of those viewpoints made by people on the front line.

CORPORATE TAX

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Premier. The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity made some very sound recommendations regarding Ontario's growing prosperity gap in its most recent report in 2007. Its expert authors argued that "the new government should assess as a high priority to lower corporate income tax rates to stimulate business investment and to increase provincial tax revenue."

Premier, you pay \$1 million a year for this advice. Why, as Ontario slips into have-not status, are you ignoring the recommendations of the economic experts that you fund?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll take this as a "cut" question.

Assuming that we wanted to have an intelligent discussion about our competitiveness associated with the level of our corporate income taxation—and I think there's some merit to having that kind of discussion—we would need the fiscal flexibility in order to engage in that kind of discussion. There are some areas where we know we could invest more quickly to provide more supports to

our most vulnerable, particularly to help the poor so they can grow stronger and become productive and contributing members of a stronger economy.

We can't have those kinds of discussions when we continue to send \$20 billion to the federal government for distribution in the rest of the country. That's the reality. We're not prepared to cut our taxes now at the expense of our important public services. But there are all kinds of other discussions we could have were we able to retain more of the wealth that we're actually creating here.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm convinced the Premier didn't read the report. The report says that in order to increase provincial tax revenues, business taxes should be cut.

I'd like to read a couple of more quotes from this million-dollar report: "Other than the United States, no other country in the developed world has higher taxes on new business investment than Ontario." I also quote that "Ontario and Canada are losing tax revenue because of high corporate tax rates." This is not a cut question, Premier. This is to increase government revenues.

With your current tax structure, it is no wonder that businesses are shifting investments, jobs and tax liabilities out of Ontario. Will you continue to ignore the advice of the experts now that we are in recession? Will you continue to stand idly by as jobs and revenues disappear, or, as recommended by your million-dollar—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Where the member and I have a fundamental disagreement is that he doesn't see this as a cut question. It is a cut question. They want us to cut taxes by \$5 billion. Given our existing revenue base, to cut our tax revenues by \$5 billion would absolutely and necessarily mean cuts to our health care, to our education and to supports for our most vulnerable Ontarians. There's no way around that.

We can't have the kinds of discussions that the honourable member would have us enter into unless we have access to more of the wealth that we are actually generating here every year in Ontario. I say again, we should come together and say to the federal government, "Sending \$20 billion of our wealth to the rest of the country is simply not fair."

RENT BANK PROGRAMS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Minister of Housing. Debbie Palmer, a single mom and laid-off nurse, needed the help of the rent bank centre in Sault Ste. Marie when she was waiting for EI to start. Today, rent bank centres across Ontario—particularly this one in Sault Ste. Marie, but also in Cobourg, Northumberland and Simcoe county—are all out of funds and turning away families who are facing eviction.

If the minister is so proud of his affordable housing program, why hasn't he committed any money in the 2008 budget for Ontario rent bank centres?

Hon. Jim Watson: As usual, the NDP are a day late. One of our members asked this exact same question and

I'll give the same answer. We're very proud of the rent bank. We've put, to date, \$18.8 million into the rent bank, including \$4.8 million last year. I indicated that we are committed to funding the rent bank in 2008.

We have asked for a study into its effectiveness and how to improve the rent bank. I received that study about a week or so ago. We anticipate within the next two weeks to have additional funds out to those rent banks that require money because we recognize the value of the rent bank. It prevents evictions of those people who have had a difficult time. As I said yesterday, it has prevented 13,200 evictions in the province of Ontario and saved \$7.7 million in emergency shelter costs. It's a great program and we're very proud of it.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Low-income earners rely on rent bank centres because we barely have any affordable housing in this province. According to anti-poverty groups, an affordable monthly rent is 30% of a person's income. For low-wage earners, ODSP and OW recipients, that's less than \$500 a month. We just received a letter signed by this minister that says there are only 486 units that rent at \$500 or less across the entire province. No wonder we have a waiting list of 170,000 households waiting for affordable housing. How can this minister be proud of providing less than 500 units of truly affordable housing, and he's had five years to do it in?

1450

Hon. Jim Watson: Again, I'd like to correct the NDP. We have provided over \$301 million for an affordable housing program that was matched by the previous federal government. It's called the affordable housing program, and it includes a number of components: home ownership, home repair. We also brought in a program of rent subsidies called the ROOF program, and the DOOR program for rent repairs.

When we brought forward \$100 million, do you know what the NDP called \$100 million in home repairs? "Meagre." To me, that was an insult to the people who are providing affordable housing.

On the rent bank, when my predecessor brought forward the rent bank, do you know what the NDP said? The member from Beaches-East York said, "It means almost nothing."

I would urge the members of the NDP to get your act together and come forward with one sensible position on how—

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

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Farmers in my riding have been asking me about support programs for farmers. They would like to know why the federal government has not matched the level of support that the McGuinty government has provided them.

Last year, you introduced a three-year risk management program for grains and oilseeds producers. Farmers

in my riding were very appreciative of this initiative, and the ones I have spoken to indicate that they plan to stay enrolled in this program and hope that it can be continued in the long term.

When the risk management program was developed, you indicated that the McGuinty government would fund its traditional 40% of the farm risk management program and would ask the federal government to kick in its 60% share. Minister, the farmers in my riding want to know, will the federal government finally come forward—

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

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The member has identified an issue that I hear about regularly from grains and oilseeds farmers. It was because of their good work and their partnership with this government that we were able to implement the risk management program.

I see members on the opposite side of the House smiling. This is a very serious issue and a very important issue for all grains and oilseeds farmers in the province of Ontario. They came and asked for a program. They asked the province to work with them, and they wanted the federal government to be a partner. I was happy to announce last July that the province of Ontario is very prepared to partner with them. In fact, we have come to the table not just with pen in hand, but with dollars. As a result of the agreement we've signed with them, we have delivered \$40 million to grains and oilseeds producers. I wrote to the federal minister and asked him to continue to—

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

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: This is not the only program where the federal government is shortchanging Ontario farmers. In the fall, you announced \$150 million to support cattle, hog and horticulture producers. A federal budget has since come and gone and there has been no announcement from them of meaningful—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This question is not sounding like it relates to the initial question you asked.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: It's programs. Farmers in the cattle, hog and horticulture sectors have been especially challenged recently by factors such as the high dollar and high cost of oil. My constituents would like the federal government to come to the table, just like we did, and provide support for risk management. I ask the minister, wouldn't it be easier to support our farmers if we had a real partner in the federal government?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We will continue to attempt to bring the federal government onside with the partnership programs that we have put in place for the farmers in the province of Ontario. I wrote to Minister Ritz and asked him to participate in the risk management program. He wrote back to me and said they would not be prepared to do so.

In December, the Minister of Finance for the province of Ontario responded to the needs in the agriculture sec-

tor for cattle, hogs and horticulture. We've come forward with 150 million new dollars. I know that producers would like the federal government to respond in kind with new dollars, not with advances for existing programs.

We will continue to work with our federal partners to have them understand that we need to have additional resources in difficult times for the agriculture industry. We want to work with them on a program that is flexible, that will meet the needs of—

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

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Premier: Last month, you announced with great fanfare the \$1.5-billion Next Generation of Jobs Fund. Let's look at the facts here. In the auto sector this past Monday, we had 1,000 jobs laid off. This is about the third such announcement. In the ag sector, we had the Campbell Soup announcement in Listowel, we had the United Food announcement and we had Nestlé's announcement in Chesterville. These are all losses of the agricultural sector—and on top of that, CanGro and others. Last week we had the Dell announcement of job losses in the high-tech sector.

You claim you have some sort of strategy—a jobs fund. I would ask today that you stand up and tell the House where the plan is. What is the plan for your Next Generation of Jobs Fund? Where is the focus for the jobs in this new fund?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm very happy to address this question. We had an opportunity yesterday at estimates committee to talk at full length about the various programs now available in the province of Ontario to reach out and partner with industry to have investment happen in this province.

We spoke about the AMIS program, another budget item that we would like to see the opposition parties vote for, which actually brought the threshold into more manageable ranges for small to medium-sized businesses that are prepared to make advancements in innovation for technology for manufacturing. That's what we want in Ontario, yet these opposition members voted opposed to this.

Our Next Generation of Jobs Fund, which has already delivered a \$100-million investment in Ontario by Sanofi Pasteur—that would not have happened without our government's partnership. This is the kind of program that we have available to reach out and bring Ontario—

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

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, you're quite correct in the fact that we did have our first opportunity to review the work being done by your ministry. In fact, a member, Mr. Chudleigh, just asked a question on that to show how

little you knew about the pathway to prosperity report, which you paid \$1 million for. Clearly, by the answers, you had not read Roger Martin's report. I'd encourage members to look at the Hansard of that—

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: That's not true.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the minister to withdraw the comment, please.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I withdraw.

Mr. John O'Toole: If the economy is any judge, you should resign.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Everybody seems to be in quite the mood today, and there are lots of armchair Speakers out there. I appreciate your efforts in assisting me, but there is only one Speaker, and I will do my job.

The member has the floor.

Mr. John O'Toole: What we have here is the minister trying to blame everyone else, but she also gave a little litany of her travel log to China, Mexico and Paris. All in other people's hour of need, you're travelling around, giving out old speeches.

Minister, could you just clearly stand up and show where the plan is, where the leadership is for this—

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I expect that this member opposite will reflect an accurate position when he speaks on his feet in this House.

Let me say this: Roger Martin has spent time in our ministry, going through at length the reports that we asked him to write for us, because we value experts talking to us about good, sound economic policy. That's why we support Roger Martin, that's why we support the Competitiveness Institute, and we will continue to do so.

I might also remind that member that it was his government that brought Roger Martin to the table with the Ontario government, so you clearly appreciated his view when you sat on this side of the House. Fortunately, times have changed.

Let me say this: I believe it is Ontario's role as an export jurisdiction to take our story around the world about why the whole world should invest in Ontario, the best place to do business in North America.

1500

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. What is the McGuinty government doing about the 13,233 children in Toronto, the 5,145 children in Ottawa and the many thousands more across the province who are eligible and approved but cannot receive licensed not-for-profit child care because the new subsidy program hasn't been adequately funded?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the question from the member opposite. As she well knows, and as I trust many members here know, we have changed the eligibility requirements for subsidies across the province.

Prior to this recent change, there was a patchwork of eligibility. In some communities, people with very low incomes were not eligible for subsidies at all. We have greatly expanded the eligibility because we recognize that even low- and moderate-income people need help with subsidies.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: But what the minister is not talking about is the fact that there was no funding to help municipalities with the new subsidy formula. A waiting list of more than 23,000 Ontario children unable to obtain affordable licensed child care is nothing to brag about. Instead of making the \$300-million provincial investment that the Premier promised five years ago, the minister created a parking lot for tens of thousands of children and has them waiting, year over year, for their opportunity to have a subsidized child care space in this province. Why does this government keep waiting lists rather than keep promises, so families can access the child care that they need?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're working hard for Ontario families, we're working very hard for children in this province and we are committed to improving child care in this province, even after the federal government cancelled the child care funding in this province. I would welcome the support of members opposite in getting a real national child care policy back in this country.

Each municipality does create their own wait list. Each municipality decides who they will prioritize. We are carefully monitoring the situation. I look forward to the recommendations from OMSSA on where we should go next with the child subsidy.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Some of my constituents in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex have expressed concerns about the new Provincial Animal Welfare Act that is before the Legislature. Farmers in particular are asking how the new legislation will affect their farm operations. These constituents, and actually all farmers across the province, are already regulated by current agricultural industry standards with respect to how they treat their animals. As a matter of fact, many commodity organizations have long-standing and well-established best practices for animal husbandry that are adhered to by their producers. Minister, can you please explain to the House how this legislation, if passed, will affect farmers across the province?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member for her question and her advocacy of the agricultural sector. Farmers are vital to Ontario and to the provincial economy. Let me make it clear that current agricultural industry standards would be respected and activities in accordance with those standards would be exempted from the proposed Provincial Animal Welfare Act. My ministry will continue to work with the Minister of Agriculture and her staff to ensure that this proposed legislation is proper, that this proposed legislation will

ensure that existing industry standards are recognized and respected.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I know that many farmers will be very happy to hear your commitment to working with the agricultural sector on this new legislation.

My riding is predominantly rural, so I also have a number of constituents who enjoy hunting and fishing and I'd like to know from you how this legislation will affect those activities as well.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Again, I come from a family of hunters and fishermen as well. Hunting and fishing are activities enjoyed by people across Ontario. I would like to clarify for all the members in this House that this legislation will not affect, and will in fact protect, current activities pertaining to wildlife and hunting, fishing and trapping activities that are already regulated by MNR legislation, including the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Minister of Research and Innovation. While the Minister of Research and Innovation was toasting himself at the Economic Club in Toronto over the lunch hour today, the community of Listowel, in Perth-Wellington, was reeling from the news of the pending closure of Campbell Soup.

Having ignored prudent warnings for the last two years about the pending crisis in manufacturing, what will the Ministry of Research and Innovation now do to help the 500 people who've lost their jobs in Listowel? And don't refer the question.

Hon. John Wilkinson: As a minister, I realize that my colleagues have responsibility for certain things, and I refer this to the minister responsible, the Minister for Training, Colleges and Universities. I thought the member knew that.

Hon. John Milloy: I think all members of the House, particularly my colleague the Minister of Research and Innovation, are always upset to hear about the layoffs in Listowel. But in all these cases, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities works closely with those workers affected. We've already been in touch with the plant, and when the layoffs occur, we will be setting up with them the sorts of supports they need so that they can get the types of retraining they need so they can move on.

I'm very proud of the fact that our most recent budget contained \$1.5-billion program to help workers find further employment. Part of that is the second-career strategy, which will be in place in June. These workers will be eligible for it. It will provide them with additional training.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The Minister of Research and Innovation would have us believe that he's seizing global opportunities and creating Ontario's next generation of jobs and prosperity. It would seem that the only global opportunities being created are in Pennsylvania, where the Listowel jobs are going, and that we're going to have

to wait until the next generation before the minister takes action in his own riding.

The company says it's closing the plant because to stay open would require significant new investment in the facility, which they're not prepared to make. They would have been more likely to do so if Ontario did not have the highest taxes in North America on new business investment. The Campbell Soup closure is but one more step on the road to Ontario becoming a have-not province under the McGuinty Liberals.

My question to the minister is: When will the government wake up and realize the devastating impact of its high-tax policies and address the economic crisis that their tax-and-spend budgets are causing?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very proud of the strategy of this government, the five-point strategy which the Minister of Research and Innovation is part of, to strengthen our economy and to create jobs for the next generation. As the honourable member is aware, there are literally 100,000 jobs that go wanting in this province every year because of lack of skills, which is why our most recent budget contained a \$1.5-billion Skills to Action jobs plan, which is going to help those workers who have been affected by layoffs get the skills they need to find another job.

My ministry is working closely with the Minister of Research and Innovation and with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade to create the types of opportunities which are going to create those job opportunities for those who have been affected. How dare he stand up, from a government that is looking for nothing but cuts, and criticize a government that has put forward a plan to support those workers who have been affected.

ONTARIO CHILD BENEFIT

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Premier. In today's mail, parents received this shocking news. The notice to Ontario Works and Ontario disability support program recipients states: "You will receive less from social assistance. Your new monthly Ontario child benefit payment and your full national child benefit will make up the difference." Otherwise, they tread water. Today Carol Goar exposed this in the Toronto star.

Why won't the McGuinty government stop punishing the poorest of poor children, end the clawback and implement the full Ontario child benefit for all children today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm proud of the fact that we're the first government in Canada that has put forward an Ontario child benefit. I'm especially proud of the fact that we're doing this at a time of real economic challenge. It would have been argued, I'm very certain, in other circles that now is not the time to reach out in this particular direction because it's too challenging for us. But in terms of giving expression to our shared values, we think we need to do more to ensure that our kids grow up strong and receive all the opportunities they need to become contributing and productive members of

our society. So I'm proud of the fact that we are the first government in Canada to develop a specific benefit dedicated to Ontario children.

1510

Mr. Michael Prue: I have to ask if the Premier is also proud of the fact that children on social assistance continue to live on incomes well below the poverty line. Is he proud of the fact that in August, his government will eliminate the back-to-school allowance? Is he proud of the fact that in November it will take away the winter clothing allowance payments as well?

I have written to ministers, I have asked questions in this House and I have never received a response other than what I got today. So I ask again in hope against hope: Are winter coats, boots and school supplies now a luxury that some Ontario children have to do without?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's be really clear about what the Ontario child benefit is. It's a benefit for all low-income children in the province. It does involve a restructuring of social assistance because it allows the child portion of a social assistance cheque to move with the parent as they move from social assistance into those entry-level jobs.

It is a major improvement in how we support low-income children in this province, and I really do wish that the members opposite would support such innovation and such an enormous investment in the lowest-income children in this province.

TORONTO WATERFRONT

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. As you know, the revitalization of Toronto's waterfront is critical to ensuring the future prosperity and high quality of life in our city. The positive effect of waterfront revitalization is being seen first-hand in my community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, where shovels are in the ground, turning forgotten, abandoned and inaccessible waterfront to a place where our community will gather, bike-ride, rollerblade and picnic.

But it is critical that as we have invested in Mimico Linear Park, we do so and ensure that the province plays a role in ensuring that the rest of Toronto's waterfront continues to be revitalized. So will the minister please tell me what actions are being taken to ensure access to the waterfront and development of environmentally sustainable communities within the city of Toronto?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member for the question, but also for her passion and advocacy when it comes to the revitalization of the city of Toronto's waterfront.

Our government remains committed to creating livable communities for the people of Ontario. That is why revitalizing Toronto's waterfront, mainly the West Don Lands, is a priority project for the province and for the people of Toronto. A lot of work has taken place to

prepare the West Don Lands for future development and to turn this piece of land into a viable community for the city.

I'm proud to say that Ontario is leading the charge in key pieces of this project, such as the construction of a flood protection land form known as the berm, which will have the capacity to protect the entirety of Toronto's downtown core from natural disasters, as we have seen previously, like Hurricane Hazel, and enable future occupancy in the West Don Lands. It's a proactive, adaptive strategy for dealing with future climate change and a necessary catalyst for large-scale redevelopment of the West Don Lands.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: In my community in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, the damage that was undertaken by Hurricane Hazel so many years ago is still legendary. So I appreciate the minister's indication that other communities would be protected from other environmental and natural disasters like Hurricane Hazel.

I would ask whether or not our government is committed to working in partnership with the city of Toronto to continue to build a foundation of sustainable development, and I would ask the minister to provide some specific details with respect to the activities Torontonians can expect to see in the West Don Lands now that that critical berm is in place?

Hon. David Caplan: We have made real progress with Toronto's waterfront redevelopment and revitalization in helping the city of Toronto—and with our partners in the federal government, I'll add—to develop a more complete community where Ontarians can live, work and play.

Just last week I had the great pleasure to announce the development partner for phase 1 of the West Don Lands. I would say that this is a tipping point to the revitalization of Toronto's waterfront. Phase 1 is the first step toward a \$250-million private sector investment in waterfront revitalization and demonstrates both private and public sector commitment to partner with Waterfront Toronto.

This proposal embraces key provincial objectives such as creating inclusive communities, reducing urban sprawl, transit-first approaches and leveraging the creation of public parks and spaces. We're working hard to attract international award-winning developers and designers to come and invest in Ontario, and that's why this province has committed \$500 million in funding to the Toronto waterfront revitalization.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Premier. Not only is the economy at a point where we've become a have-not province, when it comes to health care, we're headed in the same direction. When we take a look at health care in Ottawa, specifically Ottawa-Orléans, we learn that thousands of residents who rely on the Orleans Urgent Care Clinic are facing a decline in service. Why? Because there are not enough doctors. Marion Moritz, the executive director the clinic stated,

"All the doctors we are recruiting have left for greener pastures. We are bleeding doctors."

I ask you: What are you going to do? You made promises more than four years ago that there would be more doctors and that you would unclog emergency rooms. Nothing has happened.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: First, on the matter of doctors, the honourable member obviously ignored all the information that has come out even in the last week or two from the college of physicians in the province of Ontario and, indeed, from the survey on the national basis, which shows that the number of doctors practising in Ontario is up by 13% in the last five years.

But I do agree that in the particular circumstances of Orléans we do not have the health care system performing as it should. I've been working on this matter closely with my colleague the member for Ottawa-Orléans, and I have to say, in respect of the progress that we've made, it hasn't been good enough, and I take full responsibility for that. By coincidence or not, this afternoon, I have a resolve meeting in my office where people will be bringing their very best ideas, as there have been some proposals floated which we think will be very helpful and beneficial to the people of Orléans, and I hope, alongside my colleague from Ottawa-Orléans, to soon be in a position to make such an announcement.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Again to the Premier: The reality is, if the minister wants to talk about facts and figures, only about 10% of physicians today are accepting new patients. When we were in office, it was over 20%. There's no improvement. The number of underserved communities has increased from about 121 to about 142. The reality is, there were a million people without a family doctor then, and there are still today. There's simply no progress being made.

I'll say to you, the situation in Ottawa is so grim that Councillor Rainer Bloess is calling for the resignation of the member from Ottawa-Orléans for failing to keep his promise for better health care. What are you going to do to meet the needs of the people in Ottawa-Orléans?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, I'm very, very privileged to work alongside this member from Ottawa-Orléans.

Let me correct some information. Last year in the province of Ontario, fully 85% of Ontario's doctors took new patients, on average almost 50. The Ontario Health Quality Council will soon show that the number of Ontarians without access to care is more in the neighbourhood of 400,000, not the high numbers that the member likes to inflate for her own political purposes. Here is what the executive director of the Orleans Urgent Care Clinic had to say today in response to that attack by a friend of yours. They said, "Mr. McNeely has advocated strongly on behalf of the clinic and has opened doors for us in the MOH." They said, "From 1994 until Phil McNeely's election, the MOH turned a deaf ear to every and all entreaties made by the Ottawa Orleans Urgent

Care Clinic.” I have visited there alongside that member, and we will be back for a—

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

1520

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is for the Premier; the minister isn’t here.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We don’t make references to the absence of individuals.

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Erlene Weaver is a Hamilton grandmother forced to raise her grandchildren, Jordon and Alicia, both of whom are victims of fetal alcohol syndrome. For over six years, Erlene received temporary care assistance through the Ontario Works program. Despite her fixed pension and financial hardships, she was cut off from this child care assistance. Erlene is just one example of many Hamilton grandparents in the same situation. Why have grandparents like Erlene been cut off from temporary care assistance?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can’t speak to the specifics of the issue. It’s obviously a case of some real hardship. What I can undertake to do, on behalf of the minister, is to look into this more closely to see if it’s at all possible to work with the family and the service providers to improve the circumstances.

Mr. Paul Miller: Premier, I don’t know if you get it here. We have grandparents giving up their meagre pension income to raise their grandchildren because the ministry allowed the little money provided for the grandchildren’s upkeep to be taken away.

When will the minister or the Premier reinstate the temporary care assistance to these grandparents who are in dire need? This is a shame.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I have given my undertaking on behalf of the minister. We will look into this at the earliest possible opportunity and find a way to connect with the member to see what, if anything, we can do to provide support.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Mike Colle: To the Minister of Research and Innovation: Yesterday, at the Premier’s innovation award night, Cameron Piron from my riding, the president and co-founder of Sentinelle Medical Inc., was awarded one of these prestigious awards for innovation. His globally competitive company is involved in the research and manufacturing of leading-edge magnetic resonance imaging, also known as MRI.

This breakthrough entrepreneur has been awarded this prestigious Premier’s award for innovation. Could the minister please tell me why it is important for us to recognize these innovators in ridings like Eglinton–Lawrence and recognize what these innovators contribute

to our economy and to our society in general? Minister, please answer the question.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my friend from Eglinton–Lawrence for actually asking me a question for my ministry. I thought that was great. You understand the rules here, sir. I want to say that you should, and everyone in your riding should, be particularly—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind the member that directly or indirectly making an accusation or taking a shot at another member is not appropriate.

Hon. John Wilkinson: A wise ruling, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the member and all the members that they should be particularly proud of Cameron Piron and all of his business colleagues at Sentinelle Medical Inc. We had a wonderful event last night at the MaRS discovery district. The Premier was there and we were able to see some 10 amazing Ontarians—business leaders, entrepreneurs and cutting-edge researchers. One of your constituents was one of those recipients. He has come up with a wonderful new technology that allows for much better detection of breast cancer. He should be commended for that and for the pain and suffering that he has alleviated for so many women.

As well, we want to thank the other brilliant researchers. There were researchers there last night, two of whom have developed brand new disciplines of science—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member for the question.

PETITIONS

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank Reverend Rudy Plug and Trinity United Church in Beeton for sending this petition.

“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.”

I agree with this petition and I’ve signed it.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I’ve got a petition signed by people in my riding and in Etobicoke, and it’s 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 affix my name to this petition and I give it to legislative page Mikaela.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a series of petitions that have been presented to me from my riding of Durham. This one is from the Clarington Older Adult Association in Bowmanville, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its" rightful "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'm pleased to sign this in support, and to present it to Naomi, one of the new pages here.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Kim Craiton: I'm pleased to read in this petition, which was brought to my office for me to read on behalf of my constituents from Niagara Falls.

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

"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;

"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."

I'm pleased to submit this on behalf of my riding.

GYPSY MOTHS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to present a petition called "Protecting Ontario Properties from Gypsy Moth Infestation," signed by residents of Binbrook, Mount Hope and Caistor.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas gypsy moths are a dangerous pest because they can nest in more than 500 different native plant species; and

"Whereas professional arborists have estimated that thousands of acres in Ontario have been deforested by gypsy moths; and

"Whereas many properties in Binbrook, west Niagara, Haldimand and surrounding areas have been dramatically harmed by gypsy moths; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario has previously funded a cost-shared gypsy moth spraying program;

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

"That Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources immediately fund a gypsy moth spraying program to assist landowners and municipalities attempting to control further gypsy moth infestation."

In support, my signature.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Jeff Leal: I just got a rushed petition from the good citizens of Eglinton-Lawrence: "Stop Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles—Bill 56.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas 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" immediately "Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

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

LORD'S PRAYER

Mrs. Julia Munro: "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 we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

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

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

As I am in agreement with this, I have affixed my signature and given it to page Matthew.

1530

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Kuldip Kular: "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 agree with the petitioners, so I put my signature on the petition as well.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to present a petition entitled, "Petition for the Creation of Pope John Paul II

Day," signed by residents of the Niagara area. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

"Whereas Bill 194, the Pope John Paul II Day Act, 2007 did not pass before the Legislature was adjourned three weeks early for summer recess;

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

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario designate a day as Pope John Paul II Day in honour of his extraordinary contribution to our communities."

In support, I affix my signature.

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 on the quality 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 will affix my signature and pass this to Sheilagh.

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mr. John O'Toole: Normally I'd be presenting the Lord's Prayer petition, but I have so many others that I will read this as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

"Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from the McGuinty government, at any level;

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

I'm pleased to sign this in support of this community and present it to Hannah, one of the new pages.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is in conjunction with Bill 56, which was introduced by the honourable member for Eglinton-Lawrence. It reads as follows:

"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;

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

Since I agree with this petition 100%, I'm delighted to sign it as well.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare funding. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with a growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

"Whereas studies indicate that overcrowded emergency rooms result in higher mortality rates; and

"Whereas growing demand and lack of available long-term-care beds places increased pressure on acute care beds; and

"Whereas the operating budget for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare must reflect the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

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

"That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services for the people of Muskoka-East Parry Sound and allocate more long-term-care beds for Muskoka-East Parry Sound."

I support this petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from Patricia Thompson, who lives at 6363 Amber Glen, Mississauga, Ontario.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. David Caplan: I move that, pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order, when the order of the day is called for resuming the adjourned debate on the amendment to the motion for adoption of amendments to the standing orders, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the

motion and any amendments thereto, which questions shall be decided without further amendment or debate. If a recorded vote is requested, the division bells shall be limited to five minutes and no deferral of the division pursuant to standing order 28(h) shall be permitted.

1540

This particular motion relates to, as it says, the changes in the standing orders which have been proposed. This has generated a great deal of debate amongst members here in the chamber. From the debate as I listen to it, there's agreement, I believe, on 95% of the matters that are in front. There is a very small amount where there is some disagreement, and I think that's very fair, but I think in the interests of moving forward, we should move ahead, have a vote on this, have legislators have a chance to decide and then test and see. I know that the government House leader has proposed that over the course of the summer these standing order changes will be reviewed by a legislative committee. So in order to get things moving along, I think it will be important to support this motion, although for the purpose of clarity, I'd like to move an amendment to the motion.

I move that the motion be amended by striking the word "motion" in the fourth line and substituting "main motion."

I look forward to hearing the debate on today's motion that is in front of all members of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Madam Speaker, can we have clarification on what implications that change would have?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I will read the amendment for clarity's sake.

"The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal has moved that the motion be amended by striking the word "motion" in the fourth line and substituting "main motion."

Does that clarify for the members what the intent of the amendment is? Okay.

Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: We've had a lot of concerns about the process that the government has used in making changes to the standing orders. I guess we've been concerned that there was no opportunity for all three parties to come together and unanimously—or at least reach some consensus as to what the changes might be. As you well know, these changes were made in a way that the press received them first, and the two opposition parties received them next. There was never, ever any time for us to determine or have an opportunity to discuss the reasons for the changes being made or to make some decisions as to how they might better meet the test of accountability to the people in the province of Ontario and deal with some of the issues of concern to us.

I would say to you that we have proposed an amendment. Our amendment would change the question period time from 10:45 to 1 o'clock. Our main objection to the standing order changes, which are drastically going to

alter the time of the Legislature's sittings, is the time of question period. Question period is going to move from a starting time of approximately 2 o'clock every day to 10:45 in the morning. We are quite concerned about that because we believe that question period is probably the most important time of the day. It is an opportunity for us to hold the government accountable and, regrettably, there are some implications to the ability of the opposition parties to do so. There are also implications for the press, who have indicated that there's a problem as far as their ability to hold the government to account.

I just want to go to a letter that was received by the NDP which I think probably addresses the whole issue of question period quite effectively. Professor Graham White, a respected individual who actually spent six years in the Clerk's office of the assembly, has indicated that he is of the opinion, the view—"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."

I guess that is our key concern as well. We simply don't believe that there's going to be the same opportunity to hold the government to account if question period starts at 10:45. We have no problem with starting the day earlier, as it's going to now, at 9 o'clock. We're quite prepared to do that. In fact, if it was 8 or 7, we would be prepared to be here as well.

Probably, the only change that's going to happen is for staff: the people who support this Legislature and some of the members, who drive in every day. It's going to mean that instead of getting up at perhaps 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock and coming into this place—because of the gridlock we experience now around the city of Toronto and around the GTA, and wherever you might be coming from, whether it's Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Oshawa, Barrie or Newmarket, it is going to mean that both the staff and the members are just simply going to have to get up earlier. Obviously, there would be a change to some people's schedules.

But Professor Graham White goes on to say that "moving question period into the morning would very seriously detract from the strongest accountability mechanism available to the opposition." He goes on to say that because we have a majority government—and we usually do in this province—"It is vitally important for the people's elected representatives to be able to hold the government to account for its policy and administration."

So that's why it is so important that we oppose the change to the standing period time, because it is the most effective mechanism for fostering government accountability and for keeping the people—and this is important—in the province of Ontario aware of what's going on in this Legislature: aware of the bills that are being debated, the bills that are being introduced and the opportunity to hold the government accountable for their successes and their failures.

For example, today, we held the government to account when it comes to the economy. We now understand that, according to the TD report, this government in the province of Ontario is headed in a direction which will lead us to become a have-not province. This is a province which used to be the leading province in all of Canada when it came to the economy. We were the economic engine of Ontario, and today we learn that we're dead last.

It's that type of information that we need to be able to communicate to the public. We need to make them aware of the government's successes, and in this case, the fact that they've taken no action to turn the economy around. They've simply continued to blame others, whether it's the federal government, the dollar or oil prices. We need that opportunity to hold the government accountable for their actions. Also, the government needs to be given the opportunity—and we do too—when there are successes, to be able to speak to those as well.

1550

Question period is the most important part of every day. It is the only legislative proceeding to which the media pays regular attention, and, I would dare say, it is the time of day when the most people in this province pay any attention. I know many people who will turn it on for question period, and then they turn it off. So an "effective question period is essential to the health of democracy in this province," and we're now going to change it from about 2 o'clock to 10:45.

Why is this a problem? Again, I want to quote from Graham White. He says—and he knows; he was here for six years—that it will severely undercut the effectiveness of question period. He goes to say that you need to plan, you need to research and you need to reflect if you're going to pose questions to the government of the day.

Now, this is sometimes a challenge even in the afternoon, but it certainly is going to be made more impossible by having it at 10:45. The opposition parties need to find the facts, they need to process the facts, they need to locate, and they need to contact the experts inside and outside of the government. They need to solicit factual information and opinion from people and organizations who are affected by the government's bills, the government's actions; these people need to have their opinions considered in this Legislature. And they need to organize whatever material they have been able to gather into a coherent question period strategy.

Despite your efforts to do a lot of this the day before, it's not always possible, because a lot of question period, as we saw today again, speaking about the economy and the fact that we're now going to be dead last in Canada, really depends on the information that you see in the media. A lot of it requires an immediate response, and you can't prepare for it the night before. Many of the questions that we ask, as reflected today, originate in stories that are published in newspapers, on the TV and on the radio, and the newspapers are not published until the morning.

It also takes time to make sure that the information you hear or read about is factually correct, and of course, you always need to do some further research if you're going to have an effective question. This is a reason why we oppose the change in the time of question period. We hope that the government will consider our amendment to change the question period time to a set time of 1 o'clock today. If they're really serious about listening to the opposition and thoughtfully considering why this change is necessary in order to make sure that we can hold them accountable, and make sure that the will of the people is reflected, I would urge them to support our amendment today.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Here we are, addressing yet another time allocation motion from the government, older members of which howled in protest when they sat in opposition and governments of the day introduced similar time allocation motions. To be fair, there were—oh, my goodness, how shocking—four days of debate, four sessional days of debate on the motion that would dramatically alter the standing orders, including shifting question period in a most dramatic way.

Now, let's understand that's not four whole calendar days, is it? We're not talking about eight hours a day of debate when we talk about four days of debate so far. We're not talking about six. We're not talking about four. We're talking about maybe two or two and a half hours a day during the course of those four days.

So let's not pretend that somehow there was some long protracted process taking place here that in any way, shape or form had the potential or the capacity of derailing this majority government's insidious plan. Let's not delude ourselves. Are you with me on that one?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Absolutely.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I hope so.

Four sessional days of debate, on a good day, maybe a total of 10 hours. We have 10 New Democrats. How many Conservatives in the official opposition?

Mr. Tim Hudak: It's 26.

Mr. Peter Kormos: And then the balance of members of this Legislature as well, who I presume—dare I be presumptuous?—would want their constituents to know, either now, currently, or maybe a week, a year, two years or five years down the road, why they would support the burying of question period in the morning hours of the day.

That's what it boils down to, don't it, Speaker? You've listened, and I know there's been nat, nat, nat about starting at 9, starting at 10. Look, I'll start at 8. Do you guys want to start at 7 a.m.? I'll start at 7 a.m. I'm fine. I'll be here. I've worked shift work, do you understand what I'm saying? I've worked the occasional double shift, I've worked midnights—and I'm not 25 anymore. I'm not 35 either, but I'm pretty confident—

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Looking good, though.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The member says. I take those kinds of compliments anywhere, any time I can. I appreciate it.

But look, that isn't the issue. Let me put this to you. Will you indulge me? Will you permit me? Thank you, Speaker. If there's anything that can be declared to be the de facto property of the opposition, it's question period. The introduction of government backbench questions to question period is a relatively new phenomenon. In fact, question period—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Yes, it is—a relatively new phenomenon.

Mr. Tim Hudak: What year?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, in the lifetime of a whole lot of Ontarians. Mr. Hudak wants me to come up with the year, the month, the day. Well, I'm sorry. I've disappointed him, probably once again.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You should do your research.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's the whole point. It was well before my time; let's put it that way, okay, Mr. Hudak? Well before my time.

But the introduction of government backbench questions is relatively recent. It is also almost inevitably a direct violation to standing orders, as we often note, being referred to the standing orders by myself and more than a few others—most specifically standing order 36(d), along withstanding order 36(a). One has to question how relevant backbench member questions are to question period.

That's not to say that from time to time in the history of government backbench questions there haven't been hard-hitting backbench questions. They're oh, so rare, but when a member does ask them, boy, oh boy, does it change the temperature in this place rapidly. It is a real delight to behold. It really is; it really, really is, because, what happens now?

Let's understand this; let's be perfectly clear. The minister has an office that writes the backbench question for the questioner, who then stands up when his or her time comes and either displays great reading skills or marginal reading skills and reads the question. It's inevitably lengthy, it's inevitably not related to something that's an urgent matter or a matter of express public concern, but it's a fluff question, a lob ball, the old underhanded pitch. The minister will then read the answer and display his or her reading skills, or lack thereof, and then the government backbencher will turn the page. I remember seeing some backbenchers' questions in this government where I've noticed, as it's being dropped to the floor, that at the bottom of the question it says, "Turn the page," so the backbencher doesn't foul up.

Look, we're talking about people who sit idle for lengthy periods of time. It's just like your car: If you leave it sitting for a couple of years there, the tires are going to deflate and you're liable to get some rust inside those cylinders, if you don't squirt some oil down there before you put her away—right, Mr. Miller? You can't just leave an engine idle. But, you see, we've got a whole lot of backbenchers here who sit idle for protracted periods of time, so it's important to give them as explicit a set of directions as possible.

1600

Question 1 at the bottom: "Turn page for question 2." I'm not criticizing. I'm not condemning anybody. I understand, because, you see, there's an impression on the part of backbenchers from the government that if they ask a question, somehow it gives them some exposure here in the Legislature. I suppose it does, but you can get that as readily by sitting behind the Premier, assuming that the minister who usually sits behind the Premier isn't there, and making sure that you lean to one side or the other. You've got to understand what the camera angle is when you sit behind the Premier in an empty seat or, indeed, if you have the privilege and luxury of sitting beside the Premier, should from time to time the Minister of Finance not be able to be here.

I've seen government backbenchers literally sneak—my neighbour's dog Cheech: Cheech was out. I was at the market on Saturday morning, and I came back, because at the market some young folks sell homemade dog biscuits and Cheech knows I show up with dog biscuits. So Cheech—

Mr. Mike Colle: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I can't recognize the member; he's not in his seat.

Mr. Mike Colle: What's the dog Cheech got to do with this?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Continue the debate, please.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker.

You sit and listen, Mr. Colle, and I'm going to tell you what relevance Cheech has to this debate.

So there I am: I pull up the truck in front of the house down on Bald Street, and the neighbours, Bruce and Charlotte, are out in their backyard and Cheech is there. Now, Cheech has been very well trained not to cross the property line, even though we share—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Colle notes that Cheech is his uncle's name. His uncle is not my neighbour's dog—please.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I'd remind the member to try to address other members by their ridings and not their names.

Mr. Peter Kormos: My neighbour's dog Cheech is my neighbour's dog. It's a dog, for Pete's sake. But Cheech knows—a very smart dog—not to cross the property line. It'll sit there right on the edge. But the neighbours come over to the patio, and I pull out of my pocket a little package of these dog biscuits—homemade, from the Welland market square—and Cheech starts creeping across the line. Do you know dogs that'll do that? Just an inch at a time. First the nose goes across, the snout, and then paw after paw, and before you know it Cheech is, like, five feet into my yard, not that I mind.

But that's what I've seen government backbenchers do, sitting beside the Premier. They keep crowding the Premier because they want a part of the shot, right? They want to get right in there. They're leaning over. They're darn near sitting on the Premier's lap. Watch here, you'll

see it. The Premier doesn't know who they are. You see, there are no photographs on the little seating chart here.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: Standing order 23(b) directs the member to direct his speech to the question under discussion. As interesting as the anecdotes and the digressions are, they have drifted from the topic under discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the member for his point and will remind all members that we are speaking to a particular motion and expect that these stories will come back to the motion that's on the floor. Thank you.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you, Speaker.

Let me explain it this way. I know this is abstract and it's a little difficult for some, but if I am going back to Welland from Toronto, I can take either the Gardiner Expressway, the QEW and 406—zoom—assuming there aren't, of course, huge traffic jams on the QEW, or I can take Highway 2 along the lake here through Port Credit and I can join up with Highway 20. You know where that is, Speaker. I'll still get to Welland, but it takes a little longer. So, you see, the point I'm getting to is that I'm making a point here, and there are two ways to make a point: You can either drive the QEW and get there fast—far less entertaining, far less pleasant, far less scenery to enjoy on the way there, and you get a far lesser understanding of what Ontario is all about—or you can take Highway 2 and Highway 20 down through the heart of the Niagara region. I'm getting to my point.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Close to my house.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Close to the Hudak homestead.

I'm getting to the point, you see, but some people over here always want to take the highway; they don't care about small-town Ontario. They don't care about those little burgs, villages and hamlets that make this province and this country the wonderful place that it is. So what I'm saying is, I understand.

The other problem is that a whole lot of folks in our society nowadays want instant gratification. They want it now. They don't want to have to work for it. It's far easier for a government backbencher to have a scripted question that he or she gets to ask and have that Warholian fame—and it's not even 15 minutes; it's like a minute and a half—than it is for a government backbencher to stand up and participate in a debate. Not with the Coles Notes from the whiz kids—what did Mr. Murdoch call them? Never mind what Mr. Murdoch called them—in the Premier's office. And what I have noted over the course of two decades now is that somebody has kept the template for those Coles Notes, because there are some Coles Notes being used that I recall back from over 20 years ago. It's true. Regardless of the regime change and regardless of the colour of the flag that waves outside here, the Coles Notes, the cheat notes, appear to remain the same.

What I'm trying to explain is: Why do we have debate? Lord knows, the days are long gone when you've got governments that aren't controlled by the Premier's office. Mr. Zimmer is well aware of that. Governments

control not by elected people but by unelected people and, increasingly agonizingly, by unelected people who aren't even in the Premier's office: the pollsters, the consultants and the bloggers. It's incredibly frustrating for that to be the case; I resent it myself.

So we know that when the marching orders come down and when there are any number of government backbenchers—which is an unfair term, because not all of them sit on the backbenches. There isn't enough room in the backbenches for all of the backbenchers. Government backbenchers—heck, some of them sit here. A backbencher is a term used to refer to somebody who's not in cabinet. I'm not sure whether it applies to PAs or not—parliamentary assistants or not.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: See, that's the problem. You want to acquire an ability, at the very least, to read body language here, if not minds. During question period—the government has some very capable ministers in its cabinet. The government also has some ministers in its cabinet who, when they stand up to answer a question, you see half a dozen backbenchers looking saying, “I could do better than that,” and, “Why is she or he there instead of me? I could do better than that.” We got backbenchers who run out in their pyjamas on cold winter mornings with slippers on their feet, grabbing the morning papers to see which cabinet minister got himself or herself into trouble last night, because just maybe the door might open or at least the phone will ring.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Speak of the devil.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: Don't get the wrong impression. I truly do enjoy listening to speeches from the member. However, let us refer again to the standing orders—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member needs to put the point of order very succinctly, please.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Order 23(h) prohibits the making of an allegation against another member, and 23(i) prohibits the imputing of false or unavowed motives to another member. In both of these cases, Speaker, I find that the anecdote does transgress the standing orders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the member for his point and remind all members to please be careful about impugning any other members in their speeches. I return the floor to the member from Welland.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I thank the member for his point as well. And for Pete's sake, will he stop riding my coat-tails during this afternoon's sitting? If he wants to get on Hansard and on television, just stand up.

1610

The member for Mississauga–Streetsville is a perfectly capable storyteller. I've listened to him here in this Legislature. I've encouraged him, quite frankly, to speak more often. I've encouraged him, equally frankly, to use his full 20 minutes available to him as a follow-up speaker. But for Pete's sake: Look, I understand, but get your

own press on your own time. Get your own Hansard during your own 20 minutes. I've got a scarce hour available to me, and I've only got 26 minutes left and I'm nowhere near finished what I'm talking about; nowhere near.

We're talking about why we have debates. Your folks, the people who vote for you or don't vote for you, have a right to know why you're voting a particular way on a particular issue. Your folks, the people who vote or don't vote for you in your riding, have a right to have their stories told in this chamber. You're their voice; that's why they elect you. They have a right to have their stories told. They have a right to get some information about why a particular bill or policy is or isn't relevant to them and why a particular bill or policy should or shouldn't be supported. They have a right to know why a particular bill or policy, from your point of view, is or is not being voted for by their representative.

This is indeed a sadly premature time allocation motion because, while all but maybe one New Democrat has spoken to the matter—there are only 10 of us; we understand that—there still remain Conservative members who I believe have not spoken to the matter, and more than a few government members. I would dearly, passionately, want to see a process here that from time to time—merely from time to time; not every time, not even most of the time, but maybe just from time to time—reflects the government's respect for members of all political stripes, regardless of where they sit, because that's what Dalton McGuinty promised, huh? Mr. McGuinty promised that the role of the backbencher was going to become more meaningful. Mr. McGuinty promised that the opposition was going to be given more regard. Well, let's start talking about keeping promises—or more breaking of them, as the case might be.

For the opposition, it's about the timing of question period. I've heard any number of people speak. People are protesting a little too much, because there are many members here—most—who work very hard, and some who probably don't work very hard at all. That's just the odds. That's just the stats. That's just the nature of the human beast. But certainly most. Hard work is all relative, isn't it? Nobody here sleeps in. I can't think of a single person whom I know to be a sleeping-in kind of person. Everybody here—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Some of them sleep here.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Yakabuski interjects. I have witnessed that from time to time, sir, but I wasn't about to expose those people who might have been up all night working with constituents.

I remember Morton Shulman sitting over here, and one of my predecessors, Ellis Morningstar—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Ellis Morningstar. What a great lad.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Yes, he was.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He was a great lad.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Ellis Morningstar was the Conservative MLA/MPP for Welland. Ellis sat here for at least 30 years. As a matter of fact, he was the predecessor

to Mel Swart. Mel Swart broke the Tory stronghold in Welland. It took him a long time to do it—many, many runs.

Ellis's lieutenant, his capo, was a fellow named Frank Sorrentino, whom I knew well. I knew well Ellis well, too, but not as well as Frank Sorrentino, because Frank Sorrentino was a real estate agent. Frank Sorrentino was mentored by one of my mentors, Alan Goodman, a very, very capable lawyer who eventually became a judge in the Ontario Court of Appeal. His daughter Susan is now in the court herself, sitting on the bench.

Ellis lived out on Alberta Street. He was a foreman over at Page-Hersey Tubes. When the House was sitting, he took the train in. Page-Hersey Tubes, as industrial employers would be wont to, were more than prepared to accommodate him, especially as a government member, for the obvious reasons. There was no Integrity Commissioner, there was no Ombudsman, to speak of but a few.

Ellis was very popular. Those were the days when an MPP could fix things: A phone call to the minister and you could get a job in a liquor store; a phone call to the minister and your workers' comp file would be accelerated. It's true. I've seen a whole lot of the correspondence. Oh, a few of the right things said, done, including the right political donations, and you'd be appointed a justice of the peace or a judge. I suppose some things never change.

Ellis held court—because there were no constituency offices—and his lovely wife was, of course, his constituency assistant. She took the phone calls at home.

We have a colleague here, John Yakabuski. His father served here in the same type of environment. Frank Miller—

Mr. Norm Miller: There were no constituency assistants.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, the member's spouse was the constituency assistant. Please.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's right.

So Ellis's basement, Saturday morning—and Frank Sorrentino was the gatekeeper. Frank Sorrentino would accept you because you came bearing gifts. This I know because I was there. Ellis had shelvage after shelvage on his basement walls filled with bottles of booze. And people would come—my kind of people—Eastern Europeans, some of them just new immigrants. They had troubles of one sort or another. But you would no more think of going to Ellis's basement on a Saturday morning without a bottle of booze than you would think of going to church without a quarter for the collection plate. So Ellis's basement, with just rows and rows of bottles of booze—not that Ellis didn't drink a few himself.

One day, Morty Shulman, something of an upstart in NDP ranks, smuggled a—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: No, Morty's dead. Morty's gone.

He smuggled a camera into the chamber. Ellis was sitting in the government benches, and Ellis was a very, very large man. He had the pants that come up to here

and the tie that was short enough so it just barely met the pants. He wore those draped, you know. He was a big man, big hands. He comes from a Pennsylvania Dutch background.

Ellis had his hands folded on the top part of his chest—because they were comfortable there, they weren't going to slide off—and he had fallen asleep. Well, Morty Shulman, who I admire a great deal—admired and continue to admire—who I knew and who I had great respect for, to be fair, Morty Shulman knew a lot of things but he didn't understand small-town Ontario. He took a snapshot of Ellis Morningstar with his hands folded on his huge—as a matter of fact, it's called an alderman. Did you know that? The colloquial for a huge belly was an “alderman.” Check it. It's a wonderful use of the word. “Look at the alderman on that politician.” Of course, the origin of the word “alderman” was the Tammany Hall type of politics, these fellows who didn't have any shortage of food or drink.

Shulman then released the photo. He did one of those gotcha moments, “Aha, I caught Ellis Morningstar sleeping.” And I have no doubt that Ellis was. But Ellis sputtered a little bit. He said, “Of course I wasn't sleeping, but I closed my eyes for a few minutes because I was up late last night working on workers' compensation files until at least 1 or 2 in the morning. My eyes got weary and I felt the need to rest my eyes for about a couple of minutes. But asleep? Of course not.”

Ellis Morningstar only spoke around once a year in the Legislature, and that was for very brief periods of time, but he was a person who had considerable influence, as the Conservative inner circle did in those days, with those types of governments. Those days are long gone now. More is expected of members now than was expected of them then. Of course you can't get a job for somebody's brother-in-law in the liquor store simply by making a phone call. You can't get them a job at all. Things don't work that way any more, and thank goodness. It means—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Yakabuski interjects. Maybe things in Renfrew haven't caught up with the rest of Ontario, but I suspect they have.

People have high expectations of their members, and one of them should be that their members participate in debate. The other expectation that people should have of this chamber is that this isn't a rubber stamp. This isn't the politburo, for Pete's sake. We shouldn't let decisions get made—we do, regrettably—in the Premier's office or down there on Bay Street, just south of here, and then shipped into the Legislature just to be rubber-stamped, with a bunch of marionettes nodding their heads, voting as they're instructed. At the very least, members could read the legislation before they vote on it. Is that too much to ask?

1620

I don't want to make any allegations about any member, but it seems to me I've heard more than a few of them talk about more than a few bills, be it here or in

committee, and reveal thereby that they hadn't read the legislation. They hadn't even read the explanatory notes. Come on, at least read the explanatory notes. But by all means, don't just rely on the ministerial cheat sheets, which give you the government's spin.

One of the regrettable things about government and politics in general is that it's all about spin, it's all about spin and more spin. Is that what the public wants or deserves? Doesn't the public want and deserve the straight goods? Wouldn't they love to hear some straight talk? Wouldn't they like to hear some frank and candid—dare I say honest but for fear of violating the standing orders, because to say “honest” implies that some aren't being honest—responses to questions?

Why is the government trying to relegate question period to a morning audience? Let's understand, governments don't do these things unless it's in the interests of the government. There is nothing whatsoever altruistic about partisan politics, least of all once you get inside the chamber. No quarter is given.

Could one of the pages get me a glass of water? I've got to fuel up a little bit.

Governments don't introduce this type of motion unless it's in their interests. And if it's in the government's interests, it's not in the opposition's interests. And if it's not in the opposition's interests, it's not in the public interests.

The role of the opposition in this chamber, in this Parliament, like in any other, is the most single important function that takes place in the parliamentary system. I believe that. It's called democracy. If you have but token opposition, if you have opposition that's marginalized, that's diminished in their effect or capacity, then you have an erosion of democracy, and that's not a good thing by anybody's measure, is it?

I've had occasion to note that in the series of majority governments that we've endured in this province, starting back in 1987, a whole lot of people get elected to the Legislature who wouldn't have been elected were it not for the sweep, and a whole lot of people get defeated who wouldn't have been defeated were it not for the sweep, and that in the course of sweeps, people get elected who have no business being here, and in the course of sweeps, people get defeated who are very important, effective members of the chamber, of all political stripes. It started happening in 1987.

The other phenomenon that happens when you have sweeps is that people get elected to this Parliament without ever having been in opposition. Their first parliamentary experience is one of power and one of clamouring for perks, prestige and yet more power, and I find that a distasteful thing. I find it unbecoming of people who in and of themselves are well-educated, intelligent, skilled, talented people with life experiences that enable them to bring some real value to this chamber.

Let's make this clear. These standing order changes will mean that there will be more debate hours per day, which will also mean that legislation will pass through this House more quickly, because the standing orders

also provide for an automatic, if you will, threshold for time allocation at the end of but six and a half hours of debate. That means only a handful of people have discussed, or contributed to the discussion of, a bill or a motion like this one.

I also want you to know that New Democrats, along with the Conservatives, made it very clear to the government that if question period could be maintained at 1 o'clock—because we believe that strongly in it—we will adopt, sign off on, vote for and support every other part of this standing order motion. We have no quarrel with coming here at nine. We have a quarrel with accelerating the passage of legislation so that it doesn't receive the scrutiny it deserves. But, having said that, we recognize it's the majority government that's hell-bent on doing that. We are prepared to accept all of that and collaborate, co-operate with the government in the context of those new rules. The government rejected that, in my view, considerable offer.

The government says, "Oh, well, what's the difference about what time question period takes place? What's the difference: 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock?" If there's no difference, then what's wrong with 1 o'clock? If it's the government's argument that it's six of one, half a dozen of the other, then let's go for one and get this whole business resolved and dealt with.

When I spoke to the motion itself, I had occasion to quote the member for St. Catharines, the current Minister of Transportation, whom I've known for a great deal of time and for whom I have a great deal of respect and regard. I quoted the comments he made in 1997, in response so the so-called Baird standing order changes. One of the things Mr. Bradley, the member for St. Catharines, the Minister of Transportation, said, and I quoted it last week from Hansard of that debate, was, "The government was risking creating a hostile environment, such that it would be impossible to obtain the unanimous consent for even the most modest of things."

We had some pretty hostile parliaments here over the course of the last 18 years. In the early 1990s, when the NDP held power, there was pretty hostile stuff going on: pretty heavy-handed approaches on the part of the government and some real resentment on the part of the opposition. The Liberals felt they'd been cheated out of a victory. They thought it was theirs simply to have. There was a great deal of resentment by the Liberals of the NDP having formed government. They had a hard time, if you will, adjusting to opposition. They still wanted to be the government.

Oh, my, when Mike Harris and the Conservatives sailed to victory in 1995, not only were there a whole lot of New Democrats shaking their heads, but there were a whole lot of Liberals shaking their heads twice as fast, because they assumed that they were now the natural party of power. And there was Mike Harris—remember Mike Harris and Dianne Cunningham? Andy Brandt was the leader. Mike Harris was from North Bay.

You know, a whole lot of folks in this Legislature thought that when Mike Harris entered that leadership

race, Dianne Cunningham would just clean up. So the people were surprised, and some people were arrogant enough to be amused, when Mike Harris got elected as leader of the Conservative Party. Mike Harris isn't a guy who walks around with Ph.D. after his name or has highfalutin sort of approaches to things. When you talk about a member of this Legislature, a leader who acquired skills, who had a learning curve that was as steep as anybody's could be—because his leadership then resulted in his becoming Premier. The Liberals were fit to be tied. They didn't know whether they were drilled, punched or bored.

1630

When Mike Harris, again, improved as much as he did, went out there and sold his revolution to voters who had voted NDP, and who the Liberals arrogantly expected to vote for them—of course, we know what happened in 2003. We know what happened, which, again, more than a few Conservatives I'm sure found frustrating. But the message is this: The voters of Ontario have voted for all three political parties—all four, to be fair to the Green. No longer do voters or families of voters see themselves as the minority of voters who identify themselves as Liberal, Tory, NDP or Green. They vote every which way in every which riding.

So this is one thing I can say with certainty to some of the Liberal members of this Legislature: Some of you will end up in opposition benches. I don't know how many, and I'm not going to be arrogant enough to suggest when. Some of you, then, will have thrust upon you the responsibility of being in opposition. So if you think it's cute or somehow oh so clever to trim the wings of the opposition but a little more, wait and see.

I oppose this time allocation motion; never voted for one, ever. I recognize that governments of all political stripes have used them, but I also put this to you: If we're going to sit longer, if we're going to have more debate, as the Premier suggests we will pursuant to these standing orders, then why in the Lord's name would we need a time allocation motion? Why would we? The suggestion from Mr. McGuinty is that this government is all about encouraging debate, accommodating all those people who want to speak to a bill, a motion or any other matter. Then why is there a time allocation motion on the floor today?

Let's understand what a time allocation motion is: A time allocation motion is when the government uses its brute majority to terminate debate, notwithstanding how many members haven't had an opportunity to make a contribution to that discussion here in this chamber. It's not based on whether there's been a thorough discussion. It's not based on whether the public is satisfied that there has been adequate consideration. It's not based on whether or not the seriousness of the matter is one that should warrant it receiving, yes, indeed, sometimes ponderous and thoughtful consideration. It's based on the will of a government that wants to accelerate its agenda.

I imagine that in due course, there will be Liberals having to eat crow with respect to some of the things

they've said about the standing order motion, and even more so, this time allocation motion. I imagine that there will be some Liberal members who will truly regret not having stopped their Premier in his tracks.

Let's understand, this comes out of the Premier's office. Both the Conservatives and the New Democrats very clearly put to the government that the matter of standing order changes should be put to a tripartite committee, should involve the Clerk's office and should involve the Speaker; so that we can carefully study other jurisdictions, so that we can carefully study the needs of this chamber and so that we can proceed in a thoughtful and studied way. That didn't happen. Rather, the government wanted to ram stuff through—and it does it because it can, and it can because its backbenchers don't stand up to it because its backbenchers are too eager scanning the morning papers to see whether or not a cabinet position has opened as a result of the delinquencies of a cabinet minister the night before, in whatever way, shape or form. It's because the backbencher is obsessed with becoming a parliamentary assistant, a minister or some other servant of the Premier's office. It's because there are people outside of cabinet who are more capable than people inside of cabinet—and they know it—but they're prepared to embarrass themselves, to humiliate themselves, to grovel—

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Speaker: Again, I'm asking the member to abide by standing order 23(i), which is the imputing of false or unavowed motives to another—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank you for your point of order, but I didn't hear the member impugning any particular other member, so I'll ask him to wrap up his speech and give him another few seconds to do so.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, my small portion of time is up.

I regret that this government and its members prefer the jackboots to democracy. I tell you that I will vote against this motion with great pride.

Mr. David Zimmer: I want to speak to what we should be debating today, and that's the substance of the time allocation motion. The deputy House leader made the point in his opening remarks that, really, what we want to do is move along in amending the standing orders.

The previous speaker, at the end of his remarks, hit on the test that we should be bringing to time allocation motions, and that test is, has there been a thorough discussion of the issue at hand? Has there been adequate consideration? Have all of the issues been debated? Are they on the table? Does everybody understand them? In my submission, we've had plenty of time to do that. We've debated the standing orders amendment. Everybody knows what the issues are—the NDP, the Conservatives, the Liberals. It's now our obligation to bring ourselves to the point where we are going to vote on it.

Has there been enough debate? In my submission, there has been enough debate.

Let me turn to the history and facts that we should be considering when we're considering the matter of time allocation.

These are the facts. The amendment of the standing orders was tabled on April 16, so everybody had a chance to analyze the document, reflect on it and bring their judgment to bear on it. On April 21, five days later, it was formally moved in this Legislature. Again, everybody had a chance in that five-day period to think the thing through and formulate their questions. We then started debate right after the amendment was tabled, on April 21. We started the debate right after petitions. That's late in the afternoon, probably around 3:30 or 4 o'clock, and we continued until 6 p.m. We came back the next day, April 22, and again picked up right after petitions and continued until 6 p.m. We came back April 23 and again picked it up around 3:30 or 4 o'clock, right after petitions, and continued until 6 p.m. On April 28, we started to debate the time allocation motion at about 6:45, and we continued that to 9:30—an evening sitting on that topic. What's really interesting is that earlier that afternoon, there was a vote in this House as to whether we would sit in the evening to consider this business that we're now talking about today. The motion to sit in the evening was voted against by—guess who? The Conservatives and the NDP. We gave them the opportunity to come here in the evening and they said, "No, no; it's an evening. We don't work in the evenings. We're not coming here in the evenings." And they voted against it. Fortunately, those of us on the Liberal side of the House voted for it.

1640

We came here on the evening of the 28th, and I remember that evening because, rather than debate the issues at hand, the opposition party started this process of ringing the bells. I was here, prepared to speak to the substance of matters that evening, as were my colleagues, and we were prevented. We did not get an opportunity to speak because of this procedural technicality. The NDP and the Conservatives dragged us through it so that we couldn't debate the substance of it.

The NDP and the Conservatives are speaking with a forked tongue on this issue. Today, they stand up and they express outrage that they haven't had an opportunity to speak to the substance of this. Yet on the 28th, they voted against sitting in the evening so that we could have a discussion on the substance of it. They had their opportunity on the 21st, 22nd and the 23rd.

Mr. Norm Miller: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: The language he is using I don't think is appropriate for this place.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: That language was used specifically in this House, with all due respect to the official opposition whip. "Forked tongue" has a specific dictionary meaning. It was used in this Legislature a week and a half ago. That was when Speaker Peters was sitting. It was not kept silent; it was clear and obvious. I'm submitting to you that it is not out of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I thank the members for their remarks on this issue and remind all members to please be careful in terms of the language that they use in this House.

Mr. David Zimmer: In any event, after debate on the 21st, 22nd and 23rd, the opposition parties voted against an evening sitting to continue the debate on the evening of the 28th.

The opposition parties have had a substantial opportunity to speak to it, and in fact they have. Eight members of the official opposition spoke—that's a third of their caucus. Eight out of 26 members spoke, and seven out of the 10 NDP caucus members spoke. The Conservative member for Kitchener–Waterloo spoke. The Conservative member for Nepean–Carleton spoke. The NDP member for Hamilton Centre spoke. The Conservative member for Simcoe–Grey spoke. The NDP member for Welland spoke. The Conservative member for Niagara West–Glanbrook spoke. The NDP member for Timmins–James Bay spoke. The Conservative member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke spoke. The NDP member for Kenora–Rainy River spoke. The Conservative member for Wellington–Halton Hills spoke. The NDP member for Beaches–East York spoke. The Conservative member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills spoke. The NDP member for Parkdale–High Park spoke. The Conservative member for Oshawa spoke. My distinguished colleague sitting beside me here, the NDP member for Toronto–Danforth, spoke.

In addition to that, three Conservative members made lengthy members' statements to this issue: three statements on April 28—

Mr. Peter Kormos: David, 90 seconds is not lengthy. Correct yourself.

Mr. David Zimmer: Four opposition members raised questions in the Legislature: on April 28, April 24, April 22 and April 21. In fact, the debate thus far, and I have it in my hands here, has taken up approximately—I counted it. It's either 160 or 163 pages of Hansard. Here's Hansard; it's a couple of pounds of Hansard.

I come back to my point. The issue—and it's interesting that the member for Welland raised it, and that is, have we had adequate debate? Have we explored the issues? Has everybody had a chance to speak who wants to speak? The answer to that is yes. The Liberals understand the issues, clearly the NDP understand the issues and clearly the Conservatives understand the issues. We've had sufficient debate. There've been members' statements, there've been members' questions, there has been the debate that I've referred to, and there is the business of the government trying to have an evening sitting to further the discussion, and the opposition parties voted against it because they did not want to sit in the evenings.

Since I've been here—and that's since 2003—I can't remember an occasion when the opposition parties have not voted against a government motion to sit in the evening.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's not true. Correct yourself.

Mr. David Zimmer: I can't remember an occasion.

It's obvious that the two things we should be addressing in the time allocation motion have been satisfied. One: Has everybody had a fair chance to speak to the issues? Are the issues clearly on the table, if you will? In my submission, they are. That being the case, I urge everyone in this House to vote with the government on the time allocation motion.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to debate the time allocation motion which we're talking about this afternoon. Just for those folks out there watching this debate, time allocation is ending debate on the motion to do with changing the standing orders here at the Ontario Legislature.

Many people probably wonder what the standing orders are. Every member has this little grey book in their desk that is the standing orders. They are really the rules by which this place operates: the rules of debate; how many hours or days it takes to pass a particular piece of legislation; when the Legislature sits. One of the key things in terms of the changes being made right now is when question period will occur.

When the Premier reacted in the Legislature to questions about these changes to the standing orders, he put the following spin on it. He said that we're changing the time of the sitting of the Legislature to match more the workday of the average Ontario citizen. I would suggest that that is baloney; that's just spin, and there is an ulterior motive to the changes the government is putting forward.

I think the changes to the standing orders to do away with night sittings really originated from the member from Nepean–Carleton, who is a young mother and a member of this Legislature who wanted to form a committee to look at changing the Legislature to make it more family-friendly. So this Legislature passed a motion to set up an all-party committee to look at making the Legislature more family-friendly. I would ask the government what happened to that committee, because it has not met or done the business of looking at making this place more family-friendly. The government has just unilaterally brought about changes to the standing orders. They've been debated now, and the debate is being forced to an end by this time allocation motion. They're doing things they want to lessen the effect of the opposition and to make it easier for the government. The family-friendly committee has not met to discuss the business of this place.

The spin that the Premier has been putting on this, suggesting that when members are not in the Legislature they're not working, is shameful and an insult to the members of this Legislature. I can tell you that this coming Monday, had we not been meeting, I was planning on attending the Parry Sound municipal association meeting in Burk's Falls at 9 a.m. Unfortunately, because these new standing orders will be in place by then, the Legislature will be in session and I will miss that important meeting at Burk's Falls.

1650

Last Saturday, which is not atypical for me, I drove 600 kilometres around the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. I started out early in the morning and attended various meetings around the riding and arrived home after 11 p.m., and I know that's not uncommon for lots of members, particularly rural members, in this place. So the idea that we aren't working if we're not actually here is offensive to members, the great majority of whom work very hard.

Then the question becomes, what is this all about? What's the government's agenda?

The main thing we object to in the change in the standing orders is the time of question period. They're changing question period from being in the afternoon. The PC opposition has put forward an amendment that would change this proposal so that question period would be at 1 o'clock, at a set time every day, a time that allows more time for questions and allows the press more access to ministers. This government is switching question period to an earlier time of the day, to 10:45, and that makes it a lot more difficult for the opposition to prepare questions. It makes it less family-friendly for those members of staff who will now be getting up quite early to scan all the media and to start preparing questions, because there's a fair amount of lead time before question period.

I believe the government is moving question period to an earlier time so that the afternoon will basically be free for all the government ministers to not necessarily be around the Legislature, to be out making announcements and not be tied to the Legislature.

There is reduced accountability, without a doubt. Experts like Professor Graham White have given their opinion that question period, the time of the day in the Legislature that is most watched by the media, will have less focus when it's at 10:45 in the morning. There's been a letter from the press gallery here at Queen's Park suggesting that this move will lessen the accountability of this place. I think it's been fairly unanimously agreed, certainly by the opposition parties, that having question period at 10:45 in the morning will make this place less accountable.

There are other changes, but that's the single biggest change that we object to, because it makes it more difficult for the opposition and easier for the government. The ministers will be out around the province; they won't be seen around this place.

To pass a bill, instead of being sessional days, it's now going to be hours, and the effect will be that bills will pass much quicker. What's wrong with that? I'll tell you what's wrong with that. Often, it takes a while for the general public and interested groups to learn about a bill. Having the debate spread out over a few weeks is a good thing because the general public and interest groups who might be interested learn about it, and it gives them time to participate in legislative committees. I think of the bill that's before us right now, the speed limiters bill to limit trucks to 105 kilometres. I think if that passed in a couple of days, the independent truckers who might be opposed

to it wouldn't even get an opportunity to learn about the bill, and all of a sudden it's the law. They wouldn't get an opportunity to speak amongst their members, to come before a committee to put their side of the situation forward, and to, hopefully, if the process is working, improve the bill. So that's another minor change that is being proposed.

Private members' bills are going to be debated on Thursday afternoon, and the time for private members' bills is reduced. It goes from an hour to 45 minutes. I think an hour is barely enough time, and that time is being reduced to 45 minutes. If you're going to reduce anything to 45 minutes, reduce question period to 45 minutes and get rid of those silly government questions where the question and answer are handed out before it starts. They're just a waste of time. I think that's how you could save 15 minutes.

The government House leader talked about and looked for a response from opposition parties about going to three weeks on, one week off. Certainly, the PC Party generally supports that, but that's not in these proposed new changes to the standing orders. That three weeks on, one week off, like the federal government, would be much better for rural members, in that we'd have a week every month to deal with rural issues.

There are many other points I'd like to make, but I know we have many members who would like to speak, so I'm going to wrap up and say that these changes are good for the government but bad for the opposition, and that is why we are voting against them and we'll be voting against this time allocation motion.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to add my voice to this debate, which has been taking place either on the motion to review the standing orders or on the time allocation motion. I will obviously be speaking to the time allocation motion, and I agree with all the comments which were made by the honourable member from Willowdale in that we should move ahead. We should move on from this debate and try out these new rules which are being proposed.

I have been intently listening to the debate which has been taking place this afternoon and on previous days. There have been valid points which have been raised from all sides, no doubt. However, my point of view, as a newer member in this chamber, is that I don't think we should be scared of some changes in the rules. I think we should embrace change and we should try it. It is a trial, and there is nothing wrong with trying the new hours to see how that works out. If that results in creating an efficient working place for all the members of this House, then great; we achieved something good. If not, then we can revisit those rules after the spring and see how they can be improved.

As a new member, I have to admit that I was kind of taken aback by the way the hours have been set up. We start at 1:30 in the afternoon with the routine proceedings, we work until about 6 o'clock, and then we start again most evenings, 6:45 to 9:30. As somebody who has been in private practice, practising law for many years,

and is used to starting work really early in the morning—and I'm not insinuating that we members don't work long hours. I think it is a 24/7 job, in essence. But in terms of getting substantive office work done, all of us in our previous life have the experience of getting things done early in the morning.

I don't see why in this instance, when we are in Toronto at Queen's Park, when we are sitting here as legislators, not in the assembly, we don't start early here as well, 9 o'clock in the morning, and get things done. I think that's definitely modernizing the way this chamber works, and we can really achieve things.

I think a lot of us newer members started discussing those issues, and I'm very proud that this government has taken on this issue and is trying to redefine the hours. Like I said earlier, let's try them on a trial basis and see how they work out. Perhaps we will have some positive change in this place. Change is not a bad thing.

I can imagine that some members who have been members for a long time might be a little concerned because they are used to a certain way of getting things done in this particular place. But I think for the benefit of us all, and for the benefit of attracting new talent out there, encouraging others from all walks of life to consider a role in public life, it might not be a bad idea to have new hours, hours which are more reflective of modern life, where we start at 9 o'clock in the morning and we end our day by 6 o'clock.

Given the nature of the technology, I'm a bit puzzled as to why moving question period to 10:45 in the morning is going to create such a big concern. We live in a sort of real-time zone, where we've got BlackBerries and Internet, where it's much easier for us to formulate our views, to formulate our questions and to get the right information in order to pose a question to the government. Once again, to hold to the fact that somehow moving question period from the afternoon to the morning is an attack on democracy—I'm unable to understand the link between the two. Once again, let's try. We should not be too scared.

1700

I admit, I'm a newer member. I have only been elected for seven months and I don't know the ins and outs. But I'm also willing to try things out. Just because things have been working in a particular way for centuries, that is not a valid argument that somehow changing them in a particular manner is going to be an attack on democracy. We will still have an accountability session. We still have a mechanism where the opposition can pose questions to the government side and the government has to respond to those questions, not only in this chamber but outside this chamber. There are, as we know, other different agents available too, through media and our constituents, who will always make us beholden to our point of view and ensure that we remain accountable to their views.

I undertook an unscientific poll on this issue as I was talking to people in my riding of Ottawa Centre. I asked them, "We are about to change these rules. There is a lot

of discussion taking place. What do you think about that?"

I represent Ottawa Centre, a riding which has the House of Commons right within its boundaries, where people are really in tune with politics. They follow politics all the time, federal and provincial, because that's just the nature of the riding. There are a lot of public servants and people who work in the House of Commons.

First of all, most of the people were not even aware that this debate is taking place. Second, when I explained to them what kinds of changes we're proposing, they were a bit surprised that this debate is even going on. The reaction I was getting from my constituents was, "Go ahead. Try it. It's not a bad idea. We're sending you to Toronto, to Queen's Park, to work. We don't understand why you start working at 1:30. Otherwise, we'd rather you were here in Ottawa, serving the constituents." I'd rather be in Ottawa as well, serving the constituents.

I think starting at 9 in the morning and finishing at 6, so we can all go back to the office and make those phone calls, get things done on behalf of our constituents, is a good idea. It will enhance the efficiency of this Legislature in making sure that we get things done. It is a step towards modernization. We should not be afraid of choosing change. Remember, the people of Ontario chose change in 2003 and they're very glad about it. They chose change then and they've affirmed that in this past election. Once again, I think it's a logical thing to say that if it does not work out, we'll review it. I think we'll all consult again.

I very much appreciate all the debate that has taken place on this issue. In listening to some of the debates just today, it's very clear in my mind that we've exhausted this issue and that we should move on with this time allocation motion so that we can implement the changes, try them out and hope we have created a more efficient, more friendly workplace which is reflective of all our values and all the collective good that we are trying to achieve on behalf of the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Before I call for further debate, can I just remind the members to try to keep the side conversations to a little lower pitch? It's becoming difficult for me to hear the members' speeches.

Mr. John Yakabuski: If the members pay attention, everyone will have no trouble hearing what I have to say, whether they want to or not.

What this whole debate today is essentially about is the time allocation motion. What I find really peculiar and puzzling is that this government has become so determined to use time allocation that they will even use it on a motion to change the standing orders. It's an example of what lengths they will go to to show how powerful they are and how weak the opposition is. They love to take those opportunities to point out that they have absolute power in this Legislature. And that's a fact: They have the majority and they can exercise it in the way that they choose.

But the best way democracy is served is to allow the opposition to have their say and to have their day. The people need a strong opposition. What is happening with the way that this government—I wasn't here, but I will concede that governments in the past have done similar things. I'm not saying exactly this thing, because this is unique, but it's always been the way of government to try to bring in changes to weaken the opposition collectively. I'm not suggesting that they do things to weaken the ability of individual members to be effective, because I don't believe they do that.

I must say that I try to work as closely as I can with ministries and ministers of the crown here in this Legislature. But collectively they do everything they can to weaken the opposition. That practice has purely partisan purposes: In order to strengthen them, as they hope they can win re-election. If they can make opposition less relevant, that will, in part, accomplish their goals.

It scares me, because this Premier, when he came to office, promised that he would make the role of the individual member more relevant. He would make the job of being an MPP something that mattered more, on an individual and a collective basis, to the people of Ontario and indeed to this Legislature. But what has happened is that more than ever before, more than any other Premier in history, power has been concentrated in Premier McGuinty's office.

The largest staff in the history of Ontario is in the Premier's office now. Seventy-two people are working in the Premier's office. The largest staff in either the Mike Harris premiership or the Ernie Eves premiership was 44. So the numbers tell a story: the largest staff in the Premier's office in the history of Ontario. That's a fact. That tells you where the power is concentrated in this Legislature.

I don't say this in any way to demean the individual MPPs, but the government MPPs have no freedom. We at least have the opportunity within our caucus to speak when our constituents need us to speak on their behalf. In the Liberal caucus, in the government caucus, that is totally controlled by Dalton McGuinty and those 72 people in his office. There is nothing, there is not a question asked, that is not approved by his office. There is not an answer given that isn't approved by his office. It is spin and messaging every minute of every question period.

Let's talk about that question period. I heard the member for Ottawa Centre speak about being a new member and how he couldn't understand why we had a problem with question period being at 10:45. We've all agreed that we have no problem with when the day starts and when it ends. But he couldn't understand why we want question period at 1 o'clock as opposed to 10:45.

I guess my submission to him and to every other member of the governing party would be: If it doesn't matter, why would we change something that is working quite well? The timing of question period is not the problem with question period. It is the fact that the government never answers questions in question period that is the

problem with question period. It is not the time of day. We could still have question period at 1 o'clock in the afternoon as a set time, not to vary because of ministerial statements or any of that kind of stuff—as a set time, 1 o'clock. Boom, 1 to 2 is question period.

We'd even be willing to shorten it. We'd even be willing to shorten it from 1 o'clock to 1:45. But as a trade-off, you'd have to take out those four government-planted fluffy questions every day. You couldn't have those. You couldn't allow ministers to stand up, beat their chests or talk about what a great job they're doing and applaud the individual member who asked the question. You wouldn't be allowed to do that. You'd have to give up that 16 minutes. But we'd be willing to do that. So if you want to make question period a little bit shorter, a little more tight, a little more snappy, we're quite prepared to do that.

We don't have a problem with the timing of the start of the day or the end of the day. Our question was, why do you need to move that question period to 10:45? We've already been through that part of the debate.

I want to talk about—which just proves what kind of lengths the government will go to to let us know, over and over again, just how powerful they are and how serious they are about using that power.

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We get these proposed changes to the committee structure today, because, you see, you can't change the standing orders, Madam Speaker, as you know, and the question period and the orders of the day and all of that kind of stuff—and I know the people out there in TV land are wondering, "What is he talking about?" I accept that they don't really care, but they do care that we're working. Do you know what else they care about? They care that opposition is given the opportunity to be effective. If they can't be effective, given the opportunity, that's the opposition's problem. But it is a responsibility of the government to ensure that they give opposition the opportunity to be effective. Other than that, you don't have a democracy; you have totalitarianism. That's what you've got. You've got a dictatorship, thank you very much.

We don't want to have that here in Ontario. So the people out there want us to be mindful of our responsibility as opposition, and they want the government to be respectful of the need of opposition to play its role.

We got these proposed—this is not a prop, Madam Speaker, it's an official document of this Legislature—changes to the committee structure. Do you know what we were told? Do you know what we were told—again, talking about the absolute power. What is that saying? Absolute power—no, I can't say that, can I? I can't say what I was about to say. No, because the member from Mississauga—Streetsville would have been up like a shot.

Anyway, about the absolute power: Do you know what we were told? "You have two choices: You give unanimous consent to these committee changes or you'll lose question period on Thursday."

Now, can you imagine that? Can you imagine that, to those people in the province of Ontario who rely on the fact that this is the one hour of a day that we have the opportunity to hold the government to account, to hold their feet to the fire and to ask them why they are doing this about that, or why they are not doing that about this? That's the only opportunity.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That was profound.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I'll tell you, I've heard some pretty profound things coming from that side of the House, certainly on this debate.

So this was what we were presented with: an ultimatum. The proverbial gun to the head: "You do this, or you'll lose question period."

Is that—the rhetorical question—respecting democracy, when you tell Her Majesty's loyal opposition, "You're going to do this, or you're not going to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the 12 million to 13 million Ontarians out there; you will not have the opportunity to question the government as to what they're doing"? I submit that that's not democracy.

I listened with great interest—you'll have to keep an eye on that clock for me, member for York-Simcoe, and let me know when I've had enough—

Interjection: When we've had enough.

Mr. John Yakabuski: When you've had enough.

I listened to the member for Welland quite intently when he talked about bygone eras and how different it was. As he alluded to, my father was a member of this Legislature in those halcyon days, as they say, when things were quite different.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I know a few other stories too.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I know that too. I know quite a few of them too, and most of those would be ruled unparliamentary just for talking about them.

But it was a different Legislature, and he's absolutely right that the expectations on us, as members of this Legislature, are much greater today because of the fact that there is a focus on it; the proceedings of the Legislature are reported on daily. The people out there in the ridings throughout the province of Ontario want to know and be kept on top and abreast of what things are actually going on here. So this is clearly a very important debate.

I know the government kind of scoffs at it. They say: "Oh, what's the big deal? Let's give it a try, and if it's not working, we'll consider changes."

Mrs. Julia Munro: Okay, it's time.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My colleague from York-Simcoe has said: "Enough. I've heard enough from you." Actually, I must say that the government people have been rather polite today. They must have caucused this and said, "We're just not going to pay attention to them anymore."

So I do urge this government to be mindful of their responsibility, to be mindful of the responsibility that power carries with it. You have total power in this Legislature. We can't stop you from doing anything. We can only point out to you when we believe that what you want to do is wrong. You know that when we believe

what you are doing is right, we support you on those things, and we try to give you that support as often as we can. So we ask for your support to let democracy rule the day. Let democracy be king today in Ontario.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I am delighted to rise today, particularly after my good friend, and add my comments to this debate. I just want to talk about the things that he has raised. They say that when his dad was here, and some other members, the debate used to be a true debate. One would say something, and then the next person would actually comment on that. I know we've lost that art here and I know many of us are trying to bring that back. So I think it's great that we are having this debate today.

I say to the members, particularly to some of our newer members, that if you happen to sit on the government side and you look across—and all the kids who come to this place learn this, of course. If we look across, what do we see? We see an owl. There's an owl carved on the arch up there, and that is to remind the government that our job is to be wise. If you are sitting in the opposition and you look across, what we have is the eagle. The eagle is to remind the opposition that they are to be eagle-eyed and to hold the government to account. It's one of the hallmarks of democracy. So I'm glad to join into this debate.

My good friend from Barry's Bay—can we say that here? Yes, I think we can. My good friend from Barry's Bay says he feels that somehow what we're talking about today will weaken the opposition. Last time I checked I didn't think—I would never want to say on paper or in Hansard that somehow the opposition is weak, or could be weakened. I think it would be an insult to them to say that somehow we think either that they were weak or could be weakened by this. I don't think that's the case at all.

I do have a bit of a memory. I do remember that party saying that they thought the budget—the hallmark of the central document that is always presented in front of the people in this place—that a budget of this province should not be presented in this place, and should be presented over at a car parts factory. I remember that.

I remember there were questions raised by our party and by the New Democratic Party and by almost every editorial board in this province—

Hon. David Caplan: Nineteen straight days in the Globe and Mail.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Nineteen straight days, the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal reminds me—saying that they thought that was an affront to democracy. So I take with a grain of salt the question about whether or not this is an affront to democracy.

I actually think, as the Minister of Research and Innovation, that it is important for us to understand that we are in the new millennium, the 21st century. We have to embrace change. People expect us to operate at the speed of the life of our constituents, and they lead a just-in-time life. I think it's reasonable for us to say that we should look at modernizing this. I think it's important for

the government, because it does fall upon us, the mandate given to us by the people that we are to lead. So it's appropriate that we are taking these steps today.

I think there are many important issues facing the province of Ontario. I don't consider this to be one where we should take away any more time or focus from those great issues facing our province and where we are in regard to social cohesion and economic development, and spend any more time on this issue. But it is something we are doing.

My good friend from Barry's Bay was saying that somehow he felt this was taking away the ability of the private members. I've looked at this proposal, and the one thing I knew as a private member, before I happened to be called to cabinet, was the fact that one could introduce a private member's bill. I was very fortunate—I know it's somewhat rare—to actually have a private member's bill that was able to gain complete and unanimous consent, which is really a requirement to get a private member's bill.

You could sit here for an entire mandate and perhaps have one opportunity to have one bill actually debated during private members' bills. So our proposal actually will increase that by some 50%. It means that a private member will have the ability to take those bills and get them on the floor for debate—whether it's a resolution or a bill.

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I don't agree with the assertion of the member opposite that somehow this is going to weaken the ability of an opposition member, or any member who's not in cabinet, to actually have the attention of the people of Ontario, to record through debate in Hansard an important issue that is theirs that they bring before this House as a private member in regard to private members' bills.

I thought it was really interesting that the member from Barry's Bay would actually say, "Explain to us in great detail about what happens in the government caucus." As a matter of fact, I think he was very clear about that. Last time I checked on our democracy in our caucus—and I'm sure Madam Speaker's would be the same—we're just assuming that the things we're talking about in caucus are in camera, that those things are not being—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh sure, for maybe 30 seconds.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I know the member from Niagara-left-of-centre thinks that somehow this is a little bit different, but for me, we assume that our caucus is sacrosanct. So I find it interesting: I have this vision of the member from Barry's Bay with his ear to the door, that he seems to know what's going on within the government caucus, and I'd say to the member from Niagara that maybe he has his ear on the other door because he seems to have an idea of what's going on.

I don't want to break any caucus solidarity, but I can assure you that in our caucus meetings the discussions that we have are fulsome, and we bring to the government, as a member of the government caucus, the concerns of our riding and our constituents. We do a

wonderful job. I look at my caucus mates and I can assure you that they, each and every one of them, stick up for their ridings and talk about the things that are important to them. It is the hallmark of our parliamentary democracy that we have that, but if people ever had an opportunity to listen to the quality, the passion and the vision of the kinds of debates that happen within our caucuses—now, the one thing I know is that in our caucus, our leader, the Premier, actually goes to that caucus. He doesn't have to get a little pass from somebody to actually get in the building and go to the caucus.

I know the members opposite may have a little bit—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski:—soup, from Campbell's.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I hear Chicken Little over there going on about something. Well, he is talking about our friend.

I would say that I believe we have an opportunity at our weekly caucus meeting to speak directly to our leader, who happens to be, because of the people, the Premier of the day.

Mr. Peter Kormos: You're losing people.

Hon. John Wilkinson: That's amazing.

The question here is—I know the member has just gone on about the timing of question period, the time of the day. I think initially they didn't want that, but then they kind of moderated a bit, particularly after all the papers in this province said, "Are you actually going to try to explain to people that you don't want to be here from 9 to 6?" How unreasonable is that? I think it then kind of morphed into this other issue about, when is question period?

As a minister of the crown, I know I'm available to the press. The fact that they don't want to speak to me is completely up to them, but I am available. We make our ministers available to the press. They know where we are, and there are plenty of opportunities.

Whether or not 10:45 is a bit early in the morning for you—I can understand that. I can tell you that my good friend Dave Murray, with the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, is milking his cows I think at 4 in the morning.

Interjection: You're milking this speech.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm waiting for my parliamentary assistant to take over from me. He'll let me know when I've dried up.

I was just saying that he's up at 4 o'clock in the morning and he has come to visit. How appropriate—a great constituent of mine. Let the record show that Dave Murray from my riding was here. But he is up at 4 o'clock in the morning.

I find it difficult as well—and I took some offence at this. In this mandate I happen to be a minister, but I was a loyal member of our caucus in our first mandate and I got to ask questions of ministers in the House. Now, the member opposite from Barry's Bay somehow says that that question or those questions are fluffy, and I disagree with that. I have a right, sir, and I believe our caucus has a right, to ask questions in question period. I look at the question period, for example, in the mother Parliament—

Interjection.

Hon. John Wilkinson: “Fluffy” is in the eye of the beholder, is what I would say. I look at the question period in the mother Parliament; it’s on television and I notice that the members of the government ask questions of their own government. I think that is—

Interjections.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I’m more than happy to debate. At least he is heckling me from his seat, and I give him all due credit for that. I think it is important for members of the government to be able to ask questions on behalf of their constituents. I know that the member from Eglinton–Lawrence just asked me a question today about a constituent of his whom he is very proud of and whom we should all be very proud of.

When it comes right down to it, the question here is that the power that’s being exercised has come from the people. The people have decided on this matter as to the seating arrangement here. They had an election. They decided on the seating arrangement. It wasn’t up to us. All of us had only 107 votes. There were millions cast. Those of us who sit in these seats all had but one vote. Those people decided the arrangements in this House.

It has fallen to the government to look at modernizing this place. So what we’ve said is that we’re going to try this out—I know it’s a radical concept for some. We’re going to try this out; we’re going to refer this to a standing committee of the Legislature to look at over the summer. So bear with us when we try this out; it could be, I’d say to the whip, not more than eight weeks that we would try this out, perhaps a little shorter. And then we’ll refer this matter and I think we’ll have a fulsome debate as to whether or not this is a newer system. So I would say, don’t—I know some people fear change. I would suggest that yes, you should embrace change.

I’ll say just in closing: It reminds me, when I first got elected, that I had a mother call me. The local school board had changed the boundaries and her daughter had to go to a different school. She was very, very unhappy about that. I remember she was deeply disturbed and she had talked to her daughter and really characterized this as a negative thing, this change. I remember the director of the school board called this lady and said, “Listen, can you just do me a favour? Just let your daughter try it for a week. Just go to the other school for a week. Just try it for a week and then see.” I can tell you that they actually tried the school—which had a beautiful renovation made—and the daughter was happy being there. We didn’t know whether that was going to happen, but I thought it was wise of the director of education to say to her, “Just try it and we’ll see whether or not we like it.” I think that is an eminently defensible position on behalf of the government, and I look forward to further debate.

I’m glad the member from Barry’s Bay is done now. I was looking forward to further debate and I know that the good member for Mississauga–Streetsville is itching to go. We look forward to bringing this matter to a conclusion so we can debate much more important issues of the day.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I’m actually very pleased with the opportunity to speak at this particular time on this motion. The last couple of government speakers have harped on the idea that somehow these changes are things that we should embrace, that we shouldn’t be people unwilling to make change.

I come to this discussion from an entirely different point of view. I believe that these aren’t real changes. They’re not substantive and we are missing an opportunity. It’s not from the fear of change, as the government members would like to characterize it. It’s that you are looking at changing the order of the day. I find it very difficult to see this as more than some kind of manipulation.

In fact, earlier in the week, I made reference in a statement to the fact that we would become one of the very few—in fact, at the risk of leaving somebody out, almost every other parliamentary democracy, every Legislature, in Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand has question period in the afternoon.

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This has nothing to do with our reluctance to come to work. I find it very interesting that there’s some kind of idea that is floated out by the government that somehow we’re not wanting change, that we’re unable to accept change. The question is that people are, in all of these other Legislatures, cognizant of the fact that an afternoon opportunity provides the media and the public with an opportunity to be more engaged. People are not as engaged earlier in the day. When they come home, often in the evening, as obviously not everyone but the majority of people do, this is the opportunity when they can take advantage of the media and actually learn what’s going on. One of the issues, then, for us is the fact that you are making that opportunity far more reduced, the opportunity to have the media and to engage people.

I spoke at the very beginning about the fact that these aren’t substantive. A number of government members have referred to the fact that after trying this, there’s going to be an all-party opportunity to review it. Well, I would say that’s putting the cart before the horse; that we should in fact be having that kind of discussion before we debate these kinds of changes.

I offer for your consideration the fact that in the third session of the 37th Parliament, we did look at the question of enhancing the role of the private member, of being able to look at what kinds of change we could contemplate. Guess what? This was an all-party committee, and it did look at some of these things. It made specific suggestions and recommendations, such things as allowing bills to be referred to committee after first reading, which would then allow much better discussion on the merits of proposed legislation as opposed to having the opportunity, as we do now, to look at a fait accompli that the government has created. Another recommendation was the creation of select committees which would then develop expertise and be able to look at very specific areas of legislation.

In the few moments that I have left, I would just like to look at the concluding remarks that were made in this committee's report. It says that throughout its deliberations, the committee has been cognizant that enhancing the role of private members is not an end unto itself but is rather a means for private members to more effectively represent their constituents and the people of Ontario, to scrutinize legislation, to hold the government to account, and ultimately to vindicate parliamentary democracy.

This is why we are here, and this is why we object to this kind of superficial change that will in fact reduce the opportunity for the public to understand what's happening in this House.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a privilege to join in this debate, and I just want to call to mind some of the people who have been discussing these changes in the standing orders. These are colleagues, albeit across the floor: the member from Welland, who has been here since 1987, 21 years, and the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, who has been here since 1981—people with a great deal of experience in the House in government and in opposition, and actually in the third party as well.

I was elected in 2003, so this is my fifth year, second term: enough time, I think, to get to understand the rhythms and the flows of the House—perhaps not too much time such that I can hearken back to whatever the era was in the past, be it the 1990s, 1980s, 1970s or before.

I'm looking at these proposals here, and I'd like to just go over some of the objections that some members, whose ability I truly do respect as members, have raised and give them my perspective from my five years here, along with some of the perspectives I may have gained in industry.

One of the things that my colleagues have asked about is the movement of question period from approximately 2 o'clock in the afternoon to 10:45 in the morning. On the one hand, you say that this is an Internet age; news in this age is now an around-the-clock exercise. That's changed over the years. Three stakeholders come to mind for me. One, of course, is the opposition, another is the media, and the third is the government.

Looking at it from the opposition standpoint, you have to ask if the questions are reactive or proactive. Does that mean that question period is driven by what happens in the newspaper that day, that hour, that morning, or is the philosophy of question period some coherent long-term strategy to hold the government to account? As a government, we will work best when held properly to account. It is not in the government's interest to have a toothless opposition question period. Does it make a difference, then, if the question period is at 10:45 or at 2 o'clock?

From the vantage point of the news media, most news events outside of this legislative precinct are held early to midday. From the perspective of the news media, some have said, "I'm willing to try it"; others have said, "I prefer it in the afternoon." As it is now, the media have to attend question period, do their scrum, and immediately file their stories. The time for the media to think it

through, to get other reaction, to do some analysis simply isn't there at present. Might it be there at 10:45, when a minister has come in, given his question period, and the media has had a chance to attend that, scrum the minister, and then perhaps do some supplementary research? This is what we're going to find out. From the vantage point of the media, they get more time to prep for question period.

From the vantage point of the government, the ministers now have less time to prep, less time to research, less time to rehearse, and, I guess by definition, it will be a little bit more spontaneous, perhaps a little unrehearsed. It may well be that an early-morning question period may be the bane of the ministers' existence. This, we're going to find out.

The point of it all is that it strikes me as a bit of a trade-off both ways. It may not be as good. It may be that all the stakeholders to the question period proposal say they prefer it the way it was. It may be that nobody likes it. But that then gives us the flexibility to change it or to change it back. What this proposal is saying is, let's give it a try.

After this motion is dealt with, the issue will be moved to a committee, and, I'm going to speculate, because it's under the mandate of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, very likely the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. It is chaired by a member of the government and it's got some of the better members—more experienced and seasoned members—of the government, the opposition and the third party. These are people who are going to have a chance to assess these proposals in the light of several weeks of experience and determine whether or not they were effective. At that point, they can debate the effectiveness with the benefit of saying, "Well, when we actually did it in the House, this is how it worked."

The member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills raised a number of points that I'd like to discuss. On April 28, he gave a very enlightening, very knowledgeable presentation. He asked, "Is the length of question period appropriate?" There is no proposal at the moment to change question period. He said that it's 45 minutes in the House of Commons. He raised the question of whether government members should ask questions. Maybe we can consider that as well in the light of our experience with question period at a new time.

Having attended a number of sessions in which I met members from other provincial Legislatures, one of the things that struck me is that we have supplementaries. For example, the leadoff questions will give the Leader of the Opposition two questions, followed in each case by two supplementaries; in essence, a discussion on what is intended to be pretty much the same topic.

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That doesn't happen in all provinces. In other provinces, a question is a question is a question. Should we treat questions as separate, stand-alone items? I think that's also a subject that the standing committee, presuming it's the Legislative Assembly committee, should

have a chance to look at. I personally think the discussion in that committee is going to be informed. I know it to be frank. I think it's going to have proper regard to how to make the people's Legislature in Ontario work better, for our province and our people.

I don't think there's anyone here, regardless of whether they're on the government or the opposition side, who wants our Legislature to be ineffective. If times change, why shouldn't we? I think we should empower this committee with the benefit of a few weeks of experience. I think we should give the eight very capable people on whichever committee will review it some experience to work in the next few weeks and deal with it from the vantage point of some substance.

I'd like to discuss in my final few minutes a few other things that have been proposed and will be implemented on a trial basis as we change the standing orders. One is the morning sittings. As a GTA member right now, I have Monday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings in which I don't have to be down here, except for committee duty, on a regular basis. At the moment, I have to give up those things. I have to give up the chance to do site visits, school visits and whatnot, to be down here. It's not true that if you're not down here, you're not working, as member after member has said. But this, for me, is going to take some of those site visits and school visits and shift them from a Monday morning, a Wednesday morning or a Thursday morning to another time, be it Friday or—there's been a proposal, I understand, that we'll be three weeks on and one week off. That would allow me to do more of my constituency work during that week.

The second question has to do with night sittings. Do I gain my nights? If I leave here at 5:45—again, speaking as a GTA member—I can be back in the riding at about 7:15. Maybe I can attend one function. It can be said that I would gain my nights. On the other hand, I had no major objections with night sittings. I found them useful to get to know the people that I have the privilege to serve with, to understand what kind of people they are. Also, in that 6:45 to 9:30 slot, we actually did have some informed debates in which the tone of the debate wasn't coloured by daytime, by its proximity to question period. One can say, "Well, is the 6:45 to 9:30 debate relevant?" But I could ask the same thing: What about the 9 o'clock debate? Will that be relevant? That too we're going to find out with the benefit of experience.

The member for Carleton—Mississippi Mills raised an issue that I think is a very valid one about private members' time. By shifting it from Thursday morning to Thursday afternoon, one asks then, will quorum be an issue? I think that's something we have to think through. Private members' time is an important time in the Legislature. The member raises a very valid point about the difficulty of keeping quorum in the House after the government business is done. I think that's one that, with the benefit of a few weeks of experience, we're going to be able to pronounce an informed judgment on.

Even though we're going to debate three private members' bills or resolutions rather than two, a question I'd like to raise is, should members then be able to introduce more than one resolution or one bill in any one cycle? As it is now, about once every year and a half, you're going to have your one hour in private members' time. Should we go one step further and say that a member may raise more than one issue? How would we make that work? That might be another thing we can do to make private members' time more relevant for those of us who are indeed private members.

Be they Robert's Rules of Order or Marlowe and Montpetit or our own standing orders, or whatever is derived from these and from the customs and the practices and the traditions of the Ontario Legislature, the intent of our rules is to regulate the process of government, to prevent either the tyranny of the majority or the tyranny of the minority.

The member for Welland has been here for 21 years. He's been in government, opposition and the third party. He spoke very interestingly a few moments ago, and he points out accurately that we should be making these rules and their changes for times that transcend our careers, this government, this Parliament and any that will fall from it.

I think, personally, that we should take advantage of this time in between now and when the House rises in the summer to try them out, and if they don't work, refer them to the committee, go before the committee and make sure that when we make these changes, we are indeed bringing forth a more effective, a more democratic and a more responsive set of standing orders to enable the Ontario Legislative Assembly to take Ontario forward to the kind of province that we want Ontario to be.

Mr. John O'Toole: I know that we're actually debating a time allocation motion and winding up the debate on standing orders. All the members here know that this debate is a good example of the futility of the debate itself. It's the government's intention to move these orders starting next Monday. So all of the debate the people of Ontario might be listening to—indeed, even the members contributing today realize the futility. If you hearken back to the time and place when Premier McGuinty stood for something quite different during an election time, which was more accountability, openness and transparency, it's anything but. In fact, I see a gradual deterioration since McGuinty has taken over.

If you look at third party commentary, whether it's the press gallery—and their board has written to the Premier very upset with these changes. If you've listened to professor Graham White, an academic who is qualified to speak on these topics from a legislative point of view as well as a research perspective, he says this is really confronting the House with the perplexing problem of putting question period in the morning session.

No one on either side—no member I've heard—is opposed to changing the time when certain procedural things take place. By that, I mean, we're here. For instance, I was here this morning, as most members were. I

had a meeting with the Speaker and an all-party committee meeting looking at the Chief Electoral Officer's position. Every day there are committee meetings. In fact, if you look at how this rolls out, you will find that there's a lot of conflict with the committees, there's conflict with staff and many changes that I think they should have taken a bit more time with and not just rammed through. This is time allocated.

We moved a very significant and very reasonable amendment. That amendment would have scheduled question period at 1 o'clock each day, which would have been a fine compromise and, I would say, a goodwill gesture by the Premier and your House leader. It would have been the appropriate thing to do. But what they've done now is they've made life more difficult. In my case—not that it's impossible—for me to be here for 9 o'clock in the morning every day—I could have an apartment; I don't—I've got to start my trip at 6. I have no problem with that, not at all. But my point is that these changes aren't just me, there are other people involved: the staff, the preparation by the House leader's office, the strategists within each caucus to prepare for question period.

I just don't think at this time, listening to the input from the press gallery, listening to the academic input and to the experienced leaders in our own caucus—certainly, the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills, Norm Sterling, has served as House leader and in many positions over his illustrious career here. Our current House leader, Elizabeth Witmer, from Kitchener–Waterloo, has tried to make reasoned arguments, but your House leader, Michael Bryant, has refused to listen. Dalton McGuinty is acting arbitrarily, and I think rather thoughtlessly, to reach any kind of consensus, to barge ahead and change the orders and everything that's been a tradition in this place for many years.

If you look at other provinces—and I've been to almost every provincial Legislature as well as Westminster, and they do have, in almost every case, question period in the afternoon. Maybe it's tradition; maybe it's because that's the 6 o'clock-news question period, but that's been the tradition. I ask the question to at least give us some reasoned explanation.

The member from York–Simcoe, in her previous remarks, spoke about the Legislative Assembly committee that reviewed this to bring innovation into the Legislature. There's nothing innovative here. It's force-feeding to give ministers the time in the afternoon to do their political spin. That's what it's about. I hate to unravel any secrecy for the backbenchers, who have had no input on this whatsoever; none whatsoever. Despite their sincerity, they are being told how to vote, when to vote and what to say, and that's a demonstration of the leadership and accountability and the open democracy of Dalton McGuinty. There has been no input; your House leader has not listened.

The arguments and reasoned amendments have been put forward, and what are they doing? They're forcing this to happen on Monday, and there's still going to be a

review. We'll see at the review time if there's any attempt to listen to any of the input from anyone across the province, whether it's academic or whether it's people who have a better experience or a better voice.

With that, I can tell you that this party will not be supporting it. It has been the process more than the outcome. We're not opposed to sitting longer, from 9 o'clock in the morning till 6 o'clock at night. That's not the issue. The issue here is the method and the fact that they're changing question period until—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Thank you. The time for debate has ended. It is now time for the first question to be put.

Mr. Caplan has moved that the motion be amended by striking the word “motion” in the fourth line and substituting “main motion.” Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

I believe the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1752 to 1802.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): All those in favour, please rise and be identified by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dickson, Joe	Milloy, John
Albanese, Laura	Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol
Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Moridi, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Naqvi, Yasir
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Oraziotti, David
Best, Margaret	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Brotten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Chan, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Van Bommel, Maria
Craitor, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Zimmer, David

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): All those opposed, please rise and be recorded by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Savoline, Joyce
Barrett, Toby	Martiniuk, Gerry	Scott, Laurie
Hudak, Tim	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Jones, Sylvia	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Kormos, Peter	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 45; the nays are 15.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The next question to be decided is government notice of motion 80, as amended. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Same vote? All agreed? Thank you.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):
The ayes are 45; the nays are 15.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I
declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): It
being after 6 of the clock, I declare this House adjourned
until tomorrow, May 1, at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1806.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Albanese, Laura (L)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (L)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (L)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / procureur general
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (L)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (ND)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Brotten, Laurel C. (L)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (L)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	St. Paul's	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, government House leader / ministre des Affaires autochtones, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (L)	Barrie	Minister of Culture, minister responsible for seniors / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (L)	Essex	Deputy Speaker, Chair of the committee of the whole House / Vice- Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Delaney, Bob (L)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (L)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

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Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L) Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (L)	Oakville Mississauga East–Cookville / Mississauga-Est–Cookville	Minister of Tourism / ministre du Tourisme
Gélinas, France (ND) Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Nickel Belt Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC) Hillier, Randy (PC) Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Oxford Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (L) Hudak, Tim (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (L) Jeffrey, Linda (L) Jones, Sylvia (PC) Klees, Frank (PC) Kormos, Peter (ND)	Oak Ridges–Markham Brampton–Springdale Dufferin–Caledon Newmarket–Aurora Welland	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L) Kwinter, Monte (L) Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L) Leal, Jeff (L) Levac, Dave (L) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Mangat, Amrit (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton York Centre / York-Centre Glengarry–Prescott–Russell Peterborough Brant Nepean–Carleton Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (ND) Martiniuk, Gerry (PC) Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (L)	Trinity–Spadina Cambridge London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (L) McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (L)	Ancaster–Dundas– Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
McNeely, Phil (L) Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Orléans Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC) Miller, Paul (ND) Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Parry Sound–Muskoka Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L) Moridi, Reza (L) Munro, Julia (PC) Murdoch, Bill (PC) Naqvi, Yasir (L) O'Toole, John (PC) Oraziotti, David (L)	Huron–Bruce Richmond Hill York–Simcoe Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre Durham Sault Ste. Marie	

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Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
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Ramsay, David (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
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Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / York-Ouest	
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Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Greg (L)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
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Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	

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Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Gerry Martiniuk, Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch,
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht, Mario Sergio
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Social Policy / Politique sociale

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Laurel C. Broten, Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo,
Helena Jaczek, Dave Levac, Shafiq Qaadri,
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