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(Hansard)**

Thursday 5 June 2008

Jeudi 5 juin 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 5 June 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 5 juin 2008

*The House met at 0900.
Prayers.*

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PHOTO CARD ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES CARTES-PHOTO

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 4, 2008, on the motion for second reading of 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): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to rise this morning in the Legislature to speak to second reading of Bill 85. I believe that—

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Yes, of course; I appreciate that.

I have to initially seek the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the lead speech by our critic, the member for Newmarket–Aurora.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak in the House this morning on Bill 85. This bill was introduced in the Ontario Legislature just a couple days ago, so the reality is that we haven't had a lot of opportunity for consultation with our constituents or input on this issue. But we have commenced debate on this bill nonetheless, and we have this opportunity to talk about the new Photo Card Act, the long title being An Act to permit the issuance of photo cards to residents of Ontario and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act.

I first of all want to note the presence in the Legislature this morning of the Minister of Transportation, the member for St. Catharines. I've always enjoyed working with this particular member in his capacity now as Minister of Transportation. The member for St. Catharines is now in his 31st year of service in this Legislature, which is hard to believe. He deserves a great deal of credit for his longevity, his commitment and his steady dedication to this place. Certainly his presence here at 9 o'clock this morning on second reading of this bill indicates his un-

derstanding of the parliamentary system and the respect that he shows for the opposition when he comes in to be part of this debate, to be present for this debate. It is something that is very much appreciated by all of us. We would hope that it would become a little more contagious with some of his colleagues, but certainly he provides a good example that they should emulate.

The member has been elected by his constituents I think nine times, which again is something that is a good example for all of us. The work that he does is something that is very much appreciated by his constituents and by all of us in this House.

I want to begin by saying a word of thanks as well to the good staff who work at the MTO licence-issuing offices in the province. There is an licence-issuing office in Fergus which is actually located just a few feet away from my constituency office. I've had the chance to get to know some of the staff over there. Because we're so conveniently located to each other, occasionally, when there's a disagreement with the issuing office by a constituent who has a policy issue with the government, the staff are able to send them over to our office so we get to hear about it at first hand. We certainly appreciate that.

There are a number of other licence-issuing offices throughout Wellington–Halton Hills, in Waterloo–Wellington and in my old riding of Wellington, obviously. I think that all of the staff who work at those licence-issuing offices do good work. They are courteous and professional and deserve a lot of credit. I think they work very hard for the wages that they earn. I think that's something that the minister perhaps has to look at too. I've heard over a number of years that the compensation for those particular staff has not really kept up with the rate of inflation. I think they're an important part of the licence-issuing network, and with this bill they're probably going to have added responsibilities. I think that has to be taken into consideration with respect to their compensation.

I believe that transportation is one of the most important responsibilities of the provincial government. I was pleased, when I was first elected to this place in 1990, to be named by Mike Harris, our party leader at the time, as our critic for transportation. Actually, the very first words that I uttered in this Legislature were words exhorting and calling upon the New Democratic Party government of the day to make improvements to Highway 6, which bisected my riding of Wellington in those days. It still goes through Wellington county, north-south. I'm pleased to see that over the years there have been some improvements to Highway 6, I hope as a result of some

of the interventions that I've offered in this place, certainly strongly supported by the county of Wellington and by the staff at the Ministry of Transportation in London, the regional office.

I've made it a point to go and visit the staff at the MTO office in recent years. The MTO staff that I've met with for years—usually once or twice a year, making a special trip down to London to talk to them and express my ideas and concerns about the projects that need to be expedited in my riding—are very good staff as well. I know the minister appreciates their contribution.

I remember in the early 1990s, as the critic for transportation, calling upon the New Democratic Party government to proceed with the Red Hill Creek Expressway in Hamilton, something that the member for Welland understands and remembers well.

As well, I was an early convert to the need for graduated drivers' licences. When I was the critic for transportation that was an issue that I was working on. Of course, that was adopted by the government of the day and has now become a fact of life in the province of Ontario. I think most people would agree that the graduated driver's licence has been a very positive reform in terms of highway safety, especially for our young drivers. Our roads are safer. I think it's fair to say that lives have been saved because of that positive development that emanated from this place.

Bill 85, according to the minister in his presentation in this House when he introduced the bill, as well as his speech with respect to second reading of this bill—he talked about the tourism aspects of this issue. We all know and remember well the terrorist attacks that took place on North America on September 11, 2001. I recall the outstanding oratory that took place in this Legislature following those terrorist attacks. We had a day of debate in which we came together to condemn the attacks and to call upon the western world to come together and respond to them in the appropriate way. I recall that day: We were all asked to speak for about two minutes, but it was probably the most outstanding day of oratory that I've experienced in my time in the Legislature. All of the speeches were excellent, from the heart, and responded to the need that we felt at that time.

0910

Of course, in the United States, the direct subject of the attacks, there was a new cabinet responsibility created, the Department of Homeland Security. From the Department of Homeland Security there have been a significant number of initiatives to try to make United States citizens feel safer, one of them being the western hemisphere travel initiative, which has been talked about in this Legislature many, many times. The Americans feel they have to make their border more secure relative to Canada. We recognize the sovereignty of the United States, and as much as we would like to ensure that our citizens have easy access to the United States, we have to recognize the sovereignty of the United States. They have the right to make their decisions as to how they're going to manage their side of the border. We have the right to

make the decisions as to how we're going to manage our side of the border.

Given the fact that tourism has experienced considerable difficulty—in part because of the confusion, I would argue, at the border, where American tourists who in many cases might otherwise have come across to visit us here in Ontario and Canada already believe that they are going to have problems at the border. Some, I'm sure, believe that they have to have a passport now and don't understand that they can make a land crossing right now and get back home to the United States without a passport at this time. I'm sure there's a great deal of confusion in the minds of a lot of them, and that's why we've called upon the provincial government to make that a focus of a marketing campaign, so as to clarify that issue for our American friends and invite them to come across. Of course we know that the deadline for the application of the western hemisphere travel initiative has changed on a number of occasions, but right now, if you're going to travel into the United States by air, you've got to have a valid passport. As of next year apparently—unless the deadline changes again—June 1, 2009, there will be a requirement for some acceptable photo ID in order for people to get into the United States from across the Canadian border and of course for Americans who want to get home again.

This, I understand, is the impetus for this legislation, and the Minister of Transportation, who used to be the Minister of Tourism, understands this issue well. Certainly he was one of the leaders in Canada in pushing for the establishment of the allowance of another commonly used document. The suggestion was that we could ensure that the citizenship of an individual would be put on the driver's licence; I think he used the words “commonly used photo identification.” I think he deserves a lot of credit for this, for moving forward in this regard.

For my part, as the critic for tourism, I certainly was participating in this debate and I've met with a number, actually three or four, of successive US consuls general, the US consulate being just down the street on University Avenue. I've had the opportunity on a number of occasions to meet with them, talking about BSE, the issue that has affected our beef farmers, as well as this issue of the passport, and tried to do what I can, not having the travel budget of a minister being in a position to fly to Washington, DC, or to visit some of the adjacent state capitals. But I did have the chance this March, actually, to travel to Washington, DC, with my family—I would add, at my own expense—for March break, so as to experience all that there is in Washington, DC. I also had the chance to tour the US Capitol and to meet with one of the congressmen, Representative Bart Stupak, a Democratic representative of the first congressional district in the state of Michigan, and we had the opportunity to discuss this issue. I think all of us who have associations and opportunities to meet American lawmakers should be continuing to express the need for this sort of thing, and I know the Minister of Transportation would encourage this as well.

We know that this bill will allow the government to issue three new cards: (1) the combined photo card, (2) the basic photo card and (3) the enhanced photo card. The combined photo card will meet the applicable rules set out by the United States western hemisphere travel initiative, and these rules are expected to severely limit the types of documentation that would be acceptable for entry into the United States. We know that the combined photo card would be used exactly as one would use a regular driver's licence. However, the card will also display certain information about the holder, such as that person's citizenship, and will be equipped with certain machine-readable features. The features would allow the holders to access the US by land and by water and, as we know and as I said earlier, air travel will still require a passport.

The legislation, I understand, authorizes the use of new fraud prevention methods by MTO when operating the combined photo card. These include photo comparison technology, to reduce the risk of any one individual obtaining multiple driver's licences or photo cards, and the sharing of information between Canadian government entities.

Our party's critic for transportation, the member for Newmarket-Aurora, on the day that the bill was introduced earlier this week, talked about the concerns that he has with respect to privacy. The Information and Privacy Commissioner apparently has expressed some concerns about how the information is going to be kept private for individuals. I hope the Minister of Transportation pays heed to those concerns, so as to ensure that the privacy commissioner is satisfied in this respect.

I'm glad the minister is here, because I want to bring to his attention another issue with respect to his responsibility as Minister of Transportation. It concerns another important issue with respect to transportation in my riding. The proposed Highway 24, between Brantford and Cambridge, has become a controversial issue, especially in Puslinch township, Puslinch township being the rural community just south of and adjacent to the city of Guelph.

Apparently, the Minister of Transportation had the opportunity to meet with the mayors of Brantford and Cambridge some time ago—it was on February 19, from what I understand—to discuss this issue. Of course, both of these mayors are strongly advocating for the new Highway 24 through a study process. The township of Puslinch is very concerned about it, because it goes through their area, and they have serious environmental concerns with respect to this issue.

This meeting was held on February 19, and when the township council became aware of the fact that the meeting had taken place, they were disappointed that they hadn't been involved in the meeting and expressed concern that they had been snubbed. Interestingly, this article appeared in the Wellington Advertiser on April 18, and actually a couple of weeks later, on May 2, there was a letter to the editor which, to some degree, had privileged information in it that I would suggest no one

would know about perhaps except the minister's office, addressing the concern expressed by the township. At the same time, I would suggest that it was a rebuttal of the township of Puslinch's concerns.

It was a letter of some length, three columns long, and interestingly, it was signed by the president of the Liberal provincial riding association of Wellington-Halton Hills. His name is Murray Gold. I think that what may have happened here is that someone in the minister's office was monitoring the media in the Wellington Advertiser, and, noticing that the ministry had been not overly criticized but mildly chastised for not involving the township of Puslinch in the meeting, fed privileged information to the president of the local riding association in order to rebut the concern.

I'm not sure how privileged this information was, but certainly I'm willing to share these letters with the minister. I know he would be concerned about it if anything untoward was happening in his office with respect to partisanship in this regard. I'm certainly concerned about it. I wouldn't be surprised if I was criticized in this way through letters to the editor—perhaps that might happen from time to time—but I do take umbrage to a duly elected township council in our riding being criticized by the local Liberal riding association president, having received privileged information through the minister's office. I think the minister should be concerned, and I would ask that he investigate this.

I also want to talk about the roads and bridges funding that was announced just before the end of the fiscal year, the last week of March, before the provincial budget this year. We received feedback from a number of our municipalities, most notably the town of Erin, which was very concerned about how their number was calculated. I was told by the minister and other ministry officials that a formula was applied that was ostensibly supposed to be fair and not supposed to be partisan. Every riding was supposed to be treated equally, not the government members being shown preference vis-à-vis the opposition members.

However, the town of Erin was very concerned about the formula, because they felt that it had not been appropriate to meet their needs. They have a significant number of gravel roads, and I'm told that the gravel roads were given less than full weight in terms of the formula. The reason was that the ministry felt it was less expensive to maintain the gravel roads than the paved roads.

0920

The town of Puslinch would argue with that and counter that with its own comments. I would encourage the minister to meet with representatives of the town of Erin, or at the very least have his staff contact them to listen to their concerns, to see if there's an opportunity in the future to ensure that communities like the town of Erin have their needs recognized if indeed new roads and bridges funding is forthcoming.

We also remember the grant program—I forget the official name—I think it was MIII. I'm glad the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal is here. I think it was

called the municipal infrastructure investment initiative. I appreciated the support that came to my riding of Wellington–Halton Hills, to some of the municipalities at least, but again there were two that missed out. I've brought that to the attention of the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. The township of Puslinch as well as the town of Erin unfortunately were not successful in terms of that particular program. I would encourage the minister to ensure that there is an adequate mechanism to review the concerns of municipalities which feel that they've been excluded, to have a debriefing exercise so that they can be informed of whatever they could have done differently in their application so that next time they have a better opportunity to meet with success.

I'm glad to have this opportunity—because this is a transportation bill—to talk about some of the other transportation issues in my riding. It has been a very important issue that I've worked on for years. I continue to believe that transportation issues are ones that the government must make high priorities, because it's important for our economy and it's important for everyone who uses our roads.

This particular bill, Bill 85, while an important step forward in terms of the government's policy agenda right now, I think is also important to put in perspective. I said this earlier in the debate when I had a chance for a two-minute response. While we recognize that we need to do everything we can to try to encourage tourism in the province of Ontario, this photo ID card won't necessarily solve in one step the issue with respect to the American tourists who might otherwise want to come here but are going to have trouble getting back home if they don't have a passport.

I know that the Minister of Transportation is sincere when he suggests that if we take this step with Bill 85 to create this new photo identity card, it puts us on a stronger footing if we approach the other neighbouring American states like New York state, which I understand is looking at this as well. But we should be approaching Michigan, Ohio and some of the other neighbouring states to ensure that we can show them that this leadership is something that they can emulate too and that it's in their best interests if they proceed with this sort of initiative as well.

I did ask the government how much the card will cost for Ontario residents. That is not clear in the bill. I think we were told by the parliamentary assistant that it was going to be in the range of \$30 to \$35. I hope that the government will answer that question definitively before the end of this second reading debate, because I think that's obviously an important question. I'd like to know how long this card will be good for. Is it going to be five years? Is the cost going to be based on cost recovery or is it going to be seen by the government as an opportunity to enhance its revenue, perhaps yet another tax? These are issues that I think are very important to be addressed by the government during the course of this second reading debate.

The last time I bought a passport I believe it was \$75 to get the passport for five years. I would suggest that if this is going to be effective and something that people will want to buy, this new card would have to be considerably less in cost than the cost of a new Canadian passport.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to thank Mr. Arnott for his contribution to the debate today. As always, his contribution is very constructive and well informed. I think he raised a number of significant issues, and as the debate goes on we will want to ensure that the questions that he has asked are addressed appropriately.

He utilized a device that I'm told members have used from time to time to deviate a little bit from the debate, but at least—I must say this—it was about transportation. I want to assure him that all voices on the issue of Highway 24 are being heard equally and that the government of Ontario is very interested in these matters related to that highway, as are all of the local members. The government does not have a chosen position. We're looking at it in terms of the environmental consequences of any particular routing of the highway. I'm probably not even supposed to respond to something that's on the edge, but I want to give him every credit that there was about transportation. I'm glad he has a good relationship with the folks in the licence-issuing office in his area, and indeed that is a very significant service that people provide in those offices to the people of Ontario.

The member has raised a number of significant issues, and if I had a significant amount of time, I would address some of these matters. What you see in a bill and what subsequently is part of the whole passage of a bill are two different things. It's not that there's any deception in this regard, but I think the member legitimately asked some questions that during the debate we will ensure that we answer before the bill is given final consideration.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech from the member from Wellington–Halton Hills on Bill 85, the Photo Card Act, 2008. He did raise a number of concerns to do with the bill. I think we're generally supportive of a new photo card. This bill would enable three new cards. One is a combined photo card, which would basically be your driver's licence, and it would be enhanced with more information, I guess the idea being to be recognized by the United States to make it easier to cross over the border. Then there'd be two other cards: a basic photo card for those who don't have a driver's licence, and an enhanced photo card which has more information on that basic card. I do have questions about why you need three. Why wouldn't it just be two cards, and why aren't they all enhanced?

I note also that the privacy commissioners have concerns to do with this and I think that their concerns need to be addressed. But obviously it's important that we make it as easy as possible to cross the US border for the sake of our economy and for the sake of tourism in this province. It's my feeling that this year is going to be a

very challenging year for tourism in the province of Ontario, with the combined effects of the high Canadian dollar, gas prices and the slowing US economy. Those things are all combining to make for what I think is going to be an extremely challenging year in tourism, which is why I think the government might want to pick up on the opposition's idea of removing the sales tax over the course of the summertime. I think that idea can be a real shot in the arm for tourism in the province of Ontario this year through the summertime, which is prime tourism season in Ontario, and right at a time of the business cycle when it's really needed. I hope the government will give serious consideration to removing the PST—John Tory's idea—and take that idea and run with it. It will make a difference to the economy this summer.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm honoured to get the chance to comment on the speech from the member for Wellington–Halton Hills. I think it's very important, and it's been mentioned many different times. He has asked many questions, and I guess he, as a member of the opposition, has a right to raise those questions because he has to answer to his constituents. But in general I think this bill is very important for all the people of Ontario and has been raised many different times, through him and his colleagues. It's good for the tourism industry because it will allow many different people to travel between the United States and Canada without any problems.

Hopefully, when I get the chance to speak, I'll explain myself more and show what's important in this bill—

Mr. Peter Kormos: You'll have that chance in five minutes. Then you can speak for 20 minutes.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I will have that chance, definitely. It's important to show my support of this bill because it's an important initiative to allow people from the United States or Canada to travel without any hesitation. As you know, sometimes when you go to apply for a passport, it takes forever, and sometimes people are uncomfortable carrying their passport.

The member from Wellington–Halton Hills mentioned the cost. I think that our intention as a government is not to profit from this initiative but just to make it easy and accessible for the people of Ontario. Hopefully it will be applied only to the cost—whatever the cost of the card—for the clients or the people who want to travel between Canada and the United States. So as I mentioned, hopefully I'll get the chance to speak in a few minutes and I'll speak in detail about the importance of this bill.

0930

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want to commend my colleague, who made a great articulation about Bill 85, the Photo Card Act. He's our critic for tourism. He does a great job of that and has brought forward some suggestions to the Liberal government. We were hoping that they may take them in. I know he made another plug, and so did my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka, about the relief this summer that some of our tourism operators need to get more tourists to the area.

This bill is the Photo Card Act, and we certainly support the intent, because what we're trying to do is keep our border traffic moving. Of course, Americans have a long history of coming across the border to Canada to holiday and to take in our great province, but unfortunately the number of American tourists who have been coming over of late has been diminishing. They feel they need the passport already. There's confusion. They don't want long lineups on the border, which they see on TV shows. That has been hampering their ability to come across the border and their desire to come across. We need to reinstate that we are welcoming the American tourists. How can we do that? Well, there are three new cards proposed here and the intent is certainly great to keep the border traffic moving. We have some concerns about this bill, but we certainly support it in principle.

I know the privacy commissioner has some comments. I want to speak too, for the few seconds I have left, about tourism. It certainly has been hurting the resorts in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, which rely heavily on tourism. The Minister of Transportation is shaking his head. I'm glad he is aware of that. It's quite a soft market, they say, and we have lots of vacancies. So if anyone is planning a holiday, come up to Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Wellington–Halton Hills has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I appreciate the invitation and I hope to spend some time in that beautiful part of the province this summer too.

I want to thank the Minister of Transportation, the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, the member for London–Fanshawe and the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for their response to my opportunity to speak here this morning, and especially to pick up on the point that was made by my colleagues to encourage the provincial government to give serious consideration to our proposal, which we brought forward in good faith, to encourage the government to suspend the retail sales tax on accommodations and attractions this summer.

I know the Minister of Transportation, as a former Minister of Tourism, would understand how this might benefit the tourism industry. I'm sorry that the current Minister of Tourism suggested that it was nothing more than a Band-Aid, that it wouldn't really do very much.

I had the chance to speak in the House about this yesterday and I quoted some of the industry response to our proposal. Clearly, the industry believes that this would be a positive benefit to them with respect to the challenges they are facing this summer.

My colleague mentioned the high Canadian dollar, the skyrocketing price of gasoline, the confusion at the border, an ineffective marketing campaign by the government of Ontario. All of these things are coming together at once, and the initial reaction of the tourism industry to the May 24 weekend was to let us know that they believe this summer they are going to be facing serious difficulties. Obviously, we have to do something.

This isn't something that hasn't been tried before. In fact, our government did this when we were in power after the SARS situation, to ensure that tourism was encouraged in Ontario, and at that time it worked. So I submit to the government that it would work again and it would be a positive development.

It's often suggested that the opposition parties are too negative. We have a role to oppose in the Legislature—and that's an historic role—but we also have an obligation to bring forward constructive suggestions. This is one of them that the government should listen to and heed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Now I get the chance and the time to speak in detail about this bill, and also about the importance of this bill.

Bill 85, to enhance drivers' licences in the province of Ontario, I think is a very good initiative. I want to commend and congratulate the minister, who has been working very hard for a long time on this issue in order to find a solution for people crossing the border with the United States. I understand that after September 11 the Americans raised so many different issues about security, about people crossing from Canada to the United States or vice versa. I think it's important to them to see that the people who come to their nation are safe and secure and that they are not going to cause any trouble to the safety of the United States. I think it's an important request. That is why we, as a government, are taking an important step towards achieving this goal.

As you know, many people come from the United States to visit the province of Ontario. I'm not talking about thousands or hundreds of thousands; they come by millions on a yearly basis. I heard the statistics not long ago. Almost five million people come to visit Niagara Falls on a yearly basis, and some of them come from the United States. That's why it's important for our tourist industry in this province to create some kind of accessibility mechanism to allow people to travel back and forth without any problem and eliminate all the concerns of the United States, especially in terms of security and the people who go to visit the United States. This creates some kind of a comfort zone for the people and the government of the United States, because our government is taking an important step to make sure that all the people who have those cards are legitimate people, Canadian citizens—they're not criminals—and whatever the border states require. They will hopefully take those cards into consideration.

As you know, in Ontario we deal a great deal with the United States in terms of our economy. Our GDP with the United States is almost \$600 billion a year. I learned not long ago that Highway 401 alone contributes almost \$200 billion every year, through the trucking industry moving goods from the United States to Canada and from Canada to the United States on a regular basis. I got the chance last year, through our auto caucus, to meet with people from the manufacturing industry and the auto

industry. You know what they told us? Most of the parts that go into our cars travel six times back and forth to the United States. It's important to create the accessibility.

That's why I think this bill has some kind of provision to create a special licence with a magnetic chip or computer chip that can detect and read more information about the drivers who are driving those trucks or cars, to make it easy and accessible to the United States. It's in our best interest to move goods from Canada to the United States faster and without any extra costs that will occur if the car or the truck stays longer on the highway. As you know, those huge trailers or trucks cost a lot of money for the drivers, for gas, and sometimes it affects the goods, especially if you are transporting animals like cows or pigs, or whatever product. Also, vegetables cannot tolerate the heat or cold weather. That's why I think it's very important to create innovative ideas in order to create accessibility to the United States, back and forth, without hurting our neighbours and without jeopardizing our industry in Ontario.

The most important thing is to create a comfort zone with the Americans, which I think they've asked for for a long time, because it's important to them. If they want to welcome people to the United States, it has to be safe, not criminals or terrorists. That's why our government has taken what I think is a very important and practical step to eliminate fear and to create a mechanism to allow people to access the United States without any problems, so that the Americans are comfortable with our strategy.

The most important thing is also to create a driver's licence and enhance the driver's licence. Of course, this enhanced driver's licence has a lot of personal information about the person: his or her citizenship and background information required for the security of the United States. That is why the citizens of Ontario, if they wish, can apply for this driver's licence. It's not mandatory; if you want it, you can apply for it. The cost, as has been mentioned many different times, is between \$35 and \$40. I heard from the minister and the parliamentary assistant that those costs are not to raise money as extra funds. The cost of this one here is only to cover the cost of the card. As you know, those technical cards cost money, cost employers to put the pieces together etc. So this costs only \$35 to \$40 per card.

0940

But I think it's important for all of us. It's important because this card contains a lot of information. Also, when you go through the border, the border officer can swipe the card and know all the details about the person. It basically has more information, similar information to a passport.

A passport, as you know, is a little bit big. Not many people are comfortable carrying the passport back and forth. That's why the small magnetic card has all the information, similar information to that passport. You can put it in your wallet. It's easy to keep in your wallet all the time. It's like a credit card, like a Visa, like whatever. It's small like a driver's licence; it's driver's licence-sized but has more information in it. Also, the

people who don't want to have this card can have a passport or a regular driver's licence.

But the most important thing is that our government is creating a way to allow people to be comfortable, to be able to access the United States, back and forth, without any hesitation and without any problem. As you know, sometimes it's very difficult to go to the passport office and apply for a passport. Sometimes you have to wait. Sometimes you don't know whether or not your passport has expired. There are so many different complications. This is an extra, alternative way to have accessibility to the United States.

Besides that, some people can use this photo ID for many different things. If you want to go to a bank, if you want to go to different government offices, you can present this ID because this ID has all the information needed for whatever reason. Also, if you are below age and you don't have the right to drive yet, there is another photo-ID-enhanced card for people who are below the eligible age to obtain a driver's licence. As this enhanced card has all the information about the person, they can access the United States the same way as with their driver's licence.

Many people talk on a daily basis about the importance of the tourism industry in this province. As you know, after SARS, after September 11, after the gas prices and after the high dollar, not many people like to travel as much as before. That's why our government has taken so many different good initiatives to attract people to come to Ontario. One of those initiatives creates an accessibility mechanism, a card, an enhanced driver's card, an enhanced photo ID card, to allow them to go back and forth more easily than before.

I'm proud to be a part of this province. In the province of Ontario we have a lot of tourist sites. It's beautiful; it's amazing. As parliamentarians, sometimes we get the chance to travel with committees across the province—

Mr. Peter Shurman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Quorum, please.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): A quorum is present, Speaker.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: We are proud of our province. We're proud of our tourist sites in Ontario. So our job as a government is to create all the means, goods and ways to attract more visitors to come and visit the province. As I mentioned at the beginning, my friend the member for Niagara Falls told me that almost five million people visit Niagara Falls on a yearly basis. Most of those visitors come from the United States, whether to visit Niagara Falls or to enjoy the recreation facilities in Niagara Falls. Also there are many beautiful sites, whether in Ottawa, Chatham-Kent, Strathroy, London—many places—Orléans, Windsor and Toronto. This province has beautiful, natural sites that attract many people from across the globe to come to visit.

Many people are talking about the departure of manufacturing from Ontario and that we have to rely on different alternatives. We have to promote this province. That's why our Premier appointed the member for

Vaughan, the Honourable Greg Sorbara, to commission a study to see how we can promote our tourism in the province of Ontario, how we can create some way to tell the people about this beautiful province, how we can tell them to come visit and be comfortable and be happy, and also to create some way to tell people about our natural resources, our natural sites, which we enjoy on a daily basis in the province of Ontario. But we have to promote it, not just nationally but also internationally, especially with our neighbouring country, the United States.

I was watching TV not long ago and I was seeing those movie stars, the Hollywood stars. They are coming to Ontario, they're coming to Toronto to shoot their films, because they think we have all the sites that give them the tools and the way to produce some of the best films in the world.

So that's why I think we have a lot of things to be proud of, we have a lot of places that we can be proud of, but the most important thing is how we can promote those sites, how we can tell the people of Canada, how we can tell the people of the United States and tell the people of the world about Ontario: about the parks we have, about the lakes we have, about the heritage buildings we have, about the theatres we have, about the movie theatres we have, about our environment, about our valleys and beautiful sites which we enjoy on a daily basis but don't pay much attention to. These places, I think, will be important to all the people to come and see.

That's why our Minister of Transportation wants to work hard to create a way to allow people to come and visit without any trouble and without any problems. Most of the time, we take things for granted, and sometimes, when we travel, we get lazy. If we think this place or that place or a certain location is going to cause us some kind of problem or difficulty or create extra work for us, we don't go visit it. But when we create accessible ways, I think we'll be attracting more people. This is the importance of the idea of an enhanced driver's licence, and it's important for us, as Ontarians, to increase the tourism industry, the commercial industry, the transportation industry, because we rely a lot on those areas. They support our economy big-time.

As I mentioned to you, when I was meeting with the transportation industry not a long time ago, they told me that they haul almost \$200 billion on a yearly basis from Canada to the United States. So can you imagine if we delay that transportation industry? They pay for mileage, they pay per hour, and also some products are perishable products, or they sometimes haul animals through the border, like chickens, hogs, beef, and those animals cannot tolerate the heat; they cannot tolerate the cold.

So I think it's our responsibility to create an accessible mechanism. Enhancing licences by creating some kind of a magnetic or electronic chip can send a signal to the border officer, who can read all the information before the trucks reach the booth and then can allow them to access the United States fast and quick. I think it's a very important idea, because the whole idea for the accessibility to the United States is security. They want to

know more information about the driver, about the truck, about the location and the company. When that chip sends a signal to the border officer, they can read all the information about the driver and all the information about the truck and the company. Then, if it's a legitimate company, a respectable company, and has no record of any criminal activities or harbouring terrorists or whatever, they can allow them access with no problem or troubles. It's easier for the border officers and easy for commuting back and forth. I think it's a very important step.

Also, the drivers' licences is a very innovative idea. I was, at one time, interviewed on the radio in London on AM 980 with John Wilson, as all the MPPs and MPs have the chance every month to go on the show and listen to the people of Ontario and answer questions. And the most important thing was that people were asking about those drivers' licences a long time ago. They were asking how come we cannot create, with the advanced technology we have today, some kind of card or tool to allow people to visit the United States fast and quick and to come back fast and quick.

0950

Sometimes people are hesitant to travel to the United States because you may have to sit for five, six, seven hours at the border waiting for your turn to come, and especially in cold weather and hot weather it's very difficult. As you know, when are you driving in the summertime, the air conditioning does not work when the car is sitting. It doesn't work well. So it's difficult and inconvenient for many people.

I think by creating this tool, this card, we are helping people with fast and quick access to the United States and we are helping our economy continue to be prosperous. We wish the economy of the United States would get better. Our economy will be getting better. It's important for us to continue this good relationship with our friends in our neighbouring country, the United States.

I think it's important for all of us to support this initiative because it's important for all of us. It's important for our economy, it's important for our tourism, it's important for a good relationship with the United States and it's also good for the people of Ontario. I'm privileged and honoured to be a part of a government that is thinking about all these details, all the means and ways to help people have access, to live a good life and to travel without any problems.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: Just a brief response. I'll speak at length to the bill itself in a couple of moments, but in response to my friend from London-Fanshawe who talked about a variety of issues that in one way or another interface with this bill, he made a comment concerning the possibility of equipping trucks that engage in trans-border commerce with chips that could be very easily encoded with the contents of the truck and all kinds of information that would facilitate border crossings. It might be of interest to this House and the member to

know that this is done routinely by CN Rail when they put their trains together so that the assembly of trains—and I'm talking about huge trains with hundreds of cars in them—can be measured instantaneously, electronically, as they go by. I think he brings a good point forward which might well be worthy of consideration by the transportation ministry going forward because it would facilitate border crossings. I congratulate him on coming up with that.

In terms of his comments on tourism, again, I think on behalf of all sides of this House, it behooves us to consider the implications of anything we do, whether it be the enhanced cards that we're discussing today or any incentive that can bring people to move from their homes to some other place, whether they be Ontarians or whether they be people who are crossing our borders.

Contrary to statements issued yesterday in this House by the tourism minister, I think that going forward, we have some worries. Some of them may well lie with this government and others may not, but the fact of the matter is, everybody has to endure \$1.30—probably soon \$1.40, \$1.50—gas. There are a lot of things that come into play here when we talk about moving vehicles from one jurisdiction to another.

I congratulate the member from London-Fanshawe on what he had to say and I think some of those comments are very worthy of consideration.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I also want to commend the member from London-Fanshawe on his thoughts in terms of the enhanced driver's licence. He talked about how some people are reluctant to carry a passport, and I agree. I know for myself, the worry of losing it or having it taken from you is certainly considerable. It is a little bulkier than the driver's licence, so you really want to make sure you hang on to it. You don't always have it with you when you need to have it with you, but a driver's licence is something you carry with you all the time.

One of the other advantages this proposal in this bill has is that it will also act as a photo ID card. One of the things that does happen for people who don't have a driver's licence—and there are many people who do not have drivers' licences—is that when they're asked for a photo ID, they have nothing. Or if they're asked for two pieces of photo ID, they may have their OHIP card but they have nothing else. So this gives them an opportunity to have one more piece of photo ID that has all the information they need to have inside that card, so that again becomes enhanced identification for those people.

I'm also very aware of the fact that many border states are considering like legislation. That's very important if you look at my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, where we have a large tourism component. When you're along the lakes—Lake St. Clair and Lake Huron—and you have communities like Grand Bend, which are renowned summer resort areas, the opportunity to have people flow into our province from the border states is very important. One of the issues for a lot of tourism in my communities is the fact that we rely very heavily on

the American tourists; we want them to come to our communities, we want their dollars, we need them to be there, and this certainly will enhance that opportunity as well.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to follow the comments of the member from London–Fanshawe on Bill 85, the Photo Card Act. Certainly it's been spoken about quite a bit since 9/11, and the world has changed dramatically. People's identifications are drastically important in how we move around the world. We're kind of trying to get in line with what the US is going to require. I know that the member from Wellington–Halton Hills mentioned that the dates have changed several times for the identification requirements to go across the border. I think that, in a sense, is a good thing in that the Americans realize how vital it is to keep the flow going back and forth, and we certainly see this also. It's their requirement, to get back into their country, that proper identification and the passport qualifications be brought forward. It's nice, in a sense, to see the two countries working together in this respect. But, as I had mentioned in some previous comments, there already is a lot of misinformation on the American side that they need a passport to get back and forth now, so they're not coming up to take their weekend fishing tours, not coming up to our sporting events to watch the games, and it is impacting them. We see that the Buffalo Bills are going to come up and play—is it one game or more than one game up here?

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Now I've got the guys on the other side awake. Now the gentlemen are awake. That's a sign of how critical it is that we go down to their sporting events. They're going to keep us interested in the NFL, especially up here, and we certainly welcome that. As you see, everyone woke up and the excitement is here; it's that way across the province. We want to keep that traffic flowing maybe as fast as possible. It's interesting to see this debate, and hopefully we'll accomplish that.

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to add comments to the speech of the member from London–Fanshawe on Bill 85, the Photo Card Act, 2008. I think we all recognize that it's vitally important that we make it as easy as possible for Canadians to be able to travel to the States and back, for our goods and services to be able to travel across the border, and for Americans, just as importantly, to be able to come into Canada. This bill would create a new, enhanced photo card for your driver's licence and also, for those who don't have a driver's licence, either a basic or enhanced photo card that would—I assume the government's doing its homework—meet the requirements of the United States' western hemisphere travel initiative.

I think we do have questions about what this is going to cost both the general public and the taxpayers. I know last year there was a new driver's licence that was just brought out: Is that now redundant, I would ask? I think this is very important for tourism in this province.

This is going to be a challenging year for tourism. I think the government needs to do more to help the tourism economy in the province of Ontario. I wish they would pick up on the idea of the PC Party and take off the retail sales tax for this season, for the biggest part of the tourism year in the province of Ontario, the summer season. Take that idea: Take the retail sales tax off for attractions and accommodations. I think that would be a real stimulus for the tourism sector. I think you could add to that some enhanced marketing to keep people in Ontario in the province. Let them know about all the great things to do in Ontario, because this is a year that the tourism sector needs some assistance. I hope the government will work hard to provide some assistance for the tourism sector this year.

1000

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I want to thank all the members who spoke and gave comments on my speech, especially the members from Thornhill, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, and Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I want to go back to the member from Thornhill. It's an important issue for us to create accessibility, especially in terms of the transportation industry, because we generate a lot of money, almost \$200 billion, through the 401 alone, and \$600 billion on a yearly basis through our access road to the United States. Some of the parts travel six times before they finally go into being a part of a car.

The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex spoke about the tourism industry. She has beautiful Pinery Provincial Park in her riding. So many people come from across Ontario, from across Canada and the United States to visit and camp on that camping ground. The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes also mentioned the tourism industry in this province. There's no doubt in my mind that she has beautiful sites in her riding too, and many people come.

Talking about sports, we have lots of sport facilities. We have the dome down the road here where the Blue Jays play on a regular basis. We have a lot of places that attract a lot of sports fans from the United States and many places. I think we have to be accessible in allowing them to come and enjoy our facilities here in Ontario.

I think this bill, with the support from both sides of the House, because it's a non-partisan bill, creates accessibility to the people who want to visit our beautiful province. All of us, from both sides of the House, have a great interest in attracting more people to come visit us and spend money in our beautiful province. We have a lot of things to offer: sport facilities, tourist facilities and beautiful, natural spots that they can enjoy when they come to Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Shurman: It's interesting, his final comment. As I rise to briefly discuss Bill 85, the Photo Card

Act, 2008, the last comment I heard was rather interesting, about debating non-partisan bills. It seems to me, if I might be permitted a brief observation, that most of the bills we've debated in this session have been non-partisan bills, or you might easily describe them as that. In any event, I certainly support this one. So we're not going to get into any heated debate on that.

I hold in my hand my driver's licence, and I hope this will not be considered in any way more than an aide-mémoire; it's not a prop. I'm looking at it only because it is one of the new driver's licences that have been issued over the last five months or so. They were touted as a wonderful innovation by the transport minister when he introduced them because they contain a variety of security features, holographic signatures, photographs and so forth—a very beautiful driver's licence it is indeed.

But I understand that people have already figured out ways to duplicate them, and that's probably the primary issue that I'll want to raise this morning—the issue of security—although I could easily ask the question: Why did we bring out new driver's licences recently if we're going to bring out, yet again, new driver's licences, as indeed we are?

As was previously stated in the Legislature, Her Majesty's official opposition does support the government's intention to move forward with an enhanced driver's licence for Ontario's residents. This is a significant step forward for those residents of Ontario who, due to disability or for whatever reason, do not possess a traditional driver's licence. I have risen in this House to question this very issue previously myself.

In effect, as one of the three cards that are being discussed is a driver's licence without the right to drive, as it were, an identity card that contains some form of biometric information—and especially photo ID that allows somebody to identify themselves as indeed being themselves when presenting themselves to a bank or to another institution that requires some form of official identification—in that sense, I have to say that I support it.

The card itself does indeed rectify an imbalance in our identification system and it allows individuals access to ID that provides ready information for obtaining this host of various other instruments: credit cards, opening a bank account, proving age for seniors' discounts—like I now get sometimes, Mr. Speaker.

Trade between Canada and the United States is valued at a very large figure—I believe the member from London—Fanshawe mentioned something in the vicinity of \$1.9 billion per day. And he's quite correct: Economics, especially now, dictate that we accommodate the expeditious transit of goods and people across our borders with our southern neighbour.

That raises some other issues which I'll discuss at greater length as we go forward, not least of which is the fact that although we are entertaining the concept of bringing in these new cards, and very particularly cards that contain information similar to that now contained on

passports, we have no evidence with any degree of finality that our southern neighbour is ready to definitively accept these cards in the place of passports. That's one of the things that concerns me in looking at this bill.

Here in the GTA, we have access to the QEW and the 401. These are two critical arteries that link the economy of southern Ontario to the industrial dynamo of the American Midwest and the key markets of the eastern US. We can be stick-in-the-mud holdouts at our own economic peril, or we can, as the saying goes, get with the program. We in the PC Party agree with the latter: getting with the program. If we can negotiate a definitive agreement to accept this form of electronic transfer, good for us, and good for them, I think.

Each day the bottlenecks at the crossings in Windsor and Sarnia and Niagara are costing the economy, in and of themselves, billions of dollars in lost revenue. So is the inaction of this government, I have to say, but that's another story for another day, or maybe it's something for question period. But I digress.

It is due to the sensitive nature of the material being stored on these cards and due to the dependency that our economy has on timely access to US markets that I believe we only have one shot to get these cards right, and I mean really right, because we're talking about spending an awful lot of money; we're talking about incredible sensitivity of information that just cannot go further than the card itself in the hands of the individual holder of each and every one of those cards.

I got this fabulous new driver's licence recently that I mentioned—and, no, it wasn't a prop. I can see my signature on there from four different angles, so the security features in that are embedded and wonderful. But, as I've said, I'm betting that someone—and probably a number of someones—is already turning those out. I believe the last statistics that I saw on the issue of driver's licences in the province of Ontario said that they outstrip by hundreds of thousands the number of licensed drivers in the province of Ontario. So that speaks to the issue of whether identification cards of any sort, driver's licences or otherwise, beg duplication on the part of people who have nefarious ideas in mind.

I want to look back into my memory and recall for this House certain teenagers who shall remain nameless, early in the days of the original PCs—I'm talking 20 to 25 years ago—changing their marks in school by hacking into the school computer, breaking into the Pentagon's computers just for fun. And that was then, with a little thing called an IBM PC/XT that probably had a processor somewhat less powerful than the BlackBerry that I have on my belt here today.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Much less.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Right, much less.

Today, we all know about lost laptops with hard drives that contain incredible amounts of very sensitive information. We all know about discarded printouts of sensitive personal data files and misplaced bank databases or huge volumes of data on disks that nobody has disposed of, left in discarded premises from which somebody has

moved. Read the newspaper, listen to the radio; you hear these stories every single day.

1010

I owned and operated a call centre myself for about 15 years during the development and maturation of e-commerce. I personally had some familiarity with things like SQL databases, Oracle databases and a host of others, and trust me—because you can't trust anybody else; that's a bit of a tongue-in-cheek comment—when you're dealing with electronic files, once they get into the wrong hands an incredible amount of damage can be done. I am sure, without knowing for certain, that there are people in this House who have been affected personally by some form of identity theft. This has happened in my family, and I know it can wreak havoc; all this to say that my support is there for the new cards. My support is there, but these licences—or, if I may, data cards—must absolutely be tamperproof or they are as useless as no ID at all. I think that every single member of all parties in this House should bear that in mind as this bill makes its way through committee and back into this House and is passed, as it undoubtedly will be.

We already know that errors exist within the current MTO tracking system that have enabled drivers who have had their driving privileges suspended to be issued new licences. And we know that there are thousands, even tens of thousands—and I've said that I've heard figures as high as hundreds of thousands—more issued driver's licences than there are Ontario drivers. It's a staggering figure.

Can the minister assure the House and the people of Ontario that such mistakes do not happen under the proposed new regime? And will he provide these assurances, not by saying yes, but by having the supplier or suppliers demonstrate the absolute certainty of the system contemplated? I'm not being difficult. "You don't get a second chance to make a first impression," is a saying that I heard a long time ago and it certainly is applicable in this particular case.

There are a number of other questions that are raised by the bill and aspects of the bill that get down to what I'll call niceties, one of them being the fact that there are three cards envisioned: a combined photo card, a basic photo card and an enhanced photo card. I'm taking that to mean that the basic photo card would be a driver's licence without being a driver's licence, i.e., it looks like absolutely anybody else's driver's licence except you can't drive; the second card would be a combined photo card, and I'm taking that to mean it would be that plus a driver's licence; and then an enhanced photo card, which I will assume is the driver's licence, the basic ID, and all of the metrics that are now embedded in our Canadian passports would be embedded in these cards. That is the very issue that I focus on when I express the concerns that I have about security, because in the wrong hands and with the right machinery, an incredible amount of damage can be done.

I recognize as well that time is of the essence and that the people of Ontario cannot afford to have a solution to

the issue of identification become stalled, in this House or anywhere else. We have economic problems in Ontario. We are discussing them from all parties' perspectives in this House during question period every day, in caucus rooms every day, and frankly at dinner tables all over the province every day, as we are on a slide. Different people have different views on why we are on that slide, but there is no question that we have to stop it. One way to stop it is to facilitate the transportation of people, goods and services from this province, outward and back in, and that's why I say that the rapid facilitation of the implementation of these cards or any other electronic measure that would lend itself to improved transportation of goods and people can only be positive. However, the people of Ontario can afford much less to have a system put together that is rife with errors or loopholes.

Earlier this year, the Ontario privacy commissioner, Ann Cavoukian, raised some extremely valid concerns that I am hoping the Minister of Transportation and his staff are taking into account as this project moves forward. The minister raised the issue of what is called radio frequency identification technology—the acronym is RFID—being implanted in the enhanced cards. This technology can be used to store all sorts of information with a simple swipe.

Some of the members here today may actually have cars that start without a key, you just turn a switch, because they carry on their keychain—one is held up for me now by a member opposite. No props in the House, please. You get into your car and turn a switch. Why does that switch work? Because that particular member or anybody else who has one of these cars carries an RFID tag on his keychain or somewhere else on his person. It's only by proximity that this works, and it works very well.

RFID's intended use is to speed up processing at border checkpoints. Cards could emit signals to receivers in customs booths and thus display the vital statistics required. Actually, the technology is, in the parlance of the day, pretty cool, and I happen to be a techno freak. But—and this is a very big "but"—RFID technology in the wrong hands can be used to track the location of individuals carrying enhanced driver's licences due to the radio signals that those cards will emit in response to the appropriate stimulus. That means to say, in plain language, that if you have the right machine, and you push the right button, and someone is nearby with one of these licences, you learn everything there is to know on that card on a screen or printed on a piece of paper. What can you do with that information? A heck of a lot, and by "a heck of a lot," we're talking about damage.

What kind of measures are MTO staff taking to address this concern? Can I pass a scanner that provides anything and everything about me to the wrong person in possession of such a device? The answer is yes. So how do we prevent that, my walking by that scanner and giving away that information? I know we can, but I ask on behalf of every one of us here, not as an opposition

member being critical for criticism's sake, but as a responsible member of provincial Parliament. We need to know what protective measures we can rely on. We need to know this, and this is an urgent aspect of what we are discussing here today. RFID technology does not encrypt or otherwise protect the unique identifying number assigned to the holder of the so-called licence or card and would not protect any other personal information stored on the RFID.

Now, let me elaborate on this a little bit. It's not unlike every single cellphone. Every cellphone transmits a unique number called an electronic serial number. With the right receiver, criminals capture—and this happens all the time—and clone these numbers. Then they clone the phones, and then they ring up bills on the rightful phone owner's account. To extrapolate from that, my licence in the wrong hands gets a criminal across the border potentially, and American computers now have information saying I'm in Buffalo, when I'm not. The phone thing has happened to me. I've been called by my supplier at one time or another and I have been asked, "Were you in Dallas yesterday, Mr. Shurman? And by the way, did you fly from there to Miami?" The answer was, "No, I was in Toronto all day yesterday." "Well, that's interesting, because your telephone registers calls in both Dallas and Miami."

It sounds like I'm digressing; I am not. This is the same concern that I have. Once you transmit numerical information that is unique to an individual—in this case a cellphone; in the case of the bill, one of the new electronic cards—that information going through the air and captured on the right machine can have devastating consequences in the wrong hands, and it's the wrong hands that I worry about.

The combined photo card will meet the applicable rules set out by the United States' western hemisphere travel initiative. These rules are expected to severely limit the types of documentation that will be acceptable for entry into the United States. That's a salient aspect as well.

I happen to have a passport. I am willing to bet that 90%, maybe more, of members of this House have a passport, but it would be interesting to note that the majority of Canadians do not have passports. The majority of Canadians have no need for passports, or up to now have had no need for passports, and given the fact that in the next year there will be a requirement to have a passport or some acceptable documentation that has yet to be defined—maybe this card—but hasn't been accepted by the United States, you'll need a passport to get into the United States as of, I believe, June 2009. For most Canadians who don't have them, it would require them to go out and spend a significant sum of money, and even passports, as I understand it, are under review. So there are an awful lot of implications to just saying, "We're going to have an electronic card," not least of which is the fact that although the main individual involved with national security, Michael Chertoff—I believe his title is Secretary of the United States Depart-

ment of Homeland Security—has said, "Yes, we think this is a good idea," and although this initiative has been test-marketed in British Columbia and is being looked at by a number of our neighbouring provinces, there is no protocol in place as yet that says, "Yes, we, the United States, will accept your card."

1020

Another concern that I want to put on the record is that, unless and until the United States says, "We are prepared to accept the card in place of a passport," why would we want to spend millions and millions of dollars to create this new card? Let's make sure that we have our bases covered.

Finally, and I only have a short time left—less than a minute—I'd like to use this opportunity to address, because this is a transportation bill, the issue that has been raised in a number of other presentations by my fellow members, and that is the use of our roads for tourism. Tourism at this point is something we'll see sadly lacking this summer because people from outside and inside the province are facing the prospect of gas that may rise as high as \$1.50 a litre.

We've presented an initiative from this side that would involve relieving people of sales tax payments at the tourism level—we're talking about hotels, shows and so forth—and I would hope that going forward, before we recess for the summer, the government considers either that or some variation on that theme.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is a pleasure to follow a very thoughtful and informed commentary by my colleague from Thornhill, who held up his driver's licence and noted that it has just been changed and it will likely change again. I also noted that he ran a call centre. I hope it's not he who's been calling me every night at dinner-time. He also pointed out that he's worked with Oracle, SQL Server and probably through the evolution of several generations of operating systems on which those applications ran. He also says—and here's a little inconsistency that I'd like to address. He asks for absolute certainty and says—and I'll use his words—"We will only have one shot to get this right." Well, change will be a constant. The public, the police and the law will continue to wage war against those who would use your identity to steal your life and steal your savings so that they can steal more of your money and that of others.

We are going to have to cope with the evolution of standards, with the change in technology, with the increasing and sophisticated risk of fraud and with evolving security standards and changing practices in how we use ID documents. That means that regardless of what change and what card system we put into place, it, like the currency we carry in our wallets, will change.

As an example of change I'd like to use, in closing, the words of the late Gus Grissom, who said of space flight, just a short time before he burned to death in a pre-launch training accident in 1967, "There's always a chance for a catastrophic accident or a failure. It can hap-

pen on the first mission as well as the last. But you can't let that paralyze you. You get a good crew, you train them well and you go fly." I think that that is very much typical of the approach that this bill takes in a core piece of ID.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to commend my colleague from Thornhill for a great presentation on Bill 85. Obviously, it's quite evident that he understands the legislation: not only the need for it, but the things that are needed to make it work.

Bringing up a point that I think is maybe not part of the bill—in fact, it isn't in the bill—we have to make sure that at the end of the process the reason it was instituted will actually work. If we don't have the commitment of the jurisdictions around us—if you go to all this expense and you create this identification card, you need to know that it will be accepted as identification to travel across the border. I think we need to do whatever we can to make sure we can expediently cross the border, but if this legislation doesn't create that which is needed, then it's all to no avail.

He spoke about the different types of cards. I did have some requests from my local people not too long ago that suggested we should have something in place where you could actually go to the licence office and, if you didn't have a driver's licence, you could get the same identification that you could use. There are people in our province who don't drive and have no need for a driver's licence, but they would like to be able to have identification that way. But if you then include all the information that's required to get a passport to get that same identification card, then we're not solving the problem, because obviously they could go out and get the passport too. So if this isn't going to make it any easier to get than a passport, they might as well get a passport.

But having said that, if we have one that's a combined driver's licence with that information—and I think, even if we didn't need it, there's no reason why that type of information couldn't be on your driver's licence—why do we need a basic photo card, if we have an enhanced photo card? Why would you need two if one will do the job?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I want to commend the member for Thornhill for speaking in detail and voicing his concern about many different aspects.

He spoke about security. I think security is very important to all of us. I don't think the passport is more secure than the card we're going to issue. I think it's very important to create some kind of security mechanism for all the people across the province of Ontario, and across North America, as a matter of fact.

He also spoke about cloning, taking the numbers of cellphones and using them from different parts of the world. It's a very legitimate concern. But, sir, whatever we do in this life, the criminal also has ways and access to technology. They can access it and clone everything. They cloned a human being this time. They can imitate us. They can clone me and clone anyone they want.

I think it's important to raise issues. He also raised the very important issue of talking to the United States about whether they are accepting this card or not. I think the minister and the government of Ontario are not going to issue a card that costs millions of dollars to the people of Ontario without consultation with our neighbouring states to see if they will accept that card or not. I think his concern is legitimate. Hopefully, when we go more in debate and also in the committee, we can figure out a way and all the possibilities to tighten this bill and make it perfect, because, as he mentioned, we cannot jeopardize our security.

Also, we have the first hit. If we don't make it on the first hit, I guess our image would be tarnished. I think it's very important to create a good first impression to all the people, to tell them, "Yes, we are concerned about this issue and we want to create something good for all the people and to a certain degree very secure," that's good for the people and also gives them the chance if they want it or they don't want it.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd also like to add my remarks today to the debate on Bill 85. It's important to my riding of Sarnia–Lambton, being a major tourist area and having a major border crossing there as well. There are a number of Sarnia–Lambton residents who cross the border to our neighbouring jurisdictions and vice versa. We have many tourist attractions there, and also international trade; thousands and thousands of vehicles every day cross that border. So anything we can do to make it easier for our residents of Ontario to do that, and to contribute to security since 9/11, will certainly also be important.

I'd like to commend the member for Thornhill on his remarks. I heard the bulk of it in my office before I came down here and I heard the rest of it as he concluded. I think he made a number of very erudite remarks and points about the legislation, about the security and access to information that will be available in these. I've got a passport as well, but I'm sure I don't have nearly as many stamps on mine as the honourable member from Thornhill. I know he's a world traveller and knows about such things as security and travelling because he's done a lot of travelling around the world, in many different jurisdictions.

1030

I would like to just repeat some of the remarks that other members made on our side of the House and on the government side as well. I support it for all those reasons, with the provisions and issues of security and access to information that the honourable member from Thornhill expressed, as well as a number of other members from the government. At this time I would just like to say that we'll be supporting this bill at the time it comes to a vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member from Thornhill has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you to the various members from all sides of the House who have responded to what I had to say.

Let me make some specific comments. With regard to the points raised by the member from Mississauga–

Streetsville, just an admonition to my friend: Don't be so abject in accepting change as a constant. I know that change is the only constant in the world, but "Always do your best" is what I'd say. That being said, thank you for the support, because I think in essence we're on the same side of the security issue.

My friend the member from Oxford expressed concerns about the whole thing working and being accepted, which was a grand echo of my main points. There is a cost that is attached to the acquisition of a passport, and it is a significant cost for most Canadians. We have heard, although we don't know in great specifics, that there is a cost that will ultimately be attached to the obtaining of this licence. There's also a cost attached to the obtaining of a current driver's licence. So one way or another, we've got to figure out what it is in summary that Ontarians are going to pay to get some kind of card that gets us onto the roads and across borders.

To the member from London-Fanshawe: The security concerns raised were very similar to those raised by the member from Mississauga-Streetsville, and again I'm more in agreement than disagreement insofar as the use of chip technology and trying to be as secure as possible.

Finally, to my good friend on my left from Sarnia-Lambton, who talks passionately about the tourism and trade aspects that very much affect our commerce here in Ontario and notably in his riding, let me assure him that, no, I don't have that many stamps on my passport. With the cost of travel being what it is, it's hard to get around these days.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I welcome the opportunity to stand and speak to Bill 85. I want to say right from the outset that I will be supporting Bill 85.

I'd like to set the record straight, as it were, that passage of this legislation will allow for the creation of a passport alternative. It says that in all things, when one starts a journey, one must take a first step towards the common goals. To me the common goals, certainly in my mind, are to allow for not only the free travel movement of the people of Ontario but also for goods moving around as well.

Many members in the House know how important tourism is to a riding like Huron-Bruce. Certainly agriculture and energy are the two economic drivers, but I can tell you that tourism follows closely on their heels. We also have what I would call a fully mature tourism industry within the riding of Huron-Bruce. We have seen a number of Americans who have chosen to make their summer homes in the riding of Huron-Bruce, along beautiful Lake Huron. I know the Speaker knows all about what I speak of.

I see this as something that the people of Ontario have certainly asked for. When we think about what happened on 9/11, we know that the world changed. How people think of their security and ensuring that they are secure—everyone's vision of that changed on that day. I can recall, as I know we all can, those who are old enough to

remember, what we were doing on the day that it happened. I just wanted to share with the House my story. When 9/11 happened, I was warden of the county and we were sitting in committee and we had been for a number of hours. We received a call from one of our engineers that one of the planes had just hit the first building. So we decided to bring in a TV and watch. I don't think there will ever be a day in my life that I remember quite as clearly as that day—the horror that one felt seeing the devastation in New York City. Really, your sense of what you always thought to be secure—certainly we had a significant shift in our minds in how we perceived our security. You simply could not believe that it could happen. I know that in many countries that have experienced war on their own lands this is something they have experienced over the years, but in North America we had never had anything like that happen before. So we knew from that day going forward that things would change, and they certainly have changed.

But what we must always ensure is that we have, as in all things, a balance. We must ensure that our people have a sense of security while also not creating barriers for the movement of our goods and people, because then we have lost a sense of our economy as well.

One of the facets that I believe will meet the needs of the people of Ontario is that the MTO is proposing four separate products, the first product being a regular driver's licence, which is what we're used to, but with more enhanced security; also an enhanced driver's licence; and a photo card for non-drivers.

I have received over the years a number of letters and calls from my constituents specifically with this concern. The composition of my riding has more seniors, and this is something that has been of concern to them. They no longer have a valid driver's licence, but they know that in today's world you need some type of photo ID. When the driver's licence is gone from their personal belongings, they really don't have any photo ID left. It's my seniors and those in that 16-to-19 range as well, if they don't go with their driver's licence. Even travelling throughout Canada, and the United States as well, one often needs some type of photo ID that can be accepted, not only for banking.

I'm very pleased about this photo card for non-drivers. The Ministry of Transportation has recognized that as a concern of the people of Ontario and it is bringing it forward in these very comprehensive adjustments being made through Bill 85 that speak to that, and also an enhanced photo card for non-drivers.

I'm running out of time and I wanted to give other members the opportunity to speak. But I wanted to get on the record that there is a cost to implement this system. I understand that. But a system going forward that will allow four alternatives to passports I feel is a very significant movement. I want to get on the record as well that there is also a cost for doing nothing.

We recognize that in order to allow for movement, we must begin a much more enhanced program. This comprehensive Bill 85 recognizes that and it will also be

addressing other concerns from our seniors and our young people in bringing forward photo cards for non-drivers. That is why I wanted to take this opportunity to stand in this House and speak to my support for Bill 85. I do thank you for the opportunity to speak and I look forward to the next member's opportunity.

1040

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to join in comments once again this morning on Bill 85, the Photo Card Act. The many comments that we've received this morning from members—it's about this enhanced driver's licence card that would provide citizenship information.

Obviously, we understand that this is all coming from the occurrence of 9/11, the importance of having proper documentation, to protect—in this case, the US is demanding that they have proper identification that they would accept before entering their country.

It's a huge impact financially, we've heard, on our province and tourism. People go back and forth, but not as much as we'd like to. Some people don't have passports. Up to four million people don't have a valid driver's licence. That's the card that most people use when going across, with their birth certificate etc. I'm sure everyone's crossed the border at one point or another.

So we're happy that the government is bringing in the Photo Card Act. We're a little concerned about details and privacy. We just had the member from Thornhill tell us about the new driver's licence that was brought in just a year ago. So we've spent a lot of money bringing in this new driver's licence. Now it's changing again. The fact that this is going to be three new cards—the combined photo card, the basic photo card, the enhanced photo card—is a little confusing for some people. These are details that we need to flush out.

The important part of this legislation is that we need to keep and enhance that flow of cross-border traffic, whether it be tourism, business etc. I've mentioned many times that tourism is certainly critical in my area of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I hope the auto industry continues to be a critical part of our economic stimulus that we have in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, and that's part of this too.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some comments to the member from Huron-Bruce's speech on Bill 85, the Photo Card Act, 2008. I might point out that our lead on this—our transportation critic, the member from Newmarket-Aurora—has yet to deliver his lead, which is the hour-long leadoff speech. We'll look forward to his speech because I'm sure he will have done a lot of research on it and may have thought of things that we haven't thought of.

Basically, our caucus is in general support of this bill. There are concerns to do with privacy that have been raised by privacy commissioners, but certainly the need to keep border traffic moving across the border is vitally important to our economy.

There have been some concerns raised, like why did the government just introduce a new enhanced driver's licence within the past year and now it's proposing this? Does that mean we just changed the whole driver's licence for a year or two? This is supposed to be implemented in June 2009, so I would question whether the money was well spent on the driver's licence which has just been announced.

I think there are some valid concerns about why we need three cards—the combined photo card, the basic photo card and an enhanced photo card. Could it not be done as one card? I would think, why would someone want to get a basic card which doesn't have the enhanced information? So then they go to cross the border and it's not sufficient; it doesn't meet the criteria of the United States western hemisphere travel initiative to actually be able to get across the border. I'd certainly like an explanation from the government as to why they're proposing that.

As I've stated before, we need to also address tourism concerns this summer to address what I think is going to be a very challenging year in tourism in Ontario.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I too want to commend the member from Huron-Bruce for an explanation on the bill. I would agree with her, when she started off first of all by saying that she was going to support the bill.

I think I can almost say the same thing. I do believe it's very important that we bring forward a plan to deal with the border crossing, because when the Americans decide that we have to have this information to get across and all of a sudden all the people in Ontario who don't have a passport can't get across, it's going to be quite detrimental to our tourist industry and so forth. So I support her on that.

I agree that we have to take the first step, but I think it's very important that we also have an idea that that step is going in the right direction. I understand from some of the notes that in fact we have some commitment from homeland security that they would accept something of this nature to get across the border, but I would hope that the government is working on making sure that what is being proposed will in fact be accepted. As with the driver's licence just having been implemented a year ago, it's somewhat concerning to think that we would go through all the cost and the implementation of something that at the end of the day will not be accepted. So it's really important that the government look at making sure that it will be accepted identification for homeland security before we go to all the expense of putting that in place.

But I would agree with the presentation and thank her for the information that was provided.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Questions and comments? The member for Huron-Bruce has two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I do want to thank all of the members who responded to my comments. Certainly, what I'm hearing is that there is a great deal of support for this bill. We understand that there are some out-

standing concerns, but quite frankly, we agree on the path forward; it's just what that path will look like.

I certainly know that the members from across the way have heard from their constituents about the photo ID as well. We know that will address the concerns of many of our constituents who do not have photo ID without a driver's licence.

I welcome quick passage of the bill, and I thank all the members for their comments. We certainly, from this side of the House, do appreciate all your support.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for debate has ended.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce a number of guests to the Legislature today.

On behalf of the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, in the west members' gallery, Catherine Dunne.

On behalf of the member for Simcoe–Grey, in the west members' gallery, Aaron Hunt from Tottenham.

On behalf of the member from Whitby–Oshawa, on behalf of page Hisham Mohammad, in the west members' gallery, Fahmida Banu, his mother; Ilyas Mohammad, his father; Faizah Ilyas, his sister; and Ismath Unissa, his grandmother.

On behalf of page Rachele Lassaline, in the west members' gallery, her mother, Darlene Lassaline; her father, Chuck; and her sister Ella.

On behalf of the member from Scarborough–Agin-court, the grade 5 class from Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic school in Concord and their teacher, Joe Bush.

On behalf of the member for Toronto–Danforth, seated in the Speaker's gallery, His Worship, the mayor of St. Thomas, Cliff Barwick; Catherine Naismith, president of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario; Suzanne Van Bommel and Dawn Doty, on behalf of Alma College; and Grant Head and Brenda Head from Hamilton.

I'd like to welcome all of our guests to the chamber today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Deputy Premier. The International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793, received \$5 million in grants from the McGuinty Liberals between June 2007 and January 2008. That's five million taxpayers' dollars in just seven months. According to Local 793, that \$5 million was 10 times more than any other grant in the skills training infrastructure program. Deputy Premier, who in your

government was responsible for giving Local 793 such a sweet deal?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

1050

Hon. John Milloy: I've been very proud of our government's initiatives when it comes to training apprentices here in this province. As members may be aware, there are a number of different training agencies and community colleges. We have employer training. We also have employer-union training operations in place.

A number of years ago there was a \$25-million program announced by my predecessor, Minister Bentley. There was a request for proposals that went out to union training centres, union-employer training centres, employer training centres. This was an open and transparent process, and I'm very pleased that we were able to assist a number of these training centres in upgrading their equipment and allowing them to provide better training through a system of apprentices across this province. I'm very pleased that we have 50,000 more apprentices in this province and that we're doing our best to ensure that we see more registrants and more entrants into the skilled trades.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: There's nothing much open and transparent about any of this government's transactions. The minister doesn't explain why this one particular union local received 20% of the funding from this one skills training program. Could it be because Local 793 donated \$150,000 to the Working Families Coalition?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member to withdraw that comment. Imputing motives is not parliamentary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That's an unbelievable decision on your part. God, we can't even ask a legitimate question about where taxpayers' money is going? I am not withdrawing, Speaker.

Mr. Tim Hudak: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I appreciate the time that you have spent in the chair. I think you'll recall as a member of the assembly on both sides of the House that this type of question is very typical here in the Ontario Legislative Assembly. All parties have asked this question in the past. I do believe that previous Speakers' rulings have found this question very much in order and I think a very valid point by the member for Leeds–Grenville about how campaign donations have been allocated in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will take it under advisement.

The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I go back to the minister again. Could it be because Gary O'Neill, the business manager of Local 793, was one of the principals of Working Families? I go back to the minister: Why is it that Local 793 is so special that it gets \$5 million and the remaining \$20 million is divided up amongst more than 50 other grant recipients?

Hon. John Milloy: This is quite frankly outrageous. If the honourable member has some proof that he wants to put forward, he should bring it forward. We announced the program. We had a competitive call for bids. It was an open and transparent process which was administered by the public service. There were set criteria that I would be happy to share with the member. Decisions were made based on that by the public service. You cannot stand in this House and impugn the reputation of any individual or organization without facts the way he just has. The member should apologize; if not, the member should produce some proof. Say it outside the House.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Given this government's record of responsibility with taxpayers' dollars, I think we have every legitimate right to raise these issues. Five million dollars in seven short months—one could suggest that's a pretty good return on a \$150,000 investment. Gerry Hughes, who's the executive director of Local 793, puts it even better. This is from Local 793's newsletter. He says, "Incredible! We must be doing something right."

"We all owe huge thanks to business manager Mike Gallagher and his team for their successful lobbying work with the provincial government. Their effort paid off in spades and the 'return on investment' has been phenomenal, something like 5,000%." He's a little off; it's more like 3,333%. Minister, who else got such a great return on their investment, or was it just open to the donors behind Working Families?

Hon. John Milloy: I find it outrageous, coming from a party which did nothing to train apprentices, that they would stand up here and knock a system which has produced 50,000 more apprentices in our province.

The honourable member says, "Who else benefited from it?" Maybe he should look around at his fellow caucus members: How about the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, who received money for the Waterloo training centre to expand their ability to train brick and stone masons; the member from Burlington—\$627,000 to train construction boilermakers and millwrights; the member from Oshawa, whose riding received money for the Oshawa training centre; and the member from Sarnia—\$100,000 to expand the ability to train carpenters?

We need more skilled trades in this province. We have a system of union, union-employer and employer training centres, and I am proud that our government was able to support them in their important work through this fund.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Minister of Finance: To the best of your knowledge, is Ontario now in a recession?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The consensus estimate among the 12 economists whom we routinely consult with says that in spite of the challenges in our economy, the rate of growth today is about 0.9%; it's a very modest rate of growth.

What we need is a federal government that wakes up and understands the importance of the Ontario economy.

We finally heard the federal Minister of Finance yesterday saying that they ought to help the automotive industry. You ought to talk to them and ask why they trashed this province, why Jim Flaherty would run Ontario into the ground.

This government's invested \$1.5 billion in training, which they voted against. In spite of the challenges in the economy, we believe that there will be growth in the economy this year. It will be modest, as we've indicated, and we will continue to monitor it very carefully and make the kinds of investments that that member and—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: I find it passing strange that the finance minister refuses to answer directly a "yes" or "no" question—whether Ontario is currently in a state of recession. I think the finance minister has information at his hand as he prepares his upcoming reports. I'd ask him to share that data immediately with the Legislature.

Those who know that there's a Dalton McGuinty recession in the province of Ontario are the 2,600 GM workers who have permanently lost their jobs in Oshawa; it is the 200 workers at Hallmark in Toronto who just found that they've permanently lost their jobs; it is half the workforce at Lafarge in Oxford county who've just found out they've lost their jobs in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario as part of the Dalton McGuinty recession.

I know the finance minister is anxious to recess this Legislature for the summer because he knows that bad news keeps coming about Dalton McGuinty's mismanagement of the economy. Before we recess, Finance Minister, will you table a mini-budget to state the updated finances of the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Whenever an Ontarian loses a job, this government is concerned. That's why we invested in GM—and you voted against it; that member voted against it. That's why this government has worked with the CAW and with all companies across Ontario to help ensure that we can overcome the challenge of a dollar that's above par, of oil that's in the vicinity of \$120, of the state of the US economy—all factors that all economists have cited.

There are challenges, no question, but there's also news the member didn't talk about. He didn't talk about 100,000 net new high-paying jobs in Ontario in the last year. He didn't talk about the fact that unemployment this year is lower than it was at this time last year. He didn't talk about the fact that when he left office the unemployment rate was 7%; today, it's 6.3%. We'll be there for the unemployed in this province, unlike—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: No doubt the 200,000 families who are now without well-paying manufacturing jobs are deeply grateful that the finance minister is concerned. Do you know what they want, Finance Minister? They want to see some action. They want to see a plan. They want to see you turn this economy around and get us out of the Dalton McGuinty recession.

In your own budget you predicted GDP growth of 1.1%; Toronto Dominion says that it is barely half that, crawling at 0.5% at best. You predicted in your budget that oil would be \$85 a barrel; today it hovers around \$125 a barrel. You projected a retail sales rate of 3.4%; TD says that it is barely half that.

Finance Minister, your projections have as much bearing in reality as your campaign promises do. I ask you one last time, given the ongoing layoffs in the province of Ontario, given the impacts of the Dalton McGuinty recession on working families, will you rise in your place before we recess for the summer—

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

1100

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There's no doubt that there are challenges, but the member forgets some other statistics that are actually performing better than they were: retail sales up 5.5% ahead of what we projected; wages up 5.1%; housing starts up 18.9%.

This government and this party are standing behind those people who are facing the challenges of this economy. This government has stood up and done that.

One thing we do need is fairness in employment insurance. One of those GM workers in Oshawa will get \$4,000 a year less in employment insurance benefits than a worker in other parts of the country.

As long as there are challenges in the economy, this government will continue to stand up with those families and communities that are suffering. We only wish that party and the federal government would stand with those people and with this government.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Deputy Premier. About two and a half years ago, with much fanfare, the McGuinty government announced a \$235-million investment in General Motors in Oshawa. In February of this year, General Motors unveiled their new fuel-efficient hybrid-powered Sierra pickup truck and announced it would go into production this fall. This is exactly the kind of next-generation, fuel-efficient, hybrid-powered pickup truck that should be built in Ontario by Ontario workers, but it's not going to be.

My question is this: How could the McGuinty government give General Motors \$235 million of the people's money and not get a guarantee that this vehicle would be built in Oshawa by workers from Oshawa?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: There is no question that what Ontario is looking for are companies to invest in the future products that the whole world will want. Yes, that does include hybrid trucks, and yes, our discussion with General Motors is and was, all of last week and for several days now—any opportunity that we will have with General Motors, with Toyota, with Honda, with Chrysler, with Ford, with any of our new automotive

companies yet to invest in Ontario, we do want the next generation of automobile to be built in Ontario.

That is why we've launched a \$1.15-billion Next Generation of Jobs Fund. When this fund begins to roll out, as it already has with other sectors, I would look to this member to support the fund, to support our ability to go out and chase investments, to bring them right here to Ontario.

Mr. Howard Hampton: There are some things that are passing strange here.

I want to quote one Dalton McGuinty, May 7, from the Hansard of this place, the assembly: "GM has chosen to make its first-ever hybrid truck in Ontario."

Dalton McGuinty, May 13, here, in this Legislature: "We've learned recently that GM is going to produce its first-ever hybrid truck in North America here in Ontario."

But there's another story that the workers in Oshawa tell. Yes, all of the technology, the development, for this new fuel-efficient truck was done in Oshawa by Oshawa workers. Yes, the McGuinty government handed over \$235 million. But the Oshawa workers say it's not going to be built in Oshawa; it's going to be built somewhere else.

So tell us, how can the Premier be promising one thing, handing over \$235 million—the workers do the work, but the—

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think we should be clear here about the kind of investment that General Motors has made in Ontario. The largest single investment by an automotive company in Canada is in fact the Beacon project. That was a \$2.5-billion program. Where did it come? It came to Ontario. Why did it come? It came because of our automotive investment strategy. And let me say this: All of the developments at the Oshawa car plants are a direct result of that.

The very fact that we have a flex line that is going to allow General Motors to change their products as consumer demand is changing—which is very obvious to many of us today. We know that there are other parts that are very challenging. We also know that we plant our flag in the automotive sector as a very strong component of Ontario's manufacturing sector, and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I heard lots of words, but no answer to the question. Those workers in Oshawa did the engineering and development work. They built the hybrid that was unveiled in Chicago in February. Some of the \$235 million the McGuinty government gave to General Motors was used to do that development work. But the workers in Oshawa know that this truck is going to Mexico.

So I ask again, how could the McGuinty government give \$235 million to GM? How could the Premier go around the province saying this truck is going to be built in Ontario? We find out today you had no job guarantees, no product guarantees; it's going to Mexico. How could

the McGuinty government be so incompetent as to allow that to happen?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think we should be clear here. If there is more than one partner that we have had in the automotive sector, it's been the workers who work in the automotive sector. That is not what I can say about this particular member of the House. I would ask this particular member, when is the last time you talked to the leader of the CAW and asked him his view of the Ontario government's role in developing investments in the automotive sector? I would just ask him that question.

If there has been a government that has been on the side of workers in automotive, it has been this government, the likes of which the CAW has never seen. I will say today that we are on the side of workers. We want all of the investments to be in Ontario and we will continue to fight to see that that happens, unlike this member, who continues to vote against every single initiative that comes forward to help the very sector that he purports—

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

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Acting Premier: I actually went out and met with some of those workers in Oshawa yesterday who are going to be losing their jobs, thanks to the incompetence of the McGuinty government.

I still have not heard an answer. The Oshawa workers know what's going on. Two hundred and thirty-five million dollars of the people's money went from the McGuinty government to General Motors. The Premier, in this House and across Ontario, goes around saying, "Oh, the new, fuel-efficient, next-generation-hybrid Sierra pickup truck is going to be built in Oshawa." The workers there do all the development work, but guess what? The McGuinty government didn't get any job or product guarantees, so the truck is going to Mexico. I ask again, how could any government be so incompetent as to allow that to happen?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think that we have to point the finger at a couple of parties in this House that have refused to support the automotive sector. We stepped forward with an automotive investment strategy and we asked every member in this House to support Ford, to support Chrysler, to support General Motors, to support Toyota, to support Honda. On every single front, your answer was no, no, no, no, and no.

The result today is that we have more investment that has come to this jurisdiction than any other jurisdiction in North America.

Does this sector face challenges? We are the first to understand that it is undergoing some dramatic shifting. The reality is that we want our workers working in our plants. We will continue to fight to see that that happens, more so than any other jurisdiction on this continent.

Mr. Howard Hampton: What is so unbelievable about this is that 2,600 workers, who just won an award yesterday—the Oshawa truck plant, tops in the group in efficiency and quality—the workers who developed the very truck that was put on display in Chicago by General Motors, the very workers who have won all these awards for efficiency and quality, have been sold out by the McGuinty government.

You gave \$235 million to General Motors and you got no product guarantee and no jobs guarantee. Those workers want to know: What are you going to do now? What are you going to do to ensure that that \$235 million, those jobs, that next-generation truck, stays in Oshawa? Are you going to stand up to GM or not?

1110

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think we've made our position more than clear: Not only will we stand up for General Motors, we stand up for CAW workers, we stand up for Ford, Chrysler, Toyota, Honda and any world company that wants to bring investment to this province. We will stand up for them because that means good jobs for our families.

We understand the challenges that General Motors faces today. Let me say this: He purports to speak for the CAW; let me ask him if he supports Buzz Hargrove when he says, "We need both levels of government engaged in order to keep our share of future investment and jobs." And, "Without provincial support (including its participation in GM's Beacon project), the situation facing the industry today would be far, far worse." Do you agree with Buzz Hargrove? Do you agree with that statement?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think Mr. Hargrove will have his own questions he'll have to answer, and he'll have to answer them someplace. But I'd like to get an answer from the McGuinty government. Here is the reality: There's \$235 million of Ontario money that went into the GM plant in Oshawa, there's \$200 million of federal money that went into the General Motors plant in Oshawa, and the development work was done on the truck. I don't disagree with making those investments, but I think if you're going to make those investments, you should get job guarantees and product guarantees. What is the McGuinty government going to do to force General Motors to live up to the obligation? They've got the money; the truck was developed in Oshawa. Are you going to force them to produce that truck in Oshawa and sustain Ontario jobs?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Let me say this again: We understand that the Beacon project that we've participated in did not include the truck product. What we were very heartened to see is the innovation that exists at General Motors, at their engineering centre right here in Oshawa, one of their best engineering centres in world-wide GM, they have the capability to develop the hybrid truck. We want that production in Ontario. We want it to stay here. The fact that it's moving, the fact that we understand the challenges in the industry and what it's

facing today—we will continue to work with General Motors and with the CAW.

We recognize those challenges and we want them to be strong. We understand that our workers today are facing serious challenges. So let me say once again, when it comes time to vote, to put your money where your mouth is, will you stand with the CAW workers or will you stand—

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

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Attorney General. Yesterday, through our transportation critic, Frank Klees, we heard that the driver responsible for David Virgoe's death because of street racing was sentenced to two years of house arrest.

When this Legislature passed its own street racing legislation, we sent a clear message to the public and the courts that the province was going to crack down on this criminal activity with a heavy hand. The leniency of the sentence handed down to the individual responsible for David Virgoe's death is an insult to the will and intent expressed by this House and the people of Ontario. Minister, what are you going to do to ensure that the message sent by this House is heard loud and clear in our courtrooms?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As the member, who is a former Solicitor General, knows, first of all, we prosecuted this case to the full extent of the law. We made submissions in court. Those submissions were not accepted in court. A judge made an independent decision. We are obtaining and awaiting the report of the trial crown before we decide on the appeal issue.

Our government has made it clear, both with provincial legislation and in prosecuting federal legislation, which this is, that we take these matters very seriously. We prosecute them to the full extent of the law. We take a strong position in favour of public safety on these and all matters at all times.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I appreciate the Attorney General's comments, but waiting for a possible appeal to wind its way through the courts will not send a clear message to the hotshot speeders who are going to take to our highways this summer that street racing is a one-way ticket, and should be a one-way ticket, to jail.

Debbie Virgoe, David Virgoe's widow, is in the House today, and I would ask you to tell her that her husband's death will not be in vain.

Attorney General, will your government provide unanimous consent to a resolution calling on the federal government to impose a mandatory minimum jail sentence for deaths caused by street racing? Will you do that?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the widow and to the family, our hearts go out for a terrible loss in a terrible case. There is nothing we can say that will change that loss.

We have been clear in this House—on all sides—in our courts, through the prosecutors, and in the position that we have taken publicly through the media that we will take a tough stand on any form of driving offence, whether it's under federal legislation or under provincial legislation. We will continue to take that tough stand. We took it in this case and we will continue, whether it's under federal or provincial legislation.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Acting Premier. It's not just about auto jobs moving to Mexico. The Hallmark Canada production facility in North York closed its doors Wednesday, putting 200 more manufacturing workers on the street. Announcements like these seem to be an everyday reality in the Dalton McGuinty government. What is the Premier going to do now: send Hallmark a sympathy card? When will this government admit that its jobs plan isn't worth the paper it's printed on?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: What this government recognized some time ago is that we need all hands on deck when it comes to working with our manufacturing sector. That includes the federal government; that includes every member on all sides of this House.

When budgets are tabled in this very House that speak to things like our skills strategy to reach out to workers who are going to need retraining to work in other areas, we expect full support by all members of this House. And let me be clear: Workers out there who are losing their jobs, individuals who work on those plant floors, who are at Hallmark or at Canac Kitchens, any of those—we feel for those people, and we ask, "How can we help?" That means that when we reach out with our programs, we want to go to them and say, "Every member of the provincial Legislature wants to support a program like this." But we'll watch your voting record very carefully to see how you support the workers that you purport to care for.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the minister for keeping an eye on me.

Kind words won't put food on the table. New Democrats put forward Bill 6 and Bill 71 that would protect workers' severance payouts after mass layoffs like the one at Hallmark. The Premier himself said he would review our bill in this House. He said he'd review it. For Hallmark workers, it would mean 20 weeks' notice, better retaining options and two weeks' severance pay for each year of employment.

Since the government is incapable of saving manufacturing jobs, the least it could do is make the lives after layoffs slightly better. Why won't this government pass Bill 6 and Bill 71 immediately to help the people of this province who are in dire need?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: For the member's information, Ontario is the only province in the country with statutory

severance pay obligations. No other province requires employers to provide statutory severance pay. What the member wants to do with one of his private member's bills is put a tax on the very employers that are providing these jobs for these individuals.

We are leading the country. We are working with other Ministers of Labour across this country and going after Ottawa to ensure that they provide the protections under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act that these workers need. We're taking leadership on this issue—

Interjections.

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

The member from Stoney Creek will come to order, and please be reminded: When you ask a question, please listen to the response.

1120

TUITION

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is directed to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Hamilton is the proud home of excellent post-secondary education institutions like McMaster University and Mohawk College. In my riding and across the province, post-secondary education tuition fees continue to increase year over year, bringing the average undergraduate tuition fee for a university student to about \$4,500 and the average tuition fee for a regular college program to just over \$1,900.

Minister, what measures are you taking to keep tuition rates from climbing and to ensure Ontario students have access to affordable, quality education?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to begin by congratulating the member on her support for post-secondary education, particularly in the Hamilton area. She's joined by my colleague the Minister of Government and Consumer Services in her advocacy for both McMaster and Mohawk.

The member raises a very important point about tuition fees being faced by students. I was very proud that our government, upon entry into office, instituted a two-year tuition freeze in order to bring forth a fair tuition framework under which tuition fees are capped at 5% annually. What this means is that annual increases are limited to about \$100 for almost 85% of college students and \$200 for 70% of university students. The new tuition fee framework fulfills our commitment that for every dollar we ask in tuition to put forward—

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

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is again to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. McMaster University, Mohawk College and other Ontario post-secondary institutions offer a variety of programs that enhance the skills and training of our students, playing an important role in helping them prepare for the future in the workforce. However, increasing costs mean that programs become unaffordable to some individuals.

As well, once students graduate and begin looking for employment, they're often saddled with student debt.

Minister, I know this government wants to move forward without leaving people behind. Could you tell this House what financial assistance is available to students in my community and across the province to assist in the costs of obtaining a post-secondary education?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very proud, after the horrendous cuts of the previous two governments, that our government came forward with one of the greatest investments in post-secondary education in Ontario's history: \$6.2 billion. Part of that investment was \$1.5 billion specifically aimed at student aid. Through this, we've tripled the number of grants available to students, with one in four, approximately 120,000 in Ontario, now receiving non-repayable grants. We've increased OSAP maximums by 27% for the first time in 12 years, and we've limited the student's annual repayment debt to \$7,000 through the Ontario student opportunity grant program. Additionally, once a student has graduated, we provide debt management measures to students struggling to repay their loans.

I'm pleased with the supports we've offered students, and we're going to continue to work to make sure that finances are never—

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

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health. Yesterday our party introduced an opposition day motion calling for a public inquiry and investigation concerning the deaths in hospitals attributable to *C. difficile*. Regrettably, public confidence in our health system has been shattered as we learn of past and new outbreaks. This week we heard about St. Mike's, and up in Alliston.

I ask the minister today, will you restore public confidence in our health system and support our call for an investigation and a public inquiry to determine what happened and how we can plan for the future to contain outbreaks?

Hon. George Smitherman: The future is now, and the proposal of the honourable member is to invite people to stop their work and spend time in inquiry and investigation when all of those knowledgeable in the subject, including the coroner's office, offer us the advice that the information that is required on the part of the health care system to respond appropriately is before us.

Accordingly, our strategy is to act. Dr. Michael Baker will lead these efforts on behalf of the patients in the province of Ontario, and a key part of the strategy will be to offer a dramatic rise in the amount of information that's available to the public in public reporting mechanisms on a wide variety of patient safety indicators. We feel that this is the approach that will allow us to make the most progress the fastest on behalf of the 13 million Ontarians.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: The time for action is long overdue. Regrettably, the minister was negligent in his duties, having known about this since 2004. In order to restore public confidence in the health system, which I can tell you has been seriously eroded—and last night there was a meeting at the Burlington hospital where we've had at least 62 people die from C. difficile. People begged for information, transparency; they want to know why their loved ones died, and they want to make sure that it doesn't happen to anybody else.

It is time. These outbreaks occurred throughout the entire province; it is time to restore confidence. I call upon you: Be accountable. Will you support this inquiry, which can go on at the same time as everything else is going on?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member pretends that the leadership time of individuals is expandable and isn't watered down when you're asked to do a variety of things at the same time. This is an artificial premise. More to the point, it's the honourable member who seems only now to have awakened to the reality of C. difficile, by the way that she presents information on this issue.

Indeed, the problems in the health care system associated with superbugs are ones that hospitals must grapple with every single day. Only vigilance on the part of those who are in the environment—who are patients, who are visitors, and especially amongst those who work there—can produce the results necessary on behalf of patients.

The honourable member, in the second part of her question, asked about transparency. You see that the response to our plan to bring a wide variety of patient safety information into the public domain has been well received, and some people have said it's too ambitious; but we do it on behalf of patients, because—

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

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I have a question for the Minister of Correctional Services. On Monday, Minister, I asked about the cruel treatment of Fahim Ahmad, Zakaria Amara and Mohammed Dirie, who have languished in solitary confinement for two years. These three men have never been convicted or tried for anything. You, Minister, responded by saying that it was a matter of federal jurisdiction. In your hand you have the letter from Stockwell Day, federal minister, saying that Minister Bartolucci's ministry has jurisdiction over individuals on remand or awaiting trial or sentencing. Given your jurisdictional authority, why won't you end the cruel treatment of these three men and release them from solitary confinement?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member for the question, because I think some clarification is necessary. Inmates who are placed in segregation are entitled under law to just and humane treatment and

receive specific services and activities that include the right to daily outdoor exercise; access to legal counsel, services and materials; access to clergy and spiritual advisers; visitation with family members, relatives and friends; and access to telephone services—to mention only a few. Every inmate within the correctional services system is granted those rights if, in fact, they're in segregation.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The answers keep getting a lot more interesting. You have power to end this punitive treatment of these three men. You can follow the standards that have been set out by the Supreme Court, or Corrections Canada, or the United Nations. Can you table a directive or an order that gives you the right to punish these men when they have no reason to be punished through segregation? Will you treat them properly and release them from segregation into the general population?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: First of all, I outlined a few of the rights that people in segregation have. Let me continue with that: They have access to library materials, institutional programs, the opportunity to buy items from institutional canteens with personal funds etc. These people's rights are being respected. We will not interfere with the operational matters of any correctional services, because that would be inappropriate.

Interjections.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: They can yell all they want. They may not have confidence in correctional services. We have confidence in the correctional services system.

1130

VOLUNTEERS

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Members of all three parties have been happy to attend Ontario Volunteer Service Award ceremonies in our ridings. Minister, when you joined us for our local ceremony in Kitchener, we recognized volunteers who had served five, 10, even 60 years with the same organization. However, some recent statistics have identified a concerning trend: The number of volunteer hours given each year is increasing but the total number of volunteers is in decline. In my riding, the Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington does a wonderful job of promoting volunteerism. What is your ministry doing to foster volunteerism in the province, and how will this affect my riding of Guelph?

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member for her question. In order to help promote volunteerism and increase the visibility of volunteer opportunities, my ministry has developed unique partnerships with 60 different volunteer organizations. These partnerships promote volunteerism, develop inclusive volunteer opportunities for Ontario's diverse communities and provide a forum for sharing best practices.

Partnerships in small and medium-sized organizations like the Guelph-Wellington volunteer centre help secure volunteers for generations to come. Recently, in con-

junction with National Volunteer Week, I had the privilege of visiting these organizations. I was pleased to see the innovative programs, insightful resources and enthusiastic staff.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I too am very proud of the Guelph-Wellington volunteer centre. They have an exemplary record of matching the skills of volunteers to the organization's needs and of working with local organizations to develop their volunteer capacity. However, the average age of volunteers in Ontario is increasing. In many organizations, seniors do most of the work. We need more young volunteers.

Minister, outside the required 40 hours of volunteerism for high school students, how is your ministry making certain that volunteerism in Ontario is a value that passes down from generation to generation, and that we maintain our volunteer base?

Hon. Michael Chan: I understand the member's concern, and let me assure you, the spirit of volunteerism is alive and well in Ontario.

My ministry is working on a partnership project in Kitchener-Waterloo called Engaging Youth from Diverse Ethno-Cultural Communities: A Working Model. This project encourages youth to volunteer within their communities and build leadership skills.

Recently, a youth aged 13 gave this reason to volunteer: "I could inspire other people and teach others how easy it truly is." Simply put, youth are becoming more engaged.

Finally, let me leave you with a quote from another youth who I believe spoke very eloquently, explaining why youth volunteer: "Leaving a legacy for other children and youth to learn and grow from."

CONSERVATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the minister responsible for the Ontario Realty Corp. Through the Ontario Realty Corp., your ministry will be participating in an open house meeting on June 11 in Stoney Creek to discuss the Eramosa karst. Will the minister direct the ORC to announce at that meeting that the 92 acres of environmentally sensitive land to the east of the Eramosa karst will be permanently protected as part of the Eramosa Karst Conservation Area?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member for the question, because I did have an opportunity to attend and to present the deed, with former member Jennifer Mossop, to the conservation authority to protect the karst.

The member should know that it is early in the process and no decision has been made on the future of the property. The realty corporation is currently studying the lands from a number of perspectives. They've taken on a number of experts around archaeological, environmental, hydrogeological and planning to determine what the future protected lands should be, what the future use should be. In fact, I'm told that Rita Giulietti, spokesperson for the Friends of the Eramosa Karst, commented on the progress to date, that "she's glad to see the province's

Ontario Realty Corp. is conducting a thorough review of the four properties it owns near the existing 73-hectare park."

Mr. Tim Hudak: Minister, the concern is that the 2008-09 provincial budget says the ORC is required to contribute to the \$701 million in sales and rentals for this fiscal year. Stoney Creek residents and others who care about the future of this environmentally sensitive land are very concerned that you will sell off some of that sensitive land in order to meet the budget targets assigned to you by the finance minister.

My colleague from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, Mr. Miller, and I have both toured the karst. We share those concerns. You have the authority to direct the ORC. You have the ability to build on the good work of former member Brad Clark of the previous PC government and the good work of Jennifer Mossop that you've also continued as minister. Why don't you build on that good work that has involved both our parties and dedicate the remaining lands to be permanently protected as part of the Eramosa Karst Conservation Area?

Hon. David Caplan: Nice try, I say to the member opposite. In fact, the member knows that the lands in question are already designated for urban development in the official plan of the city of Hamilton. The Hamilton Conservation Authority and the province have already established very strict environmental criteria for permitting development in this area. That's why the Ontario Realty Corp. has taken the steps that it has—to engage experts on karsts, on hydrogeological features, on archaeology, on conservation and planning—to provide the best advice possible as to which lands need to be protected, as we have done previously with the 73 hectares that we have put in perpetuity through a deed transferred to the local Eramosa Karst Conservation Area. I do acknowledge that there is great interest locally, and that is why—

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

CONSERVATION

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is also to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. On several occasions I've raised in this House the issue of the Eramosa karst feeder lands. These feeder lands are essential to the life of the Eramosa karst. Any development could cause the feeder water system to dry up, causing the death of the Eramosa caves. This is the best example of the karsts created in Ontario after the last glaciers retreated.

I invite this minister to visit the Friends of the Eramosa Karst website and to come to the official opening of the Eramosa Karst Conservation Area on Friday, June 20, at 2 o'clock to gain a real appreciation of the need to protect the feeder lands.

Why won't this government protect these lands now by handing them over to the Hamilton Conservation Authority? It's well within your jurisdiction.

Hon. David Caplan: I'm glad that this member and the one who asked the previous question have finally

taken an interest in these very important lands. I can tell you that on previous occasions I have been to the karst, I have walked the land. I know that Minister Cansfield and my colleague from Hamilton Mountain quite recently toured the Eramosa karst. It's an important hydrogeological feature. That is why this government ensured that 73 hectares of land—very sensitive karst lands—were placed in perpetuity in the deed given over to the Eramosa Karst Conservation Area. That is why the Ontario Realty Corp. is working with the friends of the karst, with the local community, with the city of Hamilton and with the conservation authority, bringing in renowned world experts to provide the very best advice and guidance as to what lands should be protected. The—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: My colleague Mr. Hudak and I are very concerned about the public information consultation number one that is happening on June 11. This consultation should be focused on the protection of the Eramosa karst feeder lands, not on any other interested parties like developers. Will this minister guarantee that the Eramosa karst feeder lands are on the list to be protected forever?

1140

Hon. David Caplan: It's very instructive when Rita Giulietti, a spokesperson for the Friends of the Eramosa Karst, commented on our progress today. She said, and I know the member opposite would want to hear this, that she's "glad to see the province's Ontario Realty Corporation ... is conducting a thorough review of four properties it owns near the existing 73-hectare park." In fact, I know this member doesn't, and previously his party doesn't, like to consult the public. This government and our agencies certainly like to work with our colleagues, whether it's with the city of Hamilton, our stakeholders through the conservation authorities or local residents. I can assure this member that the ORC studies and the thorough review that they are doing for the best—

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

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. As a result of 9/11, very serious concerns have been raised about cross-border trade and travel. Times have changed and so has the identification required to cross the border. I've heard numerous calls from my constituents about this issue of photo identification cards and, quite honestly, they're very confused about this. They've heard conflicting reports of what is needed to cross the border. Some have heard that they can no longer use their driver's licence as proper ID. Some have heard that the Ministry of Citizenship is requesting to have a chip in there.

I'd like to ask the minister the following question: Could he clarify for this House what exactly his Photo Card Act legislation will do to ease the concerns?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I will share with the member what we hope to accomplish with this legislation. He would know that as of June 2009—that's not until next year—the western hemisphere travel initiative land and sea rules come into effect, and all individuals at that time looking to enter or re-enter the United States by land or sea will require a passport or passport alternative. This is why we've introduced legislation that, if passed, will give the government authority to implement a new enhanced security driver's licence.

There are more than four million people in Ontario who do not hold a valid driver's licence. That's why we've also proposed a photo ID card which would give people who do not drive the option of obtaining a convenient government-issued photo card. Non-drivers who are citizens may also obtain an enhanced photo ID card to be used at the US border.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: My question again is for our great Minister of Transportation. In the previous answer given by the minister, he spoke about two different kinds of cards being proposed in this legislation. I'm sure that the constituents of my riding will be interested to know that if this is passed, they will be able to obtain such documents and that these proposed documents can be used as an alternative to a passport.

I'm hoping that the Minister of Transportation can provide this House with more details on these cards and how one can apply for these cards if this legislation is passed. In short, I'm asking the minister to please consider streamlining this process so that this application process can be made as easy as possible for our constituents.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's an excellent question. It is actually the creation of three separate products being proposed through the photo card legislation. The first is an enhancement of the new and improved driver's licence that was rolled out in December 2007. This enhanced driver's licence is a voluntary option, and it will be available for the regular fee, with a fee on top of that, and would be valid for the same five-year time period. Initial rollout will be available in major sites across Ontario, and the application process will be set up to meet WHTI requirements at border crossings.

The second product is the photo ID card. This is an optional card for those who do not have a driver's licence but may require government-issued ID. There's a third product which is an enhanced version of the photo ID card. This would allow the cardholders to use it as proper—

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

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, I'm sure it would be impossible for you to not know what's transpiring in the auto sector as a whole. The writing has been on the wall for a number of years. I've tried, through methods in this chamber,

to highlight the concerns within that industry, and it has been falling out the way I predicted.

Minister, one of the things that took place yesterday was that Buzz Hargrove specifically mentioned that your ministry was becoming involved, or was going to be asked to become involved, with the CAW, assisting in the contractual obligations with the contract between the CAW and General Motors. Can you enlighten us as to what your ministry is doing?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think the member realizes that this government shares his concerns, as a member who has a number of constituents who are personally impacted by this, for those workers and their families. Obviously, that's our first priority.

As Minister of Labour, of course, I can't get directly involved in discussions and negotiations going on between employers and their workers and representatives. However, our Ministry of Labour officials are available upon request from either or both parties to assist in any way they can to ensure the parties are able to reach resolution on some of these very complex and important issues.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I thank the minister for the response. It was very specific in mentioning some of the branches or the options that may be available through the Ministry of Labour. Can you enlighten this Legislature as to specifically what options the ministry can enhance or work with to make sure that the contractual obligations are followed through with?

Hon. Brad Duguid: We fully expect GM, as we would any employer across this province but in particular the auto companies, to fulfill all of its obligations with regard to its collective agreements, in particular with regard to the treatment of employees for severance, layoff and termination responsibilities. However, if any of the parties wish to ask for the assistance of the ministry, we are there; we're eager. We have some of the best mediators in the country, who would be more than happy to assist the parties in any way they can as they work through this very difficult time.

As I said, the McGuinty government stands with the auto workers of this province. We recognize the important contribution they've made to our economy. We sympathize with the difficult time that they're going through right now, and certainly our ministry officials would be available to help in any way they can.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Minister of Culture: Designating the Alma College a heritage site would have meant better upkeep that would have prevented the fire that gutted that architectural marvel.

This morning, the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, the mayor of St. Thomas and concerned citizens were here asking for a proactive approach to preserving heritage properties. They don't want what happened at Alma College to happen again.

Will the minister agree to launch a provincial review into the protection and designation of heritage sites in this province?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I know I am joined by everyone in the House in our sadness at the loss of the beautiful and historic building which was Alma College. I realize what a difficult time it must be for alumni and citizens of St. Thomas as they work through this loss.

However, Alma College faced a number of serious challenges, including the fact that it was in an advanced state of deterioration. The city had recognized the heritage value; they had designated. However, the building was allowed to deteriorate over a long period of time, and when it was brought to the attention of the OMB, which was asked to settle the dispute, a structural engineer at that time advised the OMB that it was in such a state of disrepair that the cost to rehabilitate was prohibitive, and the fact that there was no alternative use being proposed made their perspective very difficult to agree with.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Minister, as you well know, given those circumstances, in order to protect that building and those like it, it's going to require provincial intervention with cash. What concerned citizens have asked is that an Alma College heritage foundation fund be set up and operated by the province to preserve and protect heritage sites across Ontario.

Will you agree to establish this fund to ensure that heritage properties across Ontario don't meet the same fate as Alma College?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: The Ontario Heritage Act was reviewed and updated by this government less than two years ago. Considerable improvements and strategies were built into that act.

In addition to that, in 2006, the province, my ministry as it then was, was very proactive in setting up a working group among the owner, the city of St. Thomas and ministry officials to look for and find solutions that might have assisted with the situation of Alma College. However, as I have mentioned—also it should be noted that the current owner walked away from those working group efforts—as I have noted, it was a sad case that this building was allowed to deteriorate. But it had been deteriorating over a long period of time, and it was far too late, in the opinion of structural engineers or any of the experts, to move in and assist the building, which would have been prohibitive in cost.

If I may just continue a moment, and that is to say that we have created a new act. We have a new process. We have given municipalities the ability to—

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

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank the members of the congregation of Walkerton Pentecostal Church for sending this petition to me.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

“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’m signing it.

1150

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario’s health care delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

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

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

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

“We call on the government of Ontario:

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

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

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it, and send it with page Alie.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I have a petition from parents and grandparents of St. Albert and surrounding area.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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 their grandparents; and

“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 grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

“Whereas 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, 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 add my name to this petition.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Paul Miller: “We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We call on the government of Ontario, the Minister of Education, to approve Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board’s business plan to build a new Winona public school in the community of Winona; that approval and funding be allocated expeditiously and with great urgency so that construction can commence immediately;

“We are calling on the government to live up to their promise for ‘excellence in the public education system,’ that our children will be put first and to ensure that schools are safe and healthy;

“We call on the government to provide the children of the Winona community an opportunity to learn, grow and unite in a new Winona public school that is desperately required to meet and address the pressures and conditions they are currently facing, and that are placing them at risk.”

I agree with this petition and affix my name to it.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition goes in tandem with Bill 56, which was introduced as a private member’s bill by the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition 100% and I’m delighted to sign it.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

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

“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.”

PROTECTION FOR MINERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of Sudbury.

“Whereas the current legislation contained in the Occupational Health and Safety Act and regulations for mines and mining plants does not adequately protect the lives of miners, we request revisions to the act;

“Lyle Everett Defoe and the scoop tram he was operating fell 150 feet down an open stope (July 23, 2007). Lyle was 25 years and 15 days old when he was killed at Xstrata Kidd Creek mine site, Timmins....

“The stope where Lyle was killed was protected by a length of orange plastic snow fence and a rope with a warning sign. These barriers would not have been visible if the bucket of the scoop tram was raised. Lyle’s body was recovered from behind the scoop tram.

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

“Concrete berms must be mandatory to protect all open stopes and raises;

“All miners and contractors working underground must have working communication devices and personal locators;

“All equipment involved in injuries and fatalities must be recovered and examined unless such recovery would endanger the lives of others; and

“The entire act must be reviewed and amended to better protect underground workers.”

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

HOSPITAL FUNDING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service that our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fast-growing communities of west Durham; and

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

I shall affix my signature to this and pass it to Doaa.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of Hamilton and Burlington.

“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;

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

“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 fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it with page Christopher.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have the last batch of petitions, from the riding of Peterborough.

“Children and Smoke-Free Cars—Support Bill 11

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Any further petitions? The time for petitions is about to expire.

This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1203 to 1300.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Norm Miller: The forestry sector in this province has long had a world-renowned platinum standard for excellence, a record that began under another government with the largest conservation efforts our province has ever seen.

Our forest management practices have worked in support of endangered species, and the science proves that species have been brought back from the brink under current forestry practices—species like caribou, red-shouldered hawks and bald eagles.

A few weeks ago, the McGuinty government sent clear signals to the forestry sector that it would not honour its commitment to provide for a long-term regulation under their new Endangered Species Act. The industry was in shock, as it had been working in good faith with the ministry in the development of regulations that would recognize current forest management plans.

More than 230,000 jobs and countless communities in the north hang in the balance, which is why the Ontario Forestry Coalition came to Queen’s Park yesterday to raise the alarm.

This development begs the question: Why? The answer is quite simple: This government has become the pawn of powerful environmental groups and has put those concerns ahead of First Nations, communities and ordinary people.

Perhaps Peter Foster said it best in his article in the National Post yesterday: “There can be no doubt that activists have done a brilliant job in infiltrating Queen’s Park. Whether such infiltration should be considered a cause of celebration depends on where you stand on the issue of animals having priority over people.”

ISLINGTON JUNIOR MIDDLE SCHOOL

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I recently had the pleasure of visiting Islington Junior Middle School in my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore on the occasion of their 175th anniversary.

Established in 1832, Islington Junior Middle is the second-oldest elementary school in all of Toronto and has a large multicultural community, where more than 40 different languages are spoken, including Korean, Somali, Serbian, Russian, Arabic, Bengali and Urdu, to name a few. A strong academic program, combined with extracurricular activities in music, drama and sports, as well as before- and after-school programs, truly brings out the best in this school community.

The village of Islington in Etobicoke was settled by United Empire Loyalists fleeing from the United States after the American Revolution. In 1822, there was an

unofficial school for eight students on the shoemaker's premises on Burnhamthorpe Road, just north of Dundas. By 1832, the growing population of Islington necessitated the building of a one-room log cabin school with monies donated by the community.

To celebrate this milestone in Islington Junior Middle's history, MABELLEarts, a Jumbles Theatre project, under the artistic direction of Leah Huston, collaborated with artists from Pigeon Creek Collective, school staff and students to design and produce a giant puppet pageant. The pageant took the form of a visual poem to tell the story of the history of one of our oldest schools.

We've all witnessed many changes since 1832, but what has not changed is the way that Islington Junior Middle School continues to serve the community. Happy 175th anniversary.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Laurie Scott: As is happening each and every week, this week we heard of thousands more job losses in Ontario. This includes over 2,500 jobs lost at General Motors in Oshawa, through the closing of its truck assembly plant.

In my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, General Motors is the largest private employer. The negative economic impacts of these job losses will hurt local businesses, suppliers and manufacturers throughout my entire riding.

Over 200,000 manufacturing job losses under the watch of the McGuinty Liberals prove to Ontarians that their Premier doesn't believe in workers.

Today, the Premier tells us about a so-called strategy that may provide help to less than 10% of those hundreds of thousands of workers without jobs in McGuinty's Ontario.

The Premier, on April 29, said, "The Minister of Economic Development and Trade tells me that we're about to build GM's first new hybrid truck in North America right here in Ontario." Well, members in this House have heard directly from General Motors that this hybrid truck isn't going to be built in Oshawa or even in Ontario, for that matter.

Not only does the minister break promises to Ontarians; she's now breaking promises to the Premier. I suppose you could call that a little taste of his own medicine.

Dalton McGuinty has spent \$600 million of taxpayers' money on his so-called auto investment strategy without job guarantees. At this point, the only thing he has created in Ontario is the loss of over 20,000 auto sector jobs.

MAD PRIDE DAY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted to rise on behalf of Mad Pride Toronto. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, many psychiatric patients were deinstitutionalized from facilities like Queen Street and the Lakeshore. Ex-patients

organized for support and called themselves psychiatric survivors or, now, consumer survivors.

In the fall of 1993, they began a yearly pride event to empower themselves and educate the broader community. In the year 2000, the local community aligned itself with the global Mad Pride movement, which recognizes July 14, Bastille Day, another day of liberation, as theirs.

Last year, Mayor David Miller declared July 14 Mad Pride Day. It is the day when the annual bed push and celebration happens outside of CAMH and continues into my riding of Parkdale, proud home to many consumer survivors.

Ruth Ruth, one of the activists behind Mad Pride, is a celebrated director, actor and consumer survivor. I dedicate this statement to her and all the others who have made Mad Pride Day such a landmark by doing something mad and declaring, along with David Miller, that July 14 is Mad Pride Day to all Ontarians. Let that day be everyone's day to discover their mad side. By all means, join us in Parkdale to push the gurney down Queen St.

Don't get even; get mad.

PUNJABI MUSIC

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I was honoured to have the opportunity to speak to the Punjabi Heritage Foundation of Canada during a recent event in Ottawa honouring the life and times of Surinder Kaur, who was known as the nightingale of Punjab, and Nand Lal Noorpuri, known as the people's folk song writer.

Surinder Kaur dedicated a lifetime to the promotion of authentic Punjabi music. She lived to lend a voice to Punjab; its flourish, its richness. She visited Ontario several times and performed to huge audiences. Her career as a folk singer started when she was only 12. She recorded over 2,000 songs and performed as playback singer in several famous films. During Surinder Kaur's visits to Ontario, she sang many of Nand Lal Noorpuri's songs to large gatherings.

I would like to thank Mitter Rasha, president of the Punjabi Heritage Foundation of Canada, for inviting me to pay tribute to these artists who continue to have such a lasting impact on Punjabi culture and heritage, including in Ontario, where their songs can be heard on Punjabi radio and Punjabi television programs frequently.

TORONTO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Mr. Peter Shurman: This morning, newspapers across the GTA carried the headline that the province has taken over the Toronto Catholic District School Board. The Minister of Education based her decision to strip the board of its power based upon an investigator's report detailing the fiscal irresponsibility of this board.

I believe that the minister has the moral responsibility to go even further. In January of this year, an investigation by the Toronto Sun revealed rampant abuses

by TCDSB trustees with regard to school-issued credit cards and expense accounts. Trustees were expensing food, booze, clothes and vacations on taxpayer-funded credit cards. One of the worst offenders billed a Caribbean vacation, pizza delivery and Tim Hortons coffee to taxpayers.

In January 2007, TCDSB trustees voted themselves medical, dental and life insurance coverage despite legal counsel advising that they did not have the authority to award themselves such benefits. Since the 2003-04 school year, the average cost per TCDSB trustee has increased by 163%.

As I said, the minister has the moral responsibility to go further than stripping the board of its responsibility. TCDSB trustees betrayed their staff and the students and parents they are supposed to serve. They have put the viability of this board in serious jeopardy. Although the Education Act doesn't allow the minister to dismiss trustees, the minister should, at the very least, exercise her moral authority and call upon all members of the TCDSB to immediately submit their resignations.

1310

COCA-COLA BOTTLING CO.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: Yesterday, Coca-Cola Bottling Co. introduced the first of 10 heavy-duty hybrid-electric vehicles to its fleet in Ontario. The addition of these delivery trucks to their fleet will improve fuel consumption by 37%, reduce emissions by 32% and create less noise and emissions when stopped in traffic.

This company recognizes that climate change is one of the most important environmental issues facing our world today. Their environmental policy indicates that they are committed to improving the efficiency with which they use energy and to reducing their CO₂ emissions and setting improvement targets for the future.

Coca-Cola has a large production facility in Brampton, with three bottling lines employing approximately 800 employees. In 2006, Coca-Cola Bottling Co. celebrated 100 years of doing business in Canada. On behalf of my constituents of Brampton–Springdale, I'd like to congratulate them and thank Coca-Cola for integrating state-of-the-art technology into vehicles that transport their beverages. This announcement is a great way to celebrate Environment Week.

PETERBOROUGH REGIONAL HEALTH CARE CENTRE

Mr. Jeff Leal: Friday, May 9, 2008, was a momentous day for Peterborough. It was the day we cut the ribbon to open the new Peterborough Regional Health Care Centre. This is a project that has involved the community of Peterborough, the Peterborough Regional Health Care Centre Foundation and the government of Ontario, all working together to provide the funding necessary to build this state-of-the-art facility. It was only possible through the hard work, dedication and com-

mitment of all these partners that this project reached fruition.

This new hospital means better service to the residents of this area, it means access to the latest technology and it means doctors will come to Peterborough to work in this new facility.

As he cut the ribbon, the Honourable George Smitherman said, "I will declare it's ready for occupancy. Peterborough Regional Health Care Centre was built on the backs and love of local people." It took four years to build this new hospital, and many more years to raise the funds.

In an emotional speech, the president and CEO of PRHC, Mr. Paul Darby, said, "I'm overwhelmed with the enormity of this project and what it represents for Peterborough and the region.

"We did it. Together, we all did it."

Everyone from the Premier to each resident of Peterborough who contributed to this project can feel proud of this great accomplishment.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Earlier this week, Premier McGuinty and Quebec Premier Jean Charest signed a memorandum of understanding on fighting global climate change. A major component of this partnership is a cap-and-trade system shared by both provinces that could be in place as early as 2010. This means that companies that emit less greenhouse gases than their caps could then sell those unused quotas in an open market to other companies that are exceeding their emissions caps.

For years, farmers in Lambton–Kent–Middlesex have been discussing the agricultural opportunities presented by carbon sinks and carbon credits in this type of system. The cap-and-trade system will help both provinces transition to a low-carbon economy and create a green future for our children.

This system also serves as an impetus for technological innovation and job creation. I'm pleased to say that the McGuinty government is already moving on that front with our Next Generation of Jobs Fund initiatives.

But with so many positive outcomes, I was surprised to see and hear that the federal environment minister and former provincial Conservative member criticized this initiative, saying, "The reality is, we can't have efforts at the provincial level." I disagree. The fact is that Ontarians are looking to our government for action on the fight against climate change, and we are doing just that, not only through this agreement with Quebec, but also with our efforts to improve public transit, encourage conservation and more.

This government is committed to a greener Ontario, and we will work with our partners—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 55, An Act to enact the Ontario French-language Educational Communications Authority Act, 2008 and make complementary amendments to the Ontario Educational Communications Authority Act / Projet de loi 55, Loi édictant la Loi de 2008 sur l'Office des télécommunications éducatives de langue française de l'Ontario et apportant des modifications complémentaires à la Loi sur l'Office de la télécommunication éducative de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Mrs. Jeffrey from the Standing Committee on General Government presents the committee's report as follows:

Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 48, An Act to regulate payday loans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 48, Loi visant à réglementer les prêts sur salaire et à apporter des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

2076467 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2008

Mr. Lalonde moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr13, An Act to revive 2076467 Ontario Inc.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 85, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

2029652 ONTARIO LTD. ACT, 2008

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr9, An Act to revive 2029652 Ontario Ltd.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 85, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

FAIRNESS FOR FAMILIES ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE TRAITEMENT ÉQUITABLE DES FAMILLES

Mr. Hudak moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 88, An Act to provide fairness for families by amending the Taxation Act, 2007 to allow income splitting for taxation between cohabiting spouses and common-law partners / Projet de loi 88, Loi prévoyant le traitement équitable des familles en modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts pour permettre le fractionnement du revenu entre conjoints ou conjoints de fait visés aux fins de l'impôt.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Hudak for a short comment.

Mr. Tim Hudak: As you may know, families in Germany, France, United States, Ireland and Switzerland allow married or common-law couples to file a joint tax form and effectively split their income. The federal government's moved on this with respect to pension income. Families who choose to have a spouse stay at home or work part-time pay higher taxes than a couple with the same income who are both working full-time. This is unfair. The Fairness for Families Act will bring equality to all married or common-law couples by amending the Taxation Act in Ontario to allow them to file a joint income tax return with respect to provincial taxes for their spouse or common-law partner.

1320

OMBUDSMAN AMENDMENT ACT (HOSPITALS AND LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'OMBUDSMAN (HÔPITAUX ET ÉTABLISSEMENTS DE SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE)

Mme Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to amend the Ombudsman Act with respect to hospitals and long-term care facilities / *Projet de loi 89, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'ombudsman en ce qui a trait aux hôpitaux et aux établissements de soins de longue durée.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for a short statement?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Currently, under the Ombudsman Act, the Ombudsman may investigate decisions, recommendations, actions and omissions of government bodies and may exercise other powers necessary for an investigation. The bill amends the act to give the Ombudsman the same powers in relation to hospitals and long-term-care facilities.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

CONSUMER REPORTING AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RENSEIGNEMENTS CONCERNANT LE CONSOMMATEUR

Mr. Ruprecht moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 75, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act / *Projet de loi 75, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements concernant le consommateur.*

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

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The purpose of Bill 75 is to prevent as much as possible identity theft and lessen the inequities which presently exist between the banking sector and consumers.

Before I get into the details, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to tell you that I'm dividing my time with the member from Oakville and the member from London-Fanshawe.

Identity theft is a very serious crime. There are presently over 53 million credit cards in circulation in Canada, which is much more than the total population of our country. Since our personal quality of life—yes, our well-being—is directly affected by our creditworthiness, our credit rating, is affected by the mortgage we can buy, is affected by the loans we need, is affected by our credit score, let me tell you how this bill will help Canadians with their financial security.

Bill 75 affects the Consumer Reporting Act and speaks directly of the “duty to inform” the consumer “about missing or stolen information.” I will go through these 10 points and then try to explain each of them in more detail, and I'm hoping I won't run out of time.

(1) “The bill provides that where a consumer reporting agency”—such as Equifax, a bank, TransUnion—“and any other person, such as a bank, to whom a consumer report has been provided, discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information or that such information has been lost or stolen, they shall immediately inform the affected consumer.”

(2) “Duty to truncate”—that is, to mask-out—“vital information

“The bill provides that a consumer report shall not provide information pertaining to a consumer's address, date of birth, social insurance number and credit account number that is not in a truncated form and also that there be no information in a consumer report other than information provided by the information provider, except for the unique identifier number.”

(3) “Duty to delete unconfirmed information within 30 days

“The bill provides that consumer reporting agencies shall investigate disputed information within 30 days and correct, supplement or delete any information found to be unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate.”

(4) “Duty not to penalize consumers for applying for credit

“The bill provides that consumer reporting agencies and other persons may not consider, as a key factor in determining the credit score of a consumer, the fact that a consumer report has been requested. In addition, credit scores and the key factors used to determine them are added to the list of information to be disclosed to a consumer on request.”

(5) “Duty to provide full disclosure if credit denied

“The bill provides that a person who takes adverse action against a consumer on the basis of information contained in a consumer report shall inform the consumer of the action and provide a copy of the report, including the name and address of the agency that prepared it, and shall notify the consumer of the right to correct incomplete or inaccurate information.”

(6) “Duty to disclose calculation of credit score

“The bill provides that consumer reporting agencies shall disclose, upon request of the consumer, the range of possible credit scores, under the model used, all the key factors that adversely affected the score, the date the credit score was created and a summary of how the credit score was calculated, including the method being used.”

(7) “Duty to report only inquiries resulting from applications for credit

“The bill provides that consumer reporting agencies shall only report inquiry records resulting out of actual applications for credit except in a report given to the consumer.”

(8) “Duty to report in writing only

“The bill provides that consumer reporting agencies shall only report information on consumer reports in written or electronically transmitted form, and not orally.”

(9) “Duty to retain information that is not contested legally

“The bill provides that consumer reporting agencies shall not delete or otherwise fail to make available any information in a consumer file that is not contested in legal proceedings brought by a consumer against the agency arising out of a claim of inaccuracy in a consumer report.”

(10) “Duty not to report debts vacated after bankruptcy proceedings

“The bill provides that consumer reporting agencies shall not provide the names of creditors or the amounts owing to such creditors after the date on which the debtor is discharged from bankruptcy. The consumer reporting agencies shall continue to be able to note bankruptcies by providing information on the date of filing for bankruptcy, the date of the discharge and the total amount involved.”

This is quite a lengthy discussion in terms of protecting the consumer. What are we trying to do with Bill 75? The essence is clear: to provide a way that will safeguard identity theft, which according to the RCMP, the privacy commissioner of Ontario and the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, Jennifer Stoddart—in a recent report released the day before yesterday, what does she say about identity theft? She says the following, and remember, this was just released two days ago: “Over the past few years, hundreds of thousands of Canadians have been affected by data breaches, with financial institutions being the worst culprits.”

Here we are; the Privacy Commissioner of Canada says, “Hey look, business guys, hey look, financial institutions, you are too lax with private information that has to do with financing.” It says quite clearly that there’s a problem here, that there’s identity theft taking place that can be and should be avoided as much as possible. That is quite an undertaking. We’re trying to safeguard the consumer. We’re trying to safeguard private information so it cannot be stolen.

Let me tell you simply this: I personally have been affected by it, and I’ve got the copies and the bills here. Look what it says, for instance. It says here, “Mr. Ruprecht, you owe \$866.10, because your credit card was debited. You bought a computer and you bought some clothing. Please pay up.”

1330

I was surprised when I heard this against my name. Since I didn’t want to pay, guess what happened to me? I said, “This is fraud. I didn’t even know about this. I don’t have a credit card. Certainly, I do not have an MBNA credit card.” Yet I’m supposed to pay this bill on a card that I didn’t request and on a card I didn’t charge. This happens to hundreds of thousands of people. I’m sure if I were to ask the members here, there would be many who have had the same experience.

How do we then get to the credit-granting institutions and tell them, “Hey, look, this is wrong”? If I were not an MPP and I were an ordinary resident in my riding saying, “Hey, something’s wrong,” then what’s the next item that we’re trying to protect the consumer against, getting this information out quickly? Why?

Let’s assume, for instance, I go on the 407 and I get a bill and I say, “Oh, this bill is wrong,” just like this credit card bill was wrong. If I don’t pay and I say, “Sorry, I wasn’t on that highway. I didn’t have anything to do with this bill,” immediately what they say is, “All right, you don’t pay and we’ll report you to Equifax and TransUnion,” which are the holders of your credit cards.

They’ll report it. Consequently, if they report that you don’t want to pay, immediately your FICO score on your credit report goes down. Then try to get a mortgage. Try to get a loan for your car. If you thought you’d get a good deal, you’re wrong. The amount of credit you get is not only lowered, but what happens that’s even more important is that the amount you now pay on interest on your mortgage, or the amount you pay on interest on your car loan or any loan, is suddenly higher. Instead of paying 4%, you might end up paying 6%. Is this fair? No.

This Legislature has a duty to perform, and that is to protect the consumer against this kind of fraud. Identity theft is really reaching—according to the Privacy Commissioner of Canada—proportions which must be checked. It is, she says, an epidemic. Identity theft is an epidemic. Now, when Equifax admitted that 2,500 of its files were “stolen,” then I asked the RCMP—I wrote a letter—“You know what? Tell me please, RCMP officers, one thing: Who are you going to charge now? Yes, we know Equifax was not as careful as they should’ve been. Who are we charging here? Who should be charged?” The RCMP replied to me in a letter and they simply said, “You know what? This is so complex, the truth is that it is so overwhelming, that we’re unable to help you.” That’s essentially the fact. They told me something else that I should share with you today. They said to me, “We have identified six sites where swapping of private information is open. It’s on the Internet.”

So when you open the file, when you open the Internet, and you say, “I’d like to get a passport. I’d like to get a driver’s licence. I’d like to get a security card. I’d like to get any private information,” there is a list that says, “For your passport information, we’ll pay you”—it’s in terms of swapping—“I’ll swap something and you give me something else.”

On the Internet a real passport, meaning the numbers and the information, costs you, as a swap, \$500. A driver’s licence costs you \$500. A social security card costs you \$250. Amazing—the RCMP says they’ve identified six sites where this takes place. How do we stop this? They’re overwhelmed. This is what the Privacy Commissioner of Canada says it is: an epidemic.

Do we have a role to play here? Can we at least mitigate the situation to some degree? Can we help out? Can we help the consumer? Yes, we certainly can. Here’s the deal. The first point in Bill 75 says simply this: If a security breach has been committed—in other words, if your file has been stolen, if your private information has been compromised—wouldn’t it be a good idea to have the credit granter, or a bank, or Equifax or TransUnion, say, “You know what? I’ll admit that 2005 files have been stolen and you’re one of them. Please check it out. Be careful. Have a look at what’s on your credit card.”

It's clear. Can we do something about this? Is it fair to give a 30-day notice? Yes, it is, and I'm here to tell you today, and I'm hoping that you will support this bill, because the essence is important. As the privacy commissioner says, we've simply got to stop this leaking of private information.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I want to compliment my colleague from Davenport. I know that Mr. Ruprecht has brought this bill forward before.

Let me first speak on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party and the official opposition and indicate how important we feel that this legislation is for consumer protection and that we're interested in working with the Legislature and all three parties to ensure that there are greater consumer protections in Ontario.

I might note at this point that the last time there were sweeping introductions of consumer protection in the province of Ontario was in 2002. Under a previous Progressive Conservative administration, in which my colleague the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook was minister of consumer protection at the time, he brought in sweeping reforms. I might add that I am disappointed that at this point in time there are still regulations from that piece of legislation that passed in 2002, regulatory regimes that have not yet been put in place, whether it's for the bereavement sector or the auto sector or even the Ontario racing community.

That said, while I am proud of the achievements of our previous Conservative administration under Mr. Hudak's leadership, I must say that, today, protecting Ontario consumers is even more important when you're looking at identity theft or Internet fraud or even when you're looking at the bill before this Legislature that was introduced by committee today, Bill 48, which is on payday loans.

I might also add that this is the fourth time this bill was introduced by the member. I encourage him to continue to raise awareness on this very important issue. I think it speaks to his insight into what happened to him, but also to his determination for change. But let me speak, I guess, to the disappointment we have on this side of the chamber that a member from the governing party who has direct experience in identity theft, who actually introduced a bill that the former Minister of Economic Development, Joe Cordiano, brought before this House—that the Liberal cabinet wouldn't adopt this legislation. In fact, in 2005 there was unanimous consent to try and move this piece of legislation along so that it would be speedily passed. Here we are again, three years later, three sessions later, a new Parliament, and we're still debating a piece of legislation that is long overdue.

Just to summarize for those who have just joined the debate: As defined by the federal consumer agency of Canada and Industry Canada, a credit report is a snapshot of your credit history. It's one of the main tools that lenders use to decide whether or not to give you credit. That is what this bill is about. It's actually improving consumer reporting to protect people against identity

fraud. A person's credit history is recorded in files maintained by at least one of Canada's three major credit reporting agencies: Equifax, TransUnion and Northern Credit Bureaus.

These consumer reporting agencies are private businesses that create, maintain and sell information about you to a business that has the right to have access to your file and has paid a fee to a consumer reporting agency. There are two classes of information which you may file at a consumer reporting agency: credit information and personal information. As outlined by this member, his private member's bill provides that if the consumer reporting agency and any other person, such as a bank, to whom a consumer report has been provided discovers that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information or that such consumer information has been lost or stolen, they shall immediately inform the affected consumer. It also outlines the duty to shorten vital information so that a consumer report does not provide information relating to a consumer's personal information, such as an address, date of birth, social insurance number and credit card account number.

1340

Some other key provisions include—and I think that the member who has put this piece of legislation forward four times succinctly described them to this Legislature—the duty to delete unconfirmed information within 30 days; the duty not to penalize consumers for applying for credit; the duty to provide disclosure if credit is denied; the duty to record only inquiries resulting from applications for credit; the duty to report in writing only; the duty to retain information that is not contested legally; the duty not to report debts vacated after bankruptcy proceedings; the duty to provide a true copy of the report; and the duty to store and safeguard information in accordance with the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act.

As many folks here know, and I know that there are a few members who are critics or part of the government and consumer protection sector that we've got here in this chamber who have been part of the general government committee that put through Bill 48. I have spoken an awful lot about Ontario becoming a credit card economy. That is why we need this legislation.

I highlighted some of the complexities around this, and as a result, I believe it is imperative that Ontario's consumers are well-informed of the issues surrounding such a complex issue in this chamber: the credit reporting system, as it has such an important impact on each of our daily lives. I really am heartened that he has brought it forward, but I just can't reiterate enough that a senior member of the Liberal caucus has brought this forward. I remember debating the former Minister of Government and Consumer Services, who's in front of me right now, on Focus Ontario and talking about the same piece of legislation over a year ago—two years ago now, I believe—and how important this was and the bravado and the promises that the government gave us that they were going to protect Ontario's consumers, and nothing.

What I'm frightened about, as I go into my concerns about this piece of legislation, is this: What we're doing here today is important, but it will never become law unless it is a government cabinet minister who actually brings forward this legislation. What we're doing here today is nothing more than just an educational awareness campaign. Quite honestly, the member who brought forward this bill, Mr. Ruprecht, ought to be congratulated for his persistence, but shame on the government. Four times this member has brought this forward, and I bet you, when all the Liberal members speak on this legislation in this House today—do you know what they're going to do?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Support it.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They're going to support it. They're going to vote for it. Will it become law? What are you going to do around the cabinet table? What are you going to do around the caucus table? Are you going to call on the Minister of Government and Consumer Services and demand that this piece of legislation become law? Are you going to do it? I'm not sure.

The general public does not have a whole grasp on consumer reporting, and we must do our best in this Legislature to make the information as accessible as possible, and for that I commend the member. As Linda Leatherdale noted on December 11, 2005, three years ago, in a Toronto Sun article called "Credit Clampdown," "Many victims don't realize they've been hit by scam artists until they find the deed to their home is no longer in their name, their bank account is wiped out, or credit card bills arrive showing a wild spending spree."

We in the Progressive Conservative Party and the official opposition are delighted to see the bill. As some of you may recall, when the member first introduced the bill in 2005, our member of provincial Parliament for Barrie, Joe Tascona, debated the bill. He made a few excellent points and noted that we were and remain saddened by the fact that, again, it was brought forward in private member's bill format, not by the government. I hate to see the member being used in the name of consumer protection when this government is not going to do a thing. He's just being used.

But first and foremost, this is about the consumer. If the current Ontario government was truly supportive of this piece of legislation and protecting consumers from fraud and identity theft, it would have brought this legislation through the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, and it should have been done several years ago.

The second point I'd like to make is that it is essential that our province play a regulatory role and establish an enforcement mechanism when it comes to consumer reporting. The member, of course, has made some excellent points, and he brings forward some rules and regulations that are outlined in his bill. But specifically, if a security breach occurs and personal confidential financial information is stolen from an individual, consumer reporting agencies and financial institutions must inform the consumer.

While I agree with his point that standards of protection must be introduced and adhered to by the industry, my question is, what if the credit reporting agency does not adhere to these rules? Nowhere in this piece of legislation does it indicate the repercussions and/or the penalties associated with an offence. This is a serious question which I believe requires further consultation.

As I've stated, the Progressive Conservative Party is looking forward to continuing the debate on this legislation. I applaud the member. As I've said several times, I only wish his government would listen. It's essential that this legislation receive considerable and substantive consultation with stakeholders throughout the community of Ontario, but also to make sure that we have public hearings into this legislation. It's an important issue, and I urge the member to talk to his cabinet and his caucus and tell them to put this piece of legislation as part of government legislation. We must hear from the affected stakeholders: the people in this province who are being ripped off, who are being defrauded. We need to protect the people who have sent us here. We must be extremely effective and helpful to our consumers.

On that note, I just want to again congratulate the member. I want to look at the members opposite in the government and say to them: If you're serious about this, don't just say it in this Legislature today so that you can tell the folks back home that you're supporting it and then sit on your hands with your lips zipped at your caucus table and not see this piece of legislation come forward as a piece of government legislation by the end of this four years, because this is important. As I said, whether we're talking about payday loans or identity theft or Internet fraud, we must be protecting the consumers of Ontario. This is what the bill does. We need to put it out to the public and support the legislation, and the government ought to get on with doing something.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm certainly pleased to speak in favour of this member's bill once again in the Legislature. It's a sign of persistence that he's continuing to introduce this bill, but it's also a sign of commitment, and I think that's the important piece. This member is committed to making a change here in Ontario. In this particular case, as he indicated in his opening remarks, part of that commitment comes from his own personal experience. From the description of that experience that he shared with us a little bit earlier on, his first-hand brush with the identity theft issue was relatively minor in terms of financial impact. He ended up receiving a credit card bill that had a couple of purchases on it that amounted to less than \$1,000. For some people, \$1,000 is a great deal of money, and for others it's perhaps not as much. But I can tell you that the incidence of identity theft leading to credit card fraud in the province of Ontario is much, much more vast than this one example signifies. I think the member actually remarked on some of the statistics that he has been able to glean from the RCMP, particularly in regard to identity theft, and credit card fraud as well.

It's interesting because this issue is one that the member raises in his bill, but it's not only in the credit reporting agencies where this is problematic, particularly in terms of identity theft. We know that this is a huge problem in terms of the Internet. I think it was only about two months ago when everybody was warned that if you do Internet banking, don't do Internet banking, because there's some new worm or some new process where hackers have gotten into people's bank accounts from following certain keystrokes and have been able to hack into people's accounts and have drained those accounts. Of course, that's something we're always having to keep an eye on in regard to technological change.

1350

We also remember that there was a significant criticism of the government not too long ago. The auditor was very critical of the Ministry of Health and the fact that they had been issuing tens of thousands of OHIP cards that didn't even relate to the number of people in Ontario who were eligible to hold one of these OHIP cards. So even the government's own ministry—the Ministry of Health, I would say, one of the most important ministries the government of Ontario has in its fold—experienced this whole issue of fraudulent identification being utilized to obtain OHIP cards inappropriately. We know it's an issue that touches the individual, but it also touches organizations like the provincial government.

The member did a fine job of outlining some of the progressive changes that he's hoping to make here, as did the previous speaker on the bill, the member from the Conservative caucus. New Democrats also support this bill. We believe that it provides new legislation that supports against identity theft. We believe that it improves the privacy of information that is kept by credit card agencies, and we also believe that it creates better disclosure practices. The member did go through the process of reading the clauses in the bill that specifically address many of those issues. He indicated that those were the things he felt most important.

In fact, if you go through the bill—it's the fourth time the member for Davenport has brought this bill forward. It's not a huge bill; it's eight pages long. It's an eight-page-long bill and yet the impact of it on individuals and their ability to feel secure in terms of identity theft and in terms of fraudulent practices that result from identity theft is enormous. When he spoke about the dollar value of some of these situations, it's hard to believe that a bill of merely eight pages, which has been introduced four times in this Legislature now—in fact, I was corrected. It wasn't necessarily this member who has done it all four times, but nonetheless, I think that's irrelevant. What is relevant is that a bill of this import, which is rather small in terms of the number of pages, in terms of the physical size of the bill—the impact that it can have in the province of Ontario is absolutely enormous.

I find it frustrating that when private members, during this part of our agenda, bring forward these pieces of legislation that really are pretty much no-brainers—they are pretty much no-brainers. People watching in TV land

and people in the galleries today would think, "Why wouldn't all of the MPPs in this chamber agree to this kind of a change?" It protects consumers and makes sure that if someone is utilizing information that they've provided, they get the heads-up that that's happening. It gives them a chance to correct information about them that they find out is being inappropriately recorded and stored. It creates all kinds of checks and balances that are lacking, that lead to the kind of fraud that we see in the province of Ontario.

So as we go through the process today, we'll see these members who are now present in the House—I don't think I'm allowed to talk about how many, because if I talk about how many, it will indicate how many aren't here. So I won't do that, Mr. Speaker. I won't put you in a position of having to call me to order.

Nonetheless, the reality is that I would suspect everyone in this chamber understands how important this bill is, will support it, will speak in favour of it, and yet, at the end of the day, for the fourth time, we will not have improvements to the Consumer Reporting Act in the province of Ontario. We won't get those improvements, because, notwithstanding how important this is and notwithstanding how many people speak in favour of it and notwithstanding how many people out in TV land and in the galleries are watching this, notwithstanding any of that, it takes the government to make changes to the law. Even when private members bring forward great ideas like this, ideas and pieces of legislation that are meant to really improve the situation for people in the province of Ontario—the government uses this all the time when they're trying to pass changes and they get some criticism from the opposition. They say, "Well it's children, so it's non-partisan;" "It's poverty, so it's non-partisan;" "It's this, so it's non-partisan." It's kind of their cloak in trying to say, "Don't criticize anything we do, because we're just trying to do good." The argument is bogus nonetheless.

You know what? In this particular situation, this really is a non-partisan bill. It's brought forward in the time when we deal with these issues in what is technically a non-partisan fashion, because it is private members' business. But I don't think that lets the government off the hook in terms of taking a bill that is their very own member's bill and actually making the changes. I would hope that the minister responsible—and I believe that's the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, Minister McMeekin, who's from my very own community; he represents the riding of Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale—would see fit to take this private member's bill and take it upon himself to introduce a government bill, because that's what it takes to become law, to get it through the Legislature.

It's about time, when we see all the tragedies and horror stories that happen as a result of identity theft in this province, that we have a tightening up of the legislation. Again, I want to commend the member. I know the member from Nickel Belt will have a couple of comments after the rotation. New Democrats think that this

bill can be improved. I hope that she'll have an opportunity to suggest some of those improvements, but New Democrats do support the bill and congratulate the member for bringing it forward.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It certainly is a pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 75. I really want to thank my colleague for bringing this forward, because every so often a bill comes along in private members' time that's meaningful, that's practical, that can really make a difference, or can prevent tragedy in somebody else's life.

I think this is a good example of such a good initiative, because it talks to something that all of us deal with in everyday life, as consumers, members of a family, people who need mortgages or car loans. We all have credit cards, I assume, that type of thing. We all have bank accounts. In a modern society like we have today, financial information is transmitted on a fairly regular basis.

I think that consumers in Ontario need to be confident that that information is both treated confidentially and that should anything happen to that information, should there be a breach of security—I think under the current practice we have right now in Ontario, the consumer should be absolutely outraged that if there's a breach of security, there's no onus on the people who experience the breach to notify the consumer that that information is now out of the confidential realm and has moved into the public realm. I think it's common courtesy. I think it's the sort of business practice that should be everyday business practice in the province of Ontario.

I thank the member from Davenport for bringing forward this bill, because it really could make a difference. Certainly we've heard examples of members of this House who have experienced identity theft, where they've had issues, or they've had items charged to their own credit cards, or they've been confused with other people, and bills have been ascribed to them.

I think we can do this, and I think it's put forward by the member from Davenport in a very fair and balanced way. As I said earlier, we all know that the issuance of credit now is a part of everyday life. Credit is used in a number of business transactions, from very small to very large. I think we should expect that lenders, the people who are extending that credit, should exercise due diligence before they extend that credit. I don't think anybody's arguing with that fact, but we know that that involves the transmission of personal information.

In my opinion, consumers in Ontario don't have the protection they should have and don't have the protection that is contained in Bill 75, because currently the system is slanted away from the protection of consumers and is actually slanted towards protection of the credit-granting agencies or those people who keep that type of information. I think, if you go through the bill, you'll find some very practical information. If the average person in Ontario knew what little protection they had without the protection of Bill 75, they'd be very concerned.

I'm going to close my remarks here, but I want to extend my thanks to the member for Davenport for bring-

ing forward a very meaningful bill. I'd urge all my colleagues, on behalf of consumers around this province, to support the bill when the time for the vote comes.

1400

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm always privileged and honoured to stand up and speak in support of Bill 75. I believe I've spoken on this bill in the past—last year, I believe, when the honourable member for Davenport introduced it in this House for the third time. This is the fourth time.

Many members spoke in different fashions, but the member for Davenport brought a different approach to it today. I think his aim and goal for introducing this bill is to protect consumers across Ontario. It's a very important initiative. It's a very important bill. As I listened to the many speakers who spoke before me, they are supporting this bill very well, because we have to protect the consumer in Ontario.

I want to tell you something very important that happened in my riding. Not long ago—last week—one of my constituents came to my office and was complaining that he got five bills from the authority that looks after the 407—five bills. He assured me that he never drove on the 407. He never went on the 407. He was shocked when he received the bills. Somebody must have stolen his licence plate.

Identity theft is very common these days, through many different initiatives, because the technology is very advanced. The criminals are very advanced too. We are advanced in technology and the criminals catch up with advanced technology, because they want to hack into the computer system, go to the personal information, take it and use it against people.

This poor man who came to my office was so upset. He's not a rich person and he's being billed almost \$2,000. He doesn't have the money to pay it. He and his wife have been working hard for many years to save a little bit of money on a yearly basis, to pay the mortgage, to do some stuff in the house. He does not have the money to pay the authority of the 407. He does not know what to do. He came to my office and we filed a complaint.

The member for Davenport brings to this House a very important issue. I think all of us should support it—definitely. I don't agree with many of the speakers who spoke before me about private members' bills not going through. Since I got elected in 2003, I've seen a lot of private members' bills pass in this House. I'll give an example: the diabetes machine—what do you call it? The pump machine for diabetics?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: The diabetic pump.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: The diabetic pump machine. It has passed. And not long ago, the member for Sault Ste. Marie passed a bill that you cannot smoke while the kids are in the car. So many different initiatives are being brought to us in this House. I think of—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: That was a government bill, though.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Well, it's our job to co-operate with a ministerial bill that fits with our government agenda. Normally, private members' bills bring awareness to the people of this government in order to be adopted and become law in the province of Ontario.

I think this member is a dedicated member. He's determined to see this bill pass. It's important, not just because he had a bad experience with identity theft, but also to protect the people of Ontario. So many people across the province, so many people across many different communities, face the same problem. I think our job and our duty, as elected officials, is to create ways—laws, rules and regulations—to protect our constituents, our people in this province.

I want to congratulate the member for bringing this forward. I'm going to support it for a second time. Also, I'm going to speak up wherever I go in order to create more awareness about it.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to continue on some of the comments that my colleague from Hamilton Centre had started. First of all, let's make it clear that as a New Democrat, I support this bill. It provides new legislative support against identity theft, improves the privacy of information kept by credit agencies and creates better disclosure practices. It protects the public.

As we know, identity theft is an increasing concern, with over 3,000 complaints of identify theft creating a \$7.5-million loss—and apparently this is a conservative estimate; it could be way bigger. We look forward to this bill going to committee so that we can hear from the experts, consumer advocates and people who have lived through this to get their opinions on this.

We think the bill could go a little bit further. Many states in the US have brought legislation forward around what they call credit freeze rights. Basically, it's a law that was started in California. It's called California Law SB 168. It allows consumers to freeze their credit records at each credit agency. That prevents an identity theft. That means that even someone with the name, address, social insurance number, date of birth etc. will not be able to borrow or obtain credit under that name. There are 40 states in the US that have followed California's lead. The credit freeze is so tight that it doesn't even allow the person who triggered the freeze to get credit unless they provide a secure personal identification number, a PIN number, as it's called, to stop the freeze. The service is free and it goes a long way to give people the peace of mind and the protection they want.

This bill effectively provides for credit alarms. Credit agencies would have to inform individuals about missing or stolen information, but this could be ignored by lenders, meaning that consumers may still be open to theft.

As the member from Nepean—Carleton mentioned, this bill has been presented to this House many times before. We hope that this is the time it will become the law in Ontario and that a private member's bill will actually make it through to become the law of the land. The New Democrats will support this, with some improvements.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I do have a few more minutes extra; I appreciate that. I just want to tell the House that this bill is not only costing individual consumers a lot of money and a lot of heartache, but in addition, let's consider this: In North America, guess how much money is being defrauded? It costs our whole economy over \$50 billion in fraud in terms of identity theft. It's amazing.

Let me tell you what's really going on out there. I know many members have received these kinds of letters from our banking institutions. For instance, I have one here from TD, another from RBC, another from the Bank of Montreal and others from two other banks. These are the kinds of letters that we're getting as consumers—not as MPPs but as consumers. It says the following: "Due to a recent security breach in the TD Canada Trust computer systems, we're asking all customers to immediately log in and report any unnoticed password changes, unexplained fund depletions or otherwise. We recommend you update your banking information of your accounts"—and what do you do next? What is the request here? It says, "Link up below and tell us your numbers."

There are thousands of letters going out. Guess how many people are responding to these fraudulent letters? It's a fraud. TD is on here and so is the Bank of Montreal. At first, when I got this, I thought that this is what's called an "official communication" from the bank. It isn't; this is fraud. There are thousands of people responding to this fraud because they think it's real. They think this comes from an official bank when in fact it doesn't. Guess how many people are responding to this fraudulent letter? The consumer reporting agencies tell us that 5% of Canadians are responding, are linking up and are providing all banking information that's requested here.

This is a fraud, and I would only hope that all of us will tell the people of Ontario and all the consumers, please, whatever you do, do not respond to any official-looking communication from any bank and certainly don't log on and provide personal information. Please don't do that.

We have with us today one of the vice-presidents of the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario. They are supporting this bill as well. Why are they supporting this bill? Because—and this happened to me as well. Guess what? TransUnion sent a letter to my insurance company. My insurance company is Allstate. Allstate in turn sent me a letter saying the following:

"Mr. Ruprecht,

"TransUnion ... provides us with aspects of a consumer's credit history"—your consumer credit history—"which we use to establish a score." They have found that specific characteristics apply to me. And what is that?

"Based on your"—new—"score," Mr. Ruprecht, "with respect to your property insurance coverage"—on my house—"your premium reflects an increase from this factor."

In other words, my FICO score on my credit file went down a few numbers, and immediately what does my

house insurance do? They say, "I'm sorry, your score goes down, and up goes your insurance."

1410

We have a law that says when car insurance comes in that way, it's illegal. Why not make it illegal for house insurance as well? That's why I think this bill is so important.

The brokers' association says the following:

"The practice of using credit reports as a basis of premium calculations disadvantages those with poor credit, and adds to the financial burden of those who can least afford to bear it. Removing this provision would effectively prohibit this practice" and they agree with it.

"Thank you very much," they say, "we support your proposed changes." So it is clear that when the TransUnion and Equifax people provide the FICO score, they should not be able to have the insurance company tell us they'll raise the price of our insurance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Mr. Ruprecht, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I certainly very much appreciate that this will be supported by all parties, I hope. I know that having introduced this bill previously—Bill 38—there was unanimous consent that something should be done. It behooves us as legislators to try to help our consumers.

One of the most important items in my new bill simply says this as well, that I should not be penalized for looking for a better mortgage. As it stands right now, if I as a consumer look around for different banks and ask them, "Please give me a good rate for my house mortgage" or "Give me a very good rate for my car, for my loan"—I would ask them to do that. As soon as I have more than two credit inquiries—inquiries, which are not leading to the actual loan, just an inquiry—or if you want to rent a house or an apartment and the landlord asks the credit reporting agencies, Equifax and TransUnion, for an inquiry, they would ask, "How is Mr. Ruprecht doing? What is his credit score?" So the landlord then gets the response. As soon as he gets the response, that is considered an inquiry. If there are more than two or three inquiries which have not led to an actual loan or mortgage, I am being penalized.

What's the proof? I have the proof right here. I have a number of cases, in case anyone wants to see them, where this in fact took place. That's why I say this bill is a good bill because it would prohibit me or anyone else, any Canadian consumer, from receiving an inquiry which then reflects on bad credit.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should recognize positron emission tomography (PET) as a vital diagnostic tool for care, and as such should introduce an implementation plan with timelines to achieve the same level of access to PET scanning here in Ontario as in

jurisdictions such as Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mrs. Witmer has moved private member's resolution number 25. Pursuant to standing order 97, Mrs. Witmer, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I have brought forward this resolution today on behalf of the men and the women and children in this province who are being denied access to PET scanning.

PET scanning is the gold standard when it comes to diagnostic tools throughout the world. They help to diagnose and they help to plan treatment for patients. Regrettably, in this province, we are still doing clinical trials, which have been ongoing now for about five years. We still have no plan, no timelines, telling us when they will be accessible to all people, as they are in other provinces and other countries throughout the world. So people continue to be denied access to PETs, which, as I say, are the gold standard for diagnosis throughout the world.

I first became aware of the problems that people were having when I had a constituent in my own riding, Mike Allard, who was denied access to PET scans because he didn't fit the limited criteria in Ontario. He was going to be forced to pay the \$2,400 out of his own pocket if he were to go and get PET-scanned. Today, many doctors in Ontario, many specialists, recommend that their patients have PET scans in order that they can diagnose where the cancer is and also help in the planning of a course of action when it comes to treatment.

Regrettably, if the people are denied access—which, in most cases, the majority are—they will have to pay, out of their pocket, \$2,000. They can go to Mississauga to a private clinic, or, as many people do, they can travel to the United States or to Quebec. Unfortunately, there are many, many gaps in the Ontario health system today, and this is one of the many gaps that we do have. I am calling on the government to develop a plan and timelines in order that we can have the same access as elsewhere.

I am pleased to be supported in this resolution by CARP. I am also pleased that the president of the Ontario Association of Nuclear Medicine, Dr. Christopher O'Brien, wholeheartedly supports the resolution. I would like to quote what he has had to say, because I think it says it better than I could say it. He's the expert.

"It is a travesty that the patients of Ontario are subjected to limited access and are also subjected to inappropriate hurdles to gain access to PET scanning, a well-established and -researched diagnostic procedure....

"It is unacceptable to see patients denied access to PET scans in Ottawa when, across the river in Gatineau," Quebec, "patients with the same cancer have access to PET scanning and the beneficial impact on their care that PET scans deliver. Access to modern diagnostic procedures should not be based on postal codes.

"It's time to bring Ontario into the 21st century."

That was Dr. Christopher O'Brien, president of the Ontario Association of Nuclear Medicine.

I am also pleased to have the support of the Canadian Association of Nuclear Medicine, which embraces this resolution to provide all Ontarians access to PET scans. I want to quote their president, Dr. Jean-Luc Urbain. He says:

"Over the past three decades, all the benefits" of PETs "for the management of patients with cancer have been extensively documented..." Listen to that: "over the past three decades." Here we are in Ontario, still saying that we need to go through tests and clinical trials that have been undertaken in other parts of the world and have found that this PET is appropriate for use. He goes on to say: "Not only does this procedure save life, it also decreases the burden of disease, saves patients from inappropriate treatments and ... spares a fair amount of taxpayers' dollars for other health programs.

"In all developed countries in the world," he says, "except Canada, PET scanning is used routinely for the diagnosis and management of patients with cancer." In those countries, it is used routinely. It "is considered as unethical and malpractice not to recommend this procedure."

1420

He goes on to say that this is absolutely necessary, and I would support that. The time has come when the McGuinty government must recognize, as other governments throughout the world have done, that the PET is a vital diagnostic tool for care and management of treatment.

I have many testimonials here that I am going to read into the record. I can't read them all, but I was absolutely flabbergasted by the number of people who have approached me once they heard I had a resolution and was fighting on their behalf to make sure we could have fair and equitable access to PETs. If you don't have the \$2,500 that is required to get your PET at a private clinic in Mississauga or go to Quebec or to the United States, you can't have one. This government talks about the fact that they don't support two-tier medicine. We have two-tier medicine in the province of Ontario. If you don't have the money, you can't get the PET scan. In some cases, people are mortgaging their homes in order to get a PET scan, because they know it helps with the diagnosis.

I want to read one letter from Mr. Sam Bruno, cancer patient in Sudbury, who says, "I ... fully support Mrs. Witmer's resolution." He goes on to say that he's met with his local MPP, Mr. Bartolucci; he's written articles. He knows that people like CARP and unions and other patients support this resolution. He goes on to say, "My dying wish is to see Mrs. Witmer's resolution taken seriously by this government and to see it provide access to funded PET scans to Ontarians as quickly as possible. It may be too late for me but not too late for the thousands of cancer patients in this province in need of a funded PET scan. Mr. Smitherman," he asks, "will I see the implementation of PET within my shortened lifespan?"

He goes on to say: "As a cancer patient, I have been extremely frustrated and disappointed with this government's flagrant nonsense and pretence with its continuous PET scan trials. Anyone with even an ounce of common sense would agree that access to funded PET scans needs to be an integral part of our provincial health plan.

"Now, let's get this done once and for all!"

His letter is so much the same as those we get from others. Here is a mother, Mrs. Deborah Maskens, and she says:

"As a stage 4 kidney cancer patient who has travelled twice to the United States to access a medically necessary PET/CT scan, I ... support Mrs. Witmer's resolution. In my own case, a PET finding of cancer in an additional lymph node changed the planning for my surgery ... at Toronto General. Thanks to the PET scan in the US, radiologists at Princess Margaret were able to see a second area of cancer previously undetected on CT images. With this information, surgeons were able to remove all remaining cancer in one operation. Without the PET, an additional surgery or additional months of cancer treatment would have become necessary."

She concludes by saying, "I will need another PET scan early next year and sincerely hope that, next time, I will not need to board another flight out of Ontario," to the United States.

She also mentions that she's had two battles to fight. The first is the one with kidney cancer, which has very few treatment options. But, she says, the second one is even more frustrating, and that is that despite her oncologist's recommendations, the Ontario government still does not fund access to PET scanning even when it is deemed medically necessary.

Here is another one, from Margo and Eric Paraskevopoulos. "Thank you," they say. The husband, Eric, has faced colorectal cancer and has been fighting this cancer. He was scheduled to have a CT scan to determine the stage; then they decided that they would instead go to Montreal and pay for a PET scan. That CT scan that they had, by the way, showed no cancer in his liver, and when they decided they maybe should go to Montreal to have a PET, guess what? It showed "five cancerous lesions in the liver.... When we presented the results of the PET scan to the specialist, he was surprised...." So, as you can well imagine, there was a different course of treatment undertaken for that patient.

They indicate that they were alarmed at the discrepancy between the PET and the CT scans, and they also were concerned about the long waits that they have experienced to see the colorectal surgeon and the oncologist. They are continuing now to have all their scans and tests done in Houston. Folks, this is absolutely unbelievable. They indicate they have no faith in the Ontario health care system. Here is a young man with two daughters aged four and five, and he's fighting for his life but he can't get the diagnosis and the treatment that he needs. His wife says:

“Ms. Witmer, I commend you on your fight to provide more accessibility to PET scans for residents of Ontario.

“I never understood why people who experienced injustices did not fight for change. Now I understand. It has been seven months since my husband’s diagnosis, and I am already tired. But I will do whatever I can to ensure others do not have to go through what we have. I owe this to my husband and our two children.”

I got letters like this—so many of them.

It is an injustice that in a province such as Ontario we do not have access to this gold standard, this diagnostic tool, which is used by countries throughout the world. I call on this government to provide a plan in order that we can have equality for all people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I am pleased to rise today in response to the motion from the member for Kitchener–Waterloo about positron emission tomography, better known as PET scans. Basically, PET is nuclear medicine imaging technology and it is used to detect and evaluate different types of cancer. How does it work? Radioactive material is injected into the patient and then the machine detects cancerous cells by measuring the amount of energy used in that area.

As of November 2007, there were 22 centres performing publicly funded PET scans in seven of the Canadian provinces. Some provinces fund a certain number of PET scans each year. In Quebec, it’s 21,000; in British Columbia, 3,500. In Alberta, they fund 3,000 PET scans a year; in Nova Scotia, 1,500; in Manitoba, 1,000; and in New Brunswick, 600.

If we look at this by 100,000 of population, because not all provinces have the same number of residents, it goes like this: For Quebec, it’s 272 per 100,000 residents; in British Columbia, 81; in Manitoba, 83.

The funding level varies greatly as well. It goes from about \$1.3 million in New Brunswick to \$14 million in Quebec. Ontario provides funding for PET scans through clinical trials on two registries and through the Ontario PET access program. The total number of patients, residents of Ontario, as of December 31, 2007, in those clinical trials goes as follows: We have 1,406 enrolled in clinical trials, we have 1,198 in registry studies and we have 45 that have access through the access program. In Ontario, we have nine publicly funded PET scanners and they are used for those clinical trials.

Three active clinical trials evaluate the role of PET scanning in the diagnosis and staging of head and neck cancer, metastatic lung cancer, and colorectal cancer with liver metastases.

1430

Two clinical trials—on potentially resectable non-small-cell lung cancer and breast cancer—have completed patient accrual and the results are presently being analyzed. I—as is the member from Waterloo—am certainly looking forward to seeing what the results are going to be so that a decision can be made.

The Ontario Cancer PET Registry Study provides PET scans for patients with a solitary pulmonary nodule, potentially resectable non-small cell lung cancer, or suspected recurrent cancers—and there are limits in those; those are from the thyroid, from the germ cells, and colorectal—with elevated tumour markers but negative anatomical findings in traditional imaging tests, such as X-ray, MRI, etc.

The Ontario Cardiac PET Registry Study provides PET myocardial viability assessments to patients with severe ventricular dysfunction being considered for revascularization or a heart transplant. Some of the examples were given by the member a few minutes ago.

Patients who are not candidates for the clinical trials or registry study may apply for a PET scan through the Ontario PET access program. The PET access program is for those who don’t qualify for any other trial, but if your physician or your oncologist feels that he or she would like to order a PET scan, then the request is reviewed by a panel consisting of an oncologist, a nuclear medicine physician and a radiologist who review each application on a case-by-case basis to determine whether the PET scan would be appropriate. This is an interim measure until the clinical trials are completed and a decision is made as to how many PET scanners—when, where, etc.—will be rolled out in Ontario.

Based on current indications recommended by the Ontario PET Steering Committee, about 2,000 PET scans are currently anticipated in this fiscal year. I’m talking here of 2008. If you want to link this back to some of the stats that I said before, that would be about 16 PET scans per 100,000 population. That puts us kind of in the middle of the pack.

The five clinical trials were originally supposed to be completed in 2007, but for reasons that are unclear, they are expected to continue into 2009. For me, this raises a lot of concern. We know that the PET scan is an expensive technology, and we know that we need hard, solid evidence to make funding decisions on this new technology. What I don’t want to see happen is that those clinical trials are being unduly delayed so that funding decisions don’t have to be made. This would be unacceptable to this party and I think unacceptable to everybody in Ontario.

The Ontario PET Steering Committee has recommended a new pilot study because, as years go by and more knowledge is gathered about the usefulness of PET scanning, a new pilot study on diagnosis of recurring cancer is due to begin patient enrolment this spring. So it is just starting.

There are also privately owned PET scanning clinics in Canada, and Ontario has one such clinic. I think the member from Kitchener–Waterloo has mentioned in some of her examples that people have actually had to go to those private clinics. The cost of those varies between \$2,300 and \$2,800 for one scan. This is a huge amount of money and certainly out of the reach of most people on fixed incomes, low incomes or minimum wage in this province.

We do, though, in Ontario have access to 11 PET scanners that are located a little bit throughout the province. We have some in London, Ottawa, Toronto and Hamilton. Those are available for the people in the clinical trials and on the PET access program. I'm really disappointed to see that the ministry didn't see fit to have one of those clinical trial sites in northern Ontario. With the higher burden of cancer diagnoses and lower survival rates after a cancer diagnosis of people living in northern Ontario, you would have thought that one of those clinical trials would have been there, but it wasn't. They have been concentrated in London, Ottawa, Toronto and Hamilton.

Although there are a number of very well-respected oncologists and nuclear medicine specialists who support the use of PET scanning, there is still considerable debate in the medical community about the effectiveness of PET scans as a diagnostic aid in Canada. Recent systematic review concluded that: PET scans bring little benefit to diagnostics except for head and neck tumours, they can play a role in assessing recurrent and residual cancer, and they are beneficial for the identification of distant metastases in later stages of disease when tumours are larger and other results are equivocal.

The potential negative effects of extended reliance on PETs are that tests could be ordered that are not necessary, and it might deter more time-intensive clinical intervention by physicians. We have seen, through the wait-time strategy with MRIs, that although the number of MRIs that are now being performed in Ontario has nearly doubled—certainly the resources to support MRI testing have nearly doubled—the waiting list has not gone down one iota.

The main reason for this is that MRIs are now being requested for more and more procedures and diagnostics that, really, MRIs were not made for. When we see results coming back from MRIs with a diagnosis of a sprained lateral or medial collateral ligament of a knee, it leads me to ask, how can it be that any physician with all those years of study was not able to diagnose a sprained knee without an MRI? There is a little bit of a judgment call here in that as the technology becomes more and more available, it's not always being used for the indication it was put there.

As far as stakeholder positions, I agree with the member that there are very strong proponents for greater access. The Canadian Society of Nuclear Medicine is one, the Cancer Advocacy Coalition of Canada is another one, and the Ontario Association of Nuclear Medicine is another—certainly three stakeholders that have very clear positions. They want PET scanning available to all, and they want it immediately. There are other stakeholders just as important that are ready to wait for the results of the clinical trial before expanding access. Those, I must add, include the Canadian Cancer Society, which to me is also a heavyweight in that field.

We certainly recognize the importance of increased access to new technology to help with the prevention, diagnosis and treatment, but we also recognize that many

new technologies are extremely costly and that the health care budgets are increasing. There is still significant debate within the medical community about the effectiveness of PET scanning. We agree that the government needs to complete the clinical trial assessing the effectiveness of PET scanning, but we will not tolerate any delay in those assessments that would delay the making of a decision towards increasing access to PET scanning. The motion as it stands isn't clear, because it proposes equal access to Quebec, B.C. and Alberta, which, as I've already said, have already got different rates of access, so it's a little bit misguided and a little bit premature.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm pleased to join in and speak on this motion on positron emission tomography, better known as PET scans. The McGuinty Liberals are investing in health care after years and years of neglect under the previous Conservative government. We've come a long way. Yes, there is still more to do, and we accept that. We currently have clinical trials under way to evaluate PET technology. Two of the clinical trials have completed patient accrual and results are being analyzed by the Ontario Clinical Oncology Group. This process that the government is going through is endorsed by international experts.

1440

While the trials are underway, we have an access mechanism that allows Ontario patients to access PET technology today. I repeat that: Today, Ontario patients do have access to PET scans. Ontario has established one of the largest PET infrastructures in Canada, including 11 PET scanners at nine centres. Seven of these Ontario PET scanning facilities in four Ontario geographic areas participate in the Ontario-funded PET evaluation study. Recently, the Thunder Bay hospital announced the purchase of a PET/CT scanner to be operated by the research institute attached to the regional cancer centre.

Before we offer widespread access to PET scans, it is critically important that we know exactly those indications for which this is the most desirable form of a diagnostic test to be utilized. We are not in a position to offer this technology without strict guidelines about its most appropriate use.

I think that our government is being responsible. I think our government is being accountable. We are doing a lot more today than in the year 2003, when the previous government was in power. We accept that there is more to be done, but we must be accountable for our decisions. We must be responsible to Ontarians. We will do more after these trials are reviewed and we will do what is right for the people of Ontario.

We took over from a Conservative government that was closing hospitals; 31 hospitals were ordered closed while our population was aging. They were firing nurses by the thousands and compared the nurses to hula hoop workers. The Conservatives were intent on breaking up public health care. We all know that they're in favour of a private health care system. Our government is in support of the health care system that we have today.

We're working to improve it, we accept that there is more to be done and we will do that in the coming years.

This is a motion that is only intended to represent that government's viewpoint. We will do what is right for Ontario.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Whenever I hear Tina Turner's song "You're simply the best" on the radio, for some reason I think of the member for Kitchener–Waterloo. It's not surprising that her supporters picked this recording as her theme song for her leadership campaign in 2002, because we believe that she's simply the best member of the Legislature.

Even the Toronto Star has recognized her as "the hardest-working MPP in the province," and I couldn't agree more, although I know that the vast majority of MPPs all work very hard. Some members of the House may not be aware that this past year the member for Kitchener–Waterloo received significant recognition by Equal Voice, an organization dedicated to encouraging the election of more women. They recognized Elizabeth Witmer as "the greatest female Premier" Ontario could have, and so she would be.

I've considered it a great privilege to have had the chance to work with her the last 18 years, and hopefully for many more years to come. Through her advocacy, first as the member for Waterloo North, and since redistribution in 1999 as the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, her riding has seen major improvements to health care services. A few examples include a new cancer centre, dialysis unit and MRI at Grand River Hospital in Kitchener; a new cardiac centre at St. Mary's hospital in Kitchener; new childbirth and children's services at Grand River Hospital; the Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre; and improved access to doctors and primary care through the introduction of family health networks, which the current government calls family health teams.

Her record on the environment is just as impressive. While she served as the Minister of the Environment, I was privileged to serve as her parliamentary assistant. During this period, she announced the date for the closure of the Lakeview generating station, which at the time was the most polluting coal-fired power plant in the province. She expanded the Ontario smog patrol and she committed \$10 million for municipal groundwater studies—a very important step towards a better understanding of this vital natural resource, our drinking water.

I could go on and on about her impressive achievements while she served as Deputy Premier and Minister of Education, including new textbooks, enhanced funding for special education and literacy programs. She supported building new schools, including St. Luke, St. Nicholas, Lester B. Pearson, Laurelwood, Northlake and St. Mary's. Post-secondary education in Waterloo region has benefited greatly because of Elizabeth's work. She has pushed for a new science research centre at Wilfred Laurier University, my alma mater, and the University of Waterloo Research and Technology Park, among many other leaps forward at these two leading Canadian uni-

versities, and at Conestoga College, the number one institute of technology and advanced learning in Ontario.

Unfortunately, I have to say that since the McGuinty Liberal government came into office in 2003, Ontario has lost its leadership role in health care. The system today no longer benefits from the same kind of dedicated and outstanding leadership we saw when the member for Kitchener–Waterloo served as the Minister of Health, and I would say to you, Mr. Speaker, during your tenure as Minister of Health. We have not seen that kind of strong leadership since 2003. That's why she quite appropriately has seen fit to introduce this resolution on positron emission tomography scanners, or PET scanners, as they are known.

As I understand it, a PET scanner is a state-of-the-art, 21st-century diagnostic imaging technology which produces a three-dimensional image or map of the body's functional processes. It is particularly helpful to have this information if you're being treated for cancer.

At a time when Alberta, BC, Quebec and Manitoba are leading the way in providing their citizens access to this amazing and life-saving technology, Ontario, as has been so often the case under this government, lags far behind. In fact, PET scanners have been used in Canada on a clinical basis for the last 20 years.

It's not just Canada that has accepted this proven technology. The United States, Japan, Germany and many other smaller countries across Europe adopted it many years ago. It's no wonder, given the success of the PET scan as a routine diagnostic procedure for cancer patients, as well as its uses in pediatrics, cardiac disease and neurological disease.

We must listen to Dr. David Webster, a nuclear medicine specialist practising in Sudbury, who has called upon the government to finally accept the science from around the world by making this crucial tool available to all Ontarians who need it and to recognize that the time for select clinical trials is over.

We must listen to the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario and their advocacy coordinator, Mrs. Pat Salter, who says: "It is no longer acceptable to delay this life-saving diagnostic, regardless of the position of the Ministry of Health, given this is the standard throughout the world for cancer treatment and many other disorders."

I understand that OHIP is already compelled by law to reimburse Ontarians for PET scans performed in other jurisdictions. If that's the case, what's stopping this government from providing the service here at home? Why do patients have to travel hundreds of kilometres in some cases for this medical care that they so sorely need?

Again, Ontario is falling behind the rest of the country, and the McGuinty Liberal government's Minister of Health seems completely unwilling to do anything to change it. Our health system is in desperate need of new leadership from this government. We need a system that is patient-centred and one that responds to their needs.

I urge all members of this House to listen to the doctors, listen to the patients, listen to the families, listen

to the experts and listen to the member for Kitchener–Waterloo. Support this motion and send a strong signal to the Minister of Health that he must make PET scans a higher priority.

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm honoured and privileged again to get the chance to speak on this motion brought by the member from the opposite side, talking about PET scans and radiation treatment for cancer patients in Ontario.

I am proud and honoured to be a part of the government. Since we got elected in 2003, we have invested heavily in health care, because we value the health care issues in Ontario. We think it's our responsibility as a government to treat all the people in Ontario, and all the people have the right to have access to publicly funded, accessible health care. I remember when we started in 2003, I think the budget was almost \$28 billion. The last budget invested almost \$40.4 billion in health care across the province of Ontario.

I know the member opposite brings in very important issues, and I'm glad to see our government taking steps toward this issue. We have 11 machines across the province of Ontario, at nine centres in different regions, to do pilot studies to see if this one will benefit the people of Ontario or not.

1450

I know that cancer patients seek all opportunities and avenues in order to treat themselves—especially their parents and their loved ones—because these are important issues and a very difficult disease. It's a very complex disease. Not many people now are able to totally get well from it or be treated 100% for it because the technology is not there yet.

One of those initiatives that the honourable member brought to this House was PET scans. Our ministry and our government want to introduce it to the community step by step in order to see if this will work or not. It has not been proven yet that it's the right treatment and full treatment in order to detect cancer, treat cancer and cure cancer.

I think it's important for us to keep talking about this issue. I'm not sure if it's the right way. I think that our government and our Minister of Health have been working very, very hard in order to seek the best way, the most important way, in order to help people across the province to be treated. We can see a lot of achievement at this level, in many different areas: MRI centres across the province of Ontario have been almost doubled since we got elected; many patients have access to health care without any problem; we lowered the wait times; and many different steps are being taken toward this avenue.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to join in the debate on the resolution that, "in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should recognize positron emis-

sion tomography (PET) as a vital diagnostic tool for care, and ... should introduce an implementation plan...."

I was listening to my colleague from London–Fanshawe. You don't have to look far to find out the best way. Everybody else is doing it but us. I lead with that.

I'm pleased to thank the member for Kitchener–Waterloo for bringing forward the resolution. She has certainly been a strong advocate for health care. She is our health care critic and does a great job in bringing forward the needs in that industry to the Legislature. Hopefully, with the example of this resolution, we can get all-party support so we can move forward with this very important diagnostic tool that needs to be accessible by the people of Ontario.

There's no question—I've spoken many times here as a former nurse—on the importance of preventive medicine, early detection and prevention, and better solutions for individual treatments. Early detection not only makes someone more comfortable in the long run, but it saves lives. There's no question.

When you go to a doctor or to health care practitioners of all sorts, they feel more confident when they know they've done all they can to diagnose and treat a patient. It's very frustrating when you know that a solution exists—in this case, a diagnostic tool—that can bring forward the best treatment possible for the patients they see. When you have the barriers that exist today—we have this barrier to accessing PET scans—it's just not acceptable that the McGuinty government will not move forward on this.

We've had many quotes from people. Dr. David Webster, for example, the nuclear medicine specialist at Sudbury Regional Hospital, has pointed out that PET scans will ultimately save money because they will yield more accurate diagnoses and better treatment.

PET scans are accessed worldwide, including the other provinces outside Ontario. It's not at clinical trials anymore; it's not a new or experimental procedure. We need to open PET scans to be available to all the people in Ontario who need to have PET scans.

The Ministry of Health Promotion has a budget of nearly \$400 million. One would think that, with a budget of this magnitude, they would be able to come to the conclusion that Dr. Webster has and would demonstrate interest in actually promoting health and making the lives of Ontarians more comfortable as they battle major illnesses like cancer and heart disease.

I'd like to remind my colleagues in the Legislature that one in four people will die from cancer. Based on current incidence rates, 39% of Canadian women will develop cancer during their lifetime, and 45% of men will. Those are staggering statistics.

I think that we all have to step back and say, "How do we approach this as a team?" It's very hard. I know that political cycles tend to be shorter than planning-for-health-care cycles, but sometimes, please, just take the politics out of it and move forward for what's best for the people—in this case, of Ontario—in their health care.

If you look at the data from the US National Oncology PET Registry recently released, it shows that 38% of patients who had a PET scan were able to have their treatments changed as a result of the findings of the scan. These were changes for more effective treatment. If there is access to PET scans, there are some treatments that people are going through that they wouldn't have to go through. They would be ruled out; they wouldn't be effective. I just can't tell you how much of a difference that makes in someone's life.

The evidence is staggering. Again, I go to the Ministry of Health Promotion website. It says that the ministry will help Ontarians lead healthier lives by delivering programs that promote healthy choices and healthy lifestyles. It's kind of ironic that people are leaving the province to get their badly needed PET scans. This is not delivering programs, and it's certainly not promoting healthy choices for better treatment solutions.

It's quite another thing, and I think this was brought up earlier today, that Ontario is the second-largest PET installation base in Canada but it's not delivering a PET scanning program. So you go to all this trouble to oversee installations, and then you stall on clinical trials of over 1,000 individuals instead of helping the estimated tens of thousands of people waiting for a PET scan.

My colleague from Newmarket–Aurora has raised in the House a number of times the installation and operation of cone beam CT scanners in private dental practices. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is just starting to determine the process on the rules and regulations related to the operation of the dental CT scanners in all settings. The minister can't drag his feet on the heels of these useful devices the same way he has on PET scanners. The approval will not cost the government anything. Ontario has an opportunity here to be ahead of the curve when it comes to health care and the promotion of health, as a health care leader. We have the largest population of any province, and this should be reflected in our ability to deliver first-rate health care to the people of Ontario. Instead, we're the only province that has not approved the use of cone beam CT scanners in dental offices. Instead, dentists are sending people to get in line for their CT scans at hospitals, a drain on our health care system and a greater radiation risk than the cone beam style of CT scans that could be available in dental offices.

As a nurse, as the health promotion critic and especially as a citizen of Canada and a resident of Ontario, I urge the government to recognize PET as a vital diagnostic tool for health care and preventive medicine. I thank the member for Kitchener–Waterloo for bringing forward the resolution today, and I am hoping that all parties can take the politics out of it and pass this resolution.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm pleased to speak to ballot item number 29. I think that some of the comments of our colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock to try and look at this from a non-partisan position are important suggestions. When I heard about this particular ballot item coming from the very well-respected member

for Kitchener–Waterloo, a former Minister of Health, I decided to delve a little more deeply into this particular issue.

It is clearly a prudent approach that our government has taken, one that shows our dedication to fiscal responsibility. We have a consistent approach in our government that all new health technologies that appear promising but for which there is insufficient quality evidence of clinical utility to justify multi-million-dollar funding, need to be subjected to very careful evaluation. That's the approach that we have adopted here in Ontario.

Our colleague from Nickel Belt mentioned the fact that notwithstanding the 11 PET scanners at nine centres, unfortunately Sudbury does not have one in place. I know that she will be happy to hear that since October 1, 2007, the northern health travel grant is available to all northern patients referred for PET scanning.

When we look at the clinical trials and the registries, we see that there has been a large target enrolment. As an example, the head and neck cancer clinical trial—a cohort trial—has a target enrolment of 400. As of March 31, only 328 have been enrolled, so there is certainly more space. There are spots for people in that particular clinical trial, as there are a number of spaces in the stage 3 lung cancer trial. It's interesting to know that there are well over 3,000 individuals who have accessed PET scans through the Ontario PET evaluation trials and registries.

1500

There have been some quotes from some noted authorities, and I'd like to quote Dr. Bill Evans, chair of the Ontario PET steering committee, oncologist and president of Hamilton's Juravinski Cancer Centre, an excellent centre: "There has been criticism in Ontario in its seeming tardiness to adopt. But it's a decision taken by cancer specialists of the province, various surgeons and medical and radiation oncologists...."

"In cancer, we have to figure out how best to use it. When the clinical trials are completed, there will be a complete evaluation."

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: First of all, it's a privilege to speak on this particular issue from, as reported, the hardest-working MPP, the Honourable Elizabeth Witmer, former Minister of Health and current MPP for Kitchener–Waterloo on ballot 29, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should recognize positron emission tomography"—or PET scanning—"as a vital diagnostic tool for care, and as such should introduce an implementation plan with timelines to achieve the same level of access ... here in Ontario as in jurisdictions such as Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec."

I think there are a number of issues that are important, and I would thank our honourable colleague for raising this particular issue. Of course, as a physician MPP, I certainly support the broad outlines of attempting to bring 21st-century technology to a wider audience, a wider participation rate, so that we, as physicians, may be

further empowered to diagnose, treat, monitor and intervene on an earlier and earlier basis.

I think, though, perhaps some of the political rhetoric embedded in the commentary or within in the ballot item itself is largely being addressed, because as you know, the government of Ontario, with its current health budget of something on the order of \$40 billion plus, having increased from \$28 billion when we took office in October 2003, has demonstrated its extraordinary political will, the McGuinty vision and a real resourcing of the health care sector broadly.

I'll give you a case in point very briefly in the 47 seconds that I have left. PSA testing—cancer testing for men—is now covered. A female patient came to me and said, “Doctor, I want you to do a PSA test.” I said, “Why?” “I want to find out if I have prostate cancer.” I said, “You don't have prostate cancer.” She said, “How do you know unless you test me?” The reason I bring that up in a somewhat humorous way is that if we allow unregulated widespread access to, let's say, the latest fashionable test of the day, it will probably be misused, overused and abused. That's why I think the government is taking a measured approach with the clinical trials at a research level, gathering the facts and information so this modality—very extensive, as you know—can be used judiciously.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mrs. Witmer, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to thank all the people who spoke to the motion. I would encourage the Liberal members to look at the motion. The motion is simply committing your government to introduce a plan of implementation with some timelines in order that Ontarians will know when they can achieve fair and equal access to PET scanning here in Ontario, similar to the access that we have in other parts of Canada, such as British Columbia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Quebec or Alberta, and also the same access that people in other countries of this world, such as Chile, Lebanon, Argentina etc., have to PETs. That's what we are asking for in order that people may know that the time will come that there will be equal access.

I think I've pointed out that this is a diagnostic tool that is the gold standard in the world today. It is being used by other governments. The clinical trials and tests that are being undertaken here in the province of Ontario that were to last two years have now gone into almost five years. In fact, one of the members of the PET scan steering committee, Dr. Charron of the Hospital for Sick Children, resigned two months ago because he said that there's an obvious ethical problem with a technology that can benefit cancer patients and the fact that it's unavailable to most of them under the presumption that it's being studied.

The time for study is over. It has been studied to death by other countries and provinces. It has been accepted for use. We know that it has a big impact in the diagnosis of cancer and certainly in the treatment. The latest data from the US said that 38% of patients had their management

changed to a more appropriate therapy. This certainly demonstrates the need for PETs. I urge you to support the motion.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario develop an “Eat Local: Live Fresh” food miles strategy to encourage publicly funded schools to serve healthy, local Ontario foods to their students.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 97, Ms. Pendergast, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I rise in the House today to call on the government of Ontario to develop and encourage publicly funded schools to serve healthy, local Ontario foods to their students. I'm thrilled that today our gallery is full of young students from our schools in Ontario. I'm calling on schools to change: to change the philosophy under which we operate, to change the way we make healthy choices, to change because it's the right thing to do. It's for our children, and I will speak to the ripple effect this has from childhood to aging.

We have removed trans fats from school cafeterias. Let us replace them with healthy choices and local choices, to reduce the food miles that our food travels. The concept of food miles is used to describe the distance that food travels from the location where it is grown or raised to the location where it is consumed. In Waterloo region alone, imports of 58 commonly eaten foods travel an average of 4,497 kilometres to the region. These imports account for 51,709 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually, contributing to climate change and air quality, both of which have an effect on human health.

A significant opportunity exists to reduce our contribution to global climate change and air pollution by replacing imports, while at the same time doing the right thing for the health of our children with food items that are sourced locally. The implications are boundless, including strengthening our communities, our economies, reducing the carbon footprint, supporting our farmers, health and wellness, and teaching our students good choices.

Schools are the microcosm of larger society. What we begin here will spill into the larger communities. Beginning with schools, the Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act has set the stage. This act amends the Education Act to add provisions regulating the trans fat content of all food and beverages sold in a school cafeteria. The bill bans trans fats from food in school cafeterias and vending machines and calls for healthier menu choices in cafeterias.

According to a report published by Health Canada, while most Canadian children and youth are healthy, a number of nutrition concerns do exist. Poor eating patterns contribute to chronic health problems such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and later in life,

osteoporosis. Obesity in children is increasing. Inadequate nutrition affects the long-term development of our children. We owe it to our children to offer them healthy choices within the very educational institution in which they spend their days: schools.

We have a responsibility to provide our youth in schools with healthy choices, as well as to educate them with health and wellness courses for them in the long term.

1510

“Eat Local: Live Fresh” will provide an enhanced learning experience for Ontario’s schoolchildren by supporting their sense of local identity. According to the CSPI study *Are Schools Making the Grade?*, “Poor nutrition is a key preventable risk factor for the major chronic disease that takes a huge toll in morbidity, disability and premature death in Canada.”

The fear is that “today’s generation of children may be the first in a long time to live shorter, sicker lives than their parents.”

Poor nutrition is a key preventable risk. This government has taken the first steps with the Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act. Now let’s take the next step and replace trans fat with healthy local choices that support agriculture and build local economies and strengthen our local communities.

Premier Dalton McGuinty has pledged to work with farmers, the agri-food industry and community organizations to increase the public profile and sales of Ontario food products. This government will invest \$56 million over four years to promote Ontario food products for farmers’ markets. This encourages all Ontarians, when grocery shopping or dining, to pick Ontario freshness.

We need to move that Ontario freshness into our schools and make the opportunity to Live Fresh available to our students in schools. Premier Dalton McGuinty has said, “Everyone has a role to play to support Ontario agriculture,” and, “If we buy Ontario, everyone wins because we are supporting our farmers, our processors, our rural economy, our environment and ourselves with healthy food from here at home.” Healthy food from here at home reduces the food miles travelled, reduces the carbon footprint, and supports local farmers, local agritourism and the local economy.

Our students have a role to play in this beyond better health, beyond learning wellness, right into developing their own commitment to their local communities at a grassroots level. They learn a sense of dedication and commitment to their world, and they will continue to choose to live local; they will continue to choose to eat fresh.

This will promote a sense of mutual prosperity based on confidence. Students will feel satisfaction by supporting local farmers, and food producers will also be encouraged to reinforce their quality control when they know that their product is being consumed in their own backyard.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is involved in the Pick Ontario Freshness marketing stra-

tegy and Foodland Ontario to build awareness of and demand for the fresh, high-quality foods grown and produced in Ontario.

The benefits of eating local and living fresh, both in our schools and at a community level, are tremendous. The community of Kitchener–Conestoga and the larger Waterloo region have rallied together to support this resolution of a “Eat Local: Live Fresh” food miles strategy. We have several exciting initiatives occurring that both support this resolution and deserve recognition.

St. Mary’s High School, one of the largest schools in Waterloo region, has not only moved to reduce the trans fats from its cafeteria, but has also taken the next step to move forward. A student-led initiative to serve healthy foods in their cafeteria has resulted in a school policy to that effect. The exceptional part of this is that it’s student-led, it’s student-inspired, and it’s student-driven at the grassroots level.

We are continuing to look at the aspect of reducing food miles and supporting local agriculture and farmers’ markets. Anne Facey, who is the director of the St. Mary’s High School progressive cafeteria policy, states: “Kids consume half of their daily calories in a high school setting. We have a responsibility to educate them about their nutritional health and raise awareness about the socioeconomic factors surrounding where their food comes from.”

Foodlink of Waterloo region, under the leadership of executive director Peter Katona, is a grassroots organization made up of farmers, food businesses, consumers and other community stakeholders who are committed to putting local food on local tables. Since 2002, Foodlink has been committed to championing a healthy local food system to sustain our community food producers. They’ve taken a leadership role in linking rural and urban towards a common appreciation of local food and its role in building stronger communities. The Buy Local, Buy Fresh map marks its sixth year in Waterloo region. It features farmers, along with local farmers’ markets, food processors, restaurants and shops, and they support local food. As Peter says, “Local food is not cheap; it is priceless.”

Foodlink supports the “Eat Local: Live Fresh” resolution and is pleased to support healthy food in our schools. Peter Katona also says, “In Waterloo region, if you have gone 100 miles to localize your diet, you have likely gone 90 miles too far.”

The Herrle family in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga has become a local tradition in the region and has been growing and marketing fruits and vegetables in Waterloo region for 45 years. They state the following:

“We believe that the promotion of a local food economy in our schools is a priceless lesson we can teach our students. The ‘Eat Local: Live Fresh’ program will be a healthy boost to our students, to our environment and to our local economy. The Buy Local, Buy Fresh campaign has had a tremendously positive impact in our region. May ‘Eat Local: Live Fresh’ be embraced the same way.”

Under the leadership of president John Tibbits and his team—Marlene Raasok, John Richards and Elissa Bonin—Conestoga College is developing a wellness concept called Choosing Lifestyles of Health to implement in their programming so that our students can continue to develop healthy lifestyle choices. They are moving toward a centre for wellness excellence or a one-stop shopping model for student wellness. The student association supports this concept. President John Tibbits supports “Eat Local: Live Fresh” and he says, “We want to be fit to live, not just live to be fit.”

Dr. Ron Schlegel in my riding has formed a unique partnership between Schlegel–University of Waterloo Research Institute for Aging, or RIA, and the University of Guelph to ensure that optimal food and nutrition are at the forefront of disease prevention and long-term health planning, and we must continue to do that health planning for all ages.

St. Mary’s hospital in Kitchener has been honoured as well for its neighbourhood market. They are thrilled to be recognized as innovators among their peers.

As you can see, this concept of “Eat Local: Live Fresh” food miles strategy is embraced in Waterloo region, both within the school setting as well as within the larger community.

Today I call on the government of Ontario to recognize the priceless benefits of a “Eat Local: Live Fresh” food miles strategy and encourage its implementation both within our schools and throughout our communities as a whole across this province. It’s the right thing to do for our children; it’s the right thing to do for their future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I’m pleased to very briefly join the debate on the motion that has been put forward by the member for Kitchener–Conestoga, where she is calling upon this House to develop an “Eat Local: Live Fresh” strategy to encourage our publicly funded schools to serve healthy, local Ontario foods to their students.

Many of the people she has talked about as supporting this—Dr. Schlegel, Dr. Tibbits, and the Herrle family and the fresh farm produce that they produce and sell—are close to my riding. I just want to congratulate her on bringing forward this particular resolution. I think she has done a good job to raise awareness one more time about what is necessary if our students are to be as healthy as they possibly can be. We see obesity in our schools, and it’s important that students eat healthy. Of course, whenever we possibly can, if we can eat foods that are grown locally, all the better for those who provide those foods.

I congratulate her on her resolution and certainly will be supporting it.

1520

M^{me} France Gélinas: I’m happy to rise and talk about “Eat Local: Live Fresh,” the food miles motion. Certainly, the NDP supports the eat local movement and would encourage the government to do everything in its

power to increase the amount of local food served in our public schools. We have long supported nutrition in schools. Former NDP colleague MPP Tony Silipo introduced the first school nutrition program, and that was 15 years ago.

Eat Local is a win-win scenario: It supports local farmers, it reduces the impact on the environment of transporting food, and it encourages consumption of healthy, fresh produce.

The member from Kitchener–Conestoga said that schools are a good place to start, and we would agree. Eating patterns and habits started in childhood and youth tend to endure throughout adulthood.

It is particularly critical to encourage the provision and consumption of local and fresh food in schools at this time. Why? Obesity rates are climbing due to poor diet and lack of exercise, especially among young children; children and youth are increasingly targeted by advertisements for fast foods and processed foods, both very unhealthy; and financially stressed schools are increasingly selling things such as chocolate bars and other unhealthy foods to raise funds for basic programs because they just don’t have the budget to do so otherwise.

An eat local, eat fresh strategy needs to be more than symbolic. The strategy needs to be comprehensive and include education, legislation and financial support.

If you talk to the public at large, everybody will tell you it is a good idea. So why aren’t we doing it? Well, we’re not doing it because there are some structural issues. The eat fresh, eat local strategy needs to effectively respond to those structural issues that mitigate against the purchase of local, fresh food. Education and provision of information is important, but raising awareness is not enough. We need to address the current barriers to the purchase of fresh and local food.

First, I want to talk about the financial barriers as well as the time pressures on individuals.

Some 340,000 Ontarians rely on food banks each month. They have to rely on mostly second-rate canned and packaged goods that are not fresh and probably not local. If the food bank is lucky enough to have some cash donations, they will buy milk. Why? Because 60% of the food bank users are kids, and we know that they need milk.

Today is National Hunger Awareness Day. An important part of any strategy to promote fresh and local food is a strategy to end hunger in a wealthy province such as Ontario. Such a strategy means ensuring that all Ontarians have access to adequate incomes, whether through fair wages or decent income supports for those who are not able to work. That is the only way that all Ontarians will be able to purchase healthy, local food.

Time is also an issue. Too many Ontarians are working multiple jobs to make ends meet. They have no time to seek out and purchase local, fresh produce that is not available in the corner store or the local supermarket but that you have to go around to the producers to get and then prepare.

Second, advertising: An eat local, eat fresh strategy needs to include legislation to ban advertising of junk food and pop in schools. It is presently being done in Quebec, it has been in the UK for some time, but it is not here in Ontario. It should ban junk food advertising to kids outside of schools, as some other countries have done. We need to recognize that multinational companies are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on sophisticated and very cool ads, but those ads are aimed at getting kids to become hooked on sugar, salt, caffeine and other unhealthy chemicals. Most of them have no nutrients whatsoever. Without bans and controls on junk food advertising, any government strategy will be only a drop in the bucket.

Third, we need to adequately finance our schools. Parents are put in the difficult situation of having to raise funds to cover basic educational needs: classroom expenses, library books, sports equipment, music, IT—the list goes on. When the school doesn't have enough money to provide the basics needed for education, it's very hard for those same schools to think of spending locally, eating fresh and eating local.

One of the easiest ways to raise money, of course, is to sell junk food. Has anybody bought a chocolate bar lately from those cute little guys who come to the door, raising money for their school? I know I have. They also hold barbecues, and what do you find at those barbecues? Hot dogs and pop. I've paid my dollars for hot dogs and pop. I want to support my local school, but at the bottom I know that this is not healthy. We are sending a message to our kids that is wrong.

For a school to be in a position to implement an "Eat Local: Live Fresh" policy, they have to have adequate financial resources so they aren't put in a position where they have to fundraise for the basics. Schools also need financial support and incentives to purchase local and fresh food and be able to pay for the storage, the environmentally friendly utensils and plates etc.

It is heartening to see that there is a growing movement in support of the purchase of local food. Yesterday, the city of Markham became the first municipality to implement a local food procurement policy, ensuring that a minimum of 10% of its material and produce comes from LFP-certified Ontario farmers, with further increases of 5% per year.

Also, Local Food Plus in Toronto has developed a certification for local, sustainable food that includes sustainable production, safe and fair working conditions for on-farm labour, and reduced food-related energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

The agricultural sector is beginning to respond to the Eat Local movement. Historically, our agricultural sector has been thought by the government to be an export sector. The vast majority are large farms that are growing produce for export. However, with the rising cost of gas and oil, things are beginning to change and a movement is growing to buy directly from the local farmers. But it is not easy.

I want to give an example from my riding. Although we have quite a few chicken farmers and egg producers, there is nobody in and around Sudbury who can get that accredited—if it's a small, medium or large egg. It doesn't seem so high-tech to me to see if an egg is small, medium or large, but because we haven't got anybody, we cannot buy fresh eggs from our egg producers in Sudbury. They have to be shipped out, measured—small, medium, large—and then God knows where they end up. If you want to buy local eggs, you have to go to the market, you have to go to the farmer. Why am I not allowed to buy local Sudbury-grown eggs in my supermarket? It's beyond me.

Hagar, which is just on the edge of my riding, has about 30 farmers who have been brought together, each investing \$3,000 of their own money to open a slaughterhouse, because there are none to be found in and around Sudbury. This is the type of partnership and management that would be managed by an intermediary who already processes meat bought from the packers. The farmers are waiting to hear back from the Ontario Cattlemen's Association's expansion program with the hope of the program starting in October.

There are many more examples of structural barriers to eating locally and eating fresh. If we want those programs to be successful, we have to pay more than lip service to them. We have to look at those structural barriers and change them, and this is what the NDP intends to do.

1530

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to rise and speak in support of the motion by the member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

As has been noted earlier, we understand that there is an increasing problem with our school-aged kids with the issue of obesity. If you look back at the data from about 1977 or 1978, back in there, the official stats told us that about 13% of children were overweight or obese. If you look at the current data, we find that that rate has doubled. We now find that 26%, or about one in four kids, are overweight or obese. Clearly, that's an alarming statistic, particularly because we know from all the medical research that if a child is overweight early in life, they're likely much later in life to have difficulty with diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis and a variety of issues.

Our government has taken a couple of steps to deal with that. We know that the issues related to childhood obesity are a lack of exercise, and poor nutrition habits. In terms of the sedentary lifestyle that we know a lot of kids have, we now require that there be phys-ed every day in our elementary schools, to try and get our kids to be more active.

We've just recently passed a bill called Healthy Food for Healthy Schools. It does three things. First of all, it bans trans fats from being sold in schools, predominantly school cafeterias but also any other forum where food is routinely being sold. It focused on processed trans fats. There are small amounts of naturally occurring trans fats

in dairy products and ruminant meats, and they are exempt. The processed trans fats, which cause the health issue, are being banned. We're also banning junk food from school vending machines.

The third piece of this, which we are currently working on, is providing broader nutritional guidelines for all foods that are sold to kids in school. That's where this motion from the member really fits in very nicely: As we develop those broader nutritional guidelines based on Canada's Food Guide, we expect that we will be getting away from the fries and some of those other sorts of staples in school cafeterias and looking a lot more at a healthy diet. There's a great opportunity here, as we have a healthier diet in school cafeterias, to bring in local foods.

I live in a part of the province where in fact the major grocery store chain actually does have flats of locally grown strawberries in season and crates of locally grown corn in season, but I know as I travel around the province, if I'm on vacation and go into a grocery store, that's not always the case. It's often a huge issue actually even being able to access locally grown foods in our grocery stores.

There's an opportunity here not only to provide foods but also get students to start to think about where the food comes from. How many of us know when we go into a grocery store whether the meat came from the farmer down the concession or whether it came from Australia, from New Zealand or from Texas? I have a huge abattoir in Guelph that produces boxed meat, yet if you go and look at boxed meat, you will find that most of it comes not just from out of the province but out of the country. If we adopt these sorts of programs, we can start to educate our kids to find out where their food comes from, because in a lot of cases, you would be very surprised at the answer. It doesn't come locally. We need to give much more thought to the Foodland Ontario program and to this motion, "Eat Local: Live Fresh," and make sure we get more local foods.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to join the debate on the resolution today before us that would encourage publicly funded schools to serve healthy local Ontario foods to their students, brought forward by the member from Kitchener-Conestoga. I have spoken many times in the Legislature about how important agriculture is to the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock and about all the farmers and producers I have. Again, the slogan "Farmers Feed Cities" fits. It's in many of our constituency offices, and we participated in many of their education campaigns out there.

I'm pleased to support the principle of the resolution. It stresses the need to promote our products and, in turn, let our producers know that we value them and support them.

I'd like to point out one fact. In the backgrounder, the member from Kitchener-Conestoga listed some excellent examples of community leadership on that front. Kawartha Choice FarmFresh, which is in both Peterborough county and Kawartha Lakes, is an excellent example of

great community leadership, showcasing local produce with end-of-the-laneway farm signs so they know they can come up the driveway and buy farm produce, and also the farmers' markets that we have throughout many of our small communities and that started on the May 24 weekend. We'd like to see them expanded. I would like to see a year-round one at the new Lindsay Agricultural Society and bring people from Toronto to the area, because we have many products all year round. I have many goat dairy industries that are quite attractive to urban dwellers, and the products they produce are fantastic. It's interesting that we could maybe make that connection. But they certainly need to be added to that list.

The Ontario cattlemen were here and served fine beef this week to all of the MPPs, and the Foodland Ontario programs are out there.

As opposition critic for health promotion, I certainly agree with promoting healthy choices in diets and helping kids make decisions. We need to start to educate them early as to how food is produced. As we've all seen the price of fuel and the cost to the farmers increase, we need to assist more of our local farmers and buy more locally. I know that the Dairy Farmers of Ontario have been working hard, creating great leadership in the school milk program currently used in the province. I've met with many members in my local riding from the DFO. They want to expand that milk program to include milk from cows that are fed a diet with DHA omega 3, which is instrumental in the development of the brain, the eyes and the nerves in the critical years of youth in their physical development.

I know that my colleague from Oxford is going to speak further on this, but I just want to comment that our farmers in Ontario need help. They have been asking the government for help for a long time. There is no question that we support the intent of this resolution. Our farmers need a long-term, sustainable plan for our agriculture sectors or they're not going to be able to grow the local food that we eat, and it is getting to be that crisis. We cannot push any more farmers out.

In 2005, the Kawartha Lakes Chamber of Commerce said, 50 farms closed down in my area. It's many more than that now. The input costs are growing extremely high. The cost of production is so much that they need political support. There has to be the political will that we want our farmers to stay in business and produce the high quality of food that they do produce.

I appreciate the resolution that has been brought forward today, and I know my colleague the member from Oxford is going to expand at length on that.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes to talk about the "Eat Local: Live Fresh" motion from the member for Kitchener-Conestoga. People think that Hamilton is a big city, and it is: 500,000 people; that's fairly big. So it's perceived as a city, but in fact one of the major industries in Hamilton is agriculture. We have a number of farming enterprises around Hamilton in what used to be some of the smaller com-

munities that became a part of Hamilton during amalgamation.

I know for sure that there are several initiatives being undertaken to try to get people to tie into our local farmers and to purchase their foods. One of our current city councillors is a former farm family of the year, from his area in Flamborough. There are organizations like plan b Organic Farm. They provide the opportunity for people to enlist in a program whereby they pay a certain amount of money and, every week, groceries are delivered fresh from the farm for the families to consume over that week. We have organizations like the Conserver Society, Environment Hamilton and others that are encouraging people to acknowledge the importance of eating from our local farms.

1540

We have a new farmers' market that was relocated right into a neighbourhood on Ottawa Street. It used to be located in a mall parking lot, and now it's really engrained into a neighbourhood in a business district, which is quite fabulous.

We have a number of community organizations, including our community health clinics, the North Hamilton Community Health Centre, that have implemented community gardens for people who don't have land of their own and who can go and produce vegetables and things over the summer to feed their families from a fresh, local perspective. We have a new such enterprise on the Hamilton Mountain at 1605 Garth Street that I was invited to attend.

But we also have things like CanGro, where the government of Ontario didn't support the operation and farming of those peaches and we no longer have that industry. That's a shame.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Again, it's a pleasure to be able to support the member for Kitchener–Conestoga's resolution to "Eat Local: Live Fresh," whereby we will be encouraging publicly funded schools to serve healthy, local Ontario foods to their students. I see this as building on Bill 8, the Healthy Food for Healthy Schools Act, that recently received third reading, where we banned trans fats in school cafeterias and vending machines. This is a concerted effort on the part of our government to bring full attention to the issue of how good nutritional practice can positively influence our health. I think, as everyone is becoming increasingly aware, that poor eating habits do contribute to chronic health problems, whether they be diabetes, heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, so the patterns established in the early years are ones that will produce lifelong benefits for our children, and perhaps our children will influence their parents to look at good nutritional programs as well.

The Ministry of Health Promotion, of course, is very much involved in promoting the concept of eating as many fruit and vegetable servings a day; five to 10 is obviously an excellent idea. When these are locally produced, obviously there's less need for preservatives, fewer chemicals, which can also potentially influence our health.

The northern fruit and vegetable pilot was a program the Ministry of Health Promotion introduced in 2006-07, and that was in conjunction with the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Porcupine public health unit, schools and local school boards. They started off by providing three servings per week of Ontario-grown fruits and vegetables to 5,000 students in 24 elementary schools in Timmins, Schumacher, South Porcupine, Porcupine, Matheson, Iroquois Falls and Cochrane. Obviously, accessing fresh fruit and vegetables is a challenge in the north. We have recently expanded that program and now it is in 60 elementary schools in Porcupine and Algoma regions.

These are examples of very positive steps that our government is taking in order to encourage individuals to eat fresh and local.

I also wanted to mention a very useful interactive website that you can access through the Ministry of Health Promotion website: the EatRight Ontario interactive web—and also a call centre, for those who are perhaps less likely to use the Internet. It enables Ontarians to readily access up-to-date, comprehensive nutrition information and advice on healthy eating from a registered dietitian.

Hopefully, all these measures will reap long-term benefits for all Ontarians.

I commend the member for Kitchener–Conestoga for bringing this resolution forward.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to speak on and support this resolution, which would bring more locally grown Ontario food into our schools. I want to recognize the member for Kitchener–Conestoga, who has not been here very long yet, for bringing her first private member's business into this House and deciding that it was important to bring in an agricultural piece of business, a resolution to ask the government to prepare a strategy for doing a better job of getting Ontario food into our schools.

I just want to point out that over the past three years the locally grown movement has been increasing. We heard the member in her introductory remarks point out the 100-mile diet, in which people attempt to eat only food that is grown within 100 miles of home. I want to say to everybody in the Legislature this afternoon that if you use that 100-mile rule, all the good food in Oxford county is eligible to fit the criteria. So from here on in, you will eat nothing but the best if you stay in the 100-mile radius.

More and more people are recognizing the value of eating locally grown food. I think there are a lot of reasons for this movement, and it's worthwhile. It means the food meets high Ontario standards; it means that we aren't wasting resources, including the environment, by shipping foods long distances, as was mentioned by the member; and to me the most important part of it is that it supports our local farmers and our local agriculture industry. That's why I support the principle of this resolution. I believe that our schools should already be serving

locally grown Ontario foods. In fact, one of our party's campaign commitments was that all Ontario public institutions, from schools to hospitals, would purchase foods from Ontario farmers. We also committed to promote Ontario-grown foods by ensuring that when people went to a cafeteria in a hospital or a public building, they would see a sign telling them that the food they are being served was grown and produced by their fellow Ontarians.

Over the last few years, as the member pointed out, the McGuinty government has been quite comfortable telling schools what they can and can't serve, and banning trans fat from the cafeteria. If the McGuinty government feels they should tell schools what food they can serve, why haven't they already said that the food they are serving should be Ontario food? It would have been easy to include that change in the Healthy Food for Health Schools Act, which was introduced by the Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, and passed on December 5, 2007. The bill bans trans fat from food in school cafeterias and vending machines and calls for healthier menu choices in cafeterias based on the new Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. I don't see that it would have been very difficult to have included, and they should give preference to, food produced in Ontario.

That wouldn't have been the first place that happened. There was legislation passed in the state of Washington. The reason I mention that is because the approach that is being recommended here is to develop a strategy, not what that strategy will be. This bill that was passed in Washington "eliminates low-cost bidding requirements for school purchases of Washington-grown food and allows schools to adopt price preference for local food." It was mentioned in the member's presentation that it isn't cheap, it's just the best buy.

The second one is, "requires development of food procurement procedures for state entities to encourage and facilitate purchasing of Washington-grown to the maximum extent practicable." Again, it's not suggesting that you would always have to have Washington food, or in this case Ontario food, but in every case where it is possible and practical it would be done.

"Requires all state food contracts to include a plan to maximize the availability of Washington-grown food purchased through the contract." If that were passed by our government in Ontario, it would be a great boon for our farming communities.

I just want to point out that this legislation in Washington promotes local produce being produced and served in schools, and the bidding process allows schools to take into account where the food was grown. Again, it may not be the cheapest food, but because it was grown at home, that's the one they're allowed to purchase. They don't always have to take the best price.

So why in Ontario does a government member need to use private members' business—and I appreciate that she did—to ask her own government to develop a strategy to bring Ontario food into schools? The ability was there all along. Why didn't they do that? Why hasn't the Mc-

Guinty government already included that in their legislation?

Now, I wasn't asked, and I'm not suggesting the member should have asked, but if I had been asked, I would not have introduced a resolution today. I would have introduced a bill, a piece of legislation that would have included that—the same as in Washington state. There, the government doesn't develop a strategy, the government actually makes it happen. That would have been a great benefit to us all.

1550

Recently, I was talking to an agriculture leader in our province and he was telling me he had just been to a school breakfast program that morning. He visited us in Oxford shortly after that and he said he was quite disturbed. He went to the school breakfast program, and the produce they were serving at the breakfast program was in fact not Ontario produce. This is food that is bought with Ontario taxpayers' dollars, being purchased by an Ontario institution and being fed to Ontario children, yet it is not produced in Ontario.

Mr. Peter Kormos: So where was it coming from?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I don't know. I wasn't able to follow the whole trip, because it didn't come straight from where it was grown to where it was served, but I'm sure it went well beyond the 100 miles.

Again, the member's resolution speaks about developing a strategy. I support the goal of eating locally grown food, but I have real concern that if this government keeps ignoring the needs of our farmers, there won't be any food grown in Ontario.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm delighted to stand up this afternoon and speak in support of the resolution by my colleague the member from Kitchener-Conestoga. The resolution is the "Eat Local: Live Fresh" food miles strategy, which promotes fresh fruits, vegetables and food being served in our schools. I think it's a very important initiative, because this initiative fits with our government direction.

I remember when we were elected in 2003, our government, the Minister of Education, introduced a law to ban junk foods from elementary schools. I think that was a very good, important step. Not long ago, we also introduced another bill banning trans fats from school cafeterias across Ontario. Now the member from Kitchener-Conestoga is bringing in a different initiative to create awareness and promote local products being planted in local areas.

It's important for us to support local farmers, local producers and our local economy. We, the province of Ontario, are a big producer of many different products: carrots, lettuce, celery, grapes. Many different fruits and vegetables are being grown locally. We also have a lot of meat production in the province. So it's important for us as a government, especially at the school level, that when we introduce a different program across the province, Ontario tax dollars are spent locally and used to support the local economy. This is part of the strategy to promote local initiatives, to support the local economy and create

an awareness among the kids about what we grow in Ontario.

This initiative will also help to reduce obesity among kids across Ontario, and also reduce health risks. What happens when people eat a lot of junk food products—chocolate bars, chips—that aren't healthy or fresh? They increase their risk of diabetes, heart disease and many other diseases.

This resolution is important. Hopefully the next step will be to adopt it in a government bill, to become law in the province of Ontario. This will help us, as a government, to maintain the health of the people of Ontario.

I remember last year, the Minister of Health Promotion, in conjunction with the Minister of Education, came up with an initiative to support and create awareness in many different schools. I know that two schools in my riding, Clarke Road high school and Montcalm high school, participated in this program, introducing healthy, fresh fruits and vegetables for breakfast on many different days to the students at those schools. It was a very good initiative, and I hope all the schools across Ontario will promote that.

Again, I'm glad to support this resolution. I congratulate the member.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate? The Liberals have 26 seconds. Seeing none, Ms. Pendergast, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I'd like to begin by thanking all of my colleagues for an engaging and supportive discussion. Thank you to the members from Guelph, Oak Ridges–Markham and London–Fanshawe, as well as my colleagues the members from Oxford, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, Kitchener–Waterloo, Nickel Belt and Hamilton Centre. Thank you to everyone today for engaging in this discussion.

I did want to leave you with a quote, as I always do as an English teacher, just to remind you that, “We cannot always build the future for our children, but we can build our children for the future.” That's what this is about today: the discussion that we have the tools to build our children for the future, to give them healthy choices and to encourage them and teach them how to choose local.

For me, “local” in Kitchener–Waterloo region is the world-famous Schneiders meats, Tavistock cheeses and dairy, Herrle's corn, as we heard about earlier, and the Wellesley apple butter festival. I can't forget the Kitchener–Waterloo Oktoberfest and all of the wonderful sausages for Oktoberfest.

It's more than just healthy food and good choices in schools and teaching wellness; it's about the big picture as well: reducing the carbon footprint, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, learning to invest locally, investing in our community and everything that our communities stand for, and strengthening our local farmers and our local farmers' markets. We have the St. Jacobs Farmers' Market. Of course, absolutely it all comes together in learning to eat healthy.

I did want to just reiterate that if food has travelled 100 miles to come to Waterloo region, it has travelled 90 miles too far.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

CONSUMER REPORTING
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES RENSEIGNEMENTS
CONCERNANT LE CONSOMMATEUR

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will deal first with ballot item number 28, standing in the name of Mr. Ruprecht.

Mr. Ruprecht has moved second reading of Bill 75, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I'd like to have Bill 75 referred to the Standing Committee on General Government, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Shall the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government? Agreed. So referred.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with notice of motion number 25.

Mrs. Witmer has moved private member's resolution number 25. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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.

We will call in the members after we deal with the next ballot item, and have a vote.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The next ballot item: Ms. Pendergast has moved private member's resolution number 37. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Agreed to.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now call in the members. It will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1558 to 1603.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mrs. Witmer has moved private member's notice of motion number 25. All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Hardeman, Ernie
Kormos, Peter

Miller, Paul
Scott, Laurie
Shurman, Peter

Sterling, Norman W.
Witmer, Elizabeth

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Best, Margaret
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David

Colle, Mike
Delaney, Bob
Dickson, Joe
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gélinas, France
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Lalonde, Jean-Marc

Leal, Jeff
McNeely, Phil
Phillips, Gerry
Ramal, Khalil
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 8; the nays are 27.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

Negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, I do now call orders of the day.

Hon. David Caplan: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, June 6, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1606.

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Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
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Continued from back cover

Child custody	
Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde	2350
School facilities	
Mr. Paul Miller	2350
Firearms control	
Mr. Tony Ruprecht	2350
Community colleges collective bargaining	
Mr. Ted Arnott.....	2351
Protection for miners	
Mme France Gélinas.....	2351
Hospital funding	
Mr. Joe Dickson.....	2351
Long-term care	
Mme France Gélinas.....	2351
Anti-smoking legislation	
Mr. Jeff Leal	2352

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

Endangered species	
Mr. Norm Miller	2352
Islington Junior Middle School	
Ms. Laurel C. Broten	2352
Automotive industry	
Ms. Laurie Scott	2353
Mad Pride Day	
Ms. Cheri DiNovo	2353
Punjabi music	
Mrs. Amrit Mangat.....	2353
Toronto Catholic District School Board	
Mr. Peter Shurman.....	2353
Coca-Cola Bottling Co.	
Mrs. Linda Jeffrey	2354
Peterborough Regional Health Care Centre	
Mr. Jeff Leal	2354
Climate change	
Mrs. Maria Van Bommel.....	2354

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DES COMITÉS

Standing Committee on Finance and economic Affairs	
Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde	2355
Report adopted.....	2355
Standing Committee on General Government	
Mrs. Linda Jeffrey	2355

Report adopted.....	2355
---------------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS / DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI

2076467 Ontario Inc. Act, 2008, Bill Pr13, Mr. Lalonde	
First reading agreed to	2355
2029652 Ontario Ltd. Act, 2008, Bill Pr9, Ms. Horwath	
First reading agreed to	2355
Fairness for Families Act, 2008, Bill 88, Mr. Hudak / Loi de 2008 sur le traitement équitable des familles, projet de loi 88, M. Hudak	
First reading agreed to	2355
Mr. Tim Hudak	2355
Ombudsman Amendment Act (Hospitals and Long-Term Care Facilities), 2008, Bill 89, Mme Gélinas / Loi de 2008 modifiant la Loi sur l'ombudsman (hôpitaux et établissements de soins de longue durée), projet de loi 89, Mme Gélinas	
First reading agreed to	2356
Mme France Gélinas.....	2356

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉS

Consumer Reporting Amendment Act, 2008, Bill 75, Mr. Ruprecht / Loi de 2008 modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements concernant le consommateur, projet de loi 75, M. Ruprecht	
Mr. Tony Ruprecht	2356
Ms. Lisa MacLeod.....	2358
Ms. Andrea Horwath	2359
Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn.....	2361
Mr. Khalil Ramal	2361
Mme France Gélinas.....	2362
Mr. Tony Ruprecht	2362
Diagnostic Services	
Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer.....	2363
Mme France Gélinas.....	2365
Mr. Bas Balkissoon.....	2366
Mr. Ted Arnott.....	2367
Mr. Khalil Ramal	2368
Ms. Laurie Scott	2368

Ms. Helena Jaczek.....	2369
Mr. Shafiq Qadri	2369
Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer.....	2370
Healthy schools	
Ms. Leeanna Pendergast.....	2370
Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer.....	2372
Mme France G�linas	2372
Mrs. Liz Sandals	2373
Ms. Laurie Scott.....	2374
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	2374
Ms. Helena Jaczek.....	2375
Mr. Ernie Hardeman.....	2375
Mr. Khalil Ramal	2376
Ms. Leeanna Pendergast.....	2377
Consumer Reporting Amendment Act, 2008, Bill 75, Mr. Ruprecht / Loi de 2008 modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements concernant le consommateur, projet de loi 75, M. Ruprecht	
Second reading agreed to	2377
Mr. Tony Ruprecht.....	2377
Diagnostic services	
The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson).....	2377
Healthy schools	
Agreed to.....	2377
Diagnostic services	
Negatived	2378

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 5 June 2008 / Jeudi 5 juin 2008

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Photo Card Act, 2008, Bill 85, Mr. Bradley / Loi de 2008 sur les cartes-photo, projet de loi 85, M. Bradley

Mr. Ted Arnott.....	2325
Hon. James J. Bradley	2328
Mr. Norm Miller.....	2328
Mr. Khalil Ramal.....	2329
Ms. Laurie Scott	2329
Mr. Ted Arnott.....	2329
Mr. Khalil Ramal.....	2330
Mr. Peter Shurman.....	2332
Mrs. Maria Van Bommel.....	2332
Ms. Laurie Scott	2333
Mr. Norm Miller.....	2333
Mr. Khalil Ramal.....	2333
Mr. Peter Shurman.....	2333
Mr. Bob Delaney	2336
Mr. Ernie Hardeman.....	2337
Mr. Khalil Ramal.....	2337
Mr. Robert Bailey.....	2337
Mr. Peter Shurman.....	2337
Mrs. Carol Mitchell	2338
Ms. Laurie Scott	2339
Mr. Norm Miller.....	2339
Mr. Ernie Hardeman.....	2339
Mrs. Carol Mitchell	2339
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	2340

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	2340
--------------------------------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Apprenticeship training

Mr. Robert W. Runciman	2340
Hon. John Milloy.....	2340

Ontario economy

Mr. Tim Hudak.....	2341
Hon. Dwight Duncan.....	2341

Automotive industry

Mr. Howard Hampton.....	2342
Hon. Sandra Pupatello	2342

Automotive industry

Mr. Howard Hampton.....	2343
Hon. Sandra Pupatello	2343

Road safety

Mr. Robert W. Runciman	2344
Hon. Christopher Bentley	2344

Manufacturing jobs

Mr. Paul Miller	2344
Hon. Sandra Pupatello	2344
Hon. Brad Duguid.....	2344

Tuition

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis	2345
Hon. John Milloy.....	2345

Infectious disease control

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer.....	2345
Hon. George Smitherman	2345

Correctional services

Mr. Peter Tabuns	2346
Hon. Rick Bartolucci	2346

Volunteers

Mrs. Liz Sandals	2346
Hon. Michael Chan.....	2346

Conservation

Mr. Tim Hudak	2347
Hon. David Caplan	2347

Conservation

Mr. Paul Miller	2347
Hon. David Caplan	2347

Border security

Mr. Tony Ruprecht	2348
Hon. James J. Bradley	2348

Automotive industry

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette	2348
Hon. Brad Duguid.....	2349

Heritage conservation

Mr. Peter Tabuns	2349
Hon. M. Aileen Carroll.....	2349

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Lord's Prayer

Mr. Jim Wilson.....	2349
---------------------	------

Home care

Mme France Gélinas.....	2350
-------------------------	------

Continued on inside back cover