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Tuesday 3 June 2008

Mardi 3 juin 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 3 June 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 3 juin 2008

The House met at 0900.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion regarding division of time for debate on government motion 60.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Caplan seeks unanimous consent for debate on government notice of motion 60. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. David Caplan: Thank you. I move that the time available until 10:45 a.m. this morning be divided equally among the recognized parties for debate on government motion 60, following which the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the motion without further debate or amendment.

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

Agreed to.

PERSONAL HEALTH INFORMATION PROTECTION

PROTECTION DES RENSEIGNEMENTS PERSONNELS SUR LA SANTÉ

Hon. John Wilkinson: I move that pursuant to subsection 75(a) of the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004, the Standing Committee on Social Policy be authorized to review the act; and that, pursuant to subsection 75(b) of the act, the committee shall report to the House its opinions, observations and recommendations concerning amendments to the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004, no later than one year following the assignment of this order of reference to the committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of this important legislation and the fact that it is important that we see this Personal Health Information Protection Act move forward to be examined by committee, so that we can make sure that in a world of information, data collection and new technology, as things are constantly changing and improving and innovating, we

have an opportunity to make sure that our legislation, which was introduced in 2004 and came into effect in 2004—and at the time really set a gold standard in terms of making sure health information was protected and that Ontarians had access to their health information—it's absolutely critical that we make sure that we continue to have the gold standard in Ontario.

I'm going to take a few minutes this morning and let Ontarians have a bit of an understanding of the process that's taking place. As the minister indicated, this is a motion pursuant to subsection 75(a) of the Personal Health Information Protection Act, or PHIPA, as we call it, for this piece of legislation to go to the Standing Committee on Social Policy so that they can review it and provide a report to this Legislature with their observations and recommendations determining how PHIPA might be amended in any way.

We were really pleased to deliver this information in 2004, and we have made sure, by way of this legislation, that rules are established for the collection, use and disclosure of personal health information by health information custodians. Health information custodians would include doctors, laboratories, long-term-care homes and hospitals. This legislation also provided Ontarians with the legislated right to request access to and correct their health records of personal health information. It set rules that health information custodians needed to follow, including ensuring that personal health information was protected against unauthorized use or disclosure, informing an individual if their personal health information has been lost, stolen or accessed by unauthorized persons. Those are really critical things.

When we think about what has transpired over the last number of years as to how we collect and maintain data and information, we think back to many years ago where your doctor's office had their records in a file cabinet locked with keys and, as somebody who practised in the legal profession, I was certainly very knowledgeable about the fact that every cabinet needed to be locked at night, because we were very paper-driven. As we move to a more information and database and computer regime, frankly there are issues, because a document that used to be locked away in a cabinet might now be accessible on a hard drive or could be e-mailed to somebody, firewalls can be broken down, so it is really critical that as we modernize society, we modernize the way we protect and maintain health records.

Under the act, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who is currently Ann Cavoukian, is responsible

for overseeing compliance with the legislation. Under the act, the Information and Privacy Commissioner has the authority to investigate complaints, undertake a review on her own initiative and has order-making power to ensure that health information custodians take steps towards complying with the rules set out in the act. So that really ensures that the act has a great deal of teeth when you have someone as prominent and well known in her ability to protect information as Dr. Ann Cavoukian as the Information and Privacy Commissioner, that they have the ability to make sure that that information is well protected.

I want to share with this House that the act has really been widely regarded as a success since its passing in 2004. Some watching may know that the federal government passed a bill called the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, or PIPEDA, as that one is called. In 2005, PHIPA was declared substantially similar to that federal legislation, and so becoming the only privacy legislation in Canada to receive the designation, making Ontario's health sector exempt from the federal policy because the Ontario policy provided as much or substantially similar protection. PHIPA has served as the model for health privacy legislation in other jurisdictions in Canada, including very recently in Newfoundland, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner recently wrote to the New York Times that they should consider PHIPA as an excellent model for protecting medical privacy.

0910

The review that we are proposing by way of this motion arises directly from the foundation, the early drafting and the early passing of PHIPA. It was contained in there that we needed to have a review, and irrespective of this great success, PHIPA contains a requirement that it be reviewed by a legislative committee. As I said from the outset, I think that's a really important thing, because it's critical that we circle back with those whose information we are trying to protect, with those custodians of the information, to see if there are ways that things could be done better. Is it working? Is the legislation able to continue to provide that important protection of critical health information and allow those of us who need access to that information, to our own health records, to get those changed if there is information that is wrong? We need to make sure that it is accessible, modern and able to modernize itself with the times.

The review is set out so that it needs to be timely. It will take place within a year. The sharing, storage and use of personal health information is evolving and, as I said, it will continue to evolve as we move forward in this government with the important initiative of e-health records.

When I talk to my constituents in my home community in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, I have an opportunity to talk to people about things that are important to them: making sure that our health care system continues to be modern, continues to change with the times, and that we have

access to critical information, because information is essentially the key to success.

We know that if a doctor has all the information about the patient, we'll make sure that that patient does not have contraindications in prescriptions, for example. If the pharmacist has that information and if all the various health care providers are able to coordinate, if we move to the continued development of a time where we have health records that are available electronically, that will provide patients across Ontario with an incredible amount of power to look after themselves, to maintain those records and to be knowledgeable about their own health experience, their own health history, and to make sure that that information is accessible and available.

I know that we look to the modernizing of health records, yet we still have some of our old ways of doing things. I recently had to take my sons, Zachary and Ryan, in for immunization. As you are trying to get out to the doctor's office, as you can imagine, with two-and-a-half-year-old twins, it's a little bit of a commotion to get out of the house. "Where are those yellow papers? Where are those immunization records that I need to bring back to the doctor's office?" Wouldn't it be great if we had that information available? It is available electronically in our doctor's office, no doubt, but when we move to the system where it is there, you will have access to it. You can do your banking online now. You apply for a mortgage. You can do all sorts of things. Let's move to that system.

That's what Ontarians are asking, but making sure that PHIPA continues to be a very protective piece of legislation is absolutely critical as we move forward with the modernization of our health records system, because if we don't have adequate procedures in place, we will potentially have critical and important information that will go astray, that will get in the wrong hands and that will get out to someone who should not have it.

I know that we can all turn our minds to a couple of examples about why you would not want your health information available broadly. First of all, it's personal. This is exactly what this is about: personal health information. And that personal health information is yours to disclose to whom you want. Perhaps you have a history of an illness in your family, you've had some tests done for that and you got back whatever answer, yes or no, whether you were predisposed to have that illness. You don't necessarily want all sorts of others who are not to be privy to that personal health information to have it. That's why this legislation is very critical.

Personal health legislation needs to consider changes in the way health care is also being delivered and the way health information is being managed. We know there are very modern, new technologies happening in our hospitals right across this province and we're proud as a government to be leading the way and ensuring that that takes place.

In my own hospital in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Trillium Health Centre, we now have a process where doctors, nurses, PSWs and others communicate by way of BlackBerry. They are able to have an immediate exchange: "I

am at patient X's bed. This is the circumstance. What do you think?" It's much more efficient, and there are instantaneous answers given back to the health care providers so that they are able to give the immediate transition and medication necessary for the best care of that patient. At its heart, every step that our government is taking is to ensure that we provide the best health care for Ontarians. We do that by putting Ontarians first, putting our patients first, at the centre of everything that we do. That is also the focus of PHIPA. The protection of personal health information puts our patients first and our Ontario citizens first, at the heart and centre of a system that is critically important to their quality of life here in Ontario.

Personal health information, as I said, needs to modernize and perhaps change in the way we do things. The use of new technologies such as patient portals allow patients to interact with their doctors online, view lab test results and request appointments. That's starting to take place in the province, and it is of critical importance that information is protected. But wouldn't it be convenient if you had a lab result done and you could have an opportunity to see that? It's efficient for our patients, who don't need to take time away from work, who can have access to their information, as they would, for example, to review their stock portfolio. Why should they not be able to review those health records and have communications with the doctor professional whom they're interacting with, as they do with many of the other professionals in their life? But at the same time, this health information needs to be protected.

A growing number of health care registries are developing. That information also is critical and needs to be safeguarded. The use of databases and information for research and health system planning—those are all mechanisms by which your personal health information is made available, is put on a document on a computer network. We need to make sure that that is being protected.

The legislative committee review would listen to patients and stakeholders and provide advice to the Ministry of Health on how the legislation should evolve so Ontario can continue to be a leader in protecting personal health information. I think today, as we debate this motion, is a really great day, because it demonstrates the ability of this place to keep up with the times. I would suggest that sometimes our constituents might argue that here in the Legislature we don't keep up with the times and it isn't a very modern way of doing business. We sought to remedy some of that this session and modernize the way we do business here in the Legislature. This is a modern time to be speaking. According to my watch, it's about 16 minutes after 9. It is very different for us to be here in the morning, and I think it's great, much more in keeping with when our constituents are up and at it, getting their kids off to daycare, getting their kids to school, then getting into the office and conducting the business of the people. That's what we're doing here.

This motion is about making sure that legislation that we put in in 2004, which was leading-edge at the time, has a mechanism built right into the legislation to make sure that we stay leading-edge, that if someone has a good idea somewhere else in the world or a new technology develops that we didn't think about and we need a new way to ensure the protection of that personal information, we are able to do that.

I think it's a very great day in the Legislature. I look forward to seeing this motion pass very quickly so that we can get PHIPA off to committee and the committee can examine whether or not we need to make any amendments in accordance with new technology.

0920

We've come a long way. We know there's much more to do. The area of electronic health records and the modernization of the health system to use new technology is one that we are very focused on. We're very pleased with respect to a number of the initiatives that we've been able to move forward with since taking office this mandate and the last mandate. We've made sure to look around the world and ensure that we have excellent health care being provided closer to home for Ontarians, that they have access to their health care professionals, and made sure that we protect their personal health information while at the same time ensuring that we are nimble and able to modernize the way we do the business of health for people in this province. Because it is all about putting our patients first and making sure that their information is accessible to them, that their records are protected. Ultimately, that will make for better patient care, a better health system and a sustainable and modern health system for generations to come.

I'm pleased to have had an opportunity to speak to this motion. I will be sharing my time with two of my other colleagues: the member from Etobicoke North, and the member from Mississauga—Streetsville, Mr. Delaney. I look forward to seeing this motion passed quickly and getting this to committee so we can continue to have the most modern legislation here in Ontario.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm pleased to rise to talk about the health protection information act, more particularly the review of this act. We certainly welcome the initiative of a review of the Personal Health Information Protection Act. It should be noted that the review is long overdue. It actually should have been started a year ago, according to the act. But we're doing it now. So I'll agree with the member from Etobicoke—Lakeshore: Let's move on with it.

When Minister Smitherman introduced this bill, he basically said it delivers on the principle of accountability: accountability within the health care system for the services they provide and for the information that they're keepers of. This has to be with accountability to us, to the public, to the clients of those health care agencies. This step toward accountability is welcome, but it should be said that a number of other government actions are also needed toward accountability: to bring accountability to all of the parts of the health care system, to the clients, to

us, the public of Ontario, who use those services. The health protection information act is certainly one piece of it, but I would say there's still a lot to be done in that direction.

The act is an important and necessary act. Privacy legislation in Ontario was a long time in coming. Researchers told me that there were four bills during the Harris government that were actually submitted toward more accountability and protection of health information, but none of them could be agreed upon. Basically, the Personal Health Information Protection Act extends the federal privacy legislation, which did not, in our view, go far enough. It outlined serious and important responsibilities for health care providers and agencies dealing with the protection, disclosure and transfer of people's private health information. When you talk to people about health information, everybody will agree that this is something that they feel is very private to them, this is something that should be handled with care, should be protected—and they should know about it. When they sign a consent, it should be an informed consent so they know who will have access to that information and who won't have access to that information. Then it becomes the agency's and the provider's responsibility to make sure that those wishes and directions are followed according to the act.

The NDP supported the bill back in 2003-04, and we will continue to support its full and effective implementation. When the bill was first introduced we had some concerns. Most were addressed and changes were made to the bill to make it stronger. But one significant concern was not addressed. Our concern was about the financial cost of effectively implementing the bill. If you have a bill that the people, the providers, the agencies are not able to bring into effect, then you're not protecting anybody.

This concern was raised by the number of community-based agencies but mainly by mental health associations and mental health providers during the discussion about this bill. Many of those organizations were concerned that they lack the basic infrastructure, such things as computer systems, to meet their obligation to protect, to keep and, where appropriate, to share personal information.

We expressed concern that small agencies might find themselves in a serious position of unwittingly disclosing information due to the lack of resources necessary to comply with the bill. This is one illustration of why careful monitoring and review of the bill is very important, to see whether it is being implemented properly and how to better support organizations in its implementation in the future.

We, too, look forward to having a review of this bill. If there are agencies and providers in the field that are having a tough time, we should know what they are so we can take remedial action to make sure that the full intent of the act is being respected by everybody covered under the act.

Ontarians have reason to be concerned about whether their health information is being properly protected. The

NDP has regularly expressed concern about the lack of oversight and public accountability, specifically within our public hospitals. We have argued that Ombudsman oversight power should be extended to all hospitals, and the government has resisted. I don't understand why. The Ombudsman himself has said repeatedly that he should have the power to investigate complaints that have to do with hospitals. He receives hundreds of complaints every year about our hospitals, and unfortunately, he has to answer back that he hasn't got the power to investigate complaints coming from hospitals. When people have privacy complaints, there are steps to follow through the act, but other complaints should be under the mandate of the Ombudsman, and we would certainly hope that the minister will see that it is a big step toward accountability to give the Ombudsman oversight of what goes on in our hospitals so that he and his office can investigate complaints.

Protecting people's private personal health information is really protecting people's dignity, and yet almost daily we hear examples of practices in all sorts of health care agencies that really are an affront to the dignity of individuals. One need only read Joe Fiorito's column in the Sudbury Star in which he shares quite a few of the many stories of lack of human treatment in Ontario hospitals and other health care settings—a total lack of respect for their dignity. In part, this act is there to change this.

There are systemic issues within the health care system. I would see the shift toward interdisciplinary teams so that more people gain access to primary care. There are still hundreds of thousands of Ontarians right now who do not have access to primary care. They don't have a family physician. They don't have access to a community health centre or a nurse practitioner-led clinic. They just don't have access. Moving forward with interdisciplinary teams under the governance of communities would go a long way toward restoring the dignity of those people who are basically on the sidelines, who are looking out into our health care system, but not able to gain access.

0930

My colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, across the House, talked quite a bit about the importance of adoption of electronic health records. I can tell you that at my community health centre, when we put into place all of the changes that were required to comply with the Personal Health Information Protection Act, a big part of it was dealing with our electronic health records. We wanted to make absolutely sure that whatever information we stored in the electronic health records was only available to the people it was intended to be available to; that when the client gives consent, they give consent to different providers for different information; and that all of this was properly captured by our electronic health records so that only the people who the client had given permission to could have access to that part of their chart, that part of their electronic health record.

I agree with her that having electronic health records throughout the health care system in Ontario would change forever a lot of what is happening on the ground with regard to the health care system. I agree with her that it would be very beneficial for people to have access to their records, to be able to review them and better understand and basically take ownership of their health and their treatment. It would also facilitate communications between the different health care providers so that they better understand what has been done in another agency, in another part of the health care system—if somebody has been hospitalized, exactly what happened; if they went to a lab, gaining access to their lab results. And the list goes on, whether it be a mental health agency or long-term care or home care etc. None of this is feasible in Ontario right now because very few have adopted an electronic health record although time after time many, including the Ontario Health Quality Council, have said this is the key to making our system better perform and also better protect the information, as this act is trying to do.

We also talk about the lack of adequate standards in long-term care and how this relates to lack of protection of human dignity. We've had many stories, most of them reported in the press, of family members who are really saddened by the type of treatment that they see their loved ones getting in long-term-care facilities. We have been asking for an average 3.5 hours of hands-on care for everybody in long-term-care settings. The acuity of the people in our long-term-care homes is such that they deserve and need a minimum average of 3.5 hours. Yet the government is very slow to move on this, which means that here again the human dignity of those people, the founders of this province, the people who have built what we have today, is not being respected. This is something shameful and this is something that has to change.

Understaffing in community home care is another one. Home care tends to be the poor cousin, where the working conditions are not good, the benefits are not good, the wages are not as good, yet those are the same providers; a nurse is a nurse no matter if he or she works in a hospital setting, in home care, in long-term care or in community-based care, yet a nurse can get way better wages and benefits if she works in a hospital setting than if she works in home care.

People will tell you that here again lots of the problems that we see within our emergency rooms, problems that we see within our hospitals are because of the weakness of our home care system. If we did a better job at maintaining people in their homes, that would go a long way towards preventing those people running into problems, having to access emergency rooms and ending up in a hospital bed where they are labelled as "alternative level of care." They are in a hospital but that's not where they should be, and that's not where the best care is for them.

At the base of it all is that if you ask, most of those people will tell you, "I want to stay home, but to stay

home I need the proper support." Here again the basic dignity of those people is not being respected. We're not supporting them in their homes the way we should. They end up with problems, they end up in emergency rooms and they end up in a hospital bed—not the way the system should work, and again a lack of dignity to those people who needed us.

Yes, we need to treat people's information carefully and professionally. But we also need to ensure that people are treated justly and caringly.

In summary, we look forward to seeing the results of a comprehensive review of this act. We hope very much that the report will be released within one year, something that is even more important, given that the review is so late in being started in the first place. We also hope that this will be the first step to a general improvement of monitoring and accountability of health care facilities, not just to ensure proper control of information, but proper and dignified treatment of people themselves.

Il me fait plaisir ce matin de vous parler de la Loi sur la protection des renseignements personnels sur la santé. Selon la loi, nous devons faire une revue de cette loi. Cette revue devait être entreprise l'année dernière. Malheureusement, on est pas mal en retard, et on la commence cette année, mais mieux vaut tard que jamais.

La revue de la Loi sur la protection des renseignements personnels sur la santé va nous permettre de nous assurer que toutes les agences et ceux qui ont la responsabilité de garantir l'accès à l'information ont les ressources nécessaires pour le faire et ont été capables de le faire d'une façon efficace dans toutes les parties du système. Lorsque la loi a été proposée, nous, les néo-démocrates, avons proposé plusieurs changements, et le gouvernement a écouté et a adopté la plupart des ces changements-là.

Par contre, il y a quand même une partie qui nous laisse un peu perplexe : est-ce que toutes les agences, surtout les petites agences, et ici je parle surtout des petites agences de soins de santé mentale, ont les ressources nécessaires pour être sûrs qu'elles sont conformes à la loi ? Plusieurs de ces petites agences nous disent qu'elles n'ont même pas l'infrastructure nécessaire—ici on parle d'ordinateurs et de choses comme ça—pour s'assurer que l'information est gardée de façon sécuritaire.

On peut lire dans les journaux plusieurs fois des exemples où des personnes n'ont pas été traitées avec dignité dans notre système de santé. On parle ici des foyers de soins de longue durée, dans les hôpitaux. Plusieurs de ces histoires font les manchettes des journaux.

Quand on parle de protection des renseignements personnels sur la santé, on parle également de protection de la dignité humaine. Nos renseignements personnels sur notre santé, ce n'est pas des choses qu'on veut partager avec tous et chacun. C'est des choses pour lesquelles on doit être capable de dire, « Cette information-là, je suis d'accord de la partager avec tel et tel professionnel, mais je ne veux la partager avec d'autres. »

Ça, c'est notre droit absolu. Ça, c'est ce que la loi nous permet de faire. Mais dans la vie quotidienne de ceux qui offrent ce type de protection, ils doivent avoir les ressources nécessaires pour le faire. On parle ici non seulement de protection des droits, mais on parle également de protection de notre dignité humaine.

En revenant aux histoires qui se retrouvent souvent dans les manchettes, j'aimerais mettre l'accent plus précisément sur les organismes de soins de longue durée. Les maisons de soins de longue durée ont demandé depuis longtemps au gouvernement provincial de recevoir un minimum de 3,5 heures de soins personnels par bénéficiaire. Malheureusement, on est encore loin de là, bien que le niveau de besoins des gens dans les maisons de soins infirmiers continue d'augmenter.

Il y a quelques années de ça, on n'aurait jamais pensé que quelqu'un qui recevait de l'oxygène se retrouverait dans une maison de soins de longue durée. Avant, ces gens-là devaient demeurer à l'hôpital. Maintenant, on en voit de façon courante. Même chose avec des gens qui ont des problèmes d'alimentation : avant ça, ces gens-là devaient demeurer à l'hôpital. Maintenant, on en voit de plus en plus dans les maisons de soins infirmiers, et c'est un pas dans la bonne direction.

Ces maisons-là sont faites justement pour essayer d'être des maisons. C'est une résidence. Donc, c'est quelque chose de bien, mais il faut quand même être en mesure d'avoir les ressources nécessaires pour venir à bout de rencontrer les besoins toujours croissants de ces gens-là. Ça, c'est pour protéger la dignité autant de ce qu'on essaie de faire avec notre projet de loi.

0940

Un autre aspect que l'on aimerait voir augmenter, c'est les pratiques interdisciplinaires. En ce moment en Ontario, il y a des centaines de milliers d'Ontariens et d'Ontariennes qui n'ont pas accès au soins de santé, qui n'ont ni médecin de famille, ni accès à un centre de santé communautaire, ni accès à une clinique d'infirmières praticiennes. Parce qu'ils n'ont pas accès, ils sont à l'extérieur, et vraiment nous regardent de l'intérieur. Ça pourrait changer, et ça pourrait changer vite, en mettant en place des équipes interdisciplinaires qui sont gouvernées par la communauté pour s'assurer que dans les petites communautés, qu'elles soient rurales ou du nord, où il y a souvent un problème de pénurie, si le médecin vient puis repart, le centre, lui, qui est gouverné par la communauté, demeurerait là pour s'assurer que ces gens-là continuent d'avoir accès : continuent d'avoir accès à leur dossier médical, continuent d'avoir accès aux autres pourvoyeurs de soins de santé pendant que le recrutement continue.

On parle également d'avoir un mécanisme pour investiguer les plaintes, et là, on parle de l'ombudsman. Ici en Ontario, l'ombudsman demande le pouvoir d'investiguer les plaintes dans les hôpitaux depuis longtemps. Nous, les néo-démocrates, on le demande au ministre de la Santé depuis des mois. Je pense qu'il n'y a pas une semaine que je ne me lève pas à la Chambre pour demander au ministre de la Santé d'accorder à l'om-

budsman le droit d'investiguer les plaintes dans les hôpitaux. Malheureusement, pour une raison ou une autre, le gouvernement refuse.

Bien que l'ombudsman ne puisse pas investiguer les plaintes, il reçoit quand même des centaines de plaintes à chaque année envers les hôpitaux. Malheureusement, tout ce qu'il peut répondre, c'est qu'il n'a pas juridiction. Ça aussi amènerait le système de santé un pas plus loin, et il serait important que ce soit mis en place.

En somme, nous, les néo-démocrates, appuyons la revue de la Loi sur la protection des renseignements personnels en matière de santé. On pense que c'est une loi importante. Les agences de santé ont travaillé fort afin de la mettre en place et de s'assurer que toutes les parties de la loi étaient respectées parce que c'est quelque chose de bien pour nous, les consommateurs, les clients, pour ceux qui vont demander des services de santé. Mais une revue est importante pour s'assurer que toutes les parties du système ont été capables de la mettre en œuvre et ont des ressources nécessaires afin de la mettre en œuvre de façon cohésive et cohérente. Donc, pour nous, la revue de cette loi servira à s'assurer qu'elle est bien en place, mais à s'assurer également un pas de plus envers le respect de la dignité des gens qui ont besoin du système.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: I think it's very important that we, as a Legislature as well as the government, move forward on this very important motion on the Personal Health Information Protection Act and improvements that will no doubt occur subsequent to its passage, as well as review.

The idea of information privacy is of course one that physicians are taught very early in medical school, as custodians, as stewards of what is no doubt the most personal, significant and impactful information there is about individuals—way beyond, by the way, credit cards, social insurance numbers, alarm code keys or whatever—information that deals with individuals and their personal health. By the way, Speaker, as all of us mourn, as you know, the loss of one of our chief medical officers of health, Dr. Sheela Basrur, all of this really underlines the fact of how important and personally significant this type of information is.

This has been true through the ages, and certainly when we were going to medical school about 20-plus years ago, but I think it's even more accented and highlighted now that we are truly in the information age.

I'll give you some personal examples. A patient who comes to a medical office, to a family physician, will no doubt share with them all sorts of information about their personal background, about their genetic history, about family problems, be they genetic or social. For example, are there conditions of things like alcoholism or depression or Alzheimer's within the family? Then the family physician will, hopefully, do an excellent physical examination, probing and prodding and measuring and essentially cataloguing all the various findings from top to bottom. Then the patient will be asked to undergo a number of tests, whether it is with regard to blood or any kind of radiology imaging—for example, ultrasounds or what

we call upper GI series. We really want to have a look at the insides as best we can.

Then comes the small matter of the results that we have to share with the patient. Of course, there is a certain amount of finesse, sensitivity, humanity and regard for a fellow human being who is, no doubt, at their most vulnerable. All of that information can literally make or break the person's day, the person's year and the person's life. That sort of information, whether it is shared with the individual alone—there are people we will be diagnosed with very significant conditions, be it cancer or HIV or chronic hepatitis B or any number of conditions, and very often they do not want that kind of information disseminated to the public, but perhaps even to members of their own family or their own circle. Of course, there is legislation that governs those kinds of rules as well.

Altogether, these are very significant pieces of information. Therefore I think it's only appropriate that, as a provincial Legislature that has oversight for health care, we bring to bear our collective wisdom and initiatives and stakeholder consultations to make sure that we have the best legislative framework we can—the rules that govern this particular domain.

One of the privileges but also challenges of being a family physician is that you will actually have multiple generations of the same family. I've had even four generations of the same family: the great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and the kids. When you discover particular conditions or if, let's say, a teenage girl wants to come in and access various forms of medication, sometimes other members of the family will actually ask and try to intrude into the discussion. Again, there are very specific rules—and they're age-based, of course, in terms of age of consent—that govern all family physicians' conduct in these matters.

It goes beyond just the idea of conduct in an office setting, though. There are rules that actually talk about the protection of this information, be it the digital version or the hard copy version, for years and years after that patient encounter. I think there are probably a number of reasons why that information is kept available or made available. For example, perhaps subsequent to the physician encounter, maybe two or three years hence, there may be an issue—whether it's medical or legal or maybe the individual is now up for kidney transplantation or heart transplantation or blood transfusion or any other number of scenarios—and there may be the necessity for actual review of those particular medical records. So there is very specific legislation in place that actually governs how those records are kept even decades after that initial patient encounter.

The other thing that's very interesting is that patients who will be diagnosed with things like elements of the cardiometabolic syndrome, basically the evils of obesity—none of my colleagues or members need think that I'm speaking of them specifically, although they often come and talk to me afterward. Elements of the cardiometabolic syndrome show elevated sugars, cholesterol,

blood pressure, waist circumference and so on. They will often say, "Doc, please don't release this information to anybody, or if my insurance company calls"—or if this office or that office or an employer or anyone else calls.

0950

Of course, what's always interesting and amusing is that we have to reassure the patient that until they allow us, with a signature on a specific form that essentially allows to us release that information, not even the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of the province, or even your own esteemed office, Speaker, can ask for that information without actual written consent. That is part of the law of Ontario, and of course other jurisdictions in this country, to protect the privacy of this very personal and deeply impactful medical information.

I say that to you as part of the larger context under which the medical information flows. But now I speak to you about the digital age, because all of those pieces of information that I was mentioning—whether it is lab tests; the results of radiology exams; pap smears; HIV testing; VD testing or any number of other tests; or, for example, the patient's own patient record, meaning the encounter with the patient, whether it's by the way of a psychiatric nature or a depressive nature—all of these things are now going digital. This, of course, is not only increasing the flow of information, but the traffic and the points of intersection and the areas of flow are now literally increasing exponentially.

Very often, for example, some of us are signed up to alerts that are sent to us by e-mail. Let's say there's a patient who comes in and we're vaguely dealing with the condition of some kind of chest pain. We send the patient off for an electrocardiogram and cholesterol tests. We try to match their risk in terms of their overall picture. As family doctors, we have no doubt been watching them, tracking them and following them for years on end, and something is going on, some vague kind of chest pain. Some of us are actually now signed up to e-mail alerts where the laboratory in question will send us directly, or possibly fax us directly, and/or all of the above, that there are some conditions that are very important and need to be acted on on an immediate basis.

That, of course, opens up a whole opportunity, unfortunately, for missed calls, misinformation, disinformation and the incorrect spread of that information. For example, some physicians will inevitably receive information about patients who are not their own. Sometimes it comes because you happen to be in the same building. Sometime it comes because perhaps your e-mail happens to mimic others. All of these issues are now in play and are amplified and accentuated because of the digital age in which we live.

It's extremely important that we talk about, as I say, this very deeply impactful personal information, as well as the whole area, which is a major discipline in and of itself: the idea of patient confidentiality; the consent that is required for a physician to actually release, use, redirect that information; the very personal and intense rules that govern physicians' custodial responsibility or

stewardship of these records, whether it is access requests from individuals, other members of the family, other institutions, insurers and employers; and, of course, the overlay that is now so important because of the digital age that we are now in. That's why, as Minister Bryant and others have talked about, it's extremely important for us to move forward, not only with this motion but also the review that it will eventually lead to.

Having said that, I think it's important for us to review the fact that the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004, was actually regarded as a model and really understood, incorporated and responded to, and talked to the idea that the management of health care information is of course changing, evolving, self-regulating and self-upgrading.

Part of what this motion speaks to is the idea that a legislative committee will actually allow us to consult with patients and stakeholders. And no doubt, as part of that consultation, we're going to have a relatively healthy dose of consultation with digital software providers, because time and time again we hear in the press and in the newspaper and elsewhere the idea not only of the sanctity of digital information but unfortunately the opposite: how it seems to be relatively easy to make off with it, to actually steal it, whether it's personal information, banking information or even the whole idea of identity theft.

This particular privacy act came into force, as you'll recall, on November 1, 2004, and has some fairly intense specifications for the rules, the usage and the ability to redirect and disclose personal health information by terms that need to be specified and amplified: "health information custodians," which of course include doctors, laboratories, long-term-care homes and hospitals.

I'll give you an example. I had the opportunity recently of chairing a medical conference on a new domain that is just becoming better and better appreciated in Ontario. It talked about cardiovascular disease, or heart and blood vessel disease, that is now unfortunately exploding. It now, by the way, accounts for something in the order of 40% of all the deaths in Canada. But one of the spins or skews or nuances that we're learning is that one of the risk factors, along with the usual suspects of blood pressure, smoking and obesity, happens to be one's ethnocultural background. The Heart and Stroke Foundation has actually just allocated fairly significant resources to go after the health information on some of these areas for specific communities—for example, aboriginals, the Chinese population, the black population and South Asians.

I just say that to you in terms of the background, but what was extremely interesting is that one of our American colleagues, a physician, came back and said, "Listen, if there is a higher risk of cardiovascular heart and stroke disease in these particular populations"—and of course, God bless America, it's kind of an American question—"do we really want to tell anybody? Do we want to disclose this information?" Because from the American perspective, he was talking about a person's

insurability, a person's ability to actually get health coverage. Of course, that's an entirely different kind of debate. In America, it seems they were interested in perhaps the opposite—once again, God bless America—in terms of the suppression, shall we say, or the very specific targeted use of this kind of health care information.

In any case, all of these various issues, whether it is the extraordinary exponential flow that we now see on a day-to-day basis of information in the digital age, the very important regulations that we have been brought up on and are still living on and that still resonate in our medical offices with regard to privacy and patient confidentiality or the release of documentation, be it in the public domain, the private domain, electronically by fax and so on, I would say the deeper responsibility that we have as a Legislature is to make sure that the stewardship of this information accounts for all of these different issues and struggles and initiatives and challenges.

With that, I would urge members of this House to support this particular motion that was brought forward by our government so that we can offer best practices on the personal health information protection domain.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm going to share some words on behalf of our party regarding this motion dealing with the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004, which is going to be reviewed, in this motion, by the Standing Committee on Social Policy. That committee, once this motion is passed, will have the opportunity to report back to the House its opinions, observations and recommendations concerning amendments to this 2004 act.

1000

I think it's already been mentioned that this review is necessary and it is, as has already been mentioned, overdue. It deals with the protection of personal, private health information. We have heard this morning repeatedly that people obviously want and require that their personal health information be protected at all costs. Certainly, the government in the province of Ontario has an obligation to make sure that happens.

This particular legislation dealing with the protection of personal health information—we have been trying to draft legislation since about the year 2000 and we are now at a point where we have legislation and we need to review the legislation. I don't anticipate that this review is going to result in a major overhaul of the act, but I think what this review will enable us to do is to ensure that the legislation is effective as we move towards the establishment of a province-wide e-health system. I guess that's what we are looking forward to.

That is a priority. Unfortunately, it is a priority that we have not yet seen the realization of in this province. But certainly coming out of this review, if not before, this government must—and I stress the word "must" because this is what we're doing and why we're doing it—clearly communicate to the public, the Legislature and the committee information as to where we are going with electronic health records. Of course, when this electronic

health system is in place, we need to ensure that this legislation that we are reviewing is going to be adequate to maximize the potential of electronic health records. We need to ensure that the legislation we are reviewing is adequate to protect the private, personal health information of Ontarians. I guess that is the missing information that we still don't have. What progress is being made on electronic health records? We really need that information in order to do the review that we are undertaking, and I think that's really been the missing ingredient.

This government spent \$647 million on the Smart Systems for Health Agency between 2002 and 2008. This is a considerable amount of money, and we still don't know when people in this province can expect a full electronic health system that will give every person in the province a health record that all authorized health care workers can access. We do not have any final decisions on timelines or announcements on timelines for the full implementation of the electronic health record. Regrettably, if we don't have that information, this review will not do all that is necessary, and that is ensuring that it's going to adequately protect the information in preparation for the full implementation of electronic health records.

Deloitte did a review of the Smart Systems for Health Agency in 2006, and regrettably that review indicated that despite the fact that this government has spent millions of taxpayers' dollars, there was still no strategic direction and the government didn't seem to be accountable for any of the spending and really had nothing to show for it. In fact, the report found that "significant questions exist relating to the effectiveness of certain decisions and the value obtained from significant investments." The report called for "an aggressive agency turnaround plan."

This electronic health record, which still has no timelines or goals, would help us to bridge physical distances, it would help us to penetrate the silos, it would allow for unprecedented communication amongst health care providers, and it would have tremendous benefit to patients. They'd be more informed. There would be the whole issue of safety. It would allow them to move also in a seamless transition along a continuum of care. It would mean that no matter where you travel in this great province, if you become ill and require any services at any emergency ward, that ward will have all the information that pertains to your personal health history. That would save us tremendous costs because we wouldn't have to repeat tests, but, more importantly, it would ensure that all of the health care providers in this province who are entitled to your information have it available when it comes to your treatment. Regrettably, we don't know when that electronic health record is going to be available for people in Ontario because we've not seen any timelines and we don't know what the goals are. In fact, we don't see any announcements of timelines.

In 2007, the Ontario Information and Privacy Commissioner, Ann Cavoukian, confirmed what I have just

said, and that was that Ontario is far behind other provinces when it comes to implementing electronic health records. According to Canada Health Infoway, Ontario lags far behind other jurisdictions such as, for example, Alberta, British Columbia and, on the east coast, PEI, regarding the implementation and adoption of electronic health records. If we take a look at Alberta, they have an electronic health record system in place, and they hope to have all people in that province on the record by the end of 2008. We don't have any timelines at all. If we take a look at British Columbia, they intend to build the infrastructure they need to develop a province-wide electronic system by 2009.

I think we can see that in Ontario, unfortunately, the health system is falling behind. We see this when it comes to doctors and the growing doctor shortage, and the fact that in 2005, we saw doctors leaving this province for the first time ever, really. In 2007, the number of doctors leaving this province to go to other provinces had tripled. We've seen the government's lack of action on C. difficile. We've seen that they failed to introduce the PET scanner, a new piece of diagnostic equipment which is available in provinces such as Alberta and British Columbia.

This province, when it comes to health, is falling behind. We're increasingly seeing gaps in our health care system. We know that the poll that was taken by SES just before the end of last year indicated that over 60% of the people in this province weren't seeing any improvements to the health system. If we talk about e-health, in April 2007, Tony Fell, who was chairman of RBC Capital Markets, resigned from the Toronto Central LHIN because, as he said, he was "extremely disappointed with the low priority that had been accorded by the Liberal government to e-health." According to Fell, "An advanced e-health system could save many billions of dollars annually while, at the same time, providing vastly improved service and care to our citizens and a major reduction in medical errors." That was April 19, 2007, in the Toronto Star.

1010

In 2008, the Ontario Hospital Association also reported that, "The evolution of e-health in Ontario has been hindered by the absence of a health system funding approach that recognizes e-health as a strategic investment priority." The OHA believes that "the current funding environment does not effectively support the adoption, collaboration and integration necessary to enable the timely realization of e-health's true value." According to the OHA report, "Improved availability, integration and communication of health care information will result in improved care for those with chronic diseases...." There are so many people in the province today—I want to deal with that a little later, about the impact of e-health on chronic disease.

They also said that if we had it, it would create "greater efficiency in interactions with patients, improved patient safety"—and, a very important fourth point—

“improved patient participation in their own health....” This is critical.

Currently, if you try accessing the e-health strategy, you aren't going to get much except a phone directory.

Who else had something to say about the government's inaction, lack of timelines or goals towards the e-health strategy? The quality council. The quality council was quite critical of the government regarding the lack of activity and, again, they came back to the fact that it would enable the ministry to focus on the prevention and the management of diabetes and other chronic diseases. Also, e-health investments would support the government's diabetes strategy in the shorter term and form the foundation for the longer-term goal of creating electronic health records for all Ontarians.

In fact, when the Ontario Health Quality Council released their report recently, the council chairman, Ray Hession, said, “Ontario needs a province-wide electronic health records system to better monitor and treat patients with chronic disease.” They actually went on to say that nearly 8,000 lives in this province could be saved annually if the province did better testing, treating and monitoring of patients with such diseases as diabetes and heart disease. They indicated that currently, slightly less than half of those with diabetes have their blood sugar under control, while only 28% of patients with diabetes and high blood pressure have their blood pressure under control. As well, only one in three patients with coronary artery disease received all three drugs—Aspirin, beta-blockers and cholesterol-reducing medications—recommended to prevent their vessels from clogging.

We know what is necessary to deal with these chronic diseases. Electronic health records throughout the province would help us to better monitor and treat these patients. But Mr. Hession also said that the government has not released a plan with a budget and targets to “get us from where we are to where it's widely accepted we ought to be. In the absence of that, it doesn't matter what we say about when it's going to happen,” he said.” If there are no such prerequisites in place, it won't happen, and that is our concern.

Now, this is the Ontario Health Quality Council that was set up to look after what progress we are making, and in this instance they found there were failings in Ontario's e-health system: that the government had no plan, had no timelines, and as a result, lives that could be saved were simply not being saved.

We have no idea how the government plans to achieve its targets; we just know that we haven't seen any timelines. It is most regrettable that they are so slow when we know that this system could deliver better health care. I've just pointed out what actually could happen.

I'm going to conclude my remarks. I think we recognize that this review that we're undertaking is necessary. It is overdue. It will give our stakeholders an opportunity to tell us about the effectiveness of the legislation and what improvements need to be made. But it will do so because we are moving forward, we hope, to the estab-

lishment of a province-wide e-health system. We just don't know when that will happen.

Really, in the absence of that type of information, we probably aren't going to do total justice in this review, because it's going to be impossible to adequately ensure for what is ahead of us that we can adequately protect these electronic health records. At the end of the day, we need to have information about where we are with electronic health records, what are the timelines that the government has in place, when they are going to make announcements about the timelines, and what is their goal. Because without that information, we'll never know whether this review of the legislation is going to adequately protect the privacy of Ontarians. We'll support this, but we certainly hope that in the interim, the government comes forward with a plan of action for electronic health records.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to join the debate on a subject that I find very interesting, that is, the government's notice of motion on PHIPA. Does the fact that a behaviour is permissible make it mandatory? And, indeed, does the existence of a technology or a capability mean that it must be either compulsory or forbidden? This is, I think, what this motion seeks to address. And while I'm not a lawyer and I don't bring a legal mind into the considerations, I was trained in science and mathematics, so I can bring an opportunity to apply some logic.

If one looks at where this motion is taking us, Ontario, with its aging population, is going to be looking at roughly twice the number of seniors in the next generation that we have now. With the evolution of technology, we're seeing the technology of connectivity and bandwidth expanding greatly, thus giving us the ability to look at data and health records in a manner in which, as we grew up, we couldn't even imagine. Add to this the technological savvy of not merely doctors, but also their patients, and what we have is the ability to share health records in a manner in which we have never been able to do so before.

The sophistication and stability of networks, distributed storage and delivery platforms using such applications as the browser and Internet portals will mean that health information that heretofore existed in silos is going to be something that doctors and their patients can use to advance the standards of care. What this motion seeks to do is to bring together a body of knowledge and to position us not so much where we are now, but where we would like to be in 10 and 15 years, in which doctors and their patients can collaborate in ways that we're only beginning to imagine now, and do so in a manner in which a doctor and his or her patients can collaboratively determine where they're going in their treatment and how to share their diagnostics. I think this is a good, forward-looking motion that deserves the support of this Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Wilkinson has moved government notice of motion number 60. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

Hon. David Caplan: Mr. Speaker, I seek consent of the House to recess until 10:45 of the clock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there such consent? Agreed? Agreed. This House stands in recess until 10:45 a.m.

The House recessed from 1022 to 1045.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a number of guests we'd like to introduce this morning and welcome everyone to Queen's Park.

On behalf of the member from Beaches–East York: Carmen Carrasco, Cheryl Duggan, Ken MacLeod, Sharon McPherson, Chris Sartor, Nancy Van der Plaats, Kyle Vose and Mike Yale, in the west members' gallery.

On behalf of the member from Parkdale–High Park: Choesang Dhenub, Tsering Dolma, Jigdel Kuyee, Tenzin Nyendak. These are members of the Friends of Tibet, in the west members' gallery.

On behalf of the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, I'd like to welcome in the public gallery today members of the Ontario Landowners Association, visiting from approximately 30 counties.

On behalf of the member from Oakville, I'd like to welcome the guests of page Natalie LaMarche: her mother, Shaida Tabatabai; David LaMarche, her father; Mina Hunt, her aunt. They are in the members' east gallery.

On behalf of the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell: in the east members' gallery, Richard Lalonde, Jeanne Charlebois, Conrad Lamadeleine, Jean-Yves Lalonde, Gary Barton, Robert Kirby, Denis Pommerville, Ken Hill, Grant Crack and Stephane Parisien. These are guests visiting today from the member's riding, and it's Glengarry–Prescott–Russell day here today.

MEMBER FOR GLENGARRY– PRESCOTT–RUSSELL

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just like to take this opportunity as well: Today is a special anniversary for the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. Today marks Jean-Marc Lalonde's 38th anniversary in public life. Let's acknowledge Jean-Marc and his contribution.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I could stand here today and blame your government for the impact on the auto sector over and over again, but it's not going to resolve one issue, and that's the issue of jobs and support for the number one industry in the province of Ontario. Premier, you've mentioned the plan that you have in supporting the auto sector and how it's going to ensure that we have jobs for future generations in the number one employer. Today's announcement at General Motors in Oshawa is only the beginning. We're going to see five or seven times the number of those announcements coming forward as the support industries for that particular industry announce their layoffs.

Premier, the plan isn't working. Do you have an alternative form or way to support the auto sector in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me first of all say that our hearts go out to the workers affected by today's announcement from GM. My friend opposite will know that GM has decided, because truck and SUV sales have plummeted by 40% in the last year alone, that they are closing plants: two in the US; one in Mexico, which is rather extraordinary; and one here in Ontario.

1050

We will do everything we can to lend support to those workers and those families. We understand that this is a particularly difficult time, but I'm also mindful of the advice I received from a worker recently in Windsor. When I said, "What can we do for you?" he said, "Keep fighting for the auto sector in Ontario." We intend to do exactly that.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Premier, certain sectors of the plan don't appear to be working. For example, the taxation of ethanol is one small method of deterring the sale of ethanol—which supports the E85, which is 85% ethanol—a method of deterring the sales of technology-leading advantages that General Motors and the other Big Three would have in the province of Ontario. Small things like that or just-in-time delivery service, with the cost of fuel, are not necessarily the way to go.

What I'd mentioned before in this Legislature was that we need alternative methods to support just-in-time delivery service such as having taxation for warehousing to make it more cost-effective, because bringing goods in from other jurisdictions may not be the way to go. We need to think outside the box and find alternative methods to support this. Do you have some other plan that we can look at and work on with you to make sure that the number one employer in the province of Ontario stays the number one employer?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate and do not doubt for a moment the sincerity of the offer coming from this particular member. But I can tell you, from day

to day, it's hard to know where the Conservative Party is coming from on this score. Their single, most important economic priority is that we cut taxes, corporate taxes in particular. I can tell you, in talking to GM right now, they're not paying corporate taxes because they're not making a profit. They were paying capital taxes until we eliminated capital taxes for them, and they voted against that. So it is difficult, from time to time, from day to day, from question period to question period, to know where they are coming from on this score.

I can say that we will continue to work with GM. Because we have invested together with them in their new Beacon project, which is a new flex plant, that means we are at the front of the line when it comes to landing a new car manufacturing investment in Ontario.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Premier, we've brought forward a number of alternatives. I've raised this issue in the Legislature on a number of occasions going back years. I have brought forward things such as the fuel-consumption tax as a method to reduce the taxation on some aspects, as a gesture to the auto sector, and particularly the truck plant in Oshawa, as one way of support.

In a previous government, one of the Premiers came forward with an all-party committee to address issues called the alternative fuel committee. Would you consider looking at an all-party committee on the auto sector and the number one employer on how we can move forward in making sure that it remains the number one employer in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're pleased to give real consideration to this idea, but I must say that when we spoke with the auto manufacturers, they told us that their number one concern was capital taxes. They told us their second concern was business education taxes. We've also come to understand that, at the beginning of the 21st century, in a world where one of the states was prepared to put up \$1 billion to land a new key investment, we have got to be at the table.

I would prefer to be at the table together with a strong partner in the federal government, so that we can work together to further strengthen the auto sector in Ontario. But until that day comes, I'm more than prepared to work with my colleague opposite, to continue working with the CAW and to continue to work with our auto manufacturers to ensure that we have a bright and vibrant future for our auto sector in the province of Ontario.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Minister of Health, who has taken a very incredulous position on *C. difficile* and the crisis in recent weeks. Minister, you have known since at least 2004 about the threat of *C. difficile*, but you have not developed a plan nor have you revealed the numbers.

We learned that between October 2006 and September 2007, 14 patients at University Health Network in Toronto died from *C. difficile*. At Mount Sinai, between

April 2007 and March 2008, it contributed to three deaths.

Minister, we were able to get these numbers by simply contacting the hospitals. You can't continue to stonewall and say you don't have this information. I ask you: Will you release the *C. difficile* fatality figures today?

Hon. George Smitherman: As the honourable member would know, firstly—she talks about a crisis in the context of the last few weeks, and this is the difficulty with the approach by the honourable member, because maybe that's when she was first alerted to it, but the health care system has been working diligently on this issue for a long time. I've been in contact over the last few days, as an example, with some of the hospital CEOs, just to go through, step by step, the initiatives they've taken in their hospital environments. They've been grappling, struggling and working hard to address this challenge over several years.

On the matter of reporting, the honourable member knows that on September 30 we'll be implementing real-time reporting on *C. difficile* rates across the broad hospital platform in Ontario. That will be the first time that all that information is brought together in one place. I think that, under the leadership of Dr. Baker, this is going to dramatically enhance the amount of information that the public knows about patient safety circumstances in all of our hospitals.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: The confidence in the health system in the province of Ontario has been badly shaken in recent weeks and months.

Today, we learn—in fact, the media just had a big story in the papers and on TV; I was watching—there are seven more *C. difficile* outbreaks at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto and there are outbreaks at Stevenson hospital in Alliston.

Ontarians know what is happening, but you are not providing any comfort or consolation to them that you know what's going on and that you have a plan for their future. I ask you today, Minister: Will you develop a plan and will you let us know why you have failed the test of leadership these past four years?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's interesting to watch the honourable member, whose tenure as Minister of Health led to the dismissal of her government, talk about confidence and about leadership.

Ontarians know that the steps we've taken will dramatically enhance the amount of information that the public has with respect to a broad range of patient safety indicators.

We put out this release last week. I'll repeat it for the honourable member. On September 30, we'll have public reporting of *C. difficile*; on December 31, MRSA, VRE and hospital standardized mortality rates; and on April 30 of next year, rates of ventilator-associated pneumonia, rates of central line infections, rates of surgical site infections, and hand hygiene compliance.

Where the honourable member continues to miss the mark is that *C. difficile* has been well known as a struggle and a challenge in health care, and that's why

those who lead our health care organizations have been working to address it in each of the 157 hospitals across Ontario. This is not a crisis just of the last few weeks; this has been an ongoing challenge.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: The minister has one thing right: This has been an ongoing challenge. Unfortunately, he has refused to assume any responsibility. As a former Minister of Health, I know that the buck stops and starts with the minister. He has been evading his responsibility and the need to be accountable to the people in the province.

When SARS broke out, our government acted quickly in order to restore confidence in the health system, and we had the support of leaders in this province.

Minister, when are you finally going to take responsibility for the fact and not blame the hospitals or the front-line workers but acknowledge that it was your inaction over the past four years that has shattered the confidence?

Hon. George Smitherman: It's a ridiculous assertion that the honourable member makes. The health care system, including me, the ministry, all of those 300,000 or 400,000 people who work in health care—we all bear responsibility for improved performance and enhancing patient safety in health care. I bear part of that responsibility, of course, but it's not appropriate for the honourable member to pretend that it's about a piece of paper from Queen's Park when it requires front-line battling every single day by those who lead health care organizations. The honourable member, as a former Minister of Health, knows that and she knows it very, very well.

The initiatives that we're taking, under the leadership of Dr. Baker, will provide for Ontarians a degree of transparency which will dramatically enhance the knowledge that they have about a wide variety of patient safety—

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

1100

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. Premier, this morning General Motors announced it is closing the truck plant in Oshawa, eliminating the final 1,000 jobs there. This comes after General Motors received a \$235-million cheque from the McGuinty government. The money is gone, and because there were no job guarantees, there will be 2,500 fewer jobs at the Oshawa truck plant than existed before you handed over the money. Can the Premier explain why the McGuinty government gave General Motors \$235 million without getting job guarantees from General Motors in return?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: First, I want to take the opportunity once again to acknowledge the tremendous contribution that the auto worker makes to the Ontario economy.

One of the things that the GM executives told me when I was briefed on this issue this past Sunday was that we continue to excel when it comes to quality and productivity, which is all about how quickly we can produce that quality.

I also want to take this opportunity to commend the CAW for the recent agreements it has entered into with some of our auto manufacturers and for the concessions they have made, which have been very realistic in a very trying time.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I was listening hard for an answer there. The question was, how could the McGuinty government give \$235 million to General Motors, a huge multinational corporation, and get no job guarantees? I've asked that question for weeks and still don't have an answer.

The news is actually worse, because chief executive officer Wagoner said the plant will cease production in 2009 and "we don't have plans to allocate future products." This means it's a permanent closure. This means thousands of parts jobs will go as well.

Will the Premier finally admit that giving General Motors \$235 million of public money without getting job guarantees in return was not a very good jobs strategy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think a few facts on this score would be helpful.

We landed a \$2.5-billion investment; it's called the Beacon project. There was a \$235-million co-investment; \$60 million of that went to universities to help them conduct research to help us land the next-generation vehicle. All the remaining money that went to GM was a loan. That's point number one.

Secondly, although it was a car production facility, we looped in the truck plant so that if there were job losses in the truck plant, there would be early repayment of that loan required. If GM is, in fact, in breach of that agreement, then we will enforce it as such and seek early repayment on that loan.

Mr. Howard Hampton: This story becomes more interesting every day. When this announcement was originally made by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade three years ago, he said that this was going to guarantee thousands of jobs for GM workers in Oshawa, in St. Catharines, across Ontario. Then we found out there were no job guarantees. A few weeks ago, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade said they weren't in breach of any obligations. Now, today, the Premier says it was a loan and there is a breach.

Premier, can you tell us how much of the money is going to come back to Ontario, when is it going to come back to Ontario, and is it going to do anything for the 2,500 workers who've lost their jobs and the thousands more who are about to go?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We'll have to wait and see what happens at the end of 2009 in terms of actual job numbers, but there are specific provisions found within this contract.

Let me tell you why we still have reason to be optimistic. This investment that we made together in this new Beacon project was to build a new, flexible manufacturing plant. A flexible plant allows us to shift on the fly, essentially, and respond quickly to changing market conditions and new consumer demands. We know that North Americans buy at least 15 million new vehicles every year. We know that they're buying fewer trucks and SUVs because of rising gas prices. GM has told us they want to make new cars. Guess who's at the top of the line to land a new car investment in North America? It's the Beacon project in Oshawa, because of our investment that we've made together. The fact is, we have positioned ourselves well for the future and we look forward to an ongoing dialogue with GM, working with CAW to land the next new investment here in Ontario.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: This is interesting. As thousands of workers lose their jobs every week, the Premier says this is good positioning.

But it's not just to General Motors that the McGuinty government has been handing out money and not getting job guarantees. Two years ago, at the Dell call centre in Ottawa, the Premier bragged, "High-value jobs like the ones announced today will help us continue to build more opportunity for Ontario families and strengthen our future prosperity." Well, today the call centre is closed, the jobs are gone, the workers say they received little training and, yes, Dell, a huge, profitable, multi-million-dollar corporation, got \$11 million of Ontario's money. Does the Premier still say that the laid-off workers and the public got a good deal on the \$11-million gift to Dell?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I'm proud to be part of a government which offers over 150 apprenticeships in the province of Ontario, and I'm proud of the training that was received at Dell. The guidelines for the trades offered at Dell required approximately 4,000 hours of both in-school and on-the-job training, and the workers there received transferable skills.

I'd like to draw the member's attention to a quote in the Sun, where David Weedmark, managing partner of the AIM Group's IT services division, was asked to comment on the Dell situation. He said he "fields dozens of calls every week looking for exactly the type of employees who worked at Dell.

"I would say over the next couple of months a third to a half of them should be able to find work. This is not a time to give up hope, because those skill sets are very much in demand. There are people like us scouring the streets looking to find"—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: The question was to the Premier, and I think I know why the Premier wants to duck the question. His hometown newspaper, the Ottawa

Citizen, tells quite a different story. It points out that many of the workers were already fully trained. It points out that others who were contacted said they received little training for the \$11-million gift to Dell. Dell was so worried about this—the workers speaking out—that it forced them to sign a gag order before they left the company.

I think Ontarians deserve to know how their \$11 million in training money was spent since so many of the workers didn't get training. My question to the Premier: Will the Premier ask the Auditor General to come in and look at the Dell handout, where they got \$11 million and 1,000 workers wound up in the street?

Hon. John Milloy: I find this a little bit offensive. We are talking about real people and real jobs. We are talking about people who are undertaking training and transferable skills.

The honourable member asked what the funding is used for. Let me tell you about the trades: information technology support agent, 3,340 hours of on-the-job training and 600 hours—20 weeks—of in-school training; information technology call centre inside sales agent, 3,730 hours of on-the-job training and nine weeks of in-school training; information technology call centre customer care agent, 3,730 hours of on-the-job training and nine weeks of in-school training.

We care about making sure that we have well-trained workers and we're not going to stand in the House and make fun of them as the honourable members do across the way.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Most people in Ontario think that an apprenticeship involves years of training with a skilled journeyman, an instrument mechanic, an electrician or a welder. But it appears that for the McGuinty government, if you can sign something that says you might provide three weeks of training for someone in how to answer the phone, you'll get apprenticeship money. No other province in Canada doles out apprenticeship money for this kind of thing. No other province in Canada doles out \$11 million to a profitable, multi-national corporation and then has 1,000 workers out on the street—and says it's a good deal.

My question to the Premier: When are you going to call in the Auditor General to look at what was a very bad deal for workers, a very bad deal for the public and a gift for Dell?

1110

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very proud of the fact that we have an apprenticeship system in this province which recognizes the needs of the business community and the changing nature of our economy. Right now, we have 152 apprenticeships which are registered in the province, many of them providing similar training guidelines as the ones at Dell. I'll give you some examples: automotive glass technician, hoisting engineer, roofer, chef, construction craft worker, heavy equipment operator and automotive accessory technician. These are very similar training regimes as the ones offered at Dell.

We're in changing times. We actually recognize that, in a new economy, there are new skill sets that are needed, such as those offered at Dell. We don't sit there and make fun of hard-working individuals who receive transferable skills that will be useful throughout the Ottawa job market. I'm very proud of our record on apprenticeships.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier. Last September, you said the following: "For rural kids, few things are more important than being able to go to school in your own community, with your own friends. Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we're not only committed to keeping them open—but strengthening them." Those are your words, Mr. Premier, not mine.

Today, we have at least 50 rural schools closing, and many more are on the chopping block. These closures are another example and consequence of your relentless and uncaring attack on our rural culture, our rural heritage and our rural economy—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment, please. I just remind the members from the government side that heckling is one thing, but some of the personal shots that I'm hearing are not acceptable. I just remind the government members of that.

Member?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Mr. Premier, why are you once again betraying the trust of rural Ontario and breaking another promise? Do you know how to keep a promise? Do you know how to be truthful?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, let's talk about records. Since we came into office, we have increased funding to rural boards by \$632 million. On our watch, there have been 404 new schools opened, and that is in the face of declining enrolment. We all know that there will be 90,000 fewer students next year than there were in 2003.

I'm not sure which party the member's speaking for, but the record of the Conservative Party is that under their watch, there were 50,000 more students and 500 schools closed.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: To the Premier: In 2002, in this very Legislature, you felt it was critical to keep Thames Valley district schools open. Now, on your watch as Premier, these schools are on the chopping block. That same year, you asked the Eves government for a moratorium on school closures. Now there are accommodation reviews starting in 300 schools across the province.

When are you finally going to stop playing politics with our students? When are you finally going to keep

your promise, or is your legacy as education Premier going to be the closure of rural schools?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is beyond rich for a member of that party to be talking to us about playing politics on education. It is absolutely absurd. Since we came into office, 690 new teachers have gone into our rural schools—\$632 million.

The reality is that school boards in this province must be able to make decisions based on the program that they need for their students in their schools. They must be able to plan for the students who are in their schools. This is why we have put pupil accommodation review guidelines in place that require the board to consult with the community, that look at the value of the school to the community and look for alternatives, but at the end of the day, if schools must consolidate or close, boards must be free to do that in the interests of the students in our publicly funded education system.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Minister, we know that hundreds of people have died from *Clostridium difficile*. Patients at St. Michael's Hospital, as recently as this morning, are reporting that there are no signs posted at the hospital warning them of a *C. difficile* outbreak.

How many more shocking disease outbreaks will occur before this minister realizes that health care facilities must clearly warn patients of disease outbreaks?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think that the honourable member's suggestion is one that merits consideration by Dr. Baker, but I think that a far more appropriate starting point for all patients, for visitors to hospitals and for people who work in hospitals and other institutional environments is to understand the necessity of the obligation to take steps to protect themselves and to make assumptions, frankly, about the risks that are occurring in these environments.

What has surprised me to some extent is that in the House, the characterization by both parties is that they became aware of this issue just a few weeks ago, but the health care system has known about the attendant risk associated with superbugs in hospitals. They've been taking proactive steps to manage it, but these are very serious challenges indeed.

I'll take the honourable member's suggestion under advisement and ask Dr. Baker to give us some advice around that, but at the heart of it, all of us who are in those environments must make assumptions and take appropriate steps to protect ourselves and especially to do the right thing to protect others.

M^{me} France Gélinas: In the face of a public crisis, Ontarians are losing confidence in our health care system. One way to rebuild public confidence is to give them an opportunity to bring their issue to a neutral third party such as an Ombudsman. Why is the minister afraid to bring in Ombudsman oversight of hospitals?

Hon. George Smitherman: In the matter at hand, the honourable member uses a word like “crisis,” then she calls for investigation by those who don’t have express capacity in this area.

We have a different approach. We believe fundamentally that the important step forward is to ask Dr. Michael Baker, an accomplished expert in the areas of patient safety, to lead an initiative which will dramatically enhance the information that Ontarians have on a wide variety of patient safety indicators. We believe this is the approach which is prudent in the circumstances and delivers the most timely results and benefits to the people of the province of Ontario.

I remind the honourable member that C. difficile is not something that’s come about only recently. This is something that hospitals and the hundreds of thousands of people who work in those environments, visit those environments and are patients in those environments have an obligation to be aware of and to take the steps that they can take, such as rigorous handwashing and dedication to cleanliness, that can provide very, very effective capacity in these circumstances.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, the issue of emergency room wait times is well known to all members of this House. This issue is not a new one, but something that my constituents of Ottawa–Orléans have raised with me a number of times. You recently made an announcement about new investments to reduce emergency wait times. Hôpital Montfort was one of the recipients of direct funding. My constituents would like to know how this money is going to reduce wait times and when my constituents are going to see improvements.

Hon. George Smitherman: Under the leadership of Dr. Alan Hudson, we’ve taken another significant step forward, which is to bring the successful Ontario approach to reducing wait times to one of the public’s biggest battles, which is with wait times in hospital emergency rooms. A \$30-million pay-for-performance fund will target and incent the practices that will enhance performance in our 23 poorest-performing emergency rooms.

But in addition to that are a wide variety of initiatives led by Kevin Smith, the CEO of St. Joseph’s hospital in Hamilton, to provide better alternatives to hospital care so that we can reduce the proportion of alternate-level-of-care patients. That means providing more resources to home care and enhancing the number of hours that people can receive, \$22 million in priority funding that each LHIN will have the opportunity to roll out and support local initiatives, \$4.5 million for dedicated nurses for ambulances arriving, and nurse-led teams that will outreach the long-term-care homes—all in an effort to stabilize populations where they are.

1120

Mr. Phil McNeely: Minister, I know my constituents will be glad to see that Hôpital Montfort is receiving some of this targeted funding. Hôpital Montfort is an important aspect of health care in Ottawa and provides very good care to my constituents in Ottawa–Orléans. While this \$30 million in targeted funding will help the 23 poorest-performing emergency rooms, I would like to know what is being done to help the rest of the ERs across the province that are struggling with long ER wait times. I would like the minister to tell us what he is doing to ensure that all hospitals benefit from this recent announcement.

Hon. George Smitherman: Our efforts are to take coordinated steps to reduce wait times and enhance patient satisfaction in Ontario’s emergency rooms—this is a challenge in many hospitals—but most precisely are focusing in on 23 hospitals where the performance has been the poorest. By targeting the \$30 million, we’re going to provide a pay-for-performance capacity where we incent the hospital and have expectations of improved performance on behalf of patients.

All hospitals in Ontario will benefit from the efforts to reduce alternate-level-of-care patient loads. Hôpital Montfort will be receiving \$686,000 as part of an investment in the Champlain LHIN and in Ottawa hospitals that totals more than \$4 million. With these initiatives and the alternate-level-of-care initiatives which complement them, we feel confident that we will begin to make substantial progress to reduce wait times and improve patient satisfaction in Ontario’s emergency rooms.

SEWAGE SPILL

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. The city of Ottawa has been struck by unbelievable news that there were over a billion litres of raw sewage dumped into the Ottawa River by the city of Ottawa and their sewer system.

You found out about this in May 2007, according to the records. Your spokesman for the Ministry of the Environment says you started your investigation on May 26, 2008—last month. Why did you do nothing for a year?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I thank the member for the question. Obviously, we share Ottawa’s concern as to what happened there in August 2006, but we have—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It’s a cover-up.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member for Renfrew, withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw.

Hon. John Gerretsen: In May 2007, when we found out about this, the ministry immediately contacted the city of Ottawa and the following steps have been taken to ensure that this kind of an event—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Welland will withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I withdraw, Speaker.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, I'm somewhat surprised that the members opposite wouldn't want to hear what was actually done by the Ministry of the Environment when they heard about this in May 2007.

In any event, we take this very seriously, and we wanted to make sure that this kind of an event, which meant that the gates were open for an extra two weeks back in August 2006, wouldn't happen again. So what did we do? The ministry gave top priority to the certificates of approval that were required for the city's sewer system upgrade to be on track. It also ensured that all the certificates of approval for the city's sewer system upgrade included the enhanced and stringent monitoring, reporting, contingency planning of the combined sewer overflows.

We have been working with—

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

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: You still haven't answered the question as to why you began your investigation on May 26 this year. Mr. Minister, why don't you do what the city of Ottawa did, that is, have an independent investigation of its role in this whole matter? Why don't you agree to an independent inquiry into your role in this whole debacle?

Hon. John Gerretsen: The member still doesn't understand that the Ministry of the Environment started to work with the city of Ottawa as soon as it heard about this in May 2007. It wanted to make sure that the kind of occurrence that happened in August 2006 didn't recur. That's why it put more stringent monitoring systems into place to make sure that it didn't happen, and also to make sure that the certificates of approval that were in the process of being approved, were going to be adhered to.

Our main concern within the Ministry of the Environment is to absolutely assure the people of Ottawa that the kind of occurrence that happened in August 2006 won't happen again.

The investigation that he's talking about was as a result of what the city of Ottawa employee didn't do in August 2006, and that didn't occur until we were notified by the department of public health about two or three weeks ago.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Premier. Thousands of Ontarians have disabilities. Those disabilities include mental, physical and emotional illnesses that pose serious barriers to their ability to work and earn a living. Through no fault of their own, people with disabilities who also receive ODSP payments are condemned by this government to a life sentence of poverty. ODSP benefits leave single adults \$6,000 below the after-tax Statistics Canada low-income cut-off number. When will this government stop forcing Ontarians with disabilities to live on sub-poverty-level benefits?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's a very interesting question. This government has worked, since we have been elected, to improve the quality of life of those on ODSP. We have removed most of the barriers that were put in place by the previous government to prevent them from improving their quality of life. For instance, we consulted with them and some of them told us that they would go back to work if this government provided their medication. They were also telling us that they would like to be able to retain more of what they are earning. So we worked on that. We have listened to them, and we have amended our processes to help them to improve their quality of life and to help them if they want to go back to work.

Mr. Michael Prue: To the minister: And you continue to claw back everything they earn above \$350 a month.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just remind the members of the use of some language in here. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Prue: Six ODSP recipients are here with us today: Ken MacLeod, Cheryl Duggan, Kyle Vose, Mike Yale, Chris Sartor and Sharon McPherson. They're all here in the west gallery. They are here to ask the Premier to listen to their stories and to consider standing in their shoes. The meagre 2% ODSP increase that was in this budget amounts to 60 cents a day. What they want and what we all want is a commitment from this Premier that no Ontarian with a disability will be forced to live in poverty forever. Does this government believe that \$2 a day is a reasonable amount for these people to have, after rent and food expenses, in their pocket?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I will continue to let the people in the gallery know what this government has done since we came into power. We've listened to them. We have increased social assistance by—it's going to be 9% this November. We know that they have had a lot of challenges. Every time that we move forward to improve their quality of life, this party votes with their friends who reduced their benefits by 22%. We're listening to them. We want to improve their quality of life. We want to help those who are able to return to work. We are improving their quality of life, so that they can keep their health benefits, they can keep their medication benefits, and they can keep more of what they are earning. We will continue to work with them to improve their quality of life.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. But first, I would like to take this opportunity again to welcome the mayors and councillors of Glengarry, Prescott and Russell who are here with us in the gallery. They are here for a very

special day, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell day at Queen’s Park. This is going to be done every year now.

1130

The united counties of Prescott and Russell and the municipality of North Glengarry have many of the same challenges that exist elsewhere in the province, such as infrastructure deficit, shortage of affordable housing, growing transit needs and many more. Bien que ces problèmes soient fréquents—

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

Hon. Jim Watson: I want to congratulate the honourable member on celebrating his 38th anniversary representing the good people of eastern Ontario and Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. What a change to see constituents and municipal leaders from eastern Ontario here to support Mr. Lalonde.

About two weeks ago, the member from Lanark brought some constituents here, and do you know what? He had a press conference with them and they turned on him. They asked for his resignation. So I would encourage members to go to YouTube, type in “Randy Hillier,” and you’ll see quite a sight—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the member that we do not refer to individuals by their name, but by their riding.

Answer, please.

Hon. Jim Watson: I know that there will be a lot of hits on that YouTube site. Here he comes back again. So I’m very proud—

Interjections.

Mr. Tim Hudak: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I’d ask you to rule if this answer by the minister has anything whatsoever to do with his portfolio. This question should clearly be ruled out of order as a direct attack on a member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Michael Bryant: On that point of order, I think that the question and answer are entirely consistent with the kinds of questions and answers that are undertaken by the official opposition and third party. I respect whatever latitude the Speaker wishes to undertake, but the idea that the opposition and third party do not engage in ad hominem questions and ad hominem answers is completely absurd, and I know—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I do agree with the member that that was, I believe, a personal attack at the member. I would ask him to withdraw the comment.

Hon. Jim Watson: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: We often hear the need for housing framed as an urban issue, but the fact of the matter is that it affects every municipality, large or small. Often, small municipalities can feel ignored over discussions around housing. The mayors of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell’s diverse municipalities want to know that

they have a partner in this government. What have the minister and his government done to assure these municipalities that their concerns have been heard and are being addressed?

Hon. Jim Watson: I’m very proud of the work that we’ve done with respect to social housing. For instance, \$100 million was announced in the budget for rehabilitation and repair. In Prescott and Russell, \$381,000 was delivered; in Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, \$774,000.

The Premier announced the continuation of the rent bank, a \$5-million investment. Prescott and Russell received \$29,000; Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, \$71,000. This is another example of a member of this side, of the government, working hard for their constituents. I can tell you, those men and women up there are not going to be calling for Jean-Marc Lalonde’s resignation.

POLYGAMY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, just before British Columbia launched a criminal probe into the illegal polygamist marriages taking place there, I demanded the same in this chamber for Ontario’s well-documented polygamy problem. Last night, I sent the Premier an urgent letter to ask him to heed BC’s action and initiate a criminal probe here too. Will the Premier send a strong message of support for Canada’s laws and immediately launch a criminal investigation into these illegal polygamist marriages taking place in Toronto?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I’ll respond to the honourable member’s question by reminding her of what the Attorney General said in this House yesterday. He said that in Ontario, where there are allegations of criminal activity, the police are responsible for investigating—

Interjection.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: —and determining whether or not there are grounds for charges to be laid. I want to further highlight his point that political interference is not something that this government is desirous of getting into. In fact, it’s not something that’s proper. In the course of an investigation, the police can seek legal advice from crown attorneys—

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Apparently they don’t care about breaking the law either. This government is passing this issue around the cabinet table like a political hot potato. The Minister of Government and Consumer Services’ responses often contradict federal law. The women’s issues minister won’t stand up for gender equality. Now you have the Attorney General, and apparently this

minister, wanting to sweep this dirty little secret under the carpet.

So I ask: Will they do the right thing? Will they do what it took 20 years for British Columbia to do and launch a criminal investigation, or will they continue to pass the buck around for another 20 years, at the expense of the rule of law in this country and gender equality rights in this province?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: It's not my place to comment on criminal law. It is entirely my place to express in this House today that we have full confidence in the ability of the police to carry out their investigative responsibilities.

Repeated calls for interference in police investigations are not helpful and unfairly discredit the police, diminish public respect for the work that they do every single day, and unfairly jeopardize public safety. In the event that charges are laid by the police, they will in fact be prosecuted by the crown in the normal course of events.

EVENTS IN TIBET

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. The Parliamentary Friends of Tibet of Ontario are asking, along with the Tibetans of Ontario and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, that the torch relay not pass through Tibet. Many are not aware that the epicentre of the earthquake was in Tibetan territory. This will add to the instability of the situation there and is not necessary. Will this government add its voice to those around the world calling to stop the torch relay through Tibet?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've addressed this matter in this Legislature by way of a very specific resolution. It's not specific to this particular issue, but we indicated, as a government and as all parties—I'll read it: "That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, as a long-standing friend of China, express concern with the current situation in Tibet and encourage the parties to engage in meaningful dialogue." I understand my friend's concern with this specific issue, but we prefer the resolution that we supported unanimously in this Legislature.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again to the Premier: Not so long ago, we discovered that the Minister of Economic Development and Trade went on a secretive trip to China as Tibetans and others around the world asked for attention to be paid to the human—

Interjections.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: We have Tibetans who are watching this in the gallery; they don't appreciate the laughter—and others around the world asked for attention to be paid to the human rights abuses that were taking place in Tibet.

Understanding that Ontario is home to one of the largest Tibetan populations in the western world, could the Premier give the House a list of any cabinet members who are attending the opening ceremonies of the Olympic games?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the best of my knowledge, nobody is representing our government there—certainly not any elected representative.

We will continue, however, to support our athletes who want to participate, our Olympic athletes and those who are going to participate in the Paralympics. We've had funding through our Quest for Gold program, which has been set aside for quite some time now to help in that regard. But when it comes to this difficult situation between China and Tibet, we think that we gave expression to our values and our aspirations on behalf of both sides through a resolution that we endorsed unanimously in this House.

1140

INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: A number of municipalities in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, including Dawn-Euphemia, have been notified by the federal government that they were approved for funding important infrastructure projects. This funding comes from the federal municipal rural infrastructure fund that was announced in 2007. The support from the federal government, however, depends on assurances that these same municipalities can fully fund the remaining two-thirds cost of those projects. In the case of the township of Warwick, their council will have to obtain over \$4 million in order to receive the federal assistance. That's not an easy feat for a town of 600 households, in order to upgrade their sewage system.

My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Could the minister clarify for my constituents the criteria the federal government used to select projects that were actually submitted under a previous COMRIF?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member for the question. I want to let the House know how concerned the government is with announcements like the example the member has just brought forward. As the member mentioned, these announcements have created uncertainty and situations which I believe were completely avoidable. I wish I could tell the House how the federal government selected these projects, what criteria were used. Only the federal government can say for certain what they had in mind.

What I can tell the House is that Ontario welcomed the news of the so-called \$200-million top-up and was fully prepared to make contributions on the same basis which had gone previously. It was a complete surprise that the federal government decided unilaterally to select projects and announce them without informing or engaging the province of Ontario. What we see emerging from the federal government is a list of projects that were not successful in previous COMRIF rounds that had been granted provisional approval based on—

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

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Earlier this year, I was pleased to announce that municipalities in Lambton–Kent–Middlesex had received over \$21.3 million to fix roads and bridges as my riding's share of the \$400-

million investment this government made. As well, I was able to announce an additional \$18.3 million for projects approved in Lambton–Kent–Middlesex under the municipal infrastructure investment initiative. But in making a federal municipal rural infrastructure fund announcement for the municipality of Brooke-Alvinston, my federal counterpart explained in the Glencoe Transcript and Free Press, “Communities and provincial governments will match it, one third each.”

Minister, given that we have already made substantial financial investments in municipal infrastructure this year and, as you have stated, we were not consulted in any way on the recent federal projects approvals, will this government be participating in any of these federal municipal infrastructure projects?

Hon. David Caplan: An excellent question. In fact, I wrote to every COMRIF-eligible municipality to tell them that no provincial support should be presumed. This government works with our municipal leaders to make sure they have real dollars in hand to make projects happen. We’ve established a relationship with our municipal partners that demonstrates a responsible, balanced approach to recognizing the infrastructure priorities that vary across the province. The municipal infrastructure initiative, for example: \$450 million into 243 projects right across this province, projects that municipalities have under way because they have the cash in hand. That’s a real commitment to infrastructure that goes beyond the federal government phony announcements.

We are very disappointed with the MRIF process and with the direction the federal government has chosen, the situation that several communities are facing, and we’re looking forward to continuing and urging our federal colleagues to engage in a real partnership with us.

BEEF PRODUCERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. Today, the Ontario Cattlemen’s Association is here at Queen’s Park to share the concerns of their members. I want to thank them for coming here to meet with us and for all the hard work they do on behalf of those members. I also want to thank them for inviting us all to join them for a barbecue lunch with great Ontario corn-fed beef, which is famous throughout the country, if not throughout the world. We hear from them about the tough times that our beef farmers are facing.

Minister, they have asked you for a \$20-million safety net fund to guarantee a floor price for producers. Will you stand up today and commit to them that you will create such a fund?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: First of all, I would like to join the member from Oxford in welcoming the Ontario cattlemen, and we invite all members of this Legislature to come outside on the front lawn of the Legislature and enjoy some of Ontario’s finest corn-fed beef.

Our government has, certainly, a history of working very closely with the Ontario Cattlemen’s Association. Last fall, when the signs were very apparent that the

industry was in difficulty, we met with the Ontario Cattlemen’s Association, we met with the Ontario pork producers and horticulture producers in Ontario, and we came up with a program. The Minister of Finance, in December, announced a \$150-million new program—\$150 million in new money—to support cattle, hogs and horticulture in the—

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Minister, people who know what’s going on in the beef industry know that the CAIS program isn’t working for beef farmers, because prices are steadily declining. They know that a lot of beef farmers in need were missed by your cattle, hog and horticultural program. We’ve been telling you about this in this Legislature day after day.

The cattlemen are here. They told us of the type of program their farmers need. Will you commit today to provide the \$20 million to fund a guaranteed floor price for the producers?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I would remind the honourable member that I do have a letter from the president of the Ontario Cattlemen’s Association. It says, “I would ... like to thank our Premier, the Honourable Dalton McGuinty. It is very encouraging to see his government take a leadership role in recognizing the financial hurt that producers are currently” suffering. So they very much appreciate the reaction that our government has had to the crisis in the industry.

I would also like to say that, when you look across this great nation of ours, Ontario has stepped up to the plate to address the crisis there is in cattle, in hogs and in horticulture, unlike most other provinces. Geri Kamenz—again, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture—has offered very positive remarks. I think that it’s very clear—

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

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, I attended the northern growth plan consultation in Sudbury. Part of the development of the growth plan is the work of G-North, the round table of the 17 ministries. Can the Premier tell us why the meetings of the G-North round table are not being held in northern Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, this is a very unique process, where we have 17 ministers and 17 ministries coming together on a regular basis to bring the unique perspectives, the expertise in policy and the resources available to be able to work on this incredibly important policy initiative. It has never been done before. It is unprecedented in the history of Ontario government and, I would say, in government anywhere in this country. To

be able to get that level of support and the coordination—it's an incredible thing.

This table of ministers has been incredibly welcome in northern Ontario. Northern Ontarians are very excited about the northern growth plan. They're excited about the consultations. They're excited to finally have a government who stands up for them, who's working for them and developing a plan which is going to see northern Ontario move forward and see the prosperity—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The time for question period has ended. It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to petition the Legislature as such:

“Whereas understaffing in Ontario's nursing homes is a serious problem resulting in inadequate care for residents and unsafe conditions for staff;

“Whereas after the Harris government removed the regulations providing minimum care levels in 1995, hours of care dropped below the previous 2.25 hour/day minimum;

“Whereas the recent improvements in hours of care are not adequate, vary widely and are not held to accountable standards;

“Whereas there is currently nothing in legislation to protect residents and staff from renewed cuts to care levels by future governments; and

“Whereas care needs have measurably increased with aging and the movement of people with more complex health needs from hospitals into long-term-care homes;

“We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately enact and fund an average care standard of 3.5 hours per resident per day in the regulations under the new Long-Term Care Homes Act.”

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it with page Aaron.

1150

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Kim Craitor: This petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. The petition reads as follows:

“Whereas the people of the province of Ontario deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents as requested in Bill 33;

“Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

“Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and their grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

“Subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.”

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this bill.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents. This was a particular group from Blackstock, and one of the presenters is Reid Bonnard. 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 am pleased to sign this and present it to page Radhika.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads:

“Whereas an all-party committee is reviewing the recital of the Lord's Prayer at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

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

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

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

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

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mrs. Christine Elliott: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many young people with developmental special needs have no meaningful social, recreational or vocational opportunities after high school; and

“Whereas many of these young people have no real options for living independently in the community; and

“Whereas current supports in place are insufficient to meet the needs of these young people;

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

“That the McGuinty government allocate an appropriate level of funding to advance the transformation agenda of individualized funding for adults with developmental special needs in the province of Ontario to allow them to live with dignity and to reach their full potential as members of our communities.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature in support.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Central East ... LHIN ... board of directors approved the Rouge Valley Health System’s deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

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

“Whereas, with the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach \$100 million (of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government); and

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

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

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

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

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

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

I will affix my signature to that and pass this to Damian.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I appreciate all the people in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock who have signed it, and I hand it over to the page Radhika.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today. Actually, there’s an interesting name on here. It says “Steven Harper,” but this is a Steven Harper who lives in Apsley, Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present, as they have concluded that levels of second-hand smoke can be 23 times more concentrated in a vehicle than in a

house because circulation is restricted within a small space; and

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

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

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

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

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Christine Elliott: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

I’m fully in agreement with this. I’ll affix my signature and hand it to page Damian.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Phil McNeely: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas part-time college workers in Ontario have been waiting for 30 years for bargaining rights; and

“Whereas thousands of part-time college workers have signed OPSEU cards, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board failed to order a timely representation vote; and

“Whereas the Ontario government must immediately make good on its promise to extend bargaining rights to college part-timers;

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

“The McGuinty government must immediately pass legislation legalizing the rights of college part-timers to organize, and direct the colleges to immediately recognize OPSEU as the bargaining agent for part-time college workers.”

I will put my name to this petition.

LORD’S PRAYER

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

“Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord’s Prayer from daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

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

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

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

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

It is signed by many people from my riding.

HIGHWAY 138

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from some of the constituents from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

As I agree with this petition, I’ll 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, the 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 sign that and pass it to Alie.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank St. Peter’s Anglican Church in Minesing for sending this petition to me.

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition, and I will sign it.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from the Wheeler family on Franmor Drive in Peterborough.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for petitions has expired. This House stands recessed until 3 o’clock this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1204 to 1500.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Well, the axe has started to fall. Only 16 days after the contractual agreements are signed, General Motors announces another huge loss for Oshawa and the closing of the award-winning truck plant. I cannot understand why I stand in this House time after time and express my concern over the changes coming in the auto sector and the cabinet doesn’t see the light.

Fuel for consumption tax hits trucks hard. No help. Taxing ethanol, where environmentally friendly vehicles run on corn, works as a deterrent to have it available. Instead, the current government taxes it and, lo and behold, we have four stations selling ethanol. Mind you, I’m not sure the fourth has been announced yet, but I believe that the member from oh, say, Oxford, should be happy shortly.

The job losses aren’t just in Oshawa. One of the Magna plants in St. Thomas, whose number one customer is the truck plant in Oshawa, and the thousands of individuals employed there: What’s going to happen with them, and all the other feeder plants throughout the province of Ontario?

Premier, we hear about a plan. We hear how first it’s a grant, then it’s a loan, then it’s 50 years and then it’s 15 years. First it’s \$100 million and then it’s \$160 million. Even your minister doesn’t seem to know when asked the question. The plan, quite frankly, isn’t working.

The Premier is leaving a legacy of change from manufacturing to service. I would not expect that that would be the change he’d want to be known by. The government’s job is to create an environment where business can flourish and Ontarians can live, work and raise a family. I may not have all the answers, but working together, we may be able to find ways by which the Ontario sector can once again reign supreme. I ask the Premier to please consider an offer to establish a sector review committee so that we may all be able to keep Ontario’s auto sector strong.

INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED PROFESSIONALS

Mr. David Zimmer: I want to emphasize the importance of newcomer integration in Ontario's economy. Internationally trained individuals help Ontario's businesses to compete and function in the global marketplace. Last week we heard from the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration that our government is expanding its bridge training programs. This \$27.4-million investment will help newcomers to transition more easily into Ontario's labour market.

To newcomers in Willowdale, this funding means that they'll be able to enjoy greater access to job-specific training, mentorships, skills assessment and work experience. For example, the \$346,000 investment in CARE—that's the Centre for Internationally Trained Nurses, which is located in Willowdale—will enable the centre to offer language training courses. The Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, also headquartered in Willowdale, will now be able to offer examination skills preparation for internationally trained engineers. These are some of the examples of the 20 different bridge training programs available throughout the GTA.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Ontario is renowned throughout the world for the diversity of its population. This important investment in bridging programs will help internationally trained individuals, local communities and businesses across this province.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. Randy Hillier: Today the Premier skirted my questions on his government's broken promises and rural school closures. He tries to hide from his words and hide from rural Ontario. But, since he won't come to us, rural Ontario has come here to Queen's Park today.

While he sets up his cap-in-trade programs with Quebec, he asks Ontario to go cap in hand to him. Our schools stand as a foundation for small-town Ontario; it's not only a school, it's also the library, the gymnasium and the hub of activity for our communities. This government has attacked our mills, our markets, our church suppers, and now it's our rural schools.

These assaults on our institutions are consistent with the relentless, uncaring attitude of the McGuinty government as our rural culture, our heritage, our economy and our homes find his crosshairs. Success or failure as a society is to know which core values to hold on to and which ones to discard.

This government has betrayed the trust of rural Ontario. We all know it only takes a jackass to kick a barn down, but it takes a carpenter to build one.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Paul Miller: Yesterday I visited the GGS Plastic plant in Bolton to support Teamsters Local 938 workers, primarily Punjabi women, who are on strike and who are

here in the gallery today. I was appalled by the conditions that these women have faced every day of their six-week strike. The employer is bringing in scab labour to do their work rather than negotiating fairly and reasonably with these long-time employees.

These women have finally reached a pay level that brings them above the poverty line so they can enjoy a bit of disposable income. They have been loyal employees for 10 years or more, and how do they get treated? They are told to take a 20% pay cut, head back to the poverty line and forget the years of hard work it took to finally reach this income level. And when they use the only tool available when the employer is callous, inflexible and won't negotiate a reasonable contract, when they are forced out onto the picket line, what does their employer do? He trucks in scab labour.

This is why we are in desperate need today of anti-scab legislation. Ontario is facing even more of these travesties as we lose so many manufacturing jobs and employers flex their muscles against decent working wages and working conditions.

For the sake of these hard-working Punjabi women at the GGS Plastic plant in Bolton and many more like them around this province, I encourage all members in this House to vote in support the NDP anti-scab legislation that will be introduced later today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just like to go back to the statement that the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington made.

Hon. Jim Watson: Resign.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Municipal Affairs, I've already warned you once today.

I'd just ask the member to reconsider his last comments. It's not in the standing orders, but throughout parliamentary tradition you can't do indirectly what you can't do directly in a comment that you made. I'd just ask that you would consider withdrawing that comment.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I will certainly withdraw.

SENIORS' MONTH

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to commemorate Seniors' Month across Ontario.

The Chatham-Kent Senior Information Fair will be held at the Blenheim recreation centre on June 13. It is with great pride that we will gather to recognize and pay tribute to the ongoing contributions of seniors to our communities.

This is a generation that did more with less, made do with what they had, and made personal sacrifices then so we could have opportunity and advantages now.

The McGuinty government is committed to ensuring that Ontario's elderly population enjoys a high standard of living. The 2008 budget provides a new grant to help offset property taxes for low and moderate-income senior homeowners. In 2009, about 550,000 seniors will qualify for up to \$250, doubling to \$500 by 2010. When combined with the existing property and sales tax credits, some seniors could see up to \$1,000 in total tax relief

next year and up to \$1,325 in 2010. Our government is also increasing support for community services like home care, funding more nursing staff and long-term-care homes, and continuing to invest in health care.

Our seniors have made and continue to make important contributions to our province. Our government is on the side of seniors, and we are improving the supports they need to live in safety and with dignity.

SENIORS' MONTH

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm pleased as well to speak in the Legislature today to recognize Seniors' Month in Ontario. This is a time when we can reflect upon the accomplishments of previous generations and how they built this province into the wonderful place that it is today. It is also an opportunity to reflect on what an aging demographic means for Ontario and both the challenges and the opportunities that are in store for us as our population continues to grey. These challenges will require innovative solutions from legislators.

1510

Unfortunately, an opportunity for innovative legislation was lost last Thursday when the Liberals decided to vote en masse against Bill 78, which would have created a province-wide, provincially administered property tax deferral system for low-income seniors and disabled persons.

During last week's debate, we heard all sorts of ridiculous excuses as to why members of the governing party couldn't possibly vote in favour of that bill, from accusations of, "It's downloading," despite the property tax deferral program being provincially administered. "It favours the rich." Tell that to the old couple in Niagara-on-the-Lake who bought their house after the war but are being forced to sell because they can't afford their assessment rate. "Seniors would rather have the Liberal \$250 than assistance promised by Bill 78." Really? Tell that to CARP, who supported the bill and slammed the government's lip service to seniors.

These lame excuses lead to one conclusion: The Liberals voted en masse against Bill 78 simply because it wasn't a Liberal idea. This government prefers hollow photo ops to actually introducing legislation that does anything for Ontarians. God forbid that the opposition should try to fill the void.

Bill 78 is the latest addition to a long list—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, and I thank the armchair Speakers as well.

EVENTS IN AJAX AND PICKERING

Mr. Joe Dickson: The municipalities of Ajax and Pickering have significant events commencing this week on Friday, June 6.

In Pickering, there will be the gigantic Rotary Ribfest on Friday, Saturday and Sunday at the Esplanade Park beside the Pickering city hall. This will be a huge success

and attract thousands, and I congratulate their chair, Lon Harnish.

This week also commences Ajax Home Week, the 10 days commencing the largest annual event in the town, under chair Peter Hudson. This is a week we started 38 years ago to say thank you to the people of Ajax from the five Ajax service organizations: the Ajax Kinsmen, Legion, Lions, Optimists and Rotary. Events are free for everyone for over 50% of the items and are free regardless of gender, religion, race, age or personal means.

We promote the town of Ajax regionally and on an international basis and encourage former Ajax residents to return home for a visit.

The week kicks off Saturday at 12 noon with the Ajax Home Week parade under chair Angela Burke. The parade features 50 entries of animals, clowns and, for the first time, the 40-foot Chinese dragon and the Panmasters Steel Band. There's also the special emergency services day featuring the Durham police service helicopter.

We also have the Village Jazz Festival, the Young Singers concert, the Lions Pasta Nite and a multitude of others.

On Tuesday, we see Dee Miller off on her 100-day bicycle Ride for Renewed Strength for Cancer Survivors, and I look forward to speaking to this again next week.

JACK BYERS

Mr. Jeff Leal: I rise today to pay tribute to an exceptional individual from my riding of Peterborough.

Mr. Jack Byers possesses a unique ability to see the good in all youth. He is cognizant of the possibilities they bring to the world they live in. It is because of this desire to see all children succeed that he created the breakfast club for kids. He recognized the fact that children are the product of their environment and, as such, require a helping hand. Since retiring from A&P, Mr. Byers has dedicated himself to the coordination of a breakfast program for students. This has been a 12-year labour of love, during which time he served over 125,000 breakfasts each morning for 185 mornings per year.

The true value of a volunteer comes from the desire to work to help others without seeking public recognition, but public recognition was bestowed upon Jack Byers when he received the June Callwood volunteerism award on April 28, 2008.

Everyone who knew June Callwood knew how hard she advocated on social justice issues for women and youth. She was directly involved in the creation of over 50 Canadian social action organizations. During her lifetime, she worked tirelessly as a volunteer. I know she would have recognized the value of Mr. Jack Byers's efforts on behalf of our youth.

I had the distinct pleasure of being present at that awards ceremony. I was proud of Mr. Byers, who, at age 79, represents what it truly means to be a volunteer in the community of Peterborough.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Phil McNeely: I am eager to share with my colleagues some exciting news to come out of my riding of Ottawa–Orléans. I had the good fortune of playing host to Minister Smitherman this past Saturday as he announced that my riding of Ottawa–Orléans will receive the first of 50 new family health teams in Ontario.

The McGuinty government has also announced that it will provide a planning grant of up to \$100,000 to develop the proposal and business case for the proposed family health hub that will accommodate the family health team and other health care programs in Orléans.

The Orléans health hub will bring together multiple health care services under one roof, including family health care and a range of diagnostics and treatment services.

Additionally, the minister announced that the Orléans Urgent Care Centre will receive up to \$300,000 in additional funding to boost nursing facilities at their clinic.

This is truly an exciting time and has done much to improve the future outlook of health care in Orléans. Residents will be able to seek necessary medical attention within the community, which will consequently reduce the wait times of hospitals around the region.

Orléans has always been a great place to live and work, and with the addition of this new health care hub, it will assist in maintaining Ottawa–Orléans as one of the best communities in Ontario.

I want to thank all those who worked tirelessly to get better health care for Orléans. Without the support of the front-line workers and community members, this great announcement would not have been possible. Special thanks to Janise Johnston, Sandra MacInnis, Marion Moritz, Robert Paiement and Brenda Johnston.

I also want to extend my thanks to Minister Smitherman for listening to the needs of my community. It has been a long time coming, but health care in Orléans is on the mend.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

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 June 3, 2008, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 107(f)(1), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

SPECIAL REPORT, OMBUDSMAN

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a report of the Ombudsman of Ontario, entitled Building Clarity—In-

vestigation into how the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services represents its relationship with Tarion Warranty Corp. to the Public.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PHOTO CARD ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES CARTES-PHOTO

Mr. Bradley moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to permit the issuance of photo cards to residents of Ontario and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 85, Loi permettant la délivrance de cartes-photo aux résidents de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires au Code de la route.

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. James J. Bradley: I will reserve my statement until the time designated for ministerial statements.

LABOUR RELATIONS

AMENDMENT ACT

(REPLACEMENT WORKERS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL
(TRAVAILLEURS SUPPLÉANTS)

Mr. Kormos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 86, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 / Projet de loi 86, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: The purpose of the bill is to restore the provisions that were incorporated into the Labour Relations Act by the Labour Relations and Employment Statute Law Amendment Act, 1992, and subsequently repealed by the Labour Relations Act, 1995. The purpose of the provisions being restored is to prevent an employer from replacing striking or locked-out employees with replacement workers. The bill allows replacement workers to be used in emergencies.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PHOTO CARDS

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise in the House today to talk about another step in Ontario's plans to keep people and goods moving across our borders and maintain a strong economy.

Today, the McGuinty government is introducing the Photo Card Act, legislation that would provide new, secure personal identification cards for Ontarians.

We are proposing to introduce an enhanced driver's licence card that would include citizenship information. This would become an acceptable travel document, a passport alternative, for US land and sea cross-border travel.

1520

If passed, our government would also develop a photo identification card for people who do not drive or are unable to. Like the enhanced driver's licence, the enhanced version of this card could be used as a convenient passport alternative.

Each year, millions of US citizens visit Ontario, pumping hundreds of millions of dollars into our province's economy. As many of us are already aware, the United States government recently passed the western hemisphere travel initiative, one of the key recommendations from the 9/11 commission report.

The western hemisphere travel initiative has been implemented in stages. Since January of last year, travellers entering the United States by air have had to present a passport or other accepted secure document proving citizenship. Since January of this year, travellers crossing into the United States by land and sea have been required to show proof of citizenship with their identification, such as a birth certificate. The next phase will go into effect on June 1, 2009, when all travellers to the United States will have to present either their passport or an acceptable alternative.

Our proposed legislation follows close on the heels of recent security improvements to the driver's licence card already in use. Anyone who has renewed their licence during the past few months will have noticed these changes. If this legislation is passed, the proposed enhanced driver's licence would be used in the same manner as the existing driver's licence, but would also include the additional information needed to show Canadian citizenship.

Our government has worked closely with the Canada Border Services Agency to develop this program. We will continue to work with this agency and the US Department of Homeland Security to make this program a reality. We have consulted with Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner about the development of the enhanced driver's licence, and we will continue to do so.

If passed, this legislation will make cross-border travel more accessible, saving our economy millions and reducing congestion at the borders.

In Ontario, nearly four million people do not hold a valid driver's licence. Our government understands the proof of identity challenges faced by individuals who in fact do not drive. The reality is that the Ontario driver's licence card is among the most commonly used identity documents in the province.

Proof of identification is frequently requested for everyday transactions, such as opening a bank account or proving age for a senior discount. The creation of a photo identification card has long been advocated by youth, people with disabilities and senior communities.

If passed, our proposed legislation would improve access to the kinds of services and conveniences currently enjoyed by drivers every day. Like driver's licence holders, photo card holders would have the option of enhancing their cards in order to show proof of citizenship for cross-border travel.

Making sure all of these new cards and the existing driver's licence are issued legitimately is critical to combating fraud and identity theft. One of the ways we can accomplish this is through the use of photo comparison technology. This leading-edge technology would help ensure that multiple cards are not issued to the same individual under different identities.

For a number of years, our government has played a leading role in advocating to US officials that they should accept an enhanced driver's licence and photo card as a passport alternative, in order to protect the efficient flow of travel and trade at our borders.

This is about maintaining a strong economy and secure borders. This is about promoting tourism and working with our neighbours. This is about combating fraud and identity theft. This is about keeping Ontario's roads among the safest in North America.

Finally, the legislation we are proposing today is about removing barriers and increasing accessibility for people who do not or cannot drive. This creates opportunity for all Canadians. I urge all members of the Legislature to support this bill.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Hon. Deborah Matthews: This week marks Sexual Harassment Awareness Week. This is the second year in which the McGuinty government has recognized this week.

Until sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women are eradicated, we will continue to bring attention to this important issue. Women are still faced with sexual harassment, where we learn, where we work and in our communities. Ontario women have the right to live free from the threat of violence. Women cannot live up to their full potential if they are faced with violence in its many forms: domestic violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment.

The McGuinty government wants to create a better future for women, but to achieve this goal, everyone needs to be involved. That means mobilizing communities, educating individuals and taking action. By recognizing Sexual Harassment Awareness Week, we are raising public awareness of harassment against women, reinforcing public censure of sexual harassment and helping focus community prevention efforts.

Our government is spending more than \$190 million a year to provide a range of services to support and protect women. This includes \$82 million in funding over four years for the domestic violence action plan. The plan aims to change attitudes and mobilize communities to stop violence before it starts by providing better community-based supports, public education and training, by strengthening Ontario's criminal and family justice systems response and by providing better access to French-language service.

As part of the domestic violence action plan, the Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign is a public education campaign geared to mobilizing communities and educating individuals on woman abuse. The campaign is now in more than 140 communities across the province. Kanawayhitowin, the aboriginal adaptation of Neighbours, Friends and Families, is being rolled out in many aboriginal communities.

We have also launched Equality Rules, a multifaceted public education campaign to help eight- to 14-year-olds develop healthy, equal relationships and change the attitudes that perpetuate violence, such as sexual harassment.

More recently, I had the pleasure of announcing the funding recipients of the Promoting Healthy Equal Relationships grants program. These grants support projects that challenge boys and girls to adopt the attitudes and behaviours necessary to having healthy, equal relationships.

To combat harassment and violence in schools, the safe schools action team has been re-engaged. It will focus on ways to improve school safety by making recommendations aimed at preventing inappropriate behaviour such as sexual harassment, homophobia and gender-based violence.

We will also be working closely with our community partners to develop a coordinated plan to target sexual violence.

Violence in the workplace is a key concern for our government. In fact, June 2 is the anniversary of Theresa Vince, who was murdered by her workplace supervisor. The death of Lori Dupont was another senseless tragedy. I offer my sincere condolences to the families of these women.

Our government has invested nearly \$6 million in training thousands of professionals to help them better identify women at risk of violence. We are in the process of training 1,500 physicians and nurses in emergency departments to better detect early signs of abuse and to provide appropriate information and support. Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, all employers are required to take every precaution reasonable in the

circumstances to protect the health and safety of workers in the workplace. Further, a Ministry of Labour workplace violence prevention web page now links to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's violence prevention website. The website provides workers and employers with important workplace violence prevention resources and information.

I encourage my colleagues and those across the province to visit the Ontario Women's Directorate website for resources that will help them raise awareness in their communities. There you will find resources and information about sexual harassment and its prevention. It can be found at www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/owd/.

Progress has been made on ending violence against women, but there is more work to do. The McGuinty government is determined to do more for women. With our community partners, we will continue our efforts to keep Ontario women safe now and in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

1530

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the official opposition to the statement by the minister responsible for women's issues and to acknowledge the PC caucus's appreciation for increased awareness and zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

It's important to recognize that sexual harassment is a crime and even more important to equip women with the education needed to enable them to protect themselves from crime. I don't think that I need to remind the minister, as well as a number of the ministers and the Premier, that Sexual Harassment Awareness Week began yesterday, June 2, which was the anniversary of the murder of Theresa Vince, who was murdered by a workplace supervisor. It began yesterday, when the Premier and the minister responsible for women's issues felt it more important to be out of the province of Ontario, so it kind of shows where the priorities are in the Liberal government.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, it's true.

Nearly two years ago, the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex received full support from this House on the second reading of Bill 110, which would recognize in legislation the first week of June as Sexual Harassment Awareness Week. I don't believe that it's ever seen the light of day again under the McGuinty government.

The minister said in her comments that there is more to do, so I do want to acknowledge my colleague from Durham, who just recently received support from all sides of the House on his bill, Bill 10, to better protect victims of domestic violence, which is in recognition of the tragic death of Lori Dupont. I hope that this minister and this Premier are going to ensure that Bill 10 is a priority and move it forward through committee and through third reading and passage into law, in order to better protect victims of crime.

My colleague from Nepean–Carleton has also stood for victims' rights and raised the issue of polygamy and its damaging effect on women's rights and gender equality, and we, on this side of the House, encourage the minister responsible for women's issues to talk to her Premier and her cabinet colleagues and address the rights of victims in this province.

PHOTO CARDS

Mr. Frank Klees: In response to the Minister of Transportation's announcement that the government intends to move forward with an enhanced licence for Ontario residents, I want to say at the outset that we certainly support the initiative. What we are concerned about is that we address the privacy issues. Our privacy commissioner has indicated some concerns regarding the technology, and I'm certain that those consultations are taking place, and that will ensure that this technology will, in fact, protect the private information of our citizens.

I am concerned with some of the challenges that the ministry seems to have in terms of managing information. I raised the issue, on a couple of occasions in the House, of information regarding driver's licences and the access of that information by the Ministry of Transportation. I'm not convinced, at this point in time, that the minister has a full handle on that. I had asked him to have that department of his ministry investigate it and that he personally take an interest in it to ensure that this very vital information that his ministry has access to is properly dealt with and is protected.

Now, we lay on top of that this new project. The minister has his hands full, or the people who are responsible for implementation certainly will. We'll be watching very closely to consider and to see whether or not the funding for this project is, in fact, there and that the appropriate safeguards are being taken.

I want to take this opportunity to commend the Prime Minister of this country for his initiative in convincing the United States of the importance of this enhanced driver's licence facility as well. He, at least, understands the importance of some \$1.9 billion of two-way trade daily between Canada and the United States, and that the security issues and backups that we have at our borders are negatively impacting our economy, not to mention the high tax rate of Ontario that the Premier seems to be ignoring. So while the Minister of Transportation is working on de-blocking the borders, perhaps he can also try to convince his Premier that the same effort should be made to make Ontario an attractive place for businesses to come. He can start that by reducing the corporate tax rate here in Ontario, which is the highest in North America.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In response to the minister responsible for women's issues, 12 years ago, on June 2,

1996, Theresa Vince, 56 years old, was shot to death in the Chatham Sears store where she had worked for 25 years. Theresa was shot by her store manager, Russell Davis, who then turned the gun on himself. Vince was a wife, mother and grandmother, and was in fact to retire from Sears that very month.

Sexual harassment was a factor leading up to Theresa's tragic death. Theresa Vince was the company's human resources supervisor, and she had actually filed a sexual harassment complaint against her store manager, Russell Davis, in January 1995.

On November 12, 2005, nurse Lori Dupont was murdered by her ex-partner at the Windsor hospital where she worked. Again, sexual harassment was definitely a factor.

In Theresa's situation, 17 months after she filed her sexual harassment complaint, she was dead, killed at work.

After both of these tragedies, inquest juries deliberated and they came up with very concrete recommendations, steps that we could actually take in Ontario to enhance the safety of women and improve the government's response to the serious issue of sexual harassment.

I have to tell you, as community members gathered yesterday in Chatham and Windsor to mark another painful anniversary, there is an ever-present and growing focus on having Ontario adopt solutions that treat harassment as the crime that it is. Occupational health and safety websites, WSIB websites, simply do not cut the mustard. Websites are not good enough. You have to take this off the nebulous realm of the World Wide Web and put it where it belongs, which is into legislation that affects the workplace, like the Occupational Health and Safety Act. In fact, on behalf of Ontario's NDP, I introduced Bill 29, legislation that would place harassment in all its forms under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and would prescribe remedies for eradicating the harassment and protecting the harassed employee.

Notwithstanding what the minister says—I don't think she understands, and she can talk to her colleague the Minister of Labour—you cannot file a work refusal based on sexual harassment in the workplace in Ontario today. You can do it in Quebec. You can do it in many other jurisdictions around the world. But in Ontario, you cannot do it.

Those juries indicated very clearly in black and white, and I can send her those recommendations, that the Occupational Health and Safety Act needs to be amended so that workers who are being harassed in the workplace have, on any of the grounds available to them, remedy in the right to refuse. Because just as other kinds of incidents in the workplace like toxins or workplace procedures or processes or machinery can be a danger to workers, so can sexual harassment and other forms of harassment.

The bottom line is that workers do not have the ability or opportunity to indicate to their supervisor or to their shop steward that they are being harassed in the workplace and so they want to file a refusal to work. Those

work environments where harassment is taking place are just as toxic, harming and damaging to workers as any of those other kinds of workplace situations that I indicated.

In Saskatchewan and Quebec, they absolutely already have this legislation. We know for sure that Ontario is far, far behind on this file.

To the Premier, the minister, the previous minister and every one of the members in this House, it's time to get our act together and start to put those amendments forward in the Occupational Health and Safety Act. It's not a matter of what I recommend as a member here; it's not a matter of what I say getting up year after year, pretty much every year that I've been here, speaking about these issues. It's a matter of getting our nose to the grindstone and putting those amendments in place so that there are real protections for workers, so no more Theresa Vinces and no more Lori Duponts have to go to work knowing and expecting harassment that could ultimately end up in their death. That's absolutely unacceptable in the province of Ontario. I call on the minister to put those changes in place.

PHOTO CARDS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the new Photo Card Act that has been introduced today by the minister, I look forward to the work that we're going to be doing on it both at second reading and in committee. I think it responds to a number of issues in regard to entrance into the United States and where we're going to be in 2009, when it becomes a requirement for people to have ID such as passports and others to cross the border. Certainly we need to do something in order to make life easier for people.

1540

I also noticed in this particular act a couple of things that are going to happen that I think at the end could be a good thing. One is the issue I've been raising in this House in regard to the case where a person in Kingston was reissued a driver's licence; he'd either applied fraudulently or there was an error. This particular act could deal with that, and I look forward to that. But I also noticed that we're going to be giving basic and enhanced cards to people so they can use them as a method of ID without a driver's licence. I want to thank Michael Prue for having raised this issue before and look forward to the work that is going to be done on committee on these issues.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Beaches—East York has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Community and Social Services concerning the adequacy of ODSP rates. This matter will be debated today at 5:45 p.m.

OPPOSITION DAY

RURAL SCHOOLS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I move that, whereas Ontario's rural schools are the hub and heart of their communities; and

Whereas, in September 2007, the McGuinty Liberals promised they would keep rural schools open because, in the words of Premier McGuinty, "For rural kids, few things are more important than being able to go to school in your own community, with your own friends. Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we're not only committed to keeping them open—but strengthening them"; and

Whereas, in less than nine months after the Premier made this promise, over 50 rural schools are slated for closure;

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon Premier McGuinty to suspend any and all board-recommended rural school closures until both the funding formula review and a thorough assessment of alternate uses for rural schools have been completed.

This is addressed to the Premier of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 4. Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: This is an important debate. Rural, small-town Ontario is under siege and this Liberal government seems unwilling or unable to come to its aid.

Since July 2004, we've lost over 207,000 manufacturing jobs in Ontario, many of them in smaller communities, which also impacts surrounding rural areas. The government's response to the job crisis is essentially, "Don't worry; be happy. This too shall pass." That attitude of complacency is in many respects even worse when it comes to the closure of rural schools. I say that because of comments and promises made by Mr. McGuinty over many years, up to and including last year's provincial election, when he said he would not only save rural schools but he would strengthen them, no ifs, ands or buts—a clear, unequivocal promise. Eight short months later, with a re-election victory and a majority government in his pocket, over 50 rural schools are slated to close, with many more on the chopping block.

The man who likes to describe himself as the education Premier: What's his reaction? His reaction is silence—utter and complete silence. He simply refuses to answer questions in this House, and we saw another example of that today. He refers them to his Minister of Education, who dispenses the usual party spin: a touch of baffle-gab, along with a dose of blaming others. Of course Premier McGuinty can't stand up and answer, because he would once again be exposed as someone prepared to say or do anything to get elected, and when successful, betray that trust with the contemptuous and cynical view that voters will forget.

It is an approach all too common in politics, one that has brought disrepute to people serving in public office and one that Mr. McGuinty has set a new standard for, not one to be proud of. We all remember his no-new-taxes pledge and at least 50 other broken promises in their last term.

Another cause of lack of respect for parliamentarians that's endemic in this Liberal government is the acquiescence of Liberal backbenchers to any and every breach of promise or offensive decision taken by the Premier and his cabinet. We saw that recently with the suggestion that the Lord's Prayer be removed from our proceedings and that the government will start funding sex-change operations. On those pronouncements, the Premier and his minister never even consulted their own caucus, let alone looked for approval. Like everyone else, they were blindsided. That's much more than being taken for granted; that's contempt. That's disdain for the role of backbenchers. But if it bothers them, it's never reflected in votes. We hope that changes today.

Prime Minister Trudeau once said that backbenchers were nobodies once they left the Hill. Well, Premier McGuinty has refined that: Government backbenchers are nobodies even when they're in this Legislature. That can all change, and it can change today, with Liberal MPPs representing rural ridings finally standing up to their autocratic, arrogant and condescending leadership and instead standing up for the good, hard-working people who put them in office, their constituents.

The vote today is not draconian, it's not partisan; it's calling for a fair shake for rural Ontario, a moratorium on closures until an appropriate funding formula is developed and a plan is put in place to develop alternative uses for school properties facing closure—alternatives that will minimize or eliminate the collateral damage that flows from a closure: property values dropping; banks, grocery stores and gas stations closing.

A few weeks ago, the Ottawa Sun ran an outstanding piece on the rural school issue. I have the front page of the paper with me: "The Final Bell: Despite a pledge by the McGuinty Liberals to save rural schools, they're being closed at an alarming rate, leaving communities broken and dying." That line truly sums up the situation: "leaving communities broken and dying."

The article references the Rideau Lakes village of Delta and the erosion of its economy following the closure of its elementary school: property values down 19%; three restaurants, two gas stations and a bank all closed in the wake of that school closure, along with other amenities available to the community. That's the reality of school closure impacts in small rural communities.

This is an opportunity—

Interjections.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman:—including the members interjecting here today—for rural Liberal members to join with us, to do the right thing. Show that you believe in the promise that Mr. McGuinty made during the election campaign. Show that the students of rural Ontario are not out of your sight. You see them every day.

They're our sons and daughters, grandchildren, neighbours and, most importantly, our constituents.

The students of rural Ontario are not out of our sight or mind. We in the Progressive Conservative caucus are always mindful of the fact that our job here as representatives is to represent the people of Ontario, no matter how far away from downtown Toronto they might live. The students of rural Ontario will never be out of sight or out of mind on this side of the House. We will fight to keep those schools open, so help me.

The official opposition, the Progressive Conservative caucus, will keep standing up in this House and keep this issue on the front burner. The Premier may want to keep the students of rural Ontario out of sight and out of mind, he may want the residents of rural Ontario to forget his spurious promise to save and strengthen schools or his counterfeit concern for the well-being of rural communities, but he won't get away with it as long as we are here to stand up for them. He won't get away with it.

Today, Progressive Conservative MPPs will be voting for the students of rural Ontario. To my colleagues from all parties, whether you represent rural Ontario or not, remember this: Our job here is to represent all Ontarians, even the students of rural Ontario and the communities they live in. Colleagues and friends, it's time to stand up for students, to support education and to keep those rural schools open.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate.

1550

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'll be sharing my time with my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. I want to welcome the citizens of Ontario to this political forum. We're actually on live in the afternoon, as well in the morning at 9:00 when you get up, bright and early, fresh with your coffee in hand. Now fresh with your beer in hand and popcorn, it's 10 to 4. We are on live.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You've got to get it on channel—I don't know; here in Toronto it's 105. You've really got to go up to get it. In some places you can't. I'm sure it's a program that a lot of people would like to see if they're not able to see it. I'm sure of it because there are so many great speakers here in this House.

Speaker, I want to tell you I support this resolution by the member from Leeds–Grenville and—

Hon. Jim Watson: Oh no, Rosie.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I do. And I'm going to hurt them a little bit and I'm going to hurt you a little bit, too.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, because I like distributing the weight around a little bit in the entire House. I have grown fond of the Conservative Party in opposition, I have to admit.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I do. I have to admit this because, when they were in government, I've got to tell you, I had no love for Mike Harris whatsoever. I had no love whatsoever, not even any warm feelings towards

him—not much. And in terms of how they governed, God forgive them. I'm telling you, it was tough.

I recall Liberals saying, “Break ranks from Mike Harris” on this and that issue—as if you could ask Liberals to break ranks. They're not going to do that, right? They're not going to do that. Tories didn't do it, Liberals are not going to do it, and most New Democrats didn't do it either, except we had some folks with some intestinal fortitude from time to time who did do it. But on the whole, asking Liberals to break ranks just doesn't work. It doesn't make any sense because nobody does it.

So I tell you, no fondness for Mike Harris—God bless him, wherever he is. I'm sure he's doing well on whatever board he's sitting on, making some good bucks, left with a fairly good buyout, leaving the rest of us here alone, fending for ourselves. God bless him too in that regard.

But I have to say, on this resolution—

Interjection: There are others with buyouts.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: This is true. Some people did well. Some people did very well.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Including you; you got some.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I was the youngest of the group. If you were a young member of that cabinet crowd, you didn't get much. The ones with experience, long experience in cabinet and serving a lot of years in this place, did okay, leaving the rest of you newcomers to fend for yourselves—little, next to nothing.

But with respect to this resolution, it's reasonable, I have to admit. It's not often I agree with Tories. I have to admit that too, publicly. I know the Liberals want to have us collude on many issues. I understand why you would do that. But on the whole, we are in polarity most of the time politically; you know that.

But on this one, when they say, “The Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon Premier McGuinty to suspend any and all board-recommended rural school closures until”—here's where it gets even more reasonable—“both the funding formula review and a thorough assessment of alternate uses for rural schools have been completed,” it's going to be very difficult for Liberals to disagree, because it is eminently reasonable. It's tough when you say that of Tories, a resolution being eminently reasonable, but it is.

I have to put this in context because I got a few quotes from mon cher ami M. McGuinty. I know it's hard for Liberals to hear these things because they said a lot of things. They did. And now, of course, in government, they hate to hear it. They hate to hear themselves heard.

Hon. Jim Watson: Rosie, did you support the social contract?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Oh, dear, you've got to go all the way back there, too? Pretty soon you're going to go to Confederation, for God's sake. Come on.

Here's what mon ami Dalton, the Premier, said on October 22—it's not news to you, but just to refresh in your mind. Dalton McGuinty said to the then Premier, “Premier, I'm sure the people of Ontario are going to want to know the basic difference between you and me

when it comes to school closures. Here is the difference: You took \$2.2 billion out of public education, forcing school closures. We are going to invest \$1.6 billion in public education to enable small communities to keep the rural schools open. That is the fundamental difference,” said mon ami McGuinty in this place.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The Liberals acknowledge that he did say that. Okay. Let me quote further: October 22, the same day. God bless. “But we on this side of the House,” meaning he and the Liberals, “in this party,” meaning the Liberal Party, “happen to value smaller communities and rural Ontario.

“I ask you once again, why is it that you continue to have in place a funding formula that is biased against rural schools in small-town Ontario?” he said. It was a very reasonable statement that he made and it was a reasonable question.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Who said that?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Mon ami M. McGuinty, the then leader of the opposition Liberal Party. But there's more.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: We have a different structure now.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, no, there's more. He asks, “Why can you not agree to put a moratorium on any school closures at this time, until such time as the funding formula has been fixed?” Sounded reasonable in 2002; seems eminently reasonable in 2008.

He goes on. Everybody—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Pardon?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The funding formula has been fixed.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The funding formula has been fixed: I'll get to that in a second.

“Everybody knows that repairing the funding formula is going to entail putting more money into public education.” And you have—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'll get to that in a second.

“Why would you not agree that the sensible thing to do in the circumstances is delay closing any schools until we've had the opportunity to fix your broken funding formula?” Sound familiar?

Let me go on. This is October 8. I should have gone the other way, but it doesn't matter. Monsieur McGuinty asks, “Why would you not place a moratorium on school closures until you've had an opportunity to fix your broken funding formula?”

There is more. On June 10, 2002, Monsieur McGuinty again asks, “Will you put a stop to school closures that are being driven not by a desire to improve learning but rather by a desire to save money at the expense of learning?” Again, sounds eminently reasonable, almost intelligent. That's why he became the education Premier. And he asks some tough questions on education. Oh, if uttered by a New Democrat, as we have, or a Tory, as they have—God bless them, because they sound reason-

able in opposition, as I was saying earlier. If uttered by us, we get laughed at by the government, but when uttered by Liberals in opposition then, they presumably sounded intelligent, except until you get into government, and then it changes.

I've got one final one on June 10: "It is your funding formula that is driving school closures in the province of Ontario. They're here to ask for your help. They want to know whether or not you're going to help them. These are good schools where good learning is taking place. Your funding formula is closing small schools in particular, where studies are telling us very good learning is taking place."

I needed to put that on the record. It ought to teach us, in opposition, because we all go around this circle here eventually.

1600

If you're brave enough to say certain things in opposition, you ought to be brave enough to say them when you're in government, to keep the promise vis-à-vis your statements and your questions. If you don't do it, you look bad, you sound bad, you are bad. It doesn't cut it to say, "No, but we Liberals are different. The Tories were bad and everybody knows that, but we Liberals are different because we fundamentally, innately, are better. It doesn't matter what we say, what we do, as Liberals we are innately, philosophically, ideologically"—by the way, you have no ideology but I shouldn't have said it—"better than the rest of you Tories and New Democrats."

That's what I have difficulties in and with as an argument. It seems that they can argue anything, as the minister does—and I like the minister; this is not the issue. The minister then provides a multitude of rationales for it. She says, "We have lost thousands of students in the system." That becomes the rationale for everything they do, good or bad. In fact, she doesn't even say they're doing anything. She argues, "We're not going to take the right of any school board to do what they need to do. If they need to close schools, that is a right of school boards, and we don't want to interfere."

But Monsieur McGuinty had no problem demanding that the Tories have a moratorium; that they do a funding review before they closed any schools, in particular rural schools. He had no problems with it. So when you're in opposition, it's okay; when you're in government, "Oh, we don't want to interfere with school boards, oh no, because it's an inalienable right. We wouldn't take that right to close schools away." God bless. God knows. That's something they have been elected to do, and if they close schools, then that's something they have to do.

The problem we've got is that the current provincial funding formula does not sufficiently recognize or fund the unique needs of northern Ontario. Yes, the Liberals have done a few things here and there, and they make them sound like they are huge, as if they saved the northern Ontario community or saved all of the northern Ontario schools. They are unique, and what makes them unique is geography in particular, but it speaks to the unique problems they face, not just in terms of geo-

graphy, not just in terms of lacking the specialist teachers and lacking access to special education, and yes, even today, fewer full-time principals. The large geographical area makes them very special in terms of why we need to intervene as governments to make sure that rural schools keep open.

We accept that declining enrolment has happened. We understand that. The question is, do you accept it as a challenge to do positive things or do you use it as an argument to close schools? It seems to me that the government has chosen the latter. It has become an argument to close schools, not an argument to say, "It is a unique opportunity for us to review how it is that we save small schools."

I said to the minister, in a question that I put to her just last week, why would you not talk about the fact that you cut \$60 million of the declining enrolment grant just last year? Why wouldn't you speak to that? I say to you, 60 million bucks is a whole pile of money, and that was designed to allow boards to deal with declining enrolments. The Tories did it—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: They didn't have declining enrolment; neither did you.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: There was a declining enrolment grant. They did that, to be fair to them from time to time. The Liberals continued with the declining enrolment grant, because presumably they too understand that if there's declining enrolment, you've got to help with the grant. But not once did the education Premier or the minister say, "We've had to cut the declining enrolment grant." They often refer to the \$420 million or \$460 million. They throw out numbers, neglecting to say that the large bulk of that funding is simply to pay their collective agreements with teachers at the secondary and elementary levels and to pay the collective agreements with non-teachers. The bulk of that money is to make sure the collective agreements are paid. You would expect that you would flow money to pay the bills.

The remaining money is to pay for the promise they made, which is to cap the primary grades—under grade 3—at 20. To a large extent, that promise has been kept. There are still lots of schools that don't reach the capping promised by the Liberals, but that was a very expensive promise. That promise, plus paying for the collective agreements that were negotiated by this government—mostly, generally—that's where most of the money goes.

But do you Liberals know the chaos we have in all of our boards across Ontario—not just in the north, but across Ontario? Do any of you Liberal MPPs understand what kinds of pressures boards are under? My sense is that you don't, and those of you who do are zipping your mouths, and hoping that you're never quoted by anyone or asked by a newspaper to speak to any particular problem that your board may be having. If you did, you would have to dissemble by way of a response, because there is no proper response to the fact that most boards can't balance their budgets.

The Toronto Catholic District School Board, whatever you or others might say about some of their expenditures, which is a separate matter in terms of how the board and the minister is dealing with that, whatever you might say about that, the way that they're dealing with their deficit is by cutting 83 teachers—

Interjection: It's 85.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You have to be accurate—85? They are cutting educational assistants, those who work with primary teachers—

Interjection: EAs?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Educational assistants, otherwise known as EAs. They're cutting youth workers. They work with troubled kids, kids at risk.

It's a very convenient thing for the government to have a board—this particular board—be embroiled in another problem, because it conveniently gives the minister, the minister, mon ami M. McGuinty and all of the Liberals a way out of that problem, and then the public can say: "Oh, look at all the problems that this board has. Look at all the money they're wasting here and there. No wonder they've got a deficit."

Nah, they're two separate issues. The expenditures are not excusable. The government has made that clear and the public has made that clear, but in terms of the deficit, it's a separate matter.

We were talking \$11 million, \$12 million, \$13 million, \$14 million, and they can't make ends meet, so they are firing 85 teachers, beyond what the enrolment requires—so says the teacher federation representing teachers. And they're firing youth workers and educational assistants. How can the government, the minister and the Premier be happy to accept those kinds of cuts? Oh, because they're required by law to do so? Yes. But is it right? Ah, but does that not speak to the millions of dollars the government is giving? If the government is giving all those huge amounts of dollars, why is this one particular board required to fire teachers and assistants and youth workers? Why?

Maybe the government has a different kind of option to propose to the boards by way of what it is that they could cut. But how can the government sit there content that they're balancing the budget on the backs of people who are desperately needed in the educational system? How could you feel good? How could you justify it?

1610

Then, hearing a report on the CBC—"The government hasn't yet declared whether or not they are going to take the school board over." Sorry, take the school board over? For what? They already made the cuts. They already have done the dirty work for the government. Why would the minister take over a board at a time when the board has made the cuts and has done the dirty work for the government? It's silly when the arguments are made that the government hasn't yet made up its mind as to whether or not they're going to take the board over. It doesn't make any sense. Why would they take them over? Speaker, you understand; you've been here for a while. No government is going to take any board over,

because to do so would be to accept the responsibility for the cuts. Not doing so says, "Well, you know, it's not my problem." The government can argue, "It's not mon problemo. The problem is with the board. Boards have to decide how to balance their budgets, and if this is what they do, that's what they do."

So I argue with any citizen watching this political program: Does it sound like a government that's giving adequate dollars to our boards—southern, northern, eastern and western—to be able to balance their budgets without hurting teachers and our students? I argue they're not.

So we say, with respect, and with respect to school closures, that there has to be a better way. Schools are an important hub for a great deal of community outreach and community work. Schools are a part of how economies grow in those small communities. We all know that. Even Liberals know this. They made those very arguments in opposition. Schools are for community use after school, and northern schools are used for community use after school. So why would we not be creative? Why wouldn't we use it as an opportunity?

When the minister agrees with People for Education, as they propose that we have to become more creative and we have to look at ways of keeping schools open—and People for Education argue that we have to integrate services better; i.e., not simply use schools from a Minister of Education perspective and forget all of the other uses of a school. So we say, why couldn't we use schools and have parenting centres in them, child care centres, community kitchens, public meeting space, even public libraries, health clinics? They all add to the life of a school and strengthen the community sense of connection to their local schools. If that is true and if the minister thinks it's a good idea, then how fast are we moving toward that goal?

This is why I said to the minister, quite apart from what the Tories said in the past, you're doing a review of your funding formula in 2010; by that time, most schools will be closed. If you're going to do a review, do it today. Don't wait until 2010, because by then most of the schools will have been closed. At least 50 school closures have already been recommended, and many reviews are not yet complete. More recommendations for closures are inevitable. Therefore, I argue, like the Tories, put that on hold.

The minister has put together a little group to do the review. Good. God bless. Are there any timelines? We don't have a clue. Why aren't there timelines? Because, I submit to you, as lawyers would say, they have no interest in saving schools. They want school boards to move on school closures quickly, make the savings, and then, by 2010, be able to recommend something new and a new direction for the government, so that as they head into the next election, they have a new proposal: "This is how we're going to save schools from now until the next four years," as you fine people elect you fine Liberals for another four years. That's the plan.

If that were not the plan, the minister would do the following: Tell the working group that by the time we come back—maybe in September; it's hard to say—we're going to have a recommendation that deals with this problem, and we're going to review the funding formula by September so that schools have a better sense of what might be coming by September. If we do not have that commitment, it is very clear to me that they have no interest in taking up the challenge of saving small schools.

New Democrats say, "We want to save as many schools as we possibly can." Some schools we cannot save; I admit that. Some schools may be just too small to save. But what strategy do we have to save most schools? That's the argument. There is no strategy. That's the problem: We don't have a strategy.

Northern schools provide space free of charge to community groups. It's the only place, in some cases, where local communities can assemble. The high number of small communities and the great distance between those communities make the provision of adequate transportation service a constant challenge for northern schools. Transportation has been a problem for years. This government has promised to do a transportation review for years.

I remember mon ami M. Kennedy, who said he did a review, and I said to him, "Gerard, with all due respect, you've already made up your mind. You took some money from some boards and gave it to other boards." That was the extent of his review on transportation. "Oh, no," he argues in this place. "Everybody got an increase." "Of course you did, Gerard. You gave every board a 2% increase. That doesn't make it any better." What you did, by way of what the minister then did, is to take money from some boards and give it to others. Does that sound to you, Speaker, who have been here in this place, like much of a plan or strategy, stealing from some to give to others? It doesn't sound like much of a strategy. You're stealing from one group to give to the other group.

I argue, if you're going to do a review, make sure you do it fairly for everybody. This is not about taking from the rich to give to the poor. We have one public system here. It's about fairness for all. It's not like we've got loads of money in one area and less in the other. We've got a funding formula now that's supposed to treat everybody equitably, and everybody is getting equitably whacked in Ontario.

When you close schools in northern Ontario, transportation becomes a serious disaster. Some kids have to travel for hours—two or three hours. Maybe they're walking, running or using Rollerblades on those northern boards; I don't know what they use to get around, but it's tough. Maybe some kids still use horses to get around; I don't know. It's tough to get around. You can't close the schools. If there are only 25, okay, it's a problemo. If it's 50 or 60 or 70, it's a problemo. But you've got to use this as an opportunity to be able to save schools, use them as a hub and make sure you coordinate services with other

ministries to be able to save those schools and save those communities.

It's for those reasons that I support this resolution.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It gives me great pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to the opposition day motion, which I think is fundamentally based on assumptions that are not true.

I want to first of all acknowledge the importance of our publicly funded education system. Every school obviously has a school community surrounding it. When there's change, there's always the potential for concern and turmoil. Both the elementary and the secondary schools that I attended in what was the small town of Richmond Hill are no longer housed in the buildings that they were housed in. There is always change; there's constant change. But in the end, as I've said before, those local program decisions must rest in the hands of the boards of education. It is impossible for the Ministry of Education at the corner of Wellesley and Bay in Toronto to make decisions about schools in northern Ontario, in rural Ontario, in other urban centres, so we have been, since we came into office, committed to supporting school boards in those decisions.

1620

When we first came into office, we put a moratorium on school closures for two years while we did exactly what the members opposite are asking us to do now—we have already done it. If we look at the funding changes, we have made significant funding changes. We've increased funding to rural schools by \$632 million. Had we not changed the funding formula, rural schools would have had to cut \$650 million from their budget. So in fact, we have significantly changed the funding formula.

The other things we've done have been to introduce a school foundation grant. That guarantees that all schools that boards deem to be viable will have a principal and a secretary. That's the board deciding that the small elementary school in Sioux Narrows, which has 16 students, will have the leadership that it needs, as the 1,900-student elementary school in my riding of Don Valley West will have adequate administration. We put that school foundation grant in place to allow boards to have that administration and secretarial support in all of their schools.

We also introduced the supported schools grant, which means that the 300 most remote schools—those are northern and rural schools—receive a special grant of \$63 million. That allows those rural and remote schools to have extra staffing in order to be able to deliver programming.

What all of this means is that our smallest schools—as I said, we have schools in Ontario that are fewer than 20 students and they are viable. They are in place because boards have deemed that it is too far for those little children to go to the next town for those early elementary years. Those schools are supported and those boards are buffered against the declining enrolment that we are seeing across the province. We've changed the funding formula to put those buffers in place.

The second thing we've done is that we've put in place pupil accommodation review guidelines to allow boards to assess the value of schools to their communities. In the process that is in place now, we asked boards to assess schools according to the value of the school to the student, the value of the school to the community, the value of the school to the school board and the value of the school to the local economy. So we've actually put in place the kind of assessment mechanism that the members opposite are asking for. That has already been done.

The thing that has not yet been done—and I have to say it was not done by the New Democratic Party and it was not done by the Progressive Conservative Party—is to have a rational discussion about how we deal with the fact that demographics in Ontario are changing. We all know that people my age and a little older, the baby boom generation, are aging. We are not being replaced in the population to the extent that we would need to be in order to keep every single school in the province open and not have that demographic shift. We have not had that discussion.

So I have set up a declining enrolment work group, led by the member for Brant, Dave Levac, who was a former educator and who lives in a rural and urban community. He's going to be working with Eleanor Newman, who is a director in the eastern part of Ontario. They're going to be looking at the kinds of recommendations that, over the long term, will allow us to plan for the decline in enrolment.

The member from the third party talked about schools as hubs. He didn't use that language, but that is the language that we use, starting with our Best Start program, where we have child care spaces located in schools. I've asked the declining enrolment work group to look at the alignment of school board cost structures with reduced enrolment and to look at the other agencies and the other ministries of the government that might have a role to play. These entities will include, but are not limited to: municipal government, so that could be public libraries, it could be other municipal services; provincial government services, so that could be health centres, it could be other services that are provided by the provincial government located in schools; and volunteer organizations, so other community agencies. So in fact we are asking this group to help us develop a plan that will look at the opportunities in our schools.

I want to share my time with other members of the caucus, but I want to close with a quote from the Brockville Recorder and Times, which I believe is a news outlet that the member—

Interjection.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That's right—that the member for Leeds–Grenville is familiar with. I think he's familiar with it. What this editorial said is:

“As enrolment continues to decline, Ontarians need to disabuse themselves of the notion that closing a school is bad for education. We've seen two examples in Leeds county in recent years where arguably students are better

served after school closures, since they are now housed in far better facilities, namely Meadowview and Thousand Islands elementary schools.

“Facilities such as libraries, gymnasiums and science and computer labs are likely to be vastly improved when students are moved to schools that are somewhat larger.

“Premier Dalton McGuinty is correct when he argues that academic achievement, rather than the number of buildings, is the real measure of the province's school system.

“In fact, the money needed to keep open half-empty buildings would be far better spent in the classroom. It's the children, not the buildings, that matter most when it comes to education.”

It gives no one in our government pleasure to cause distress in communities. What we want is the best programming for our students. We want programming that's going to allow our students in our publicly funded education system to be the best citizens that we can have in this province. That's the work that we're doing on this side of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I recognize the member for Burlington, I wish to inform the House that the member for Beaches–East York, who previously had indicated an interest in an adjournment debate this evening, has withdrawn that request. So there will not be a late show tonight.

I recognize the member for Burlington.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm pleased to follow my colleague from Leeds–Grenville and support this particular opposition day motion today.

As PC critic for education, it's clear to me that regardless of how much I hear in this House about what the government is doing for education, I can see that any of the assessment formulas that are being put forward don't recognize the uniqueness of communities and the character and the values of each individual community. One size doesn't fit all, and the formulas that are being put forward are expecting communities to just fit under a category and move forward. That doesn't work.

As a mother and a grandmother, I am really concerned about the sheer disregard this government has for our students in our rural communities. It's the parents who are forced to advocate and to protect their children's right to education and a quality of life in our rural communities. If the parents of Phelps Central School in Redbridge had not ramped up their efforts and taken their objection to the school closure to that next level and created media awareness, then in the fall of 2008 their children would be travelling three hours and more in a school bus every single day just to attend school, because Phelps school would have been closed.

When asked for the list of school closures, the minister said she didn't have it. But that secret list of school closures miraculously appeared minutes after the question was asked. It did exist. Make no mistake, there are more closings on the horizon that appear on that list.

How can parents, students and school boards trust this government when they say one thing and do another?

They are completely untrustworthy. Evidence abounds of the Premier's broken promises to our rural communities. The minister says one thing, but when Premier McGuinty was Leader of the Opposition, he said in 2002 that he was extremely concerned about the plight of our rural schools and the negative impact the closures are having on our communities. I quote:

"Parents and students falling within the Thames Valley District School Board awoke to some terrible news. They have learned that there are five elementary and two high schools that are on the chopping block, in small communities. These schools are absolutely integral to the quality of life those communities offer."

Today, as we sit here in this House, five elementary schools and one high school are on the chopping block in the Thames Valley District School Board. This is on Mr. McGuinty's watch.

1630

Mr. Paul Miller: The current provincial funding formula does not sufficiently recognize or fund the unique needs of northern schools. Ontario's northern schools have fewer specialist teachers, less access to special education supports and fewer full-time principals than schools in the rest of the province. Most northern boards cover very large geographical areas and their schools are, for the most part, very small and very far apart. Northern schools have a number of other unique characteristics: Their enrolment is rapidly declining, they have higher-than-average heating and busing costs, a high proportion of aboriginal students and less access to community supports. And now you're going to make things even worse for northern communities by closing more of the schools that these communities depend on.

Northern schools are well-used by their communities after school hours. A large number of northern schools provide space free of charge to community groups. In many communities, the schools represent the only place where the local community can assemble. The higher number of small communities and the great distances between those communities make the provision of adequate transportation services a constant challenge for the northern boards. Students in northern boards spend more time on buses than students in any part of the province, and northern boards struggle with very high transportation costs. Closing a northern school can mean even more hours on buses for students and increased risk to the students, particularly during the winter months. These students also find it impossible to participate in extracurricular school activities and events.

The closing of a school in a northern community can have a devastating effect on the local economy as areas are already reeling from job losses. This, combined with the hard impact on children's education, can have a significant negative impact on the social life and opportunities for many in these communities. Often in the north there are limited community social services. The closing of schools means that these already limited services are now even less accessible and less likely to be used.

Among the findings in the People for Education report, it states that:

"In four of Ontario's northern boards, enrolment has declined more than 20% since 2002.

"One northern board has 36% fewer students than it had in 2002.

"There are over 100,000 students in nearly 300 schools currently under review in the province.

"At least 50 school closures have already been recommended, but many reviews are not yet complete—more recommendations for closure are inevitable."

Accepting these recommendations for closures is accepting damage to our educational, social and community structures. New solutions are needed.

"In 2003, at People for Education's Annual Conference, Peter Gooch, then-Director of Education Finance at the Ministry of Education, said that declining enrolment was the biggest crisis facing school boards. At that time he said it was urgent that the province ... begin to develop long-term strategies to deal with it."

Simply closing schools is hardly what I call a strategy, but beyond small patches to funding formulas, few new strategies have been developed. Parenting centres, child care centres, community kitchens, public meeting spaces, even public libraries and health clinics can all add up to the life of a school and strengthen a community's sense of connection to it, and the pride in their community.

In both rural and urban areas, schools have the capacity to act as thriving hubs of activity and events for their local communities. Schools could include community centres and have extended hours in the evenings and on weekends for community use.

All of these things require greater vision—which this government doesn't have—in finally fixing the flawed education funding formula, greater flexibility in joint funding and greater co-operation across sectors, ministries and levels of government.

Next steps: Strategies to deal with declining enrolment do not necessarily cost more money. In many cases, they save money in the long run but they may involve municipalities, other ministries and sectors and will entail a funding formula with greater flexibility.

The province has said it will appoint a working group to examine the impact of declining enrolment in Ontario schools and to assess current government policies and evaluate other strategies. These names and the dates of consultations must be announced and the work begun very soon. But to be truly effective, this group must also be able to make recommendations about the education funding formula before the planned review in 2010, and it must have the latitude to suggest new thinking around the connection between municipalities and their schools and new approaches to the use of school buildings.

In the meantime, boards are making decisions that will affect hundreds of communities and tens of thousands of students across the province, now and far into the future. This government must get out from behind its rhetoric. It must announce the names of the work groups now, announce its critical path to successful resolution of this

extremely serious education and social issue in northern Ontario and in rural schools and communities across the rest of Ontario.

In my community in Hamilton, we've got to a point where our board finds it necessary to sell three schools in the inner city to open one school in the suburbs. The funding formula allows for so many students, so many seats within the inner city. When enrolment declines in those schools, they're forced to make do with busing, make do with changing teacher strategies, the board strategies, and they can't even afford to build a new school. So the older cities, with their infrastructure crumbling, and people moving to the suburbs have caused unbelievable hardship in my community.

We need this government to step up to the plate now. Change the present funding formula because it's not working and it needs to be rectified. All I can say in closing is, it's time that the McGuinty government stepped up to the plate in education throughout this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The member for Huron–Bruce.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about schools in rural Ontario.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Will the member please take her seat. I would ask the members of the opposition to refrain from heckling the member for Huron–Bruce, and I return to the member from Huron–Bruce.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I only hope that the official opposition will stop and listen to the voice of rural Ontario. We hear the comments from across the way, comments from the member from Leeds–Grenville about arrogant leadership—“not out of our eyesight.”

But I do want to say to everyone who has the TV on and those members in the House today, we just had an election. And what was the position of the official opposition? Let's all remember what their position was. Their position was to fund private schools. I think about what that would have done to rural Ontario, what difference that would have made to the landscape if the official opposition had just won the election. So let's think about that.

When the Mike Harris–Ernie Eves government was in power, what happened with the funding formula that was existing under their government at that time? I can tell you: 200 new private schools, 40,000 new private school students—a 50% increase. That was under that funding under Ernie Eves and Mike Harris. If they would have been successful in the election, the growth in private schools would have been certainly much more dramatic than that. I say to the members from across the way, were they thinking of rural Ontario when they came up with that platform, that strong plank in their platform? I don't think so. I think, once again, they turned a blind eye.

But don't take my word for it. What does Mr. Tory have to say about our education system? Despite what the

Conservatives are saying today, in April 2008—because I know the member always asks—John Tory told the Sudbury Chamber of Commerce that Ontario has an education system that is doing a good job. He understands. He gets it. If he was here, he could share that with them. In April, John Tory also said that Ontario has one of the best education systems in the world. And where was that speech made? That speech was made to the Brampton Chamber of Commerce. So we know that the leader of the official opposition understands and knows that if he had been successful going forward with private schools, I tell you, rural Ontario would have been damaged much more severely. But then, what can one expect from a group who certainly turned a blind eye to rural Ontario the whole time they were in government? There certainly has been no change from that side of the House.

1640

But I do know that everyone is anxious to hear how the schools are affected in funding in Huron–Bruce, and I want to share that with you. As you know, I am from a rural riding. My largest town is just over 7,000, so that gives you a sense that it is all rural, not how some members would liken themselves to rural when they really represent large urban areas.

I have four school boards in my riding. I have shared those in the past with the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, the Leader of the Opposition and the member from Simcoe–Grey. Some of that has changed since the election, but I will share that with you.

First of all, there is the Bluewater District School Board, that being Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. They have seen a 15.6% increase while having declining enrolment. I don't have the per capita numbers, but that is a significant number that one should look at as well, and I know there are other members who will add that. We also have the Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound Catholic board, and they saw a 22% increase. The Avon Maitland school board, which I share with the member from Perth–Wellington, had an over 18% increase. The Huron–Perth Catholic: an over 20% increase. These are all during declining enrolment. We know that it is very difficult to provide the level of education in rural Ontario because we understand in rural Ontario how important education and skills are.

One of the other things that I know the members from the official opposition will be anxious to hear: Two of my schools within Huron–Bruce also have high skills majors—

Interjections.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: They just don't want to listen to rural Ontario. Two of those high skills majors are with agriculture. One is in St. Anns, which is in Clinton, and the other is in Chesley, which is in Bruce county. Both of those schools receive the Premier's agriculture awards. I share this story with the members from the opposition—not only are we respectful of our rural communities; we also understand what our rural communities need. I hope you're aware that in our agricultural communities, it's very difficult—as I know that you know, Mr. Speaker—

to attract our young people and to retain them. By putting back what was taken out by the previous government and giving the ability for the agricultural community to go into our schools and get our young people engaged—I can tell you, being a rural member, how important that is. We know that in order to engage our young people in the future for agriculture, we must start at a younger age. So when the previous government withdrew so much of that, it really was difficult for our communities to go forward.

Also, within our agricultural high skills majors, one of the things that we've been able to do is to introduce agribusiness into that as well as our equipment dealers. They are providing the equipment. It's also a sub-branch, obviously, of agriculture. As we know, agriculture is the second-largest industry in the province of Ontario.

So I say to the members across the way: I know that during the election they went out and talked about private schools. But do you know what? In my riding of Huron–Bruce, my neighbour, he got it. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, he knew it. He had the same position that I did on education. And so I say to the members across the way: Listen to your own members. Listen to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound about education. Listen to your leader about education. Listen to rural communities. You have not in the past; I hope you do in the future.

I do want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to speak to this very important issue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much for the opportunity to quickly debate on this motion today, a motion put forward by our leader, Bob Runciman, with respect to rural school closings. It seemed to be something that this government was very much opposed to when they were in opposition. If we go back to 2003, you'll remember when Gerard Kennedy, then Minister of Education, promised a moratorium, and in fact said he'd delivered a moratorium on the closing of rural schools. All the while, schools were closing, so his word wasn't any good then. The words of the Premier in 2007, they're no good either. In 2007, just prior to the election—

Hon. John Wilkinson: Why did people vote for him?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, they voted for him because they believed him, and they shouldn't have believed him.

“For rural kids, few things are more important than being able to go to school in your own community with your own friends,” said the Premier at Newburgh Public School. “Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we're not only committed to keeping them open, but strengthening them.” On September 18, 2007, that's what Dalton McGuinty said. A mere eight months later, we're now looking at 50 schools in the province of Ontario that are slated to close—rural schools—and 300 schools that are under review, including schools in my community of Petawawa.

During that moratorium, when then-Minister Gerard Kennedy said we weren't closing any rural schools, five schools in my riding closed, and now we're looking at the family of schools in Petawawa, including General

Panet High School, General Lake Public School, Pinecrest Public School, Herman Street Public School and Pine View Public School, which are all being reviewed as we speak; this from a government that promised they were going to keep rural schools open—and the importance of rural schools and how much they mean to communities.

Where we have seen rural schools close, we have seen communities suffer. The editorial from one of the newspapers that the education minister read was only about the facilities and what's offered to students at a bigger school. We're not dumb. We recognize that a bigger school has more facilities, but what about those communities and the effect on those communities? This government, because it can't keep its word, is not delivering on the promise that it made in 2007, not delivering on the promises it made in 2003, not delivering on the commitments that Dalton McGuinty made as an opposition leader in 2002—the importance of rural schools.

What we're asking for is that you put a moratorium in place until such time as you establish a new funding formula, which has been promised and promised and re-promised.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Done that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's not done; you say you're going to have a new funding formula in 2010.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Don't talk about envelopes money—a new funding formula for rural schools that includes transportation so that we can get on with the job of giving the best possible education for our children here in the province of Ontario. This government has not delivered on its commitments. It has only broken promises, broken its word and—oh, I can't say that, Mr. Speaker, but when you say you're going to do something and you don't do something, some people would call you something. In this House we can't say it, but that's what this government continues to do, and it continues to do it on the backs of rural schools.

In rural communities, we're trying to keep schools. In Toronto, they worry about pools; we worry about schools. Do something. Put a moratorium on this until a new funding formula is in place.

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to join in this debate this afternoon on the very important subject of rural schools. My riding is largely rural. It has some small urban centres, but there's a lot of rural in Chatham–Kent–Essex. We recognize how important our schools are to our communities in the rural area. If you close a rural school, they may have to travel 10, 20, 30 miles to another school, or more, perhaps, so we know how fundamental they are to our communities.

What I find very, I'll be polite and say “interesting,” in this motion coming from the Conservatives is their past history. They've suddenly gotten this new idea about rural schools. Let me tell you that Romney Central School, a rural school in Chatham–Kent, was the very first school to fall under the axe of the Harris govern-

ment's short-sighted policies—a government that admittedly set out to create a crisis in our schools.

1650

I worked with a lot of parents from the schools on the Mike Harris closure list. I worked with Romney Central. I asked questions in the Legislature urging the former government to reconsider the funding formula, which lacked the flexibility to meet the disparate needs of communities around Ontario. This inflexibility was ripping the heart out of rural Ontario. I attended many, many parent meetings and board meetings. One thing was very clear: The former government's funding formula was forcing the closure of rural schools.

Romney Central was in a location where there were virtually no houses around it. There were fields of various crops growing all around the school, and from time to time, I was told, there were deer running through the backyard. And guess what? This school, in that setting, did not meet the "rural" definition as put forward by the former government. So the parents, teachers and supporters of Romney Central travelled here to Queen's Park back in those days and begged the government to change the formula to at least recognize what "rural" meant.

Romney Central School was not a little red school-house. It was the first graded school in the county; it was opened by William Grenville Davis and Darcy McKeough, who applauded the foresight and courage of residents in forming a township-area school. And the former government caused it to close.

Small schools, like small churches, are the primary threads that weave through the fabric of rural community and rural life. Mike Harris's then government didn't understand that one size does not fit all. He governed by what he could see from the CN Tower, and he could not see Romney Central or rural Ontario from there.

Ridgetown high school was a school also, at the time, talked about for closure. The former minister, Mr. Kennedy, came to Ridgetown and told them that he had a plan, a plan that is further carried on by the current minister. Ridgetown, in a location next to the Ridgetown agricultural college, was in fear of closure under the previous government. I'm proud to say that Ridgetown high school remains viable. Our government's commitment to rural Ontario and an outstanding publicly funded education system remains unwavering.

I'd just remind the members opposite that when the Tories were in power, 506 public schools closed while enrolment was going up and over 200 new private schools opened.

I find the motion put forward today by the opposition to be somewhat incredible.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today in support of the motion to save our rural schools.

When he thinks it will get votes, Dalton McGuinty claims that he recognizes the importance of rural schools. During the election, he said, "Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we're not only committed to keeping them open—but strengthening them."

Unfortunately, we know what a promise from Dalton McGuinty is worth. Eight months later, 50 rural schools are slated to close and hundreds more are under review. Small towns are in danger of losing part of the foundation of their community, one of the things that attract people to live there.

I know how important these schools are to the future of our small communities. I've heard from many people who are concerned about the impact on their town and their children.

In Oxford, it was recently announced that Princeton Central public school will close in June 2009. I met with the people from Princeton, who told me how important it was for them that their kids learn close to home and be part of the community.

Other schools in Oxford, from Norwich District High School to Sweaburg Public School, are still under review. I've heard from many parents, teachers and local business owners in Norwich who are afraid that their high school will be next.

I've also received hundreds of great letters from students of Norwich District High School about what their school means to them. One of the students called it "the heartbeat of the community." Another said, "Even though NDHS is a small school in a small community with a small amount of students, it has a big impact with its big challenges," and helps create a big future.

Some of the letters spoke about the academic achievements and of the great sports programs. They pointed out that Norwich offers the only agricultural skills program within the entire board of the Thames Valley. Another letter talked about the contributions the school makes to the community. It is clear from all the letters that the students are committed to their education, their community and to participating in everything that the school has to offer. Is this really the kind of school we want closing?

It is not just residents in Oxford who are concerned about their schools. Across southwestern Ontario people are worried about the impact of school closing on their communities, schools like Metcalfe elementary school in the municipality of Adelaide Metcalfe, Caradoc South elementary school in Melbourne and Glencoe District High School.

I heard from one successful Glencoe graduate, Monte McNaughton, who said that, "Glencoe high school is the hub of the community. Families depend on having a secondary school in the Glencoe area so students can participate in the community and all the school activities instead of spending an extra hour a day on the school bus."

Mr. McGuinty needs to follow through on his commitment to rural schools and communities. Our students, our schools and our rural communities just can't afford another broken Liberal promise.

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak today, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm delighted to join in this debate. I want to tell the good people at home who are

watching this, these are the things you have to remember: Under the previous government, enrolment went up, the amount of money spent went down and therefore the funding per pupil went down. In our government, enrolment has declined but funding has gone up, so we are spending more per pupil. That's the first fact we have to get on the table.

The second fact is, I want to talk about my own riding of Perth–Wellington and about two communities in the midst of accommodation review. One is the great stone town of St. Marys, the place worth living in. In that community there are two elementary schools: Arthur Meighen, named after the famous Prime Minister who hailed from St. Marys, and also St. Marys Central Public School. Both are very old schools. In rural Ontario many of our schools are quite old, and as a result those two schools have been declared prohibitive to repair. It makes more sense to build a new school than trying to keep an old school up, particularly when it cannot be retrofitted to ensure that it is accessible to all children. I'm sure all of us in this House would agree that schools should be accessible and they should have the modern amenities available to them.

So that school board has decided that, with the two schools to be closed, they're going to build a new school. Yes, there will be one fewer school in St. Marys, and one could criticize us for that, but we are providing the money for a brand new, modern school to be built in the town of St. Marys, one that is right-sized for the community given the fact that the children of school age are declining. Though some people would say there should be a moratorium so that those two schools that are prohibitive to repair could be kept open in rural Ontario, I believe in a future for our students and I believe we should build that new school. We went through a process that was quite lengthy.

Next door in the community of Mitchell, they are doing an accommodation review. I want to read a letter from the chairman of the Avon Maitland District School Board, Meg Westley. What does she write? She writes Minister Wynne, and copied me—and I see the minister here.

“As the Avon Maitland District School Board approaches the end of its first accommodation review using the new guidelines”—those would be the guidelines set out by our government—“we would like to provide you with some feedback on the process...”

“This accommodation review, in the town of Mitchell, has been a much more positive experience for all concerned than any in our last round.” That would be the round under the previous government. “The longer timelines have allowed for in-depth community consultation, and we've had the opportunity to engage in a good deal of open, frank discussion with the community, and especially the ARC”—the accommodation review committee.

“All of our communities recognize the challenge posed by declining enrolment in our district. Although the prospect of closing a school continues to evoke a

strong emotional response, our communities”—our rural communities—“know schools will have to close, and even recognize that spending money to keep half-empty schools open is not the best way to use taxpayers' dollars, nor the best way to ensure students receive a quality education.”

When we first formed government, when enrolment had gone up and funding had gone down, when this funding formula we inherited was leading to the closure of schools, we imposed a moratorium. We changed the funding, and now we have to look at the reality of the situation. By working with the community, we have to look at what's best. What the proponents of the past want to say is that somehow we should keep the school open even when there are no students in it. God love us all, a school has to have pupils in it. A school has to have pupils who have teachers who can provide the kind of education that they are going to need to succeed in the 21st century.

1700

I'm not a Luddite about this; I know how difficult it is. But by engaging the community, by spending more money per pupil, we are in a position now that we can look at, for example, in the town of St. Marys, having a new school that every child—a child in a wheelchair, a child who is blind, a child who is deaf—can go into that school. That is not the case today in St. Marys.

In our communities, we are looking forward to a day when all of our rural students are welcome and accommodated in a school that is accessible for them. Therefore, I will not vote with my friends opposite, because I remember their record in government. Thank you.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I just wanted to say that it's not limited to rural schools. Recently, we've had a number of notices in my community of Oshawa, with the Durham Catholic District School Board announcing five closings that I will mention here, as well as some that hadn't been mentioned that I was informed of two days ago, which was quite surprising to myself.

But before we get into that, I just want to mention some of the other aspects that haven't been mentioned here. We talk about some of the changes. When there was another minister in this current government dealing with education, they made some suggestions for changes that came forward that haven't been brought up yet today. We talk, but we haven't heard about the impact.

In Oshawa, we now have portables coming out the ears in order to accommodate students. Yes, we understand the growth and the cycles of these areas, but now—which we didn't have before—we have a number of students in portables. We tried to point that out to the former minister, but it never came to fruition.

The other aspect was about the split classes now in our community. In our school, where our boys go, we saw maybe one split class, but every single grade now has a split class. What does that say? Yes, they may be under the required numbers, but lo and behold, we have one teacher teaching two different grades, with the impact that's having.

When you talk about impact, what about the impact within the schools locally: Canadian Martyrs Catholic School, Father Francis Mahoney, Holy Cross, St. Gregory, St. Michael? The number one question in the teaching community is, “What’s happening? Where am I going? Do I have a job? How is it being affected?”

I think something that hasn’t been brought up in the Legislature here is the capital expansion formula. I had a good relationship with the previous director, who retired in January. It came to my knowledge that there was no capital funding formula so that the school boards could actually do planning for projections in the areas.

The difficulty with that is that they have to close these before they can make announcements in coming forward, where the previous government, our government, as a matter of fact, had a capital funding formula whereby the school boards could actually look and make plans for future closures and openings. That’s one of the difficulties that we’re finding here, and that’s one of the things I would say to the people at the Durham Catholic District School Board, that quite possibly, with the schools that are closing, we may see some changes come around in the near future. But at the current time there is certainly a strong concern within the education community.

The other aspect of concern is that the school board was approached by the city. I met with the mayor last night. The mayor specifically informed me that the school board absolutely refused to discuss any growth-plan areas in our community at all. The problem with that is that there’s an intensification in the areas that all these schools are being closed down in. Brownfields are being revitalized and new development in that area is going to bring new young families into the community. Guess what? They’ll be needing schools.

Lo and behold, the Durham Catholic District School Board refused to meet with the city in order to discuss some of the planning implications. The problem is obvious. Lo and behold, two or three years from now, when all this area is developed and Oshawa is growing and expanding hugely, we actually will be needing more new schools in the areas where they’re being closed. I just wanted to raise that.

The one last thing I wanted to bring up before I close—because I know my colleagues are looking forward to speaking as well—is that it was brought to my attention and it appears, quite frankly, that the bureaucracy has made this decision, in that one of the schools is actually listed as Oshawa’s oldest school. They’re planning for a new school to be opened on Coldstream, but O’Neill is going to be closed. It was founded in 1909. Actually, my mother went there. It’s been slated to be closed once the new school opens up.

Interjection: No respect for heritage.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Part of it is the heritage in Oshawa, as the member is mentioning, as well as the families that have attended there and the traditions. Many are looking forward to having their kids attend the same school in a great facility at O’Neill. Apparently in a short

time, in a year or so from now, it is not expected to be open and there will be strong concern in our community about that community as well.

Mr. Jim Brownell: I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon for a chance to speak on this opposition day motion. As a retired educator, I certainly can understand and appreciate the need and the wish to keep all schools in Ontario open, but really, it’s just not the case. It’s not feasible in many situations.

I look at some schools in my riding, and I’m going to give you an example of two schools, John Sandfield Macdonald public school and Bonville public school, that closed in the 1980s. Certainly, nobody was banging at the doors here at Queen’s Park or at the doors of the school board to get involved. School boards made decisions then. School boards made decisions to close Finch Public School, and those two other schools that I just mentioned closed because school boards were elected to make those decisions. The minister stood up at the outset of this debate and commented about that very thing. We are not in this to micromanage our school boards; we are in this to make these elected officials make the decisions that they were elected to make, and sometimes they are very difficult decisions.

I would like to quote Greg Pietersma, the chair of the Upper Canada District School Board, who made a comment in the Brockville Recorder and Times on March 28 of this year, where he said, “We have to move from being champions of schools to champions of learning. We can keep a lot of schools open but at what cost?”

Shortly after that—it was about one month later, on April 29, 2008, in the same newspaper. I would like to quote comments made by the Leeds–Grenville member. It says:

“As enrolment continues to decline, Ontarians need to disabuse themselves of the notion that closing a school is bad for education. We’ve seen two examples in Leeds county in recent years where arguably students are better served after school closures, since they are now housed in far better facilities, namely Meadowview and Thousand Islands elementary schools.

“Facilities such as libraries, gymnasiums and science and computer labs are likely to be vastly improved when students are moved to schools that are somewhat larger.

“Premier Dalton McGuinty is correct when he argues that academic achievement, rather than the number of buildings, is the real measure of the province’s school system.

“In fact, the money needed to keep open half-empty buildings would be far better spent in the classroom. It’s the children, not the buildings, that matter most when it comes to education.”

This is a quote in that member’s newspaper, the Brockville Recorder and Times.

Here we have the community coming out and saying—I look in my riding at Dickson’s Corners Public School. In December 2006, I went out to Dickson’s Corners Public School because a young girl there designed my Christmas card and I went to present her

with an award. I drove up to the school, a very large country school with a gymnasium, and I thought I would be making the presentation in the gymnasium. I went into the school and the number of students in that school filled the library, a small classroom library. With declining enrolment, the community closed that school.

I look at Newington Public School. Shortly after I got elected—the writing was on the wall in the previous Tory government's time here at Queen's Park—once again, declining enrolment closed that school.

I look in the city of Cornwall. I'm talking about a city school in Cornwall, but many rural students are bused to a French public school in that community, Horizon-Jeunesse. Here is the situation: Right at this time, the community is working to amalgamate the students from that school over to Rose des Vents, where they will have all the students housed in one school in that community. I think that's the way communities are making decisions. The parents, in many cases, are making decisions, but it rests on the school boards to make those decisions.

When I see the help that we've given—I look at the school foundation grant, \$1.2 billion in the last two years; I look at \$3.4 billion in rural schools this year—that's a 22.9% increase since 2003. Those are the supports that we've given to the school boards, and these school boards, being elected, are making the decisions.

I rest it there. I have great faith in the school boards in my riding to do what they were elected to do.

1710

Mr. Randy Hillier: I hear all the broken promises, and this is what this debate is about. I'll be supporting this motion, and as the member from the NDP said earlier, it's eminently reasonable. I don't know if the people on the other side of the House know about those words, but it is eminently reasonable.

Broken promises: That's what we're hearing from the other side, a continuation of broken promises. Here is another one that the Premier said: "We're going to regret having closed schools prematurely when we could have kept them open." We've heard from the minister about a new envelope of money, we've heard about the declining enrolment work group, but they're proceeding. When I hear about this new envelope of money, it reminds me of the old days with Canada Post, when we used to hear, "The cheque is in the mail." There's another envelope of money; the cheque is in the mail.

Our rural schools are being closed because this Liberal government is managing the demise of rural Ontario. They are not protecting rural Ontario, they are not defending rural Ontario; they are managing the demise of rural Ontario. Those words come out of a report that that government adopted back in 2004—the panel on the role of government report. Right in there, it said that they will manage the demise of rural Ontario.

As this government just yesterday was playing hooky from their responsibilities and duties to the people of Ontario over in Quebec City, other people in rural Ontario were working. People in rural Ontario drafted up a report card on this government. It's by the Ontario

Landowners Association. Guess what? Let me just read a little bit from this report card. Rural affairs—

Interjection: An F.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Oh, an F—Mr. McGuinty "has demonstrated a thorough ignorance of all things affecting rural Ontario." Under education: Mr. McGuinty "demonstrates a complete and constant misunderstanding of the educational system"—another F. Under environment: Mr. McGuinty views this subject "as an exercise in wasteful economics.... He has disbursed millions of dollars to his favourite NGOs" via the greenbelt. Under ethics here, an F: Mr. McGuinty "demonstrates a complete lack of desire to learn the fundamentals. His daily responses are strongly indicative of a deep-seated pathological contempt."

There is a difference between this side and that side: On this side, we say what we do and we do what we say.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm happy to rise in support of this motion. It simply calls upon the government "to suspend any and all board-recommended rural school closures until both the funding formula review and a thorough assessment of alternate uses for the schools have been completed." I don't think that's an unreasonable appeal.

We know that the Premier, then-opposition leader, on June 11, 2002, agreed with this very same idea when he was quoted in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record as saying, "While schools 'will open and close in the natural order of things,' McGuinty said the province should avoid forcing closures while the funding formula is under review." He then went on to say, "We're only going to regret having closed schools prematurely when we could have kept them open." That was in 2002.

Fast forward to 2008, and we have 300 schools on the chopping block, affecting over 100,000 students. In my riding of Simcoe-Grey, the story is just as bleak. Currently, there are seven schools undergoing an accommodation review, which is essentially, depending on how you look at it, the first step before a school is allowed to close. Among those are Elmvalle District High School, Stayner Collegiate Institute, Alliston Union Public School, Our Lady of Assumption in New Lowell, the Collingwood campus of the adult learning centre, Tecumseth Beeton public school and Tecumseth North Elementary.

I should note that an accommodation review committee is meeting tonight at 7 o'clock at Alliston Union Public School for a working session on the future of Alliston Union, Cookstown Central, Tecumseth Beeton and Tecumseth North Elementary schools. It's co-chaired by Councillor Jamie Smith. They will have a public meeting on June 17 at 7 p.m. at Tecumseth Beeton public school on Patterson Street.

Now, the list does not include facilities like Duntroon Central Public School that always seem to come perilously close to closure. In fact, Duntroon is a school that I fought very hard to keep open back in the mid-1990s, and I'm happy to say that we were successful in doing that. When the board wanted to close Nottawa Elementary School and bus the students to either

Duntroon or Collingwood, I joined the fight, and we won a brand new school for Nottawa. The same goes for Admiral Collingwood. It was supposed to close, leaving Collingwood with only three schools, until we fought to have it replaced, which it was. That was the record of our government.

These schools are at the heart of our rural and small-town communities. As Mr. McGuinty said, again in 2002, "If a rural community loses a school, it's not the same as shutting one down in downtown Toronto where there's another one six blocks away. What you're doing is robbing the community of an important component. It's the heart and soul of a community. If you don't have a school, it's really tough to attract and to hold on to young families."

I completely agree, which makes me wonder why, years later, the Liberal government and the Premier are so bent on stealing the heart and soul right out of Stayner, Elmvale, New Lowell, Beeton, Alliston and Collingwood. It's deplorable, particularly when you consider the commitments the Premier has made. In the last election, on September 18, the Premier walked up to the podium at Newburgh Public School, outside of Kingston, and said, "Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we're not only committed to keeping them open—but strengthening them."

Keep this in mind, ladies and gentlemen: This is after the Premier had been in government for four years and he had all the data on finances and enrolment. At the end of the day, this is another example of a Liberal broken promise. The Premier said anything to get elected the first time, and as we saw again in the last election, they said anything to the people of Ontario to get re-elected.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the official opposition day motion, and I really wanted to expand a little bit on what my colleague from Simcoe-Grey had mentioned in his comments just a few moments ago.

I think one of the worst things about the lack of appropriate funding or the threat of school closures is the worry that these communities have. There are two schools in particular that are not too far away from where I live that I wanted to mention.

The one school that has been under a threat for the last couple of years at least, and certainly there is a strong school council that is advocating and working and trying to lobby the school board to stop any threat of closure, is Moonstone Elementary School. It's a small community not too far away from what many people know of as the Mount St. Louis Moonstone ski resort area. Really and truly, if that school was ever to close, there would be really no community there. There would be a bunch of houses, but the school is the centre of the community. The Christmas concerts, the Canada Day celebrations, everything is held at the school, so the thought of moving those children away from that school and moving them off to a larger school somewhere else would be devastating. It would actually be the end of that community.

You know, I was encouraged last year even during the election campaign, when the Premier promised that those sorts of things would not happen, that we wouldn't lose rural schools. So it is disappointing when our critic for education comes forward and finds out there are at least 50 schools in the province today under direct threat of closing, and quite frankly—

Interjection: There are 300 under review.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: And as I've heard here now, there are 300 under review.

1720

The second school—and it's not in my riding but it's in Mr. Wilson's riding: Elmvale secondary school. There's probably not a better rural secondary school than Elmvale secondary school in our province, for a small school. They've got a great spirit. For the community of Elmvale, which is a small community of 1,600 or 1,700 people, the threat of closure for that school would be absolutely devastating.

I was encouraged last year when I thought that there would be a policy put in place and legislation put in place that would have stopped that from occurring. So I hope the government members will take the time today—particularly the rural members—to support this resolution that is before the House. I think it's important for the government to prove they don't have the hatred of rural Ontario that we on this side of the House believe that they have.

Thank you very much, and again, I hope you'll all support this.

Mr. Toby Barrett: In my riding in Haldimand-Norfolk, a number of elementary schools have narrowly escaped closing. However, others have been less fortunate. As for the high schools, we fought the battle for the Delhi, Burford, Valley Heights and Port Dover high schools, and all but Burford remain open. This meant countless meetings and petitions and briefs, not only to the school board but also to the Ministry of Education.

Very recently, my hometown high school of Port Dover is again, for the second time, being eyed for review after trustees learned that enrolment had declined to 287 students. The board has abandoned its plans to review Norfolk high school for now, but the words and the actions of this present government since 2003 do not convince me that they will put their money where their mouth is and help keep these schools open.

Each and every time, I've reiterated my request for either special provincial funding or a moratorium. Last week, this side of the House once again called on this government to put in place a moratorium on these closures until the review of the funding formula has been completed.

In the interests of time, I want to reiterate that I'm personally underwhelmed by this government's—at one time, there was a toothless moratorium request. It was a voluntary moratorium put forward to two ministries. In spite of that, the closures did continue at that time. Prior to the 2007 election, this Premier said, with regard to rural schools, and I'm sure we have heard this already

this afternoon, “We’re not only committed to keeping them open but to strengthening them as well.” Premier, with 50 rural schools closing, and we now see accommodation reviews on another 300, it’s an awfully strange way to live up to that kind of statement.

What this government perhaps does not understand is that rural schools keep our smaller communities alive and vibrant. Regrettably, when a school closes, in particular a high school, there’s a great deal of collateral damage that occurs. Once that school is closed, we see restaurants close; we see a decline in property values. Families are forced to move out of town, in particular those families with young people coming up to high school age.

I know that rural education in my riding does not have time to wait for action from this government. Smaller communities are already suffering at the hands of this government, and for many of these towns, a school closure would be that final nail in the coffin. As this government continues to delay honouring funding promises, school trustees across the province are left with that unfortunate task of making decisions for this government; essentially, making decisions in a vacuum. Sadly, we remain locked in this battle to convince those who hold the purse strings, those who have their hand on policy—we are seeing no action, and the need for action is presently in need right now.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I am pleased to be able to join the debate, but I must say that there’s a certain amount of gall involved in criticizing Liberal government management of schools when we think back to the official opposition’s record.

The Conservatives really mismanaged the education system. They cut \$1 billion out of the education system. There were 15,000 fewer teachers in the school situation when they finished than when they began. How many days do you think were lost because of disruption in the school system? There were 26 million lost days from these people’s mismanagement.

Now, as many of you know, I was a school trustee through all of the Mike Harris years and through all of the NDP government years. I’d like to tell you a little bit about my experience in closing a particular school, because one of the schools that I closed, I must say, with the consent of the community, was a small K to 6 school. It was an old, open concept school. There was a neighbouring school next door. We were closing this school in a very high-needs, high-risk area and building an addition at the neighbouring school and turning it into a K to 8.

The community was actually very supportive of the move, so with the support of the community, we closed the school because we could provide better programming and a better facility. But their rules said that if we closed a school, the provincial government got to scoop it back, and that’s what they did. They took back this little K to 6 school in a high-needs community. Do you know what we found out they were going to do with it? What they were going to do with it was sell it to a private school operator, which tells you how it came to be that there were 200 private schools open when these people were in government, a 50% increase in private school enrolment.

Do you know what we did? We found out—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Will the member please take her seat. I ask the House to come to order, on both sides, and I return to the member for Guelph.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: So when we found out they were going to sell it to a private school, we actually unclosed the school, because we weren’t letting it go to a private school. Do you know what we did? We then started the process all over again, and this time we managed to do what we had wanted to do in the first place. We quite legally, with the co-operation of the municipality, transferred the school to the municipality, which, in turn, transferred it to the children’s aid and turned this school into a wonderful social service community support hub for a community which was very high risk and very high need. That is how you want to assess community need—the way we did it, not the way they do it, which is just selling it to a private school.

I do want to tell you what we have done since we came into office. Despite the fact that there are 90,000 fewer students in the system, we have actually added \$4 billion to the school system. But, in particular, when we talk about rural schools—in fact, about all schools—we have funded a principal and a secretary for each and every school. They didn’t do that. There wasn’t enough money to go around for principals in schools.

We’ve put \$3.4 billion into rural schools this year. That’s an increase of 23% since we came in. In fact, the most rural schools have something called the supported school grant. I’d like to tell you about the supported school grant, because we recognize that there are some very small schools in very small communities that must stay open. We’ve created the supported school grant so that can happen.

So for very small, very remote elementary schools, we are ensuring that those very small schools get—they have to have at least 50 students and be remote—at least 7.5 teachers. That’s almost one teacher for every seven students. The reason we’re doing that is to ensure that we don’t get into the situation where you’ve got three or four grades in one class. It ensures that the elementary program can be delivered properly.

At secondary, if it’s a very remote school, the funding is even more generous. For just 50 students, we ensure that there are 14 teachers in that school, so that a full range of proper secondary programming can be delivered.

So we have no need to take any lessons from these folks on how to manage rural schools. In fact, Emily Noble, the past president of the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, said, “The supported schools allocation recognizes that small elementary schools in remote areas have a number of challenges. No matter their size, these schools must provide a full range of services for their students.”

It is true that some schools continue to close, but we

actually have something called the prohibitive-to-repair grant, which allows us to provide better programming in better schools. In fact, all over this province, we are replacing schools that are old, that are worn out, and making sure that the kids have a better program, a better opportunity to achieve, a better opportunity to graduate.

That's what we believe in: a better experience for students, not necessarily a school building on every corner. Thank you very much. I will be opposing this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 4. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1732 to 1742.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the table.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Gélinas, France
Hardeman, Ernie
Hillier, Randy
Jones, Sylvia

Klees, Frank
Marchese, Rosario
Miller, Norm
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Runciman, Robert W.
Savoline, Joyce

Sterling, Norman W.
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakabuski, John

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion, please rise one at a time.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Best, Margaret
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad

Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Gerretsen, John
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Kwintar, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Mangat, Amrit
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Mitchell, Carol

Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Sorbara, Greg
Sousa, Charles
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 16; the nays are 48.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The ayes being 16 and the nays being 48, I declare the motion lost.

Negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 5:45 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1745.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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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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Balkissoon, Bas (L)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
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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
Broten, 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
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Colle, Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
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Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (L)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
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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	

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Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (L)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Tourism / ministre du Tourisme
Gélinas, France (ND)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	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)	Oxford	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (ND)	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)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (L)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Welland	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (L)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
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Mauro, Bill (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L)	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)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	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)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (ND)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (L)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
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Sousa, Charles (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
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Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Paul Miller
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Gerry Martiniuk, Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch,
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Continued from back cover

Hospital funding	
Mrs. Christine Elliott	2245
Community colleges collective bargaining	
Mr. Phil McNeely	2245
Lord's Prayer	
Ms. Laurie Scott	2245
Highway 138	
Mr. Jim Brownell.....	2245
Hospital funding	
Mr. Joe Dickson.....	2245
Lord's Prayer	
Mr. Jim Wilson.....	2246
Anti-smoking legislation	
Mr. Jeff Leal	2246

**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS /
DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS**

Automotive industry	
Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette	2246
Internationally trained professionals	
Mr. David Zimmer.....	2247
Rural Ontario	
Mr. Randy Hillier	2247
Labour dispute	
Mr. Paul Miller	2247
Seniors' Month	
Mr. Pat Hoy	2247
Seniors' Month	
Mr. Peter Shurman.....	2248
Events in Ajax and Pickering	
Mr. Joe Dickson.....	2248
Jack Byers	
Mr. Jeff Leal	2248
Health care	
Mr. Phil McNeely	2249

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DES COMITÉS**

Standing Committee on Government Agencies	
The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	2249
Report deemed adopted	2249
Special report, Ombudsman	
The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	2249

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

Photo Card Act, 2008, Bill 85, Mr. Bradley / Loi de 2008 sur les cartes-photo, projet de loi 85, M. Bradley	
First reading agreed to	2249
Labour Relations Amendment Act (Replacement Workers), 2008, Bill 86, Mr. Kormos / Loi de 2008 modifiant la Loi sur les relations de travail (travailleurs suppléants), projet de loi 86, M. Kormos	
First reading agreed to	2249
Mr. Peter Kormos	2249

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS
MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES**

Photo cards	
Hon. James J. Bradley	2250
Sexual harassment	
Hon. Deborah Matthews.....	2250
Sexual harassment	
Ms. Laurie Scott	2251
Photo cards	
Mr. Frank Klees	2252
Sexual harassment	
Ms. Andrea Horwath	2252
Photo cards	
Mr. Gilles Bisson.....	2253
Notice of dissatisfaction	
The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters)	2253

OPPOSITION DAY / JOUR DE L'OPPOSITION

Rural Schools	
Mr. Robert W. Runciman	2253
Mr. Rosario Marchese	2254
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	2258
Mrs. Joyce Savoline.....	2259
Mr. Paul Miller	2260
Mrs. Carol Mitchell	2261
Mr. John Yakabuski.....	2262
Mr. Pat Hoy	2262
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	2263
Hon. John Wilkinson	2263

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette.....	2264
Mr. Jim Brownell	2265
Mr. Randy Hillier	2266
Mr. Jim Wilson	2266
Mr. Garfield Dunlop.....	2267
Mr. Toby Barrett	2267
Mrs. Liz Sandals	2268
Negatived	2269

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Tuesday 3 June 2008 / Mardi 3 juin 2008

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Order of business

Hon. David Caplan	2223
Agreed to	2223

Personal health information protection / Protection des renseignements personnels sur la santé

Hon. John Wilkinson	2223
Ms. Laurel C. Broten	2223
Mme France Gélinas.....	2225
Mr. Shafiq Qadri.....	2228
Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer	2230
Mr. Bob Delaney	2232
Agreed to	2233

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	2233
--------------------------------------	------

Member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	2233
--------------------------------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Automotive industry

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette	2233
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	2233

Infectious disease control

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer	2234
Hon. George Smitherman	2234

Automotive industry

Mr. Howard Hampton.....	2235
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	2235

Skills training

Mr. Howard Hampton.....	2236
Hon. John Milloy.....	2236

School closures

Mr. Randy Hillier	2237
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	2237
Mrs. Joyce Savoline.....	2237

Infectious disease control

Mme France Gélinas.....	2237
Hon. George Smitherman	2237

Hospital funding

Mr. Phil McNeely.....	2238
Hon. George Smitherman	2238

Sewage spill

Mr. Norman W. Sterling.....	2238
Hon. John Gerretsen	2238

Ontario disability support program

Mr. Michael Prue.....	2239
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur.....	2239

Affordable housing

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde	2239
Hon. Jim Watson	2240

Polygamy

Ms. Lisa MacLeod.....	2240
Hon. Ted McMeekin.....	2240

Events in Tibet

Ms. Cheri DiNovo	2241
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	2241

Infrastructure renewal

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel.....	2241
Hon. David Caplan	2241

Beef producers

Mr. Ernie Hardeman	2242
Hon. Leona Dombrowsky.....	2242

Northern Ontario development

Mme France Gélinas.....	2242
Hon. David Caplan	2242

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Long-term care

Mme France Gélinas.....	2243
-------------------------	------

Child custody

Mr. Kim Craitor.....	2243
----------------------	------

Lord's Prayer

Mr. John O'Toole	2243
------------------------	------

Lord's Prayer

Mr. Bill Mauro.....	2243
---------------------	------

Services for the developmentally disabled

Mrs. Christine Elliott	2244
------------------------------	------

Hospital funding

Mr. Joe Dickson.....	2244
----------------------	------

Anti-smoking legislation

Ms. Laurie Scott	2244
------------------------	------

Anti-smoking legislation

Mr. Jeff Leal	2244
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Continued on inside back cover