



No. 77

N° 77

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 21 October 2008

Mardi 21 octobre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7410 or 325-3708.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7410 ou le 325-3708.

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



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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 21 October 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 21 octobre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 20, 2008, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion by Mr. McGuinty to acknowledge the economic challenges facing the province and continuing to implement an economic plan.

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you, Speaker. I look forward to the opportunity to share a few comments with you this morning and the House on our motion, and I want to thank the Premier for bringing it forward. I think it provides a great opportunity for all members of all three parties to put on the record their thoughts and feelings as we face these economically uncertain times in Ontario—certainly more acutely recently, but something that most of us have felt was coming for some time.

While I do believe that it has provided some fertile ground for the opposition and an opportunity for them to sort of slag what has been going on around here for the past number of years, I believe it has been a very important thing that the Premier provide all of us in this Legislature with an opportunity to discuss these things.

What it's also going to do is provide an opportunity for the people of the province to compare and contrast the different ways in which the different parties handle situations like this. Without going too far back in history, we know that in the period of 1990 to 1995, we had what is today the third party in power—during which there were some difficult times, we acknowledge, in Ontario—and we saw the reaction and the way that particular period of time in the province was managed. We saw the results: a \$55-billion debt left to the people of the province in that five-year window, and we saw some of the reaction and the policies that were put in place to try and deal with that, one of which I remember very clearly: a program put in place to help northerners, the northern Ontario heritage fund, which had \$60 million in it, and the NDP took that \$60 million out of that fund and put it into general revenues in that five-year period of time. They raised hydro rates by 40%, they raised the gas tax—

they did a number of things during that period of time. That was some of their reaction to what were some difficult circumstances. And, of course, we find ourselves now, as the Liberals, governing during difficult times as well. We will see at the end of our mandate how that compares to what happened while the NDP were in power.

The Conservatives very recently, from 1995 to 2003, also had an opportunity to govern, and this is why I began my comments by saying that the people in the province will have an opportunity to compare and contrast. From 1995 to 2003, I think most people would agree, the American economy was quite robust. As an export-driven economy primarily in the province of Ontario, we were able to follow along and have some very strong, very good economic times during that eight-year window. Still, in a situation like that, where we were following along a strong American economy and doing very well, we saw what I believe is probably the biggest tax shift in the history of the province of Ontario when the Conservative government of the day decided to download an incredible amount of responsibility and financial responsibility onto the backs of municipal property residential taxpayers.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That was the “who got done in” committee.

Mr. Bill Mauro: That was the “who got done in” committee. I was a member of a municipal council at that time, as I know many other members of this Legislature were, and had to try and find that capacity within their limited resources as municipal councillors. I think that eight-year period was the reason why a lot of people with municipal council experience decided that they were going to run at the provincial level. Even though we had a strong economy, that particular party felt the need to shift tax responsibility onto the residential property taxpayer. They felt the need still to sell public assets. We know the example of—is it Highway 407? A \$3-billion revenue stream to the government—an asset that was valued at \$8 billion or \$12 billion, as I understand it. These were some of the things that they felt they needed to do, even though there were strong economic times. At the end of the day, in those circumstances, we still found ourselves in the province of Ontario left with a deficit during strong economic times—a deficit that they said did not exist—going into the election of 2003. Right up until two or three days before October 2003, there was still a constant, consistent message coming from that party—the official opposition today—that there was no deficit. Well, we had that validated within six months

after October 2003, whereby the Provincial Auditor came in and confirmed that in fact there was a deficit.

Let me begin a bit by acknowledging that we all are aware obviously that there has been job loss in the province of Ontario. My community of Thunder Bay, my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan, has not been immune to this. Specifically affected has been the forestry industry. That's common knowledge, as has been the auto sector and other manufacturing-based sectors in the province of Ontario—very hard hit. Many of those people affected in those industries who have lost their jobs are people that I've known my entire life. Many of them are my demographic—people that I went through school with; people that I've known for a very long time, whose kids played with my kids. This very much hits home. We know these people. We don't need anyone reminding us about the very difficult times that individuals and families have found themselves in. I guess the point is, what have we done in reaction to that as to compared to what other parties have done when they had an opportunity to respond?

There was a program on last night that I watched, the Paikin program; he was broadcasting from Windsor. One of the things that they were talking about there was the manufacturing job losses in the province of Ontario, but they were also talking about small and medium-sized businesses. I think the number they used last night was somewhere in the magnitude of about 3,000 fewer small businesses now than there were four or five years ago. While it is the individuals who work in these manufacturing plants who are affected, we also understand that small and medium-sized businesses have been similarly affected. I know a little bit about that; I have the greatest amount of respect possible for small private business owners. My parents, Jim and Doreen Mauro, opened up a small family business. The family home was attached to the business. For nine years my parents worked that business for 365 days a year, 14½ hours a day—non-stop, nine years, full-bore; no paid pension, no sick days and no paid holidays. So I have a great amount of respect for small business owners and for private businesses, and we all understand and know the challenges that they are facing as well.

What I want to talk a little bit about today, though, within my riding is some of the reaction that we've had and how we've been able to help while there's been losses in the forestry side all across Ontario. Quite frankly, to be clear, even though the NDP have spent the last five years trying to pretend and blame our government for what's gone on in forestry, most people understand that this is a situation that exists in BC and Quebec and every province that is large in manufacturing on the forestry side. Everybody knows that these losses have occurred in all of these provinces, and in the United States as well, for a variety of reasons, but it's only the NDP who disingenuously try to suggest that it's only happening in Ontario and that it's disproportionately happening in Ontario. I must say, I would almost thank the Conservatives a little bit; their language when it comes to

commenting on forestry is much more genuine than I would suggest the third party's—not the entire third party. To be fair to the third party, I don't even think it is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'd just like to caution the member on the language that he's using with respect to the remarks that he's attributing to the New Democrats. I'll return to the member.

0910

Mr. Bill Mauro: “Disingenuous” and “genuine.” I don't think there's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member to withdraw the statement now.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I withdraw, Speaker.

What I was going to try and say was that I don't even think it's the entire third party, but I think it's primarily the leader of the third party who focuses on this particular stream of thought and who spends a lot of his time trying to indicate to people in my riding and people all across Ontario that when it comes to forestry, this party, our government, is primarily responsible for what has gone on in this industry. Of course, that's absolutely ridiculous. Anybody who's paying attention to this issue at all, when they compare to Quebec—and we saw for a long time the leader of the third party spend all of his time comparing Ontario to Quebec. You know what? He doesn't do that anymore. He stopped comparing Ontario to Quebec. He was trying to blame energy costs as the only thing that was affecting this industry and that's why all the job losses were occurring, but he doesn't compare to Quebec anymore, because Quebec has lost more jobs in the forest industry than Ontario has. While they're blessed topographically and have an abundance of hydro-electric power, which is cheaper, and they don't have to rely on nuclear or other forms of energy like we do in Ontario, still, even in that circumstance, they find themselves with more job losses in the forest industry.

So we know that that's not the case, and we know that BC is experiencing similar job losses. We know that there used to be something like 150 paper mills, at one time, and now we're down to about 50. Well, guess what? All of those didn't close in Ontario. They're closing everywhere. There's a series of variables that are affecting this industry.

In my riding in the last five years, there have been about 1,600 jobs created in a new knowledge-based sector. These jobs have gone a long way to mitigating some of the losses in the forestry industry in terms of helping a community to stay viable. We've seen great increases in employment at the university; we've seen great increases in employment at the college; at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, at the hospital; at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine; with the hiring of more teachers.

These are good-paying jobs. Whenever we make an announcement about a job that's been created, somebody always wants to try and put a negative spin on it and say, “Well it's all about service sector jobs; the jobs that are being lost are good-paying forestry jobs.” And we ac-

knowledge that there has been a lot of that, but there have been a lot of well-paying, full-time—salaried, with benefits—jobs created in our province. If you talk to real estate agents in Thunder Bay, they'll tell you that for the last three years or longer, the higher-end homes in Thunder Bay are the ones that they've been having a hard time keeping on the market and that there's not enough of them. They've been saying that for three years. It's these jobs that I'm just describing to you; these are the jobs that are buying those homes. People are coming into our community. Some of them are people who have lived in our community, and they are the ones who are purchasing those homes. There is some good news, even though, as I've said, we acknowledge the difficult circumstances that some people have found themselves in. So some good news there.

I mentioned the 1,600 number. Our government made a \$200-million investment in mass transit in the province of Ontario. That was part of an environmental policy that we adopted some time ago and committed to coming into the election of 2003; an environmental policy to get people out of their cars and into mass transit. That \$200 million flowed to the TTC who went out with a tender and came back with a \$650-million contract, almost entirely all of it landing in the city of Thunder Bay at the local Bombardier plant. I think it's fair to say that contract would not have been tendered without our \$200-million investment. As a result of that \$650-million contract—I can tell you that in the history of my community, it's not often that you see a contract of that size land in our community—it has led directly to 300 additional incremental, long-term, good-paying jobs in our community. So there is some good news, and plenty of it actually, occurring in certain sectors in my community and I think in other communities across the province of Ontario.

What is it that we can do in these difficult circumstances? If you talk to economists—and I don't know if we have any elected MPPs here in the Legislature who are trained as economists, but we all read them and they have opinions, and we listen to what they have to say. They work at universities, they work for the banks, and I think it's fair to say, without being too critical, that there may be 10 in a room and we might have 10 different opinions. They are not all of a like mind in terms of what it is that you have to do. There is one common denominator I would suggest when it comes to economists in the province of Ontario: Most of them, if not all, would believe and would say that one of the things you can do when you find yourself in difficult economic times is to invest in public infrastructure. It creates jobs; it's a good use of public money; it increases productivity. We've taken that path.

I know other parties have different positions. The official opposition is more about tax cuts, and I'm not sure what, broader than that, they have to suggest at this point, but I do know there is an opposition day motion today and perhaps we will hear a bit from them beyond tax cuts, what it is that they would suggest we do in these

difficult times. To be fair, the third party, at the risk of sounding a bit glib, perhaps, is just, "Let's spend our way out of this somehow."

I can tell you about some of the infrastructure investments that we've made in Thunder Bay that have created a tremendous amount of employment and have mitigated increases in the tax base. Two new young offenders facilities, one in Thunder Bay and one in Fort Frances, invested in by our government—approximately a \$30-million investment. Brand new high school—\$30 million from our government. Brand new George Jeffrey Children's Centre for children with physical disabilities—our government gave \$7 million to an \$11-million building. There is a \$9 million small project going on right now at the hospital to accommodate doctors' training and residency training; \$11 million for the Bare Point water treatment facility; \$100 million out of \$150 million for the Sioux Lookout hospital; in Fort Frances, a \$22-million grant for an \$85-million construction project, a cogen project. Clean energy—we'll get a pulp and paper mill almost entirely off the grid, stabilize an entire community and create \$85 million of construction work. Terrace Bay reopened the pulp and paper mill—\$22 million worth of financial assistance for a \$45-million construction job. A new courthouse coming—it's has been announced—an approximately \$40-million construction job. The new Sister Margaret Smith Centre, currently being constructed—a \$15-million job. A new long-term-care home and supportive housing project will come in as an \$80-million to \$100-million construction job. And tens of millions more for roads and bridges—this is only a partial list that I've given you.

This adds up to a tremendous amount of investment in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan and in my colleague's, Minister Gravelle of Thunder Bay—Superior North—a tremendous amount of investment. I can tell you who is happy. If you talk to the building tradespeople, they are extremely happy—and I've talked to them. Local 628, whom I met with last week, with 300 men, none in the hall—none—290 to 300. All of them are working. And similar stories for all of the trades out of locals in Thunder Bay. The mayors and reeves of Thunder Bay—Atikokan are very happy, I can tell you, as well—Mayor Lynn Peterson from the city of Thunder Bay, and all my mayors and reeves in my smaller communities of Oliver Paipoonge, Neebing, and Conmee.

My Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has met some of these people and they have come to really appreciate his assistance as well. Conmee, O'Connor, Gillies, Atikokan—all of these small communities, I should say, with large geographic land bases and a small tax base with which to support the infrastructure requirements of those communities. That's where we've come forward with a lot of financial assistance. We have done a lot to help them to mitigate tax increases for their communities and to provide them with resources so that they can do the work that is required to be done.

That is the piece that most people agree upon, but beyond that we've seen a tremendous amount of diversi-

fication occurring in my community as well. We've invested heavily on the knowledge-based side, and that is the work that's incremental. It's creating different jobs; it's not splitting the pie. One of them I would like to talk about is a task force I've been sitting on for about the past four months.

0920

A wonderful announcement came out of the Ministry of Research and Innovation—which in and of itself is a wonderful creation, and I think it's something we should probably talk a bit more about—that speaks to what the Premier saw coming in Ontario in terms of how we needed to change our approach when it came to getting intellectual property and then turning that property into commercialized products which would lead to job creation in the province of Ontario.

One of the things that has been announced out of that ministry—and I thank Minister Wilkinson for this—is something in Thunder Bay called CRIBE. I'm hoping that my constituents, in the next little while, are going to learn a little bit more about CRIBE. CRIBE is an acronym that stands for the Centre for Research and Innovation in the Bio-Economy. Our government made a \$25-million commitment to CRIBE. I, along with the mayor and the presidents of the college and the universities and a couple of others, have sat on this task force. We've developed a report that will go back to the minister, and we believe that in very short order we are going to start to see the benefits of that \$25-million commitment to the city of Thunder Bay. It is going to establish cutting-edge research, some of which will be housed at the university, but the bigger and more important part, I believe, is that it's going to hopefully—this is where we're going to do our work going forward—land us a large industrial partner that's going to come in and do work in what is this new economy. We are going to help them along with a \$25-million commitment. So this is very important.

I have very limited time left out of my 20 minutes here, so I do want to wrap up by reminding people that the situation that we find ourselves in now is one that, as a government, we feel we've prepared for pretty well. People are aware of our five-point plan. They know that, as the opposition likes to talk about, on the tax side we have done some work, cutting business taxes, especially in northern Ontario, where the business education tax was very high—disproportionately high to the rest of the province. We've made major investments in infrastructure. We are supporting innovation, some of which I've described to you, through the announcement of the CRIBE centre in Thunder Bay. We are partnering with business. Many of us here are fully aware of the investments that we've made in the auto sector, where we have—the Toyota plant, I think, landed in Woodstock. Flex plants have occurred in at least a couple of communities across the province, and we continue to invest in the skills of our people.

So while we do acknowledge that we find ourselves in very difficult and challenging times—that goes without saying—I appreciated my 20 minutes this morning just to

provide some of the other side of the story, I guess is the best way for me to characterize it. While it is difficult, there are things that we're doing. There are some good-news stories out there, even though we know that there are families and individuals who have been negatively affected. I want to thank you for your time this morning.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to debate this economy motion that has been debated the last number of days. The timing of Mr. McGuinty's economy motion is interesting. It seems to suggest that he waited until the absolute worst-case scenario before taking action. The storm clouds have been brewing on the horizon for a few years now. This situation didn't just develop overnight.

Over the past few years, Ontario has been steadily moving towards have-not status within Confederation. In 2007, Ontario had the slowest growth in Canada for the first time since the 1991 recession. Four out of five major banks ranked Ontario ninth out of 10 provinces in terms of economic growth for 2008. Ontario is experiencing one of the biggest out-migrations in recent memory. Ontario has shed tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs. All the while, opposition members have been pleading for this government to take action: to control spending, to pay down the deficit, to do something. All the while, Mr. McGuinty and his colleagues have been in denial.

So here we are, with this motion before us, after weeks of watching volatile markets around the globe, and finally Mr. McGuinty announces that the Legislature "acknowledges our province faces economic challenges." It seems like a bit of an understatement. So what is Mr. McGuinty suggesting? Well, he has a five-point plan. He wants to invest in the skills of our people, make targeted tax cuts, invest in research and innovation, invest in infrastructure and partner with businesses. He suggests expanding trade ties within Canada and internationally, and he's looking for fairness from the federal government for Ontarians. For the most part, this plan is a re-introduction of comments and policies that his government has been following for many months now. Even his criticism of the federal government is nothing new.

I'd like to give Mr. McGuinty a different vantage point from my perspective as the small business critic. I think this is particularly relevant given that small businesses form such a significant part of Ontario's economy. Depending on whose numbers you use, small businesses make up to 96% of businesses. So it only makes sense that government policies would help support small business. To begin with, it is time to recognize that small business is important to us and that wealth creators are important to all of us. They make it possible to provide social services and implement poverty strategies. They fund our health care and education programs through the taxes they generate and the jobs they provide, which also generate income tax. So I think we can all agree that we need to help small business if we want to keep Ontario's economy going, let alone growing.

I hear from small businesses every day, both in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka and across the province. I'm going to recount some of their experiences so you can better understand some of their hardships.

A Markham company contacted me about a retail sales tax audit. They own a media production company, which includes videographing weddings and corporate functions. They have three employees. When the company started they went to the chamber of commerce seminar and were told to use tax guide 901, *The Basics of Retail Sales Tax*. They noted that photography was not listed under taxable services and therefore never collected tax. They promptly reported their monthly sales and remitted retail sales tax on time. Recently, they received an RST assessment and were advised that they were doing it wrong for the past four years. They've been reassessed—all services, not just products. The assessor told them they should have been using guide 509 and didn't seem to know anything about guide 901. The preliminary assessment is \$47,000 plus interest and penalties, which could push the total to \$100,000. As it stands today, this business has been advised that, regardless of the misinformation and the fact that the guide they were working off does not include photography and videography in the definition of taxable service, they will be charged the full amount. In fact, they will even be charged for contracts that have not received any tangible product because they have divorced or not picked up their images or property.

They ask, "How can a company be charged back taxes on property that has never been received by the client?" It's a very good question. How can a small business be penalized for misinformation given to them straight from the Ontario government? They ask, "Is the province of Ontario in the business of putting small business out of business for doing their best to comply with tax laws?" How is a small business to survive when the necessary information needed to comply is not readily available, and where it is available, it can't be trusted? This small business now has two auditors and a supervisor reviewing their accounts. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case.

Recently, a small business in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka had a similar experience. A dock builder contacted my office. I'm not talking about small docks but the large ones that you see out on the lakes. He had never collected retail sales tax on the docks because at the time of starting his business he was advised that the docks were not a taxable product because the docks do not move with the cottage or the homeowner. Several years later, the business operator received a notice that he should have been collecting retail sales tax on the docks and was handed a very large assessment. He contacted my office and after some discussion with retail sales staff, it was determined that these docks definitely do not move from one property to another and that the business owner was correct in not collecting the tax.

In both of these cases the business owners did not collect tax and therefore they did not improperly pocket tax that had been collected. In other words, there's no

profit being made by the business owners here. In both cases, the fines and penalties had the potential of putting the owners out of business, with devastating effects not just for the owners but for their employees as well. People who enter into business do not deliberately set out to break the retail sales tax rules. In fact, in both cases owners attempted to get direction from the Ministry of Finance when they started their businesses and were given advice on the appropriate collection of tax. They both followed the advice they were given. Their only mistake was not getting the names of the people at the ministry who provided that advice, and perhaps not getting it in writing, which would be my advice in future.

0930

It is simply not fair to come back to a business and hand them a bill for taxes they never collected. This is where government needs to inform business instead of penalizing business.

Too often, the heavy hand of government crushes small businesses to the breaking point. For example, Stephanie Watt, president of Cash Rolls of Canada, operated a manufacturing business in Guelph. Owned and operated since 1985, Cash Rolls was the sole manufacturer of paper coin-handling products within Canada. Last summer, an inspector from the Ministry of Labour entered the facility. The inspector had no prior knowledge of this business and shut the plant down for various infractions under the new zero-tolerance policy. In years gone by, when inspectors issued orders, the business was given three weeks to comply. Ms. Watt says that she never knowingly avoided health and safety issues. As a result of this incident, Ms. Watt shut down her manufacturing business—not because of the high dollar or global competition; she shut down her manufacturing business solely because of this government's callous attitude towards small business. As a result, she has moved that business and those jobs to the United States. Now 11 people in Guelph are without a job, and the Ontario economy is without the \$1 million a year that her business provided. Cash Rolls no longer needs the raw materials supplied from local paper and corrugated companies in Ontario. They will no longer be supporting the local economy in Guelph either. Sadly, no one in the Ontario government seems to care. The inspector was not willing to work with her, and the Ministry of Labour had no interest in preserving these jobs either.

It's my experience that no employer knowingly wants to see their workers injured, but time and time again, inspectors take a confrontational stand with business owners.

The lack of support for small business doesn't end with these examples. Not long ago, I met with a convenience store operator. He told me that times are tough. He has been in business for four years, and recently an inspector arrived at his business and wanted to see all the receipts for the past four years for cigars purchased. If he couldn't produce the receipts, he would be presented with a fine of \$10,000. At no time since he bought the business has anyone from the government come around

to tell him that he should be hanging on to these receipts. In fact, at no time has anyone from the government come in to give him any kind of advice or support on how to comply with your government regulations, which is precisely the problem.

To make matters worse, even when this government makes a promise about regulation, you can't rely on it. Case in point: the Endangered Species Act and forest management plans. The forestry sector in this province has long had a world-renowned platinum standard for excellence, a record that began under the Harris 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.

Now the McGuinty government has reneged on its commitment to provide for long-term regulation under their new Endangered Species Act. The industry was in shock, because it had been working in good faith with the ministry in the development of regulations that would recognize current forest management plans—yet another example of government run amok.

What about the agriculture sector? I met with farmers from east Parry Sound region to hear their concerns just last week. They can really tell you a thing or two about government regulation: nutrient management, source water protection, pesticides bans, Bill 50, to name a few. How is a farmer supposed to cope with running a farm, managing livestock, planting a crop, coping with inclement weather, and make head or tail of government jargon? One farmer told me that his accountant told him it would cost \$500 in accounting fees to apply for an OMAFRA income program but he would only get \$235 in return. He wisely decided against it.

Last month I held a small-business round table so I could better understand the challenges facing businesses today. Things have changed a little since I was in business. A hot topic among tourism businesses was the tourism-oriented directional signs, or TODS, program. The chief complaint had to do with poor customer service at every level, whether in responding to questions, processing applications or erecting signs.

A resort owner told me how he was contacted by the Ministry of the Environment. He was asked to provide copies of all his certificates of approval for each of his small waste water systems. He told the ministry official that all the certificates had been issued by the ministry and they should simply check their records. Sounds fairly logical to me. The ministry representative told him that they had lost some of their records and therefore the burden of proving certificates that had been issued now fell to the owner. How is this reasonable?

Just this week the government has confirmed that it is moving legislation that will penalize small business, forcing them to take on extra costs by making workers' compensation mandatory for all construction workers. Judith Andrew, director of provincial affairs for the

Canadian Federation of Independent Business, calls this a very anti-small business agenda. She goes on to say, "I cannot begin to say how disturbed we are to have" labour "Minister Fonseca put forward this crazy policy."

The minister suggests this legislation will level the playing field and help to eliminate the underground construction economy. The CFIB points out that the existence of the underground economy is rooted in the government's—and more particularly the WSIB's— inability to enforce the current laws and regulations. Furthermore, they point out that there is no evidence to support the suggestion that making coverage mandatory will result in improved worker health and safety. The only sure effect will be a significant increase in costs for small construction businesses.

The TD small business survey results were recently released and they show that small businesses are worried about cash flow, about making payroll, suppliers' bills, and rising fuel and energy costs. Small businesses are being crushed under the weight of red tape and regulation and they are afraid of the heavy hand of government that punishes and penalizes for non-compliance.

The CFIB in a recent survey announced that two out of three businesses surveyed say that the overall burden of provincial regulations has increased in the past three years. So what can we do? Or rather, what can the McGuinty government do? I'd like to suggest that Mr. McGuinty start by taking a look at what British Columbia is doing. In 2001, the government of the province of BC decided to create Canada's most small-business-friendly environment. They didn't pass legislation. Instead, they partnered with small business and formed a strategy that has informed every government ministry. They have five key components. They started by measuring the extent of the burden by counting all regulatory requirements in existing legislation and set up a database to chart their progress. They initiated a regulatory reform policy to ensure that any new regulatory requirements were in fact necessary, results-based and not overly burdensome. All ministries and agencies set up three-year plans to review existing regulations and identify areas of improvement and meet target reductions. Then, to ensure accountability, they added quarterly reporting requirements. Finally, the government of BC set up a regulatory reform office to implement the strategy and a minister to oversee and champion the effort. Since 2001, BC has reduced regulatory requirements by 42%. They continue to strive for a zero net increase in regulation.

So what did this directive really mean for business? Over 3,000 fees and licences across the government were eliminated or consolidated. Applications for programs such as the child care subsidy were reduced from 28 to three pages. The Ministry of Forests reduced road permit approvals from 20 to 14 business days. Liquor licences were streamlined from 19 to two classes. Primarily, it seems to me that the government of BC understands that it needs to change the culture of government to create wealth—not wealth creation for its own sake but for the sake of all those who benefit, which is everyone.

So how is this different from Ontario? Here, small business tells me that the culture of government is punitive and heavy-handed. The minister responsible for small business shows no interest in informing small business about regulation, providing support to achieve compliance or reducing the volume of regulation. It is something I personally have found very disappointing and troubling. As a past business owner, I remember a time when inspectors would come to your business with advice and direction to help you comply with regulations—not so today.

0940

So where does Mr. McGuinty go with his five-point plan? Why not make partnering with business a genuine partnership? Work with business, not against it. Sit down and talk or, better still, listen. Borrow from other provinces: If it makes sense in BC, why not in Ontario? Begin a regulatory review and reduction strategy now as part of your economic statement. Ontario's economic situation cries out for effective leadership.

Constituents in my riding expect not only leadership, but they demand that partisan politics be set aside to ensure greater stability, responsibility and accountability. Consumer and business confidences have faltered. Over the years, the McGuinty government has put a great deal of energy into blaming the federal government for everything that's wrong in the province of Ontario. They have been very slow to accept any responsibility. Day after day, government members can be heard blaming past governments, as we just heard from the last member, for problems they are facing now. It is time for the blame game to end.

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

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to join in this important debate this morning and have an opportunity to talk about how our five-point plan for Ontario's economy affects the community that I'm privileged to represent, Etobicoke–Lakeshore, in a very positive way. As we look to the actions that need to be taken—by governments around North America, I would suggest—to weather what is an economic storm front already hovering over our economies, it is absolutely critical that we look as a government to the foundations that we've laid in the past, because the foundations that we've laid since we were privileged to form office in 2003 are those very foundations that we will turn to to help our communities expand and improve and continue to grow, prosper and weather this storm.

One of the first things that I was apprised of when I was elected was the negative consequence of business taxes on my local businesses in Etobicoke–Lakeshore and how those businesses that operate every single day on our roadways on Lake Shore Boulevard, on the Queensway, on Dundas, that make up the face of our community, that ensure that our communities are safe and that ensure that our communities have local businesses and activities, were suffering under very severe and high business education taxes. One of the very first

things that we did at our economic summits that we had in the community with respect to how we can improve business in Etobicoke–Lakeshore was to very much focus with our local businesses—and I took up the call of championing a cut to business education tax rates. We have seen a \$540-million cut announced with respect to the city of Toronto, which on average is a 19% reduction in taxes paid by businesses in Toronto. We do have a way to go. We continue to have challenges within the city of Toronto itself as to the business education tax rates that had been put in place in various communities prior to amalgamation that are now perhaps not equitable post-amalgamation, and we continue to work on that.

Another avenue of business taxation that my community has benefited from is the extended digital media tax credit. Some of you might not know, but Etobicoke–Lakeshore is a hub of small activities when it comes to the digital and entertainment media sector. Those businesses that operate in all sorts of places across the community, that many members who even live in Etobicoke aren't aware of, are really benefiting from the investments and that focus on what is a modern source of employment and a modern economic driver in Etobicoke, and we're very, very proud of that.

There's no doubt that improvements to our public services are absolutely critical to both stimulating the economy and helping our families, helping our communities have the services they need to turn to when perhaps times are more challenging in the province, as they are right now. It's been very important to my community that, for example, Trillium Health Centre on the Queensway has an expanded ambulatory care centre, has a very good track record when it comes to servicing our community for their ambulatory care needs. We've had many celebrations over the years at the Trillium Health Centre in terms of the wonderful work that's being done there, whether it's with respect to the new spine clinic or the new cancer clinic. So much progressive and innovative work is transpiring at Trillium Health Centre and a real renewal and modernization of what we call in Etobicoke the old Queensway hospital, now part of the amalgamated Trillium Health Centre, and a real beacon and leader in terms of modern mechanisms of providing incredibly strong health care in Etobicoke–Lakeshore. I think it's a prime example of how we can have the best health care and continue to make sure that our health care system, our medicare system, progresses, is innovative and can meet the needs of our communities well into the years ahead in the next century.

We also have on the site of Trillium Health Centre, in very close proximity to it, an investment that the province has made with respect to community and resident palliative care at the Dorothy Ley Hospice. This is an organization in our community that so many of us have worked with, and we are very proud of the work that has been done by hundreds upon hundreds of volunteers and contributors. We're well under way constructing the Dorothy Ley Hospice, which will be a green building, a modern building, and will provide community residential

palliative care and also assistance to families whose members are in the last stages of their life and are choosing to stay in their own homes—so again, a really progressive approach to helping our families deal with challenging times.

That is, at its heart, what the five-point plan is about. We can stand in the Legislature and talk about five-point action plans, and they seem very distant perhaps from what is transpiring on the ground in our communities, in people's homes, and what they're talking about and what their needs are. But I would suggest to you that it is exactly what our communities need to see: continued investments in infrastructure like the ones that I've talked about.

Over the weekend, I had the chance to get out for a walk with my family—my children, my husband, my dog. We were walking near Humber Lakeshore Campus and we could see all the activity in and around the buildings at Humber College. That, too, flows from significant investments, infrastructure investments, that our government has made to finalize and finish the last repairs on the buildings at Humber campus. If you haven't had a chance, Speaker, and my colleagues in the House, to go to see Humber Lakeshore Campus, it is an incredibly beautiful campus. It's the old Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital and those buildings have been preserved and renovated. The last of those buildings is under renovation right now and we see those dollars at work in our community, making that a real hub of activity in Etobicoke.

Obviously, in a riding named Etobicoke–Lakeshore, a prominent part of what is important to our community is the lakeshore. We have a long, long stretch of Lake Ontario bordering the community. That Humber campus is on the lakeshore, in sort of the western end of my riding, and a little bit more to the east is Mimico Linear Park. It is a huge expansion of Toronto's waterfront, a significant investment to bring that waterfront to make it more accessible to the people in our community and beyond. There's something that is really special in our city, and that is the ability to get on your bike in Etobicoke and ride it across to the east end or to the west end, wherever you might go.

0950

There are parts and pockets in the city where the trail doesn't continue, and we had that circumstance in Etobicoke. Mimico Linear Park has seen a really big investment from Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp., which is funded by all three levels of government. The work that we've been able to do in Etobicoke along the waterfront, and along the waterfront across the city, is reflective of the good things that can happen when governments do work together in the regeneration of the lakefront. We have now completed a portion of Mimico Linear Park, and we've had a commitment from Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp., following submissions by me, my federal colleague Michael Ignatieff, and our municipal councillor, Mark Grimes, all attending at the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp. meetings to say, "This is really important to our community." It will be an

economic development driver and will help us bring people along the lakeshore into that part of Etobicoke, to go to the coffee shops, get a sandwich, go have a glass of juice, go to some of our local businesses. So, for us, tying these improvements and really recognizing that these will be things that will stimulate the economy is a concrete example of how infrastructure investments and repairing and making the waterfront accessible will bring economic renewal into the community.

Another aspect of infrastructure investment that supports economic development and makes it easier for people to get to work, for businesses to choose to locate in a community such as Etobicoke–Lakeshore, is public transit. I'm so proud of the work that our government has done with respect to investments in public transit. My community has three GO train stations and four subway stations, and we have the opportunity to see the benefit of access to public transit in terms of businesses choosing to locate. When I talk to businesses about coming and locating in Etobicoke–Lakeshore and setting up shop, one of the things that they always ask me is, "How will our workforce get to us?" If you ask businesses that have located in Etobicoke, one of the things that they talk about is good access to the airport, easy access to a number of routes of public transit, and we're also at the crossroads of our major highways in the city. So it really helps connect our community, but beyond that, it connects our community to the broader GTA, and around the world, frankly, when you have access to that transit.

There's no doubt that we are in the middle of some very challenging economic times. We've had challenges in my own community. One of the things that I've been privileged to do is have an opportunity to sit down and talk to those individuals around the community who are looking ahead or who have lost their employment about what we are putting in place to help individuals find new employment. The role of government is to make sure that we look after our community when they need that assistance, and the job action centres that are open for Arvin-Meritor and Owens-Illinois employees and former employees are critical examples of how government support can help individuals find their way when challenges arise. Whether it's with respect to giving hands-on guidance as to how to gain their GED, upgrade their skill set, improve their resumé, look for work, all of that is critical to help find a pathway for someone who has worked for many, many years in a very good job that has provided a good living wage to their family, and now they are at a crossroads. When you're at a crossroads and you need that assistance, to have someone who cares very much about you, as I have observed and met the individuals who work in these job action centres—the compassion, the experience that they bring to help individuals find their way at this very difficult time in their life is critical.

I'm very proud that our government has really extended the work being done by our Employment Ontario centres with respect to apprenticeships, Second Career, a whole variety of options that are available, because peo-

ple are not all the same. They have different circumstances in their lives. They might be more towards the beginning of their career, and they might be choosing to look for a whole new second career. They might not be; they might only have a few years left in terms of how long they expect or desire to work. We have a variety of services available to meet the variety of people who live in our communities and work in our communities, and the work that's being done, with the support of the province, is very important.

When I think about what's important to my community, I think about really basic things. If they have a job, they want to keep that job. What can the province do to assist in making sure that we support businesses that want to transition to newer economies, to doing things in a more innovative way, like our advanced manufacturing investment strategy—the work that's being done by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade to make sure that local businesses that are doing great work can continue to do that.

We know that it's a challenge across North America. We know that there are many places that businesses could locate and that there are always forces pulling those businesses perhaps closer to head office, wherever it might be. We know that having a government that's a partner at the table is a consideration when businesses either choose to remain or choose to locate in the first instance, and that is exactly what they have with our Ministry of Economic Development and Trade—a real partner at the table who is willing to sit down with them, to have an opportunity to talk about the variety of programs that we've put in place to ensure that businesses prosper in Ontario and that we help move our entire manufacturing sector and economic sector to a modernized economic sector. They're using the new technology; they're leading-edge. I know I'm very pleased to have many, many of those businesses in Etobicoke that are looking to what is the next generation for our area of expertise, our area of manufacturing.

This past Friday, I had the opportunity to have a very extensive tour of our Campbell facility. Campbell's has been in our community for many, many years. It's a prime example of urban manufacturing immediately beside a school, beside the residents who live there, and how manufacturing can work in urban centres. Campbell Soup has been a great neighbour in our community and continues to be. They have modernized their facility, they've invested in Etobicoke, they are partners in terms of good things that happen in our community. It was very important for me to bring folks from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade into Campbell. Let's sit down and talk about how we can help them continue to weather this economic storm and continue to prosper in Etobicoke, because we want to see that economic driver remain as it has for many, many years as an important part of our community.

The other thing you turn to in times of economic downturn is you want to make sure that your kids have a good education. The investments that we have made as a

government in improving education, whether it's elementary education, secondary education, post-secondary, college or university—those investments are of critical importance, because every single parent no doubt feels the same as me: You want the absolute best for your kids. You want to make sure that they have the opportunities ahead of them that you had for yourself, and beyond that. As we look to storm clouds on the horizon, I know there are many parents who are saying, “I want my children to get a good education and I want them to be educated in a realm where there is a real opportunity to find a great career, one that they will love, for them to be able to choose to stay in Etobicoke,” if that's where they live, or certainly in our province. There is no doubt that the work we're doing with respect to the five-point economic plan, whether it's cutting our business taxes, investing in infrastructure, supporting innovation—and that's critical on so many levels. Innovation will lead us into a prosperous future and will give that exact opportunity to our children and their children to make sure that they can continue to know Ontario as we know it: a great place to live, to work, to raise your family, to invest, to prosper and build a life for you and your family.

1000

That's what the five-point economic plan is all about. It's about finding a way to work in partnership with our communities, with our businesses, with folks in the Legislature who have the privilege of representing those communities, and to find a way forward through the storm clouds to come out where we all want to be. We all want what is the best for our families and for our communities. Perhaps we go about it in different ways at times, but I think that at this time in our history, it is absolutely critical for us to work together, for us to be proud of the province that we are privileged to represent, and that we join forces to make sure that Ontario continues to be the best place to be.

I really look ahead to the future of my children, and I know that with that good, hard, collective work of all of us together in this province, we will continue to be very, very proud of where we are, and we will weather these storm clouds. I look forward to having the privilege to shepherd that as much as I can in my own community, because I'm very proud that Etobicoke–Lakeshore is a community that does work together, and I would like to bring that example here to the Legislature.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to begin my remarks by quoting a former Ontario assistant deputy minister of finance, Michael Mendelson, who is now a senior scholar at the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. He offers this advice in a contributing article to the Toronto Star on October 9 this year. I pass it along to my colleagues as we deliberate on how we, as a province, can best prepare for and deal with the current economic challenges.

“Canada is headed into stormy economic times. Our governments seem determined to navigate these waters with their eyes closed. We need instead to face reality

right now and start realistic planning for the seemingly inevitable moment when the fiscal dam bursts.”

Mr. Mendelson gives us wise advice when he exhorts government to do two things: first, face reality; and second, start realistic planning. While this advice seems rather basic, I suggest that Mr. Mendelson’s many years in government taught him that neither of these two things comes easily for government. Perhaps that’s because governments of all political stripes are often more focused on spinning public opinion and shaping how their performance is perceived rather than on the task of managing the affairs of government and being accountable for their actions. In fact, the staging of this very debate is an unfortunate example of how even the proceedings of this Legislature can be manipulated to serve the crass public relations objectives of a government.

You see, in response to the tabling of a carefully crafted and self-serving motion, members of this House are being asked by the Premier to provide input into the government’s economic plan, yet the Premier and the Minister of Finance rejected out of hand the very first proposal made by the official opposition. That proposal was to strike a select committee, structured on a non-partisan basis, for the purpose of reviewing the recommendations brought forward by members in the course of this debate and that the committee be mandated and resourced to develop an action plan for Ontario’s economy. An important aspect of that committee’s work would be to solicit public input by hosting meetings, hearings, public hearings in communities across the province, where job losses and the economic crisis are having the most direct impact.

Taking the hearings to communities now is imperative if, as the finance minister claims, he looks forward to the input of the people of Ontario. In fact, it’s the only way to get a realistic understanding of the challenges that individual families and businesses are facing, and it’s the only way that we can cut through the government’s rhetoric whenever we ask in this place about job losses and business closures in specific communities. The briefing book responses are always the same, whether they come from the Premier or the finance minister or the two ministers responsible for economic development in this province, namely—we’ve all heard it: “Thousands of new jobs have been created, retraining programs are in place and grant and loan guarantee programs are available.”

These are all 30,000-foot-level responses to questions that deal with street-level hardships. Those general responses do nothing for the factory worker who is unemployed, they do absolutely nothing for the family that is facing eviction, and they do nothing for the company that’s waiting for the cash to arrive from one of the government’s much-heralded grant programs. Rather than being thrown a lifeline, they find themselves being strangled by bureaucratic red tape, delays and demoralizing excuses and even more promises.

That’s why we are calling for a non-partisan select committee of this Legislature to deal in a practical way,

in a forthright manner, with the challenges that we’re facing in this province. That will force the government to open its eyes to the reality of the extent of the problem. It will give us a realistic sense of the needs and priorities that will ensure that this Legislature, and through it, the government, gets the best possible advice for a meaningful and practical action plan for Ontario’s economy.

If the Premier does not want to listen to his colleagues in this House, if he doesn’t want to listen to the opposition, perhaps he’ll consider the call for a select committee from another source. Yesterday’s Toronto Star editorial, under the heading “MPPs and the Economy,” had this to say in response to the Premier’s claim that the annual pre-budget consultation hearings of the Standing Committee on Finance are all that’s needed: “Those consultations—a parade of special-interest groups arguing for tax breaks or spending increases in the spring budget—hardly amount to the kind of long-term, comprehensive examination of the province’s economic future that is needed.” The editorial goes on to say that the idea of a non-partisan standing committee is a good one and, “Under the current circumstances, the government should not dismiss it so cavalierly.”

I’ve been in this House for 14 years. I don’t believe that I’ve ever had the opportunity to read an editorial from the Toronto Star supporting an idea put forward by the Progressive Conservatives in this House. But these are unique times, they are troubling times, and this is precisely the time when the Premier and his ministers and this government should be taking a position that this is not a time for partisan rhetoric; it’s a time when we all need to work together to find solutions.

So I would ask once again that the Premier and his finance minister stand by their commitment that their consultations with members of this Legislature and the people of Ontario would in fact be meaningful. The Premier said this on October 8: “We’ll have an opportunity to hear ideas, hopefully positive ideas, put forward by all members of this House, and using that information, we can help better inform the ... economic statement and we can help to inform the budget. We see it as a productive, important exercise in keeping with the values and desires of the people of Ontario.”

The Premier again, later that same day, said this, “I see this as an important opportunity for Ontarians to speak to those issues and, again, to provide their particular perspectives on this, to share their insights in terms of what they think is happening, to get a better sense of how external events are going to affect us inside, here in Ontario.”

1010

The Minister of Finance, on that same day, standing in his place here, said this: “We look forward to the input of the opposition and the people of Ontario as we move forward in a challenging world economy.”

Again, the Minister of Finance: “We need a debate on the economy. We welcome the opportunity for that debate so that we can further reinforce the appropriateness of our policy decisions to date and make adjust-

ments as we go forward in a very challenging world economy.”

We will remain optimistic that those intentions, as expressed by the Premier and the finance minister, will be confirmed by an agreement to accept the official opposition’s proposal for an all-party select committee of the Legislature to chart a new course for Ontario’s struggling economy. The official opposition has already put forward a number of specific recommendations that should be included in an action plan for Ontario’s economy. Those recommendations were tabled in this House in the form of the amendment to government order number 11, which, in fact, we are debating today, or should be debating today, although I’ve heard very little specific reference made by members in their debate over the last couple of days to that amendment and to the specific recommendations.

What I have heard is an accusation from members of the government side that all the official opposition members are interested in are tax cuts. I want to, for the record, remind members of the government and the public who are observing this debate of what those recommendations are, and I will list them for you now:

(1) That the taxpayers of Ontario deserve an immediate and comprehensive financial statement that fully opens up the public books, revealing the true state of everything from government revenues to reserve funds, what savings the government has found and how it plans to handle any financial shortfalls;

(2) A competitive tax regime for Ontario businesses;

(3) A specific plan to reduce bureaucratic red tape that is forcing business owners to devote inordinate time and resources for unreasonable and often heavy-handed regulatory compliance;

(4) The adoption of sensible apprenticeship ratios for trades that open up employment opportunities that are currently restricted;

(5) A genuine customer service approach at all levels of government services that will encourage business growth and encourage new investment;

(6) That the government lead by example and demonstrate fiscal responsibility and discipline that should be reflected in sensible public sector restraint on hiring and wage increases;

(7) That the government of Ontario take a leadership role and work in partnership with other levels of government during this economic crisis;

(8) Finally, that the government of Ontario will accept responsibility and will be accountable for those areas over which it has control.

In the time I have remaining, I want to focus on two recommendations contained in our amendment relating to the need to promote genuine customer service at all levels of government, and a call for a plan to reduce bureaucratic red tape and to end the heavy-handed approach to compliance by government agencies.

This is an action that the government can take immediately; it requires no consultation because we have had the input and feedback from businesspeople and

business owners from across the province for the last number of years on this issue. It requires no spending of any money by the government to implement. We have had pleas from individuals, from business owners, to members of this Legislature and to the government to be heard on this issue. To illustrate, I will read an e-mail from a very successful business owner in York region. This was in response to my appeal to the Premier on October 8 to reduce the regulatory burden on Ontario businesses. The e-mail comes from a highly respected second-generation owner of a car dealership:

“You are so right-on regarding the concerns you have expressed which truly represent concerns of many of us in the business sector right now! In fact, since we re-invested in our new dealership, it seems that we are a fresh target and as challenging as these times are, it seems offensive that these civil servants arrive and disrupt the workplace that in our case is all new and a hands-on business, fully cognizant of the importance of safety with a pretty good track record.

“Where are their heads at? What a waste of taxpayers’ money!”

This business owner is one of many who are becoming more and more frustrated with the attitude and activities of this government. In case the Premier and his ministers have missed the point, the business owners they are treating with such disrespect are the same business owners who have invested their life savings to start their enterprises. They’re the same hard-working people who have created the jobs for the skilled and the unskilled workers in our communities. They are the same business owners who are struggling to stay in business to retain the jobs that are there now and who want to create the jobs of tomorrow.

Speaker, I will continue my remarks after the recess.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnett): I look forward to that. I’m obliged to inform the House that it is 10:15 a.m., and as such, this House is in recess until 10:30 a.m.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I’m very pleased to introduce to the Legislature three representatives from the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators who have joined us in the members’ gallery today: Adam Schafer, the executive director; Jane Krentz, the regional project coordinator; and Dennis Ozment, the Midwest and Great Lakes project coordinator, who are here to meet with our Ontario legislators today. I know they’d be pleased to speak with other members of the House if they have an opportunity. Please join me in welcoming them.

L’hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Il me fait plaisir de vous présenter aujourd’hui une de mes résidentes, Pauline Desormeaux, qui est ici avec sa sœur, Angèle Brunet. Alors, bienvenue à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I would like to introduce some of page Willem's relatives today. We're delighted to have Tamara Crispin, Helen Crispin and John Frei.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Today we have with us the president of local 786 of CUPE from St. Joseph's hospital in Hamilton, and a number of members of the local, as well as Michael Hurley, the president of the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions and vice-president of CUPE.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Young Kevin Turner is a page here, and his proud, proud parents, Scott Turner and Denise Turner, are here to witness his exemplary conduct today.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask all members to join me in welcoming this group of legislative pages serving in the 39th Parliament. Pages, please assemble for your introduction.

Faye Campbell, from Welland; Ethan Chapman, Nipissing; Willem Crispin-Frei, Parkdale-High Park; Chloe Halpenny, Algoma-Manitoulin; Emily Heffernan, Simcoe-Grey; Shaukat Khan, Bramalea-Gore-Malton; Noreen Khimji, Don Valley East; Cole Maranger, Perth-Wellington; Adriane Pong, Halton; Meagan Prins, Richmond Hill; Laura Sawka, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound; Helen Shen, Scarborough-Agincourt; Jenna Simpson, Thunder Bay-Atikokan; Emma Street, Mississauga-Erindale; Jake Thompson, Simcoe North; Kevin Turner, Durham; Karlee Vanhie, from the great riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London; Elise Wagner, from Guelph; Andrew Walker, Scarborough-Rouge River; and Dan Xuan Wang, Toronto Centre.

Welcome, and enjoy your visit with us. Please reassemble.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, we learned in the pages of his favourite publication that you've advised other Premiers of the news that, in the space of just eight months, you've managed to take this province from a \$5.6-billion surplus to an unspecified multi-million dollar deficit.

Premier, your first responsibility is to the people of Ontario. It's to them you owe an accounting of the province's financial situation, something we've been asking for for weeks. Today, Premier, will you give the elected representatives of this province and the people of Ontario an explanation of just how you've managed to go from a \$5.6-billion surplus to a deficit in just a few months?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question, but I'm reminded of another \$5.6 billion. That was a deficit that we inherited, and I know that my

honourable colleague opposite was part of a government that ran five deficits. We worked long and hard to remove ourselves from those difficult circumstances. But I know that my friend would recognize that there are extraordinary global economic challenges that are having an impact on us here in Ontario, as well as much of the rest of the world, and I think above all Ontarians want us to act responsibly in these circumstances. That's what we intend to do. We will do as much as we can to protect their services. At the same time, we'll be asking all of our transfer partners, in particular, to help us manage through this difficult, temporary circumstance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: If Ontarians were looking for any detailed answers, they certainly didn't get it there. The Premier's refusal to do so shows a lack of respect for the taxpayers of this province. He's happy to go to Montreal and air our dirty laundry there, but apparently he doesn't have what it takes to stand in his place and look Ontarians in the eye and admit that he and his government—the decisions they've made over the past number of years—have put us in a place where we're less able to weather an economic downturn.

This morning, he said he expects the municipal sector to be understanding. I guess that means they can look forward to a big, fat goose egg. In his budget, just a few months ago, the finance minister accounted for an \$800-million reserve. He said that there's already an enormous contingency and reserve built into the budget. Premier, where did that reserve go? Where did that \$800 million, which was supposedly going to protect us from a deficit, vanish to?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Our Minister of Finance will provide details on that and other issues tomorrow. I'm proud of the fact that we'll be the first out of the gate nationally to come forward with our fall economic statement and to provide an update. I can tell you, it's not an easy thing to do because we're trying to build our economic health here on shifting sands. The projections put forward by private sector economists are varying on an almost daily basis, so we'll do the best that we can in those circumstances.

But I think in times like this, especially, it's really important that we come back to principles and values. I'm convinced that Ontario families want us to protect their public services. They want us to keep an eye on what is happening today, as well as an eye on our responsibility into the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Answer.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: So we will do what is necessary to protect those public services, mindful of the need to demonstrate restraint at the same time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, Speaker, that was a valid request you just made: "Answer." We certainly didn't hear one again.

Some \$800 million vanished, a \$5.6-billion surplus vanished, and the Premier won't stand in his place today

and look Ontarians in the eye and admit that, really, he and his government and the policies they've followed through the last number of years have put us in this place where we're unable to adequately deal with the storm that we have to weather in the months ahead. He's ignored the warning signs. He's squandered our good fortune on contracts, sweetheart deals for friends, millions and millions on hotels, multi-million dollar parties, and the list goes on.

1040

Those are expenses that he controlled, irresponsible choices that he and his colleagues made. He can't blame the economic crisis for that. His budget of last March—and these things become obsolete faster than computer technology—claimed \$1 billion in savings would be achieved to balance the budget. We've never seen the list, we've never—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we'll provide the details tomorrow. I'm proud to lead the first government in the country that will speak to a reaction to these extraordinary global economic circumstances.

But I must take issue with something else that my colleague said. We have never been better prepared to withstand these kinds of challenges than we are today. In fact, we fixed the roof while the sun was shining. Education, health care, public protections, whether you're talking about water inspectors, meat inspectors, investments in infrastructure, have never been stronger in the history of our province than they are now. So I would argue that we are better prepared than ever to withstand this powerful, external, global economic crisis. And I'm absolutely convinced that by working together with all of our partners, we will get through this.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier. Over the past few years the Premier hasn't been shy about talking about Ontario as a family, so my question is, why won't he behave in these unprecedented economic times the way families across the province are behaving right now, sitting down, discussing in a calm, rational way—no games, laying it all on the line—how to deal with the current economic challenges?

One of the ways we can do that is through a select committee, a non-partisan, balanced approach, away from the glare of party whips, focused on doing what's right for the family, this great province.

We have a motion coming before the House this afternoon—you're aware of it—and I invite the Premier to stand up today and indicate that he and his colleagues will be supporting that motion.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've had opportunities and—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's not fair, Speaker. That's not fair.

I appreciate the sentiment with which my honourable colleague's question is informed. We have created a number of opportunities for all members of this House to provide suggestions and options, and I'm sure you recognize that the opposition has not been shy in putting forward their various suggestions and proposals.

We're in the middle of a debate right now on the economy and we look forward to hearing more from our colleagues on all sides of the House. I do believe that we are in this together—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: There's the old saying that actions speak louder than words, and the Premier is clinging to the rigidly old way of doing things.

We're in uncharted waters. The finance minister has said so himself on a number of occasions over the past few weeks. The people of the province need us to work together for solutions and stop playing partisan games. That won't get us where we want to be. We need a new approach, new rules. That's what the people of this province want, not just on the economy but throughout the province in the challenges that we all have to face.

So in that spirit, once again I will invite the Premier to stand up today and indicate that he and his colleagues will be supporting our motion later today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We welcome the debate that the House is having right now on the economy. We take very seriously the suggestions from both opposition parties and the suggestions we're getting from the groups we have been meeting with over the course of the last weeks. We've begun our pre-budget consultations.

The question is getting those issues out in front, and the question is, how do we all work together? There's no doubt that there are a number of forums and opportunities. The debate that we're having in the House these days I think is very informed debate. It's a welcome opportunity to hear from everybody about their relative perspectives on this.

We'll continue to work with our colleagues in the Legislature and we'll continue to work with those in the community, all of whom, I think, want a balanced, full-some approach to the challenges that have been brought upon Ontario by world economic circumstances.

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: In 2003, we heard much from the Premier about democratic renewal. He has talked about dealing with this through the finance committee, a standing committee of this Legislature.

Just recently, we had a government bill, Bill 77, before a standing committee of this Legislature. The official opposition tabled close to 70 amendments on that bill. Not one of them was accepted. That's the approach of this government in terms of dealing with issues before us. We've suggested a new approach, a non-partisan approach, to these unprecedented economic challenges.

We're reaching out. We're reaching out on this side of the forum. We're asking you to do the same. Will the Premier and his colleagues stand up today and support the establishment of a non-partisan select committee to deal with the challenges facing this province—yes or no?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our government has brought forward a number of amendments to the processes of this House that are in fact allowing unprecedented opportunities for members to participate. I think we're seeing jointly sponsored bills and so on.

I would remind the member opposite that what Ontarians want now is a response from all of us. We have the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and I'll remind the member of its terms of reference. It is "empowered to consider and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province and to which all related documents shall be deemed to have been referred immediately...." I would suggest to the member that that is an opportunity. I would also suggest to members of that committee that you start your prebudget hearings. We're doing that. I've met with a number of groups in different communities. We'll continue that and we look forward to the participation of—

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

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. In today's Toronto Star, three prominent economists—Arthur Donner, Mike McCracken and Armine Yalnizyan—issue an eloquent plea for aggressive government action in tomorrow's economic statement. They say, "Now is the very time to act—and there are several well-founded economic reasons why we cannot afford to delay action against economic insecurity."

Tomorrow, your government has an opportunity to take action. You can make excuses, as you have over the last five years, while good jobs disappear, or you can present a real jobs plan for Ontario. Which will it be tomorrow, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I welcome the question, as I welcome the advice put forward by those notable experts, but I want to say that we've got to reconcile all kinds of competing demands for existing resources, let alone new resources, and we will do the very best that we can to act responsibly.

I have said before and I say it again: We will find a way to begin to lay a new foundation for progress when it comes to addressing poverty here in Ontario, and we'll do that in a way that has never been done before. But we will not be able to move as quickly as we would have liked. We will not be able to move as quickly as we would have were it not for this global economic challenge.

I think my friend understands that and I believe that Ontarians accept that. What they want to see from us is progress, and we will make that progress.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: Yes, Ontarians understand that there are global economic problems, they understand that there's a global economy, but what they want to see from the McGuinty government is some action in Ontario to sustain good jobs which are being lost at the rate of thousands a month.

Premier, New Democrats have offered you over the last few weeks a number of suggestions that would help sustain good jobs in this province. That's what these economists are asking for. They are asking for some action from the McGuinty government—not excuses, not blame someone else, not refer to conditions in the United States, but some action here in Ontario to sustain good jobs.

What will it be tomorrow? Will the McGuinty government present a jobs plan to sustain good jobs in Ontario, or will it be another exercise in blaming someone else? Which will it be?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The honourable member doesn't like to admit it, but I know he does recognize that we've been proceeding aggressively with our five-point plan to strengthen this economy: We have been cutting business taxes; we have been investing dramatically in new infrastructure, thereby creating new jobs; we are investing heavily in innovation; we are finding new and creative ways to partner with business; and we are continuing to invest in the skills and education of our people. Those are solid, principles-based approaches to growing this economy. They've served us very well in recent years. I know that we have not been able to prevent all job losses, and I know that my friend opposite doesn't pretend that that's something that we could have done. But I can say it's the kind of plan that I feel is solid, is sound, and we will continue to find ways to breathe more life into that. I know that my honourable colleague the Minister of Finance will be speaking to that in a bit more detail tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier keeps referring to the McGuinty government's five-point plan. Well, while you've been announcing and reannouncing your five-point plan, communities like Goderich lose hundreds of jobs, communities like Welland lose hundreds of jobs, communities like St. Thomas lose hundreds of jobs. It should be apparent to the Premier, because I think it's apparent to everyone else in Ontario, that the much-boasted-about five-point plan isn't doing anything to sustain jobs in Ontario.

Let me quote the three economists: "Better benefits, housing and wages all can act as stimulants to revive our staggering economy." Are we going to see any action on those fronts tomorrow from the McGuinty government, or is it going to be more blah blah blah about a five-point plan that isn't working? Which is it going to be, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it's important to be specific here. The manufacturing sector in particular is under attack here in Canada, as it has been in the US for

some time and in the UK and Australia as well. The best experts will tell you that in order to help transition your manufacturing sector to a point where it's more sustainable, you've got to help it transition to a point where they're dealing with advanced manufacturing. Advanced manufacturing means you've got to have higher skills in education; that's why we're investing in that area. You've got to have more sophisticated technology and equipment; that's why we're supporting that. You've got to invest in tax competitiveness; that's why we've been cutting taxes. You've got to invest in infrastructure so that they can get the goods to market faster; that's why we keep investing in infrastructure. Those are the foundations for success when it comes to manufacturing and so many other parts of our economy. It doesn't happen overnight, but it does require perseverance, and we will persevere.

POVERTY

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again, to the Premier: The Premier says, "investing in people." Ontario ranks 10th out of 10 provinces in Canada in investing in post-secondary education. That is a failure. Your so-called Second Career program, which is supposed to be available for workers who've lost their jobs—less than a thousand of the 240,000 workers who've lost their jobs have signed up for your Second Career project because they know it won't help them. Premier, these things aren't working.

The other point that the economists make is that during these difficult economic times, it is very important for governments to pay attention to dealing with poverty. It is more important now, not less important. Will the McGuinty government heed this advice and commit in tomorrow's economic statement to raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour and to improve social assistance benefits so that people living in poverty can make—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We understand how important it is for us to find a way to address poverty. That's why we put it in our platform. That's why we're so committed to finding ways to move forward on that front. That's why, during the course of the past five years, we've done things like create the Ontario child benefit, a monthly payment now flowing to families that will support 1.3 million children. That's why we've increased the minimum wage several times over. That's why we've increased social assistance rates several times over. That's why we've invested in affordable housing. That's why we're investing in a new dental program. That's why we've doubled funding for our student nutrition program to help kids who are coming to school hungry. We've done a number of things and we look forward to doing more.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, the Premier launches into promises that have been made. As for the much-boasted-about child benefit, it will not be imple-

mented until 2011 under the McGuinty government's schedule. By then, poverty will have increased. In fact, there is a new report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that shows that the gap between rich and poor is actually widening in Ontario today. The Premier neglects to mention that social assistance benefits in Ontario are 30% below what they were in 1990, while the cost of living has skyrocketed since 1990.

Premier, more blah blah blah is not doing it. What are you going to do in tomorrow's economic statement to keep your promises to actually fight poverty in Ontario, as poverty worsens?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: One of the things that we're determined to do through our work, led by Minister Deb Matthews, is to come to grips in a real and pragmatic way with poverty. That requires a plan. So we've committed, by year-end, to putting in place some indicators which help us properly measure poverty, putting in place some targets against which we will measure ourselves and hold ourselves accountable, and putting in place a strategy to help us achieve that target.

Frankly, since I've been in this Legislature for 18 years now, we've done a lot of talk about poverty, but we've never really come to grips with it in a meaningful way. There are never been indicators; there have never been targets; there has never been a deliberate, comprehensive strategy to help us achieve those targets. We intend to do that. We look forward to announcing that before the end of the year.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I agree with something that the Premier said: There's been a lot of talk from the McGuinty government about poverty, but no action. The McGuinty government talks about a low-income dental program, but not a single penny has been invested by the McGuinty government in a low-income dental program; lots of talk, no action. The McGuinty government talks about affordable housing, but you haven't even spent all of the money that the federal government has given you for affordable housing on affordable housing in Ontario. These are the realities.

Premier, it is time to stop the talk; it is time to start taking action. Tomorrow, in the economic statement, the McGuinty government will have the opportunity to actually take some action. Simple question: Will there be some additional funding for affordable housing, something which will keep workers working and help low-income people keep a roof over their heads? Will there be action on that single thing—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague knows that our commitment was to put out a plan by year-end, and we intend to do that. I know that he knows of our commitment to finding a way to address poverty. I know he knows, as well, that we've got to find a way to reconcile all of these competing interests. We want to find more money for our schools for next year. We want

to find more money for our hospitals for next year. We want to find more money for our municipal partners for next year, our colleges and universities, and so on and so on. At the same time, we want to find a way to make progress when it comes to dealing with poverty. I know he recognizes that. I know that Ontarians recognize that. As I said before, we will do that in a way that's in keeping with our values. We'll keep an eye on today, our responsibilities for today, and at the same time make sure that we're progressing tomorrow and that we grow stronger economically every single day.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services. Minister, every time I've tried to ask a question about your support for small business, you've deflected the question to one of your colleagues. My question today is quite simple: Is part of your mandate to help small business?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Absolutely.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, as I outlined this morning, small businesses are being crushed under the weight of red tape. As the critic, I'm hearing from every sector, from manufacturing, retail, construction, agriculture and tourism. There is no help to be had from you.

In the 2008 budget, your government announced regulatory modernization, which was to include an aggressive cap and trade policy for government regulations. This means that for every new regulation created, one is to be removed. Since then, your government has created five times as many new regulations as it has removed. This is hardly cap and trade. Why have you broken your promise and when are you going to get serious about eliminating red tape?

1100

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I'm actually very proud of the work that we have done, actually, to reduce red tape and to reduce the paper burden on small businesses. I talked about that in the House a couple of weeks ago, but let me just say it again for the benefit of the member.

In the first phase to reduce the paperwork burden on small businesses, in seven key ministries we'll reduce it by 24%. In the second phase, in the next 10 ministries, we'll reduce it by 25.6%. In the third phase, we are reducing it further are right on track to reduce it. Not only that, what we have also done is automated most of those forms so that the small businesses don't have to fill out the forms again and again. But we also have created a secretariat which is going to actually look into the issues of reducing the paperwork burden further and work on the cap-and-trade issue as well.

SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Lorsque votre gouvernement a pris le pouvoir,

les Ontariens et les Ontariennes s'attendaient à des actions, à une révolution dans les soins de longue durée. Ces actions doivent commencer avec une garantie de 3,5 heures de soins par résident. Le premier ministre a laissé tomber les personnes âgées de l'Ontario lorsque son gouvernement n'a pas inclus dans la Loi 140 un standard de soins minimal. Est-ce que le premier ministre va profiter de l'énoncé économique de demain pour donner aux résidents de maisons de soins de longue durée les 3,5 heures de soins dont ils ont besoin ?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member for the question. We asked Shirlee Sharkey if she would take a look at the care that was provided in our long-term-care homes, and in fact she produced, I think, an excellent report—I think the members acknowledged it in this House—where she did not recommend that we move in this direction. In fact, Ms. Sharkey has called together and has agreed to lead the implementation team, which includes representation from right across the sector—from labour, from operators, from patient advocates and the like. These are the kinds of investments we've made—over \$1 billion so far, a 50% increase into the long-term-care sector—that have seen significant improvement in long-term care. And I would quote—well, perhaps I'll save it for the supplementary to quote some of the people from the sector about what the effect of these investments has been.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I don't think the minister understood my question. In this time of growing economic insecurity, Ontarians needs their government to follow through on what matters the most. That means caring and providing for our loved ones in long-term-care homes. After a lifetime of contributing to our province, seniors deserve the highest standards of care.

How much longer do our parents or grandparents have to wait before they see a guaranteed standard of personal care hours? Will Ontarians finally see the long-term-care commitment they want in tomorrow's economic statement?

Hon. David Caplan: The advice of experts has been, in fact, to proceed under the plan, which was first outlined by my predecessor and which continues to date. That means things like quality improvement, to measure and publicly report health outcomes and the satisfaction of patients for the first time—working with our partners to implement the recommendations that Shirlee Sharkey, quite a noted figure within health care and the sector, noted for us. We have increased staff. We've added 2,500 more personal support workers, 2,000 more nurses, raising the level of paid daily care to 3.26 hours. There are better living environments for residents in long-term care. We're rebuilding over 35,000 additional beds over the course of the next 10 years.

I do want to quote Donna Rubin, the chief executive officer of the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. She says, "I want to commend you and the McGuinty government for the recently—

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

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question today for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In my own riding of Oakville, the partnership we've got with Mayor Burton and Oakville town council is very strong, delivering results. There's almost \$2 million for social housing repairs in this year's budget that goes to Halton region, \$7.5 million invested in Ontario funding for Oakville, and almost \$4 million to rebuild Lakeshore Road in Oakville.

I could provide more examples, but my question today is about participation in local government. We've just seen a federal election that saw 59% turnout, one of the lowest recorded in Canadian history. Members of this House will know that municipal elections often result in even lower turnouts. To ensure that our municipal governments continue to deliver strong public service, we need an engaged public. Minister, I'd like to ask you what you're doing to ensure that the public remains engaged in municipal governments?

Hon. Jim Watson: I think all of us are concerned when we see low voter turnout, whether it's at the federal, provincial or municipal election. It's one of the reasons that we're very pleased to be partnering with the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, and AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, to launch Local Government Week. I had the pleasure of being in Davenport riding, at Regal Road school, talking to the grade 5 students about the importance of local government. We put together, in collaboration with AMCTO and AMO, an excellent teachers' guide that talks about the importance of civic government and municipal government, and the wonderful services that they provide to their citizens. It's an opportunity for the teachers to hold mock elections, debates and other sessions, and also for municipalities to invite their students to city halls and town halls across the province in partnership with the government of Ontario.

We're very proud of the work we've done, and we look forward to continuing Local Government Week in the years ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I certainly appreciate the work that's being done. I think we can all agree in this House, politicians from all parties, that we need to do more to keep young people engaged in the process. The decisions that we make here are made with those young future voters in mind. Many of us from all parties in this House visit classrooms in grade 5 and grade 10. I was able to talk to students at the University of Toronto recently.

One thing I hear, Minister, when I talk to young people at high schools, or at Sheridan College in my riding, is that politicians should attempt to work together, no matter what order of government or political party.

Young Ontarians don't understand why there's so much confrontation—

Interjections.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Case in point, across the floor.

With the minister's responsibility for Ontario's municipalities, would he tell us what he's doing to set a strong example for young people—

Interjections.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn:—unlike the example being shown here—by working with other orders of government?

Hon. Jim Watson: That was an excellent question, because one of the things I'm particularly proud of—and this is something that the Premier has instilled in all of his ministers—is that we have to respect the municipal order of government. One of the ways of doing that, and it was fulfilled by my predecessor, John Gerretsen, and signed off by the Premier, was the establishment of the MOU process, the memorandum of understanding process, where ministers appear before an AMO table and discuss issues that are going to come before the municipal sector before they're made public. This is a chance for us to alert the municipal sector on some of the important issues that are facing the municipalities, and we thank those members of the MOU table from AMO, people like Hazel McCallion, Peter Hume, the new president of AMO, and Doug Reycraft.

The AMO MOU process and the city of Toronto MOU process is working. We respect the local orders of government, and we look forward to continuing to strengthen that relationship.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Attorney General. It has been just over a week since two Toronto women were sexually assaulted and brutally murdered in their home. The person who has been charged with the murders has been charged with two counts each of aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon and attempted choking.

Yesterday, in this Legislature, when I asked you a question about what you intended to do to prevent this situation from ever happening again, you cited the publication ban and the ongoing court matter as an attempt to avoid the question. But, again, it's not about the specifics of this case, Attorney General; it's about the issues of public safety and confidence in the justice system that we're raising.

What do you intend to do about this to protect the people of Ontario?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I say on behalf of, I know, all members of the Legislature and Ontarians: our deepest sympathies to the families, to all those who have been affected and to the community.

With respect to my friend, you weren't doing yesterday what you purport to ask today. The crown's position in all cases is that public safety is paramount. The

crown's position in all cases is that we need to protect the community. We discharged that responsibility. My friend will know that we mustn't do anything, that I can't do anything, that would jeopardize the ongoing proceedings for these very serious cases. My friend would know that there are publication bans that restrict what I can say, what I can respond to and the way that I can respond to it. We will discharge our responsibilities and maintain confidence in the administration by respecting the prosecutions that are ongoing and the publication bans that are in existence.

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again, Attorney General, it's not about the specifics of this case. People in Ontario are outraged that two innocent lives have been lost. Public confidence in our justice system is eroding. Clearly, there are some systemic issues here, separate and apart from the specifics of this case, that need to be dealt with. What steps do you intend to take, Attorney General, to restore public confidence in our justice system and assure Ontarians of their safety?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Again, public confidence will begin with ensuring that prosecutions are not jeopardized by comments about the specifics of the case. The publication bans, when they're made, are respected. It does restrict my ability to say directly to Ontarians what happened. It does absolutely restrict that. I must respect the bans so that I do not jeopardize the ongoing case.

Public safety is always paramount. We take it very seriously. We put extra resources, in terms of police and crowns, in all of our communities throughout the province of Ontario. We brought in new systems and protections and new means of detecting crime. We will continue to work for the protection of the public. But I say to all, there are things that I cannot say, to ensure that prosecutions can proceed.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The economic downturn is forcing municipalities to pay even more for provincially mandated social programs like Ontario Works, diverting more of their limited resources away from crumbling infrastructure and other priorities at the municipal level. It is simply wrong that property taxes pay for these programs. Will tomorrow's economic statement make an immediate down payment on provincially mandated services and commit the province to assuming full responsibility for Ontario Works by, at the very least, the fall of 2011?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: Obviously, the member realizes I'm not going to speculate on what's in the Minister of Finance's economic statement, but I can tell you that our track record, the track record of the McGuinty govern-

ment, is very strong when it comes to partnering with our municipal sector.

This year, 100% of the Ontario drug plan was uploaded, taken away from the property taxpayers and put back where it should have been in the first place, with the government of Ontario. Next year, on January 1, a very significant upload begins when ODSP begins the upload process from the property taxpayer to the provincial government.

When the ODSP and ODP uploads are fully uploaded over the course of the next couple of years, \$935 million will be saved by the property taxpayers. That's a track record and a history we should be very proud of, and I'm proud to be the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing who actually is reversing the chaos—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The minister should talk to the Premier, who made it pretty clear this morning in scrums that that couple of years is stretching into an awful lot of years in the next little while.

Municipalities need those dollars, and they don't need empty gestures. The provincial municipal fiscal review is now two whole years old, and still there is no report coming forward. Programs such as Ontario Works, social housing, ambulance, public health and child care all cost municipalities a total sum of about \$2.5 billion a year. That's fewer dollars for sewers, libraries, recreation centres, public transit and roads.

Will the finance minister in his statement finally reverse years of downloading and make significant and immediate down payment on this \$2.5-billion cost and promise to fully upload Ontario Works by the fall of 2011? Or is the provincial municipal fiscal review report being shelved?

Hon. Jim Watson: I am very proud of the partnership that we have developed with AMO and the city of Toronto, working in collaboration and co-operation on the fiscal and service delivery review. We expect that report to be out within the next several weeks. We're very proud of the fact that all parties have agreed to the principle that the report has to be affordable, and it's a consensus-based report. I look forward to releasing that report with AMO, the city of Toronto and my colleague, the Minister of Finance.

But to suggest that this government has been doing nothing on the fiscal relationship is not true. I've given a couple of examples, with ODP and ODSP. Land ambulance—we're now at a 50-50 cost-sharing; public health, we're now at a 75-25 split in cost-sharing. And finally on infrastructure: While the NDP may brush aside \$1.1 billion, that is new money into the municipal sector to help them with the infrastructure deficit.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. David Oraziotti: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Our government places the highest priority on the hard-working people of Ontario and is committed to

making sure Ontario workers have a healthy and safe environment in which to earn a living. A large part of improving workplace health and safety is educating everyone who has a role to play. Employers, workers, suppliers and everyone in the health and safety system have a responsibility to improve conditions at job sites. A key partner in improving conditions for workers is the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. I know that each year the WSIB begins an advertising campaign to help educate workers and employers about their rights and responsibilities for health and safety at work. Minister, can you tell us about this year's campaign to protect Ontario workers?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question and for his advocacy on workplace health and safety in the province of Ontario.

I want to talk about the WSIB's fall campaign this year, which started yesterday. The theme of that campaign is You Can Never Be Too Safe. We believe that accidents can be prevented and injury or death at the workplace is unacceptable in the province of Ontario. Workers have the right to refuse unsafe work, because it's their right through the Occupational Health And Safety Act and it's their life on the line.

As you know, Speaker, past WSIB campaigns have been quite hard-hitting and graphic in nature. This year's campaign is quite simple and it wants to send a simple message to all workers: Wear property safety equipment, demand proper training, create safety, make safety happen through your active involvement in the workplace—

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

Mr. David Oraziotti: I'm pleased to hear about the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's new ad campaign to promote workplace health and safety. My constituents support this important work and are encouraged by the WSIB's continuing efforts toward accident prevention by educating workers and employers. Unfortunately, it is far too often that we hear about a hard-working Ontarian being injured in the workplace. We all have friends, relatives and colleagues who can share their stories about someone they care about that has suffered an injury or illness in the workplace.

My riding of Sault Ste. Marie is home to Essar Steel Algoma, St. Marys Paper and a number of other industrial businesses that require workers and management to be vigilant to ensure the safety of everyone on the job site. We must continue to support all of the hard working men and women across the province to reduce the number of workplace injuries and fatalities in Ontario.

Minister, can you elaborate on the additional steps that we've taken to support the development of a successful workplace health and safety culture in Ontario?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We should all be proud of what has been achieved since 2003, with our reduction in workplace fatalities and injuries, and improvement of overall compliance with workplace health and safety legislation. I believe that Ontario's partnership with labour,

with employees, with employers and workplace safety, provides an impressive role model for other jurisdictions. Our success in building and strengthening a culture of workplace health and safety has been achieved by the hard working ministry inspectors, as well as our partners, like the WSIB, as well as safety agencies. But our work is by no means finished. We have done well but we can do a lot more. For example, on June 11, 2008, we launched Safe at Work Ontario. It's the ministry's new four-year compliance strategy. The benefits include a reduction in the burden—

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

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Health. My constituent, Mrs. Genevieve Gittens, is a senior on a fixed pension. She's a diabetic with diabetic retinopathy. Her insulin pump has been her lifeline for the last five years and when she applied to the Ministry of Health for coverage of her insulin pump, she was told she didn't qualify. I brought this to the attention of the minister, wrote a letter, got a response back and the response simply states that coverage is not retroactive.

I want to ask the minister this: How can he justify forcing a senior citizen to take on payments, in addition to her fixed pension, over the next five years—because that's how long it will take her to pay for this insulin pump—at a time when coverage is in place for others during these difficult economic times? How can the minister justify it?

1120

Hon. David Caplan: I think that the member is quite aware that we have launched perhaps the most comprehensive diabetes strategy anywhere in Canada: \$741 million, just announced this past summer. Part of that is to provide, on an ongoing basis—we're not looking retroactively, and the member well knows this—insulin pumps and supplies for residents, and that began this past September. The member is well aware of it, and I'd like to share some of the other elements of the strategy, because I know his resident would be very interested.

We've created 153 diabetes education teams right across the province: in family health teams, in community health centres, in hospitals, teams of registered nurses and dietitians, helping patients manage diabetes and manage their disease more effectively. We're investing \$190 million over the next three years to implement a chronic disease prevention and management strategy, starting—

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

Mr. Frank Klees: Mrs. Gittens is watching the minister as we speak. She is a pensioner on a fixed income. She had not paid for this equipment at the time that the program was announced by the government. She is in the process of making arrangements with the company supplying this insulin pump to pay for the next five years, and the minister stands in his place and gives me rhetoric.

I am asking the minister to look at this case—and others across the province, no doubt—where for a matter of days he is suggesting that this pensioner should not qualify for what is a very good program, to the credit of this government, announced for the benefit of citizens. Would he take a look at this situation and address Mrs. Gittens's specific circumstances?

Hon. David Caplan: I would encourage the member to forward any information that he has, but he would be aware that the government has announced that we will pay 100% of the cost—\$6,300 for an insulin pump—as well as provide an annual grant to type 1 diabetics in the amount of \$2,400 annually to help to pay for tubing and the supplies that are required in order to manage.

We came into office in 2003 and there was no funding—zero—for insulin pumps for children with diabetes. We extended that, initially, for children and then for over 1,300 adults, we project annually, for type 1 diabetes. We've literally tripled the provincial budget for diabetes programs.

This is what Ellen Malcolmson, president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Diabetes Association, says: "Providing Ontarians with type 1 diabetes the tools—

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

INFORMATION AND PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, you'll know that the privacy commissioner yesterday was before committee in regard to Bill 85. She has very serious concerns in regard to the privacy provisions of this initiative. I put forward a motion asking that the privacy commissioner come back before the committee and take the full time that we need in order to deal with the concerns that she has. Your committee members voted against it, along with the Conservatives. Are you prepared, as minister, to direct the committee to make sure that we take the time to hear what she has to say and get this bill right?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I know that in normal circumstances, the member would not want any cabinet minister to direct the committee to do anything. I have great confidence in you, the members of that committee, to make the best possible decision as to who will appear before the committee and the kind of questioning that will take place. I know that you either put forward that motion or will be doing so. I'm sure that each and every member of the committee, regardless of political affiliation, will give serious and lengthy consideration to the particular requests that you have made to this committee. I found the commissioner's representations to be very helpful, both directly to me in a meeting with me and to the members of the committee, and I certainly urge you to continue to put before the committee that particular—

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, I don't accept that because, clearly, you've given committee members direction, and that was not to hear her out for a second time. That's clear in what happened yesterday.

There are serious concerns that the technology you're using inside this legislation is a passive technology that anybody can read with the right receivers. We don't need that information going out and being picked up by people for uses that might, quite frankly, not only be a danger when it comes to privacy information, but put people at risk.

I'm asking you again: Are you prepared to allow the commissioner to come back before us to answer the questions we have in regard to the privacy concerns that we have in this legislation?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I say to the member, I don't have the power to instruct the committee on how it shall operate, nor should I have that power.

I know the great persuasive powers of the member for Timmins, and I know that the compelling arguments that he will advance to the committee will be given full consideration by all members of that committee. In fact, I would say he has leadership qualities—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley:—that make him, I think, the kind of individual within that committee who can be very persuasive.

I'm happy to hear everything the commissioner has to say. She says that she's very pleased with the cooperation and willing attitude of the Ontario government to work—

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

NORTHERN ONTARIO HERITAGE FUND

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines regarding infrastructure and community investment in aboriginal communities. As the members of the House are well aware, northern Ontario is home to many isolated aboriginal communities. Unfortunately, residents of these communities often have difficulty travelling to other communities, making it difficult to gain year-round access to health care, emergency and other services.

Minister, through your ministry's northern Ontario heritage fund infrastructure and community development program, you offer help to northern communities by making necessary investments to improve critical infrastructure. What recent investment has been made through this program that will benefit isolated aboriginal communities in northern Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much for the question, to the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan. Certainly, we're very pleased that our government's investments in infrastructure and community development are having a very positive impact on aboriginal communities in northern Ontario. In fact, on August 7, our government announced through the heritage fund almost \$1 million to enable the community of Lac Seul First Nation to build a new all-season road. This nine-

kilometre road will link two communities—Whitefish Bay and Kejick Bay—which are currently only accessible by boat in the summer and an ice road in the winter. So building this new all-season road will open up new opportunities for economic development and will benefit the community by providing them with year-round access to health care and emergency services—certainly improving the quality of life.

I'm also happy to report that, since 2003, our government has invested over \$25 million in aboriginal communities through our northern Ontario heritage fund program.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Minister, thanks for telling the House about the significant investment that our government has made for the construction of a new all-season road for the Lac Seul First Nation.

By making such an investment in infrastructure, you are indicating that our government is committed to improving quality of life and encouraging more sustainable economies and stronger aboriginal communities in northern Ontario. Building new roads in isolated communities is essential to improving that quality of life for those residents, but in order to maintain a strong community they must have healthy, active residents, and that is obviously very important.

Minister, community centres and multi-use complexes throughout Ontario help in maintaining strong and healthy communities. Unfortunately for the Neskantaga First Nation, in November 2007, they lost their multi-use complex to a fire.

To the minister: I would like to know if our government has made any investment to help Neskantaga rebuild their multi-use complex.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks again to the member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan. Certainly, we are committed to improving the lives of our aboriginal communities and continue to make significant investments towards those healthier communities.

On September 25, for example, our government announced that through, again, the northern Ontario heritage fund, we are providing \$1 million to the Neskantaga First Nation to rebuild its multi-use complex. This new facility will provide the community with a venue for social gatherings, feasts, sports activities and other events that are very important to the health and social fabric of this remote community. Also, the multi-use complex will provide office resources to accommodate mineral exploration companies that are working and consulting with the First Nations. Certainly, by accommodating the mineral exploration companies in the complex, it will help continue positive relationships that have the potential to lead to new jobs in the mineral sector for the people of Neskantaga.

1130

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, a con-

stituent in my riding of Durham was disappointed to discover that the Second Career program does not cover the retraining of Ontarians who want an AZ licence for driving a truck. My constituent has done her homework and has three potential employers, given that she has this licence. It's my understanding from my constituent that learning to be a professional truck driver isn't covered under the Second Career program because AZ training takes just two months. Apparently, under your Second Career program, courses must be at least six months to qualify. Could you please verify that indeed this is the case and that Ontarians can receive this training which would get them a job in Ontario?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the honourable member's question. I know that he would not want to leave the impression in the House that the Second Career program is the only training program which is available through Employment Ontario. Employment Ontario helps over 900,000 Ontarians every year and offers a variety of training programs. Through our action centres, for example, we helped 53,000 recently laid-off individuals. We have a number of training programs, including the skills development program, which deals with short-term training, as well as Second Career, which deals with long-term training, and we've seen the take-up go forward. It's a matter of giving people an option as to the amount of training that they require. Each individual, of course, would have to come forward and be assessed and work with the Employment Ontario counsellor to find the best options for them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. John O'Toole: It looks like you've given my constituent the answer of no.

The Ontario truck training association estimates that there are 200,000 people employed directly and indirectly in this business. The association points out that the Canadian census found that the occupation of truck driver is the top occupation amongst Canadians, males and females: 225,000 nationwide. Clearly, this is an employment opportunity for Ontarians. I would urge you to re-examine the qualifications for this to be included in the Second Career program. Could you please take this under advisement and respond to this constituent of mine, giving people a chance for a real job with the training as a truck driver in the province of Ontario?

Hon. John Milloy: I'd certainly be happy to look into any constituent's case that's brought forward, but unfortunately I think the honourable member isn't taking yes for an answer. The simple fact is that the Ontario skills development program, which last year alone had 11,482 people enrolled in it, provides short-term training opportunities including, in many instances, the truck driver training that the honourable member is raising.

The point of Second Career was to add a further option to those who have been laid off, to provide them with long-term training beyond six months and to go forward for a year or two years to go into a second career.

We provide a variety of options through Employment Ontario to people who are unemployed. As I say, I hope

the honourable member would not want to leave the impression in this House that Second Career is the only program that is offered through Employment Ontario, which has a whole menu of choices for Ontarians who are looking for a job.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Two days ago, Scotland made some bold and positive moves to wrestle down its high rate of death caused by hospital-acquired infections. One of the key measures was to stop the outsourcing of hospital cleaning services and return that important job to public hands. Will the government follow Scotland's lead and stop the contracting out of hospital cleaning services?

Hon. David Caplan: I'd like the member to be aware that we're going to continue with the policy that existed under the NDP government, under the Conservative government and that persists to the present day. Of course, we expect our hospitals to be clean, and there is a legitimate expectation that we're going to be working as hard as we can to meet that expectation. That's why this government has invested \$14.4 billion, a 31% increase in the funds available for our hospitals to be able to provide the array and the range of services that they do. That includes, importantly, cleaning services, which are quite integral to the operation, maintenance and safety in the hospitals.

I will mention more about some of the work that we're doing in hospital-acquired infection and disease control, because, just this afternoon, I will be launching, or participating—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: St. Joseph's hospital workers from CUPE Local 786 in Hamilton are here today. They launched a job action over the McGuinty government's dangerous belief that it is okay to put hospital cleaning in the hands of the lowest-bidding private company. Scotland privatized hospital cleaning years ago, but they have now acknowledged that it was a fatal mistake, and they are taking concrete action and reversing their decision.

Will the McGuinty government learn and ensure that hospital cleaning in Ontario is done by skilled, experienced and trained public hospital workers?

Hon. David Caplan: Ontarians have the expectation that hospitals will be clean and that the standards will be in place, and in fact, they are. The member tries to create an impression that somehow this government has changed things, but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, in 1993—you would be familiar, Speaker—at St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital, ancillary services were contracted out under the NDP; Trillium Health Centre in 1994; and Halton Healthcare in 1992.

We've strengthened disease prevention and control in health care institutions, including asking Dr. Michael Baker to be our patient safety lead; public reporting on

eight safety indicators; outbreak reporting for the very first time, making C. difficile outbreaks reportable to our public health units; and a hand hygiene program, which is internationally acclaimed.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1137 to 1500.

TEMPERATURE IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I wanted to make note to the honourable members that there were some concerns raised this morning about the temperature in the chamber and your wishes have been heard and the heat has been turned on. I would just say to you, though, that now that the heat is on, no complaining that it's too hot. Perhaps this may be an opportunity for everyone to just cool it a little bit in the House, to not raise the temperature too high.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Speaker: New Democrats have seen it as our responsibility to keep the heat on this government from the very first date of their election back in 2003.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Many are cold, but few are frozen.

I believe we have unanimous consent—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): One moment. We have introduction of guests.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Welcome to our guests; welcome to Queen's Park today.

SIGN LANGUAGE

Hon. Ted McMeekin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding sign language interpreters for certain proceedings.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: The motion is that during introduction of visitors, oral questions and deferred votes on Wednesday, October 22, 2008, sign language interpreters may be present on the floor of the chamber to interpret the proceedings to the guests in the galleries.

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

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ORANGEVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This week, as we are celebrating Ontario Public Library Week, I would like to celebrate

and acknowledge the important work of the Orangeville Public Library for its 100 years of outstanding service to the residents of Dufferin county.

The Orangeville Public Library was built in 1907 with a grant from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation and opened its doors in 1908. Andrew Carnegie, who had made his fortune in the steel business, believed he had a duty to use his wealth for the improvement of mankind and granted funds to communities across North America to help build libraries which would be free for all.

The original Orangeville Carnegie library is an example of classical beaux arts, an architectural style popular for public buildings in the first half of the 20th century. This style relied heavily on elements of Roman and Greek architecture, notably the use of columns. Renovations to the Orangeville Public Library were undertaken as part of the town's centennial project in 1967. In 1988, architect William Woodworth created a design to join the Carnegie library to the original Bank of Commerce building, which also had a beaux arts façade, on the corner of Mill Street and Broadway.

On Friday, October 17, the library held a successful dinner dance to celebrate this 100th anniversary and build the funds for the future. Congratulations to library CEO Cindy Weir and her staff at the Orangeville Public Library for a wonderful evening of celebration and fun. I would also like to acknowledge Cindy Weir as she presides as the 2008 president of the Ontario Public Library Association.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Peter Kormos: On Wednesday, October 15, Port Colborne's Lakeshore Catholic High School filled its auditorium to the rafters with folks from Port Colborne and beyond who were mad as hell that an unelected, unresponsive, undemocratic, unaccountable and anonymous Niagara health services board had attacked hospitals in Fort Erie, Port Colborne and Welland. The folks in Port Colborne weren't going to put up with it. The issue is one of people in that community, like the people in Fort Erie, like the people in Welland, over the course of decades and generations, working hard to build local hospitals, build services in those local hospitals, services as fundamental as emergency rooms, and then having, in the dark of night, the gang of thieves in the form of the NHS steal those services away from them.

Look, these people are appealing to Dr. Kitts and his team to make the right recommendation to the LHIN—oh, that mega LHIN, the one that covers everything from Brantford through Hamilton down into Niagara.

Ernie Eves and Mike Harris gave us forced amalgamation; Dalton McGuinty imposed mega LHINs on us. But I say that at the end of the day, the real solution is to acquire hospital service boards that are elected, that are accountable, that are democratic and that, rather than hide behind LHINs and committees like that of Dr. Kitts, involve the communities that they are working with directly in their consultations.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Bob Delaney: Commuters in Streetsville will soon benefit from a major upgrade to the Streetsville GO train station. In July, GO Transit began a major project to lengthen the station platform to accommodate the new 12-car GO trains that now serve the Milton line.

As well, GO Transit is making life a little more convenient for those of us who park in that very long parking lot at the Streetsville station. Construction of a new pedestrian tunnel is under way to link the parking lot to the station platform. What that means is that for those of us—and I'm one of those commuters—on the last three morning trains, when parking spaces are near the back of the lot, there will be a shorter hike to get to the station platform. That will not only help many commuters make their train without the sprint we often need to take when traffic is slow, but will assist us with a shorter walk when the weather is cold, when the weather is wet or when the weather is snowy.

The existing station platform is also getting a facelift. Gone are the 1980s vintage interlocking stones with all of their spring thaw puddles and icy patches when the weather is cold or wet.

Residents can get more details on my website at bobdelaney.com. I will let residents know of the official opening date for the new platform and the new tunnel as soon as the contractor can provide it to us.

L'ORÉAL FASHION WEEK

Mrs. Christine Elliott: It's with great pleasure that I rise today to speak to the House about L'Oréal Fashion Week's 16th season, which will take place October 20 to 25 this year. L'Oréal Fashion Week, produced by the Fashion Design Council of Canada, is taking place at Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto all week.

Founded in 1990 with a specific mandate to brand fashion in Canada, the Fashion Design Council of Canada has successfully created a fashion week that commands respect on an international level. Many of Canada's top fashion designers will be unveiling their spring 2009 collections over a series of 37 runway shows this week. The week also offers the opportunity to bring up-and-coming Canadian designers and their work into the forefront.

Yesterday afternoon, fashion week was kicked off by a presentation of Alfred Sung's new bridal collection, and the event was concluded by a media cocktail reception last night at Holt Renfrew.

Events such as this are crucial to preserving the unique talent and culture we have right here in Canada. Our Canadian designers can fully hold their own on the world stage, and it's important that we take time to recognize and celebrate their talent.

I'm looking forward to attending my first L'Oréal Fashion Week fashion show tomorrow evening and encourage all members to attend, if they're able, to demonstrate our support for our Canadian designers.

CARDIAC CARE

Mr. Bill Mauro: My top priority during the 2003 provincial election campaign was to bring world-class cardiac services to Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre. The provision of angioplasty in Thunder Bay has now reached the one-year mark.

The program has now expanded with the arrival of Dr. Mark Henderson as director of the interventional cardiology program. Dr. Henderson is a leading cardiologist with more than 20 years' experience performing angioplasty. Since his arrival in September, activity has skyrocketed. The percentage of cases performed in Thunder Bay has increased from 40 to 95. Dr. Henderson's arrival translates into more residents accessing more timely service without the need for extensive travel, so that they can remain close to family and friends during medical treatment.

The angio program at Thunder Bay Regional has a world-class facility and an excellent team reputation for cardiac services. Health care professionals, including Drs. Chris Lai and Frank Nigro, have performed more cardiac catheterizations over the past 20 years than any other centre with a diagnostic-only lab. Their success has placed Thunder Bay Regional in a position to offer angioplasty and expand the cardiology program.

1510

Another encouraging development is that the health sciences foundation, through its northern cardiac fund, has raised over \$1 million to support further enhancements of the angioplasty program. When fully operational, the program will serve over 550 patients yearly and will see the creation of approximately 40 new jobs.

I support and salute the generous businesses, organizations and individuals of Thunder Bay who, in conjunction with our government, share a vision of excellence in cardiac care for the people of northwestern Ontario.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm angry. People in Ontario are also angry about this government's economic mess. I'll point out that in the last fiscal year, revenues were \$5 billion higher than expected, but instead of saving for a rainy day, members opposite spent every penny.

Premier McGuinty inherited a prosperous province from Mike Harris and Ernie Eves on the heels of the Common Sense economic Revolution, but in 2004, McGuinty introduced the largest tax increase in the history of Ontario and ran up a deficit. Revenues have gone from \$69 billion to a whopping \$97 billion, but this government spends it as quickly as it comes in.

Spending has increased by 40%, to \$96 billion. Why is that? Because this crew thought the good times would last forever. Only David Peterson surpassed McGuinty for an all-time spending record of a 45% increase over five years. Even Bob Rae kept spending to 21%, while Harris and Eves over eight years had increases of just 20%.

This government began with a deficit; they'll go out with a deficit. Don't be surprised if this government brings in a deficit tomorrow.

There we have it: five years of knee-jerk Liberalism jacking up taxes, jacking up spending, and now another McGuinty deficit in the wings.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. David Ramsay: Now for some good news. I'm very pleased to inform the House today of an exciting new manufacturing development taking place in my riding of Timiskaming-Cochrane, specifically in the municipality of West Nipissing.

On June 23 of this year, I attended a sod-turning ceremony that took place in the town of Sturgeon Falls. This was to honour a multinational corporation, Jenmar, out of Pennsylvania, that is investing some \$15 million in the community over the next couple of years. Two 60,000-square-foot facilities are planned that will be home to approximately 150 new jobs. Jenmar produces products for the mining industry for ground control systems, such as bolts, nuts, gears and shafts. Mr. Frank Calandra, Jr., president and CEO of Jenmar, was present at the sod turning and stated, "We are pleased and excited to have the West Nipissing community become the newest member of the Jenmar family."

I would like to congratulate the residents of West Nipissing, Mayor Joanne Savage, her council and the tremendous administration that she has working with her for their hard work and professionalism in attracting this exciting new investment to Sturgeon Falls. Jenmar has recognized the bright future this community has to offer.

The McGuinty government will continue to work with municipalities and businesses to attract more high-paying and skilled jobs to the north. We were able, through the heritage fund, to support the industrial park that supports this, and I expect some further announcements on this in the future.

ISLAMIC HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today to recognize Islamic History Month and the contributions of people of Muslim faith to the progress of our civilization in addition to their contributions to our province and country.

Islamic History Month began last year, and many cities across Canada, including my hometown of Ottawa, have followed the lead of our national Parliament by designating October as the month to recognize Islamic history and the contributions of Muslims to various areas, such as arts, sciences, medicine and music.

The Muslim world has given us many innovations that we take for granted in our modern daily lives. Here are some examples:

The first person to realize that light enters the eye, rather than leaving it, was the 10th-century Muslim mathematician, astronomer and physicist Ibn al-Haitham.

He invented the first pinhole camera after noticing the way light came through a hole in window shutters.

Distillation, the means of separating liquids through differences in their boiling points, was invented around the year 800 by Islam's foremost scientist, Jabir ibn Hayyan, who transformed alchemy, inventing many of the basic processes and apparatus still in use today. Ibn Hayyan emphasized systematic experimentation and was the founder of modern chemistry.

These are a few examples by which Muslim scholars and scientists have contributed to the world today. I encourage all members of this Legislature and Ontarians to take some time this month to learn about the very rich history of Islam.

WALKERTON CLEAN WATER CENTRE

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I rise today to offer congratulations to the residents of Walkerton on the recent ground-breaking for the new Walkerton Clean Water Centre.

This new facility, which will be lead-certified for its commitment to energy efficiency, will increase the centre's capacity to conduct training seminars, information sessions and research that pertains to the safety of our drinking water. The Walkerton Clean Water Centre is a key resource in implementing the recommendations of the O'Connor inquiry and is dedicated to providing hands-on training and learning opportunities for owners and operators of drinking water systems, with a focus on those in remote areas. The centre will continue to be a world-class institute, dedicated to increasing the capacity for research and furthering the knowledge and expertise of the professionals who have the job of providing safe drinking water in this province from source to tap.

We have implemented Justice O'Connor's 121 recommendations. The clean water centre will symbolize excellence in the protection of drinking water, and we will never forget the tragedy that happened in May 2000 in Walkerton. But the clean water centre represents a recognition of that tragedy and the work that has gone on in the community to rebuild. It's a bright future for the community of Walkerton.

ANNUAL REPORT, ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER OF ONTARIO

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the 2007-08 annual report of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SINGLE-USE BOTTLED WATER BAN ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 INTERDISANT LES BOUTEILLES D'EAU JETABLES

Mr. Kular moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 112, An Act to prohibit the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water in Ontario / Projet de loi 112, Loi interdisant la vente de bouteilles d'eau en plastique jetables en Ontario.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Kuldip Kular: The purpose of this bill is to encourage public confidence in the water treated and supplied by our municipal water systems and to reduce waste and the consumption of energy associated with the production and recycling of plastic bottles by proposing a province-wide ban on the sale of single-use plastic bottles of water.

DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE MOIS DE LA SENSIBILISATION AU DIABÈTE

Mrs. Mangat moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 113, An Act to proclaim the month of November Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario / Projet de loi 113, Loi visant à proclamer le mois de novembre Mois de la sensibilisation au diabète.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: This bill will officially proclaim November as Diabetes Awareness Month in Ontario, in an effort to raise public awareness of diabetes and the steps that can be taken to prevent or manage the disease.

1520

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEK SEMAINE DES ADMINISTRATIONS LOCALES

Hon. Jim Watson: I am pleased to inform the members about an initiative that gives Ontario's children and youth real-life lessons in responsible citizenship.

This week, as many of you may know, is Local Government Week in Ontario. The week gives our grades 5 and 10 students a hands-on introduction to local democracy and the responsibility of citizenship. This is being done through activities such as mock elections and council meetings. For teachers, it is a new opportunity to bring local civics to life in the classroom, and for

municipalities, it provides a forum to educate young people about the importance of the services that local governments provide. They will be able to engage young people and, in turn, young people will learn how they can engage their local councils.

Local Government Week is the result of hard work and support of many different organizations and groups. In particular, I would like to thank the officials in my ministry, in partnership with the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, AMCTO, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

La Semaine des administrations locales est le résultat du travail acharné et de l'appui de nombreux organismes et groupes. J'aimerais souligner en particulier que mon ministère a conclu un partenariat avec l'Association des directeurs généraux, secrétaires et trésoriers municipaux de l'Ontario et l'Association des municipalités de l'Ontario.

We have consulted with education experts and organizations such as the Ontario Teachers' Federation, who have given valuable input to the program.

Through these collective efforts, schools and municipalities across the province have received local government resource kits with suggestions on activities to make Local Government Week come to life. The manual, if members would like a copy of it and have not seen it, is available through my office. They are excellent pieces of work that are encouraging young people to learn a little bit more about local government. We want the youth of Ontario to learn about the importance of local government and realize that they too can one day become leaders in their own communities.

Yesterday, I had the pleasure of meeting the grade 5 students at Regal Road public school in Toronto. The children had designed flags that captured what they thought of local government and their communities. I want to thank those students. They're wonderful, talented young people who welcomed me, the local city councillor from Toronto and the local school trustee. I was amazed at the students' enthusiasm and hope that this week's events will make them appreciate even more the vital role local government plays in their lives.

I would like to quote the words of the president of the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, Ray Callery. Mr. Callery is the chief administrative officer of the town of Greater Napanee:

"Teaching young people about responsible citizenship and the value of stewardship for their local communities [is] critical to the long-term vitality and prosperity of Ontario's municipalities. We are pleased to partner with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and AMO to bring Local Government Week to life, and as a celebration of the key role that Ontario local governments play in defining the character, priorities, and physical makeup of our communities."

I quote the words of the new president of AMO, Mr. Peter Hume. He is from the wonderful city of Ottawa.

Peter and I were elected the same year, in 1991, to city council. He said:

"No government touches people more directly than municipal government—particularly when it comes to young people. Local Government Week is a great opportunity to introduce young people to how municipalities work, our responsibilities, and how they can contribute to the future of their communities."

I thank all members of this House, many of whom have served at the municipal level, as I had the pleasure of doing for nine years, for supporting this initiative in their communities. I'd encourage members to go and visit their schools, talk about local government if you've had experience in local government, and share some of your experiences with these young people to encourage them to get involved in municipal government, in leadership in their communities, and some day perhaps as mayor, city councillor or trustee in their community.

ROAD SAFETY

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise in the House today to tell you about a determined group of young people who are making our roads safer by speaking out against dangerous driving.

Making our roads the safest they can be takes smart laws, tough enforcement and widespread public education. That is something we cannot do alone. And today, I would like to thank the Student Life Education Company for its commitment to keeping our young drivers safe.

Today marks this organization's 10th annual National Students Against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day; that is, NSAIDD. We pronounce that "NSAIDD Day" for short. Across Ontario, students will join over half a million youth nationwide to spread the word about the dangers of driving impaired and distracted. This day of action began almost 10 years ago by a group of high school students who knew that they had a voice and wanted to use it.

Research shows that drivers aged 19 to 21 are over-represented in drinking and driving collisions. Ontario's safety partners are taking action to change this by reaching out to their peers. For nearly 10 years, NSAIDD has been empowering youth to make the right decisions before they get behind the wheel of a car, decisions that might save their lives.

NSAIDD Day is the work of one of our road safety partners that has helped Ontario achieve and maintain one of the safest road networks in North America, year in and year out. The latest statistics show that Ontario has the safest roads of any province or state. The road fatality rate is the lowest in our province's history for the third year in a row.

With the voice of our safety partners, we are carefully examining Ontario's graduated licensing system to find even better ways to protect young drivers. We are looking at new ways to reduce some of the distractions drivers face daily. We are consulting with our road safety

partners and police, and we are reviewing the latest research and best practices from around the world.

Today is National Students Against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day, but every day is road safety day in Ontario.

WASTE REDUCTION WEEK

Hon. John Gerretsen: As you may know, October 19 to 25 marks Waste Reduction Week in Ontario. Yesterday, along with my colleague Minister Wynne, the Minister of Education, I had the pleasure of helping launch Waste Reduction Week along with its mascot this year, Oscar the Grouch. Hundreds of enthusiastic Ontario eco-school students were there. It was very exciting to see literally hundreds of young people, knowledgeable about the three Rs—reuse, reduce and recycle—and being committed to making our province greener and more sustainable.

As we all know, the blue box program started Ontario on the road to a financially sustainable approach to waste diversion some 20 years ago. Industry, municipalities and consumers all shared in its success. This past July we launched a municipal hazardous waste, or special waste, program, an important step to keep household toxic waste out of our landfills, sewers and waterways. Our government's waste electronics program goes even further by capturing old computers, cellphones, televisions and other e-waste, recovering valuable material that can be turned into new products. We have asked for the next phases of these two programs to be developed by Waste Diversion Ontario. We've also asked Waste Diversion Ontario for a program to effectively manage the approximately 12 million used tires generated in Ontario each year.

We are making progress, but much more needs to be done. We are now working on the next steps in the evolution of waste management in Ontario. The highly successful blue box program has exceeded its five-year objective and we need to consider how to best move forward. I have asked Waste Diversion Ontario to engage industry, municipalities and the public in discussing the opportunities to strengthen the blue box program, and I look forward to their recommendations.

We have also recently launched a full-scale review of the Waste Diversion Act. The act has been around since 2002. It has served us well, but it's time to take another look. After five years, we need to see what's working and what's not. This review will take place in the context of a zero waste vision, and we invite individuals and organizations to visit the Ministry of the Environment's website for a full copy of the discussion paper.

1530

Zero waste is about a changing mindset, a changing culture, more than a specific target. As author Thomas Friedman says, "We must eliminate the concept of waste." That means looking at waste in new ways and seeing the opportunities inherent in materials we are accustomed to thinking about as simply plain garbage.

A discussion paper, as I've mentioned before, has also been posted on the environmental registry so that everyone can consider the issues and provide us with much-needed feedback. My ministry will also be holding focused consultation sessions for discussion and input by everyone involved: industry, organizations, and individuals.

What we are proposing is by no means revolutionary or out of reach. In fact, we are simply building on our collective success, particularly when it comes to municipal waste diversion. We have also seen some progress being made by industry, an area where we have much to gain. Certainly more can and must be done by this sector.

The theme of Waste Reduction Week this year says it all: "Too good to waste." We still need to recognize the value of the materials and energy used to make a product, and recapture that value through reuse and recycling. We need to rethink how products are designed, how they are packaged and what to do when they've outlived their original use.

Successful waste diversion also provides opportunities for innovation in green technologies, something we are working hard to encourage. Waste recycling means new investment in processing facilities, more jobs for Ontarians and a shift towards a greener economy. As Ontario moves forward towards a green economy, companies who have incorporated the three Rs approach to doing business will be better equipped to compete in the global marketplace. Many companies have found that by focusing on reducing waste and reusing materials they can reduce costs and boost their bottom line significantly.

During Waste Reduction Week, I encourage everyone to focus on the most important of the three Rs, and that is to reduce. I challenge all Ontario businesses, institutions, industry and individuals to find innovative ways to increase their diversion rates. Our government is committed to going green and making our province more sustainable. By working together, all of us can reduce the amount of waste we produce and build a cleaner, healthier province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEK

Mr. John O'Toole: I was convinced that the Minister of Municipal Affairs, in his response to Local Government Week, would have made some commitment here today to deal with the provincial-municipal service structure review. Why isn't he announcing today that he's here to help municipalities during this week? Make the commitment up front, instead of a bunch of high-speaking language that doesn't address a single one of the municipalities' priorities. I'm so disappointed, along with the mayors in my community. I should tell you I will be visiting the schools in my community; I did yesterday and I will two other schools this week. What I'm going to be telling them is that the minister had the opportunity this week to fulfill a promise and tell them that this review has been promised three times and yet he

hasn't delivered it. I'm so disappointed he missed this opportunity again.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: On behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus I want to pay tribute to the more than 25,000 Canadian youth who are members of Canadian Youth Against Impaired Driving. On this 10th anniversary of the National Students Against Impaired and Distracted Driving Day, we celebrate the initiative and responsible leadership of young people who, by their actions, are sending a strong message to their peers that irresponsible and impaired driving injures and kills Canadians of all ages. Their vision affirms that together Canada's youth can empower and inspire all Canadians to face the issue of impaired and distracted driving head on, and promote safe and responsible driving.

The death this past summer of 20-year old Tyler Mulcahy and two friends, the result of a car crash in Muskoka, is a reminder of the importance of reaching young people with this life-saving message.

WASTE REDUCTION WEEK

Mr. Toby Barrett: Welcome to Waste Reduction Week in Ontario, the only province where the waste diversion plan creates more garbage than it diverts. This is a government whose environment minister told us it was committing to a 2005 target of 60% waste diversion. That was at the beginning of the McGuinty term. Later—

Interjection: Did they hit it?

Interjection: How are they doing?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm afraid they didn't hit it.

Later, the minister pushed that commitment back to 2008. So how is that target working? We pulled up a StatsCan survey that came out this summer, and it lays out that when it comes to McGuinty waste reduction, regrettably, it's all words and very little action.

That StatsCan survey reveals in a report that the diversion rate now—get this—sits at 18.7%. That's 18.7%; that's a far cry from the 60% diversion rate that the previous minister promised for the year 2005. It's a far cry, Minister.

Ontarians are generating more waste than ever before at a cost of \$870 million to taxpayers each year. Garbage disposal rose from 9.8 million to 10.4 million tonnes. That's an increase of 4%. So while waste generation has increased, Ontario's diversion rate has actually decreased by one percentage point, dropping to 2.3 million tonnes.

Instead of action to reduce waste, we get Oscar the Grouch. We get a supposed plan to deal with batteries—I don't think the minister made mention of that; I strongly agree with that action. But how am I—how are any of us in this House, how is anyone in the province of Ontario—supposed to believe what the minister is saying, given the record? Oscar the Grouch may like to see more trash in the can, but the people of Ontario deserve much better than that.

Today at 1 o'clock in the media studio, Gord Miller, Environmental Commissioner of the province of Ontario, had this to say in his annual report, and some in this House may argue with Gord Miller's recent statement: "Ontario lacks an overarching provincial policy for waste management that would set out capacity needs, technology preferences, goals, targets and timelines." He went on to say that "MOE"—that would be the Ministry of the Environment—"does have a target and an approach on waste diversion, but it has become outdated."

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On behalf of the New Democratic caucus, I'd like to get up and congratulate the work that has been done by Students Against Impaired and Distracted Driving.

What's interesting here is that over the years, it's gone from the legislators taking the lead to the public being in the lead, and I think, really, this is the point of today. We are blessed with people such as these, MADD and others who have pushed this Legislature and the federal government to deal with this issue, to where drunken driving is not the norm that you used to see on the highways across Ontario.

I say to all those community groups such as this, who work hard in order to keep us on the leading edge: Congratulations, job well done. Continue the good work.

WASTE REDUCTION WEEK

Mr. Peter Tabuns: National Waste Reduction Week aims to raise awareness regarding problems of over-consumption and waste. Canadians produce 31 million tonnes of waste a year, 2.7 kilograms per person per day.

Despite city recycling programs, we still divert less than 25% of the waste we generate. In fact, Toronto Star columnist Christopher Hume recently called Ontario among the worst in the world in reducing waste. So when we celebrate national Waste Reduction Week, we should recognize that we've got a long way to go.

Today's report from the Environmental Commissioner talks about other failings in the environmental direction taken by this government. He indicates we're in the midst of a multi-fold environmental crisis, energy crisis, water crisis and climate change crisis. He emphasizes that we've been lulled into a false sense of security that government is effectively protecting the environment because of all its environmental programs. But the truth, according to the commissioner, is that many of these government programs are simply not working. The low water response plan is not protecting water levels. Weak government regulations allow water bottling companies to pump millions of litres of water from the watershed, practically for free. The air quality index underestimates air quality problems because monitoring stations are placed far from sources of pollution. The Ontario biodiversity strategy is not actually protecting biodiversity.

Waste Reduction Week is a time for all Ontarians to reflect on ways to reduce, reuse and recycle, but it's also

a time for governments, like the government of the Minister of Transportation there, to ask themselves if they're doing enough to protect our shared water, air and land. And given today's report from the Environmental Commissioner, it's clear that's not the case.

1540

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEK

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm responding to the Minister of Municipal Affairs in his Local Government Week announcement. He talks in his remarks about lessons and responsible citizenship for young people; I'd say that we have to have lessons in responsible government for the Liberals across the way, who are still not paying their own bills and have downloaded them onto the municipalities.

We have in his remarks a discussion about mock elections; what about talking about Liberal mock promises? Because that's all they ever give, mock promises. In fact, they mock municipalities when they try to talk about anything to do with taking away the downloading.

This government has been absolutely absent in terms of a proper relationship with municipalities. The report that they promised to bring forward on the municipal financial relationship is still not here. Two years later, we still don't know what this government plans on doing in terms of relieving municipalities of bills that don't belong on the property tax base. We're the only jurisdiction in the entire G8 that has social programs on the property tax base—absolutely inappropriate. It is the most regressive level of taxation, it is the most inelastic level of taxation, and yet the Liberals are happy to keep all of these kinds of programs on the property tax base.

What happens as a result? Municipalities can't do the good work that they're supposed to be doing, that this minister wants to tell us he's trying to teach students about—what municipalities should be doing. Well, maybe the minister needs to learn what municipalities should be doing and what they shouldn't be doing. They shouldn't be paying for affordable housing, they shouldn't be paying for Ontario Works, they shouldn't be paying for ODSP and they shouldn't be paying for court security costs. What they should be doing is the business that is the closest to the people. That's the one thing I would agree with, in what the minister said, that the municipal level of government is supposed to provide services that are the closest to the people, services like parks, services like libraries, like recreation centres, good transit systems, good roads. Those are the kinds of things that municipalities should be paying for. But not in Ontario; they can't afford to pay for robust programs in any of those areas. Why? Because they're paying the downloaded costs from the provincial Liberal government that has refused to deal with the mess that the last government left them.

With all due respect, the minister should take his own lessons at this time of Local Government Week.

PETITIONS

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm receiving hundreds of petitions to do with 911 services in Parry Sound–Muskoka. They read:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

“Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

“Whereas Parry Sound–Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

“Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

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

“That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service.”

I support this petition.

EMISSION-FREE VEHICLES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have 1,500 signatures collected by Barry Taylor and the listeners of 102.1 the Edge, which is a local radio station, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas gasoline-powered vehicles are a major source of pollution; and

“Whereas the electric Zenn car, a Canadian innovation, is barred from road use in Ontario but is legal for use in other provinces; and

“Whereas electric bicycles and scooters that comply with the Transport Canada 2001 design standards are the subject of a pilot program in Ontario, but the McGuinty government changed the rules halfway through the trial and the status of these bicycles for legal road use in Ontario is now unclear and uncertain; and

“Whereas consumers want to do the right thing by the environment and invest in emission-free vehicles like electric cars and electric bicycles and scooters, and there is a strong consumer push to have the McGuinty government approve these vehicles for legal use on Ontario roads, with the exception of major highways and roads with speed limits exceeding 50 kilometres per hour; and

“Whereas government delays and uncertainty are putting a chill on the development of green transportation options and the purchase of electric cars and bikes in Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to move immediately to approve electric cars like the ZENN car and electric bicycles for legal use on Ontario roadways, with the exception of 400-series highways and roads where speed limits exceed 50 kilometres an hour.”

I agree with this petition, I’ve signed it and I send it to the table by way of page Helen.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craitor: I’m pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of the Lupus Foundation of Ontario. I have thousands of signatures from across Ontario. I also want to recognize Kathy Crowhurst from the foundation office in Ridgeway. This is a disease that’s known as the disease with 1,000 faces. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is unrecognized as a global health problem by public health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness; and

“Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison with diseases of other comparable magnitude and severity; and

“Whereas no safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

“We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario.”

I’m pleased to sign my name to these petitions and give them to the page to bring them to the table.

SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the previous Progressive Conservative government determined sex change operations were not a medical spending priority and instead chose to invest in essential health care services; and

“Whereas Premier McGuinty said in 2004 that funding for sex change operations was not a priority of his government; and

“Whereas the current Liberal government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy services; and

“Whereas the present shortage of doctors and nurses, troubling wait times for emergency services and other treatment, operational challenges at many hospitals, as well as a crisis in our long-term-care homes signify that the current government has not met their health care commitments;

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

“That the government of Ontario does not fund sex change operations under OHIP and instead concentrates its priorities on essential health services and directs our health care resources to improve patient care for all Ontarians.”

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

TUITION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from Local 30, the student general association at Laurentian University, to “Drop Tuition Fees and Increase Funding for Post-Secondary Education....

“Whereas undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have increased by 195% since 1990 and are the third-highest in all of the provinces in Canada; and

“Whereas average student debt in Ontario has skyrocketed by 250% in the last 15 years to over \$25,000 for four years of study; and

“Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much ... as \$20,000 per year; and

“Whereas 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, and fees reduce the opportunity for many low- and middle-income families while magnifying barriers for aboriginal, rural, racialized and other marginalized students; and

“Whereas Ontario currently provides the lowest per capita funding for post-secondary education in Canada, while many countries fully fund higher education and charge little or no fees for college and university; and

“Whereas public opinion polls show that nearly three quarters of Ontarians think the government’s Reaching Higher framework for tuition fee increases of 20% to 36% over four years is unfair;....”

Therefore, they petition this assembly to introduce a framework that:

“(1) Reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for students.

“(2) Converts a portion of every student loan into a grant.

“(3) Increases per student funding above the national average.”

I fully support this petition and will affix my name to it and send it to the clerks’ table with Laura.

1550

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents from my riding and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children’s Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents;

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

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks’ table.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John O’Toole: It’s a pleasure to read a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Freeze Gas Prices,

“Whereas high gasoline prices recently now aren’t affordable for the average person; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government’s tax on a litre of gasoline is 14.7 cents; and

“Whereas the federal government’s tax on a litre of gasoline is 10 cents plus the GST;

“Therefore, we the undersigned hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“(1) That the McGuinty government immediately freeze gas prices for a temporary period until world prices moderate.

“(2) That the McGuinty government and the federal government immediately lower or eliminate their tax on

gas for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate.

“(3) That the McGuinty government immediately initiate a royal commission to investigate the predatory gas prices charged by oil companies operating in Ontario.”

I’m pleased to sign this on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham and give it to one of the new pages, Jenna.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board reversed the 2006 announcement closing the maternity and pediatric services at the Ajax-Pickering hospital due to an overwhelming public outcry; and

“Whereas the Rouge Valley Health board of directors has recently approved closing the 20-bed mental health unit at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

“Whereas there remains further concern by residents for future maternity/pediatric closings, particularly with the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, which will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum (LDRP) birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms opening this fall in 2008, even with the Ontario Ministry of Health’s largest-ever expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

“Whereas there is a natural boundary, the Rouge Valley, that clearly separates the two distinct areas of Scarborough and Durham region;

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

“That the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE-LHIN) and the Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) board of directors review the Rouge Valley Health System makeup and group Scarborough Centenary hospital with the three other Scarborough hospitals; and

“Further, that we position Ajax-Pickering hospital within Lakeridge Health, thus combining all of our hospitals in Durham region under one Durham region administration.”

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

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging trucks going through the village of Restoule and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

“Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

“Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

“Whereas alternative routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

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

“That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan.”

I support this petition.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

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

“Whereas the federal government gives more support for economic development, health care and infrastructure to other parts of Canada, and unemployed workers in Ontario get less employment insurance support than in other parts of Canada;

“Whereas the federal system of taxes and equalization extracts over \$20 billion from the people of Ontario every year above and beyond what Ottawa invests in Ontario;

“Whereas laid-off workers in Ontario get \$4,630 less in employment insurance than they would get if they lived in another part of Canada;

“Whereas federal health care money is supposed to be divided equally among all Canadians, but right now Ontario residents are shortchanged by \$773 million per year;

“Whereas the federal government provides economic development support for people living in the north, Atlantic Canada, Quebec and the west, but provides no economic development support for southern Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the federal government stop gouging the people of Ontario and treat them fairly.”

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

SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Mr. John O’Toole: I pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the previous Progressive Conservative government determined sex change operations were not a medical spending priority and instead chose to invest in essential health care services; and

“Whereas Premier McGuinty said in 2004 that funding for sex change operations was not a priority of his government; and

“Whereas the current Liberal government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for chiropractic, optometry and physiotherapy services; and

“Whereas the present shortage of doctors and nurses, troubling waiting times for emergency services and other treatment, operational challenges at many hospitals, as well as a crisis in our long-term-care homes signify the current government has not met their health care commitments;

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

“That the government of Ontario,” under Dalton McGuinty, “does not fund sex change operations under OHIP and instead concentrates its priorities on essential health services and directs our health care resources” to improve all patient outcomes for the province of Ontario.

I’m pleased to present this to Jake, one of the new pages here at Queen’s Park.

OPPOSITION DAY

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I move that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the Ontario government to establish a select committee on the Ontario economy to consider and report on options to address the challenges faced by Ontario families and businesses in the province’s current weakened economy.

The terms of reference for this select committee shall be as follows:

The committee shall, among other matters, review the government’s current five-point economic plan and the proposals raised by members of this House during debate on the government motion on the economy tabled October 7, 2008. It shall make recommendations on specific measures to be undertaken by the government in the short term to address Ontario’s most immediate and pressing challenges, as well as recommendations for a long-range, multi-year economic recovery plan.

The committee shall be empowered to invite witnesses to appear before it as it deems necessary.

The committee shall be non-partisan in makeup, being composed of five government members, three members of the official opposition, and two members of the third party. It shall be chaired by a government member, and a member of the official opposition shall serve as Vice-Chair. The membership of the committee, including the identification of the Chair and Vice-Chair, shall be filed with the Clerk of the Assembly by the whips of the recognized parties no later than October 31, 2008.

1600

The committee shall have the authority to meet concurrently with the House and during any adjournment of the House, notwithstanding prorogation.

The committee shall have the authority to commission reports relevant to the terms of reference, and to travel within Ontario if the committee deems travel to be necessary.

The committee shall present an interim report with recommendations on immediate measures to be undertaken by the government no later than December 11, 2008, and the committee shall present its final report to the Legislative Assembly no later than March 15, 2009. If the House is not sitting, the committee has the authority to release any report by depositing a copy of it with the Clerk of the Assembly, and, upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair of the committee shall present such report to the House in accordance with the standing orders.

This is addressed to the Premier of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 2. Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm proud to speak to this motion because it reflects what should be the ideals of this Legislature in our political process. It's a proposal that is not designed to score political points. It is not an empty or meaningless public relations exercise. Instead, we are proposing to do what the people of Ontario often tell us, as politicians, that we should be doing: working together, putting politics aside, and focusing on the issues that really matter to Ontarians. Our motion does all of those things. It reflects the understanding that Ontario's economy is in deep, deep trouble, that the pain of our decline is being felt in living rooms and boardrooms across Ontario, and that, of all possible issues, this is one where public servants like us need to drop the buttons and flags and get on with the job.

It's awfully tempting to take this opportunity to compare our motion to the government's motion for the debate on the economy. It's such a stark difference between self-promotion and co-operation, between the meaningless and meaningful. But as I said, we're here to put forward a true invitation to a non-partisan exercise, so I will call off my inner attack dog and try to keep this as neutral as possible.

Let me begin by pointing out why we need a select committee like the one we are proposing: first and most obviously, because of the depth of our economic crisis. Ontario has gone from first to last in Canada in economic growth. The leading economists say our economy has completely stalled, and we'll be the only province with zero economic growth this year. The price of that is being paid by families, entrepreneurs and communities across the province as they lose jobs and too often lose hope.

The second reason we need this committee is that the government's current economic plan is clearly a failure. Again, I'm not trying to take a partisan shot here, but anyone who tries to stand up today and say that this government's plan is working, that Ontario is doing as well as it could be right now, that a new plan is not required, had better be joking, because nobody could possibly take it seriously. The government itself has admitted that their finances have completely gone off the rails. They're already talking about running a deficit, if not in this place, outside and in Montreal, and cutting back on funding for municipalities. They've gone from a \$5.6-billion surplus just a few months ago to setting the

stage for a deficit. Only in April, the Minister of Finance was saying, "We're on track for the next three years for a balanced budget." Just four weeks ago, September 18, the minister was saying, "Our budget numbers remain on track."

We all agree that there have been huge dislocations in the stock market and the global economy, but nobody told you to spend that huge surplus, just like you did with every other surplus you've enjoyed in the last few years of this economic boom. You had your chance. You had more than enough money. You had more than enough warning from us and others that difficult times were coming.

This didn't just happen in the past few weeks. As the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, John Tory, said earlier today, the current global crisis did not cause Ontario's decline; it only exposed our weaknesses. It was Ontario's overspending, overtaxing, overregulating decisions that weakened our economy, drove away the jobs and left us in this weakened state. The unvarnished, non-partisan reality is that this government's taxing, spending and regulatory initiatives over the past five years have placed this province in a highly vulnerable position. Everyone with a modicum of sense has to admit that we need a new direction and a new plan, and that's the second reason for a select committee.

The third reason is that without a targeted task force like this, Ontario will not get the best plan possible and may not get a new plan in time. The government's idea that the Standing Committee on Finance can produce a new and different plan is a non-starter. They say that Einstein had a definition for insanity: "doing the same thing the same way but expecting a different result." I don't think it's reasonable or realistic to turn to the same people who dug the hole and expect them to dig us out of it again. The standing committee is dominated by government members, and let's be honest here: Their first priority is to protect the best interests of their government and their political party.

Look what we've seen with other standing committees. Just recently, we proposed nearly 70 amendments to Bill 77. That was a bill dealing with the provision of services for persons with developmental disabilities. They were not partisan amendments. They were changes proposed by parents and other stakeholders designed to strengthen the bill and help Ontarians with disabilities and their families. Yet this government could not bring itself to support one single amendment. So the idea that the finance committee will suddenly turn into a focused, non-partisan body that will truly listen and consult is ridiculous and, for those of us who know how this place operates, downright offensive.

We also can't expect it to move swiftly and act decisively. It's a government committee. They're supposed to crawl along and produce lots of paper without upsetting the status quo. But today we're dealing with an urgent matter. We can't afford to put our package on the Titanic and hope it reaches its destination. We need to put it on a speedboat, and that's what this committee

could be, a fast vessel with a single purpose and a single focus. You don't use a hammer to drive home a screw; you don't use a flame thrower to start your barbecue. You use the right tool for the job, and that's what our proposal provides.

Let me conclude by appealing to the government members for their support of this motion, for a couple of reasons: first, because this is just the kind thing that the Premier has said repeatedly in recent days that he wants to do. It was his explanation for the debate on the government's resolution on the economy. It's the idea that getting the best solution to a truly complex problem requires true consultation. To the Premier's credit, he has said that he really wants to hear what the opposition has to say and to incorporate new ideas going forward. That was the right thing to say, and our motion today is the right way to prove that the Premier meant those fine words when he said them.

Finally, let me appeal to the honourable members opposite on these simple grounds: We have to do this. It's too important, too urgent, too much of a challenge to our province and our future to play games with. These are families out there who have lost everything: jobs, savings, homes. There are elderly people whose retirement funds have been wiped out. There are entrepreneurs whose dreams are dying and taking jobs with them.

1610

The pain is real, it's urgent, and we are not helpless. Ontario is not just some twig being carried downstream by the river. We have some control. We have choices to make, and there are actions we can take to ease that pain and put Ontario back on the path to prosperity in the future.

So I ask all members, don't let this opportunity pass by. Don't miss the chance to be able to say that, just this once, when it really mattered, we dropped the knives, cooled the rhetoric and did the right thing, because years from now, when people look back at this economic crisis, they won't remember the people who played the games of politics successfully. They will remember those who knew that the time for games was over and the time for real constructive work had arrived.

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm delighted to join in the debate on the opposition day motion.

Let me start by saying that in spite of the Leader of the Opposition's comments in the House that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is not the right vehicle by which to address matters of concern on the economy or other matters referred to it by this Legislature, quite frankly, that's exactly the place where matters of the economy and legislation should be directed, and not to a select committee that would have virtually the same responsibilities as outlined in the motion, one referred to by the member opposite, the in-House Leader of the Opposition, as a non-partisan committee, one that presumably, on his words, would act in a fashion—and his party, as the official opposition, in a manner—of co-operation and positive input.

Let me just comment, if I could, on a few of the words. I only put down a couple, kind of the themes that came out of those first few minutes. I heard things like “meaningless” exercises, “self-promotion,” the government's current plan being a “failure.” “Tax and spend,” “regulatory environment,” “offensive,” “ridiculous,” “the Titanic”: Those are not the kinds of words that would lead one to think that a committee other than the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs would be functional in this Legislature.

Let me point out, if I can, the proposed makeup of the committee as it reflects on the current standing committee. The current standing committee has six members of the government. The opposition would have the government have five members on the standing committee. Now, to some that doesn't seem to make a lot of difference. The current makeup has two members of the opposition on the standing committee. The member opposite would increase that to three members. Well, that doesn't seem to be substantive. The current standing committee has one member of the third party. This motion would have a standing committee with two members of the third party. Now, individually, those numbers would not seem to be a big deviation from what currently exists.

The motion also calls for a member of the government to be the Chair. Now, for those who have been in any governance model, and this one in particular, the Chair only has a vote in the case of a tie. Now, without getting into charting it, one only has to add the numbers up to figure out that the government, in effect, would be sitting on a committee as though it were the opposition. It is the role of the official opposition and the third party to oppose government policies, to hold government to account. That's their role. Effectively, this model would put the government in a position that they would be acting as though they were the opposition.

The public in this province a year ago didn't elect our government to a large majority to have us behave and act as though we were in opposition. They elected us to behave and act as a majority government, and that's a majority government that listens carefully to the opposition. It listens to the criticisms. It listens to their efforts and need to hold government to account. It takes those matters into consideration. It's why we're having the debate that we're having today, or have had in the past days and continue to have, on the leader's motion on the economy. The motion as put forward speaks to matters of travel, if need be outside of Toronto. That's what the standing committee does at least annually as we do our pre-budget consultations as an all-party committee of this Legislature.

This is just a small list during my time—and it hasn't been as long, certainly, as some—of some of the communities over the past couple of years, three years, that I've had the opportunity to travel to with members of that committee, including members opposite from both of the parties, to hear from Ontarians across this province. We have travelled to places like Atikokan, Windsor, Timmins, Kitchener, Cornwall, Kenora, Thunder Bay,

Sarnia, I think it was Niagara Falls or St. Catharines in the Niagara area, Barrie and Guelph, and spent much time in Toronto, where there are many people and those can travel here.

We have covered the breadth and width of this province to hear from organizations and individuals about what they see as the need for engagement in the process of developing an annual budget and supporting their positions on the go-forward policies of the financial capacity of the province. The budget and the plans of government are the means by which the people of Ontario have the chance to speak to us about their concerns, about the worrisome nature of today's economy and about their priorities as they see it in government.

The motion that we have before us today is not non-partisan, "Let's get together in a room, let's all hold hands and play nice." That's not the motion. We need to continue to function in this Legislature in the manner in which the public elected us: That's for opposition to hold the government to account; that's for opposition to challenge the positions that government puts forward; that's for an opportunity for the media to report on those matters that the opposition brings forward; that's for a chance for the public to read about that or see it. It's an opportunity for the government, through its ministers and its Premier, to support, defend, consider, modify and amend the positions that the government has on a variety of matters, most particularly matters related to the economy.

I look forward to tomorrow, with the fall economic statement by the Minister of Finance. I look forward to him providing a thorough and formal update on the current status of our economic climate here in the province and on the current status of the books of the province of Ontario. I look forward to the opportunity, should that matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, to serving with all those on the committee on all sides of the House. I look forward to our pre-budget consultations, and we'll be setting out the strategy for that as soon as we can, to find out those communities who need and want to hear from us most particularly this year, as well as opportunities here in Toronto for those who can get to us. We're anxious to get that schedule in place so we have that opportunity so that we can report to the minister and so that he can consider the matters we hear in the development and presentation his budget.

It truly is a pleasure to be able to serve on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. I've had the opportunity to serve with the member opposite from—I always miss the ridings, they change; if I can just find it—Niagara West—Glanbrook, who has had the lead from the opposition. He is not the only member. I see the member here today from Haldimand—Norfolk, who is an active member from the opposition; the member from Beaches—East York, who is the finance critic for the third party; as well as members who come and go from committee as the need arises to schedule, as well as members from our own side who have served on that committee.

1620

I look forward to that opportunity yet again in the next few weeks, in the next couple of months, as we deliberate, as we hear from the people of Ontario and what they see as their priorities, their concerns, the worrisome nature of our economy, and the opportunity to bring those matters back here through the committee for the consideration of the minister and the discussion that will occur at that time in the context of the budget, but more urgently, in the context of our debate that will occur shortly—not today, but shortly—on the fall economic statement.

I will not be supporting the opposition day motion. The select committee as proposed will do nothing more for us than our standing committee can do most effectively and do it in a fashion that reflects on the choices the public made in the election of a majority government a year ago.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to begin my remarks by quoting a former Ontario assistant deputy minister of finance, Michael Mendelson. Now a senior scholar at the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, he offers this advice in a contributing article to the Toronto Star. I pass it along to colleagues as we deliberate on how we as a province can best prepare for and deal with the current economic challenges.

"Canada is headed into stormy economic times. Our governments seem determined to navigate these waters with their eyes closed. We need instead to face reality right now and start realistic planning for the seemingly inevitable moment when the fiscal dam bursts."

Mr. Mendelson gives us wise advice when he exhorts government to do two things: first, face reality; and second, start realistic planning. While this advice seems rather basic, I suggest that Mr. Mendelson's many years in government taught him that neither of those two things comes easily to government. Perhaps that's because governments of all political stripes are often more focused on spinning public opinion and shaping their performance as a perception rather than on the task of managing the affairs of government and being accountable to the people who elected them. In fact, the staging of the special debate on the economy in this place is an unfortunate example of how even the proceedings of this Legislature can be manipulated to serve the crass public relations objectives of the government.

You see, in response to the tabling of a carefully crafted and self-serving government motion, members of this House are being asked by the Premier to provide input into the government's economic plan for the province, and yet the Premier and the Minister of Finance rejected out of hand the very first proposal made by the official opposition. That proposal is to strike a select committee, structured on a non-partisan basis, for the purpose of reviewing the recommendations brought forward by the members in the course of this debate and that the committee be mandated and resourced to develop an action plan for Ontario's economy.

An important aspect of the committee's responsibility would be to solicit public input by hosting hearings in communities across the province where job losses and the economic crisis are having the most direct impact. Taking the hearings to communities now is imperative if, as the finance minister claims, he "looks forward to the input of the people of Ontario." In fact, it's the only way to get a realistic understanding of the challenges that individual families and businesses are facing, and it's the only way, I suggest, that we can cut through the government's rhetoric whenever we ask about job losses and business closures in communities across the province, because the briefing book responses are always the same, whether they come from the Premier or the Minister of Finance, simply these, and we hear them every day: "Thousands of new jobs have been created." "Retraining programs are in place." "Grant and loan guarantee programs are available."

These are all 30,000-foot-level responses to questions that deal with street level hardships being experienced across the province in every community. Those general responses do absolutely nothing for the factory worker who is unemployed; they do nothing for the family that's facing eviction; and they do nothing for the company that's waiting for the cash to arrive from one of this government's much heralded programs that promise support, but rather than a lifeline, are strangled by red tape and bureaucracy and more and more promises of help that never come. That's why we're calling for a non-partisan select committee. It will force the government to open its eyes to the reality and the extent of the problem. It will give us a realistic sense of the needs and the priorities and will ensure that the Legislature and, through it, the government get the best possible advice for a meaningful and practical action plan for Ontario's economy.

This is nothing new. We had a similar select committee in this Legislature. It was called the select committee on alternative fuels. It was structured in a non-partisan way. It did very important and practical work, and it served to form the basis of solid government policy. So I would call on the government to do what we are calling for as the official opposition: Put partisanship aside and help the Premier legitimize his call for input from the opposition. But if the Premier doesn't want to listen to his colleagues in this House on this issue, perhaps he'll consider the call for a select committee from another source.

Yesterday's Toronto Star editorial, under the heading "MPPs and the Economy," had this to say in response to the Premier's claim that the annual prebudget consultation with the Standing Committee on Finance is all that's needed: "Those consultations—a parade of special interest groups arguing for tax breaks or spending increases in the spring budget—hardly amount to the kind of long-term, comprehensive examination of the province's economic future that is needed." The editorial goes on to say that the idea of a non-partisan standing committee is a good one and, "Under the current circum-

stances, the government should not dismiss it so cavalierly."

We are experiencing troubling times. We will hear from the Minister of Finance tomorrow just how deep that trouble is. If, for once, this Premier and this government would set aside the partisan focus that they continue to have and listen to the official opposition and form a non-partisan select committee and demonstrate to the people of this province that they are serious about consulting, they are serious about setting a new path for the future of Ontario, to put Ontario on a solid path, they will do that. If the Premier has any respect at all for this place and for members of the Legislature, he will strike that non-partisan committee and will get on with doing the work.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise today to speak to what I think is a very important motion and what, in fact, could be a turning point in the life of this Legislature. I listened today while a question was asked by a Liberal backbencher, the member for Oakville and, in all sincerity, when he questioned his minister, he talked about how young people do not understand the partisan nature of this House. Within the time frame that was allowed him, a minute or so, he talked about how we need to deal with politics in a bipartisan or tri-partisan way that should be very, very different and that can really make things happen. When he sat down, he got the usual answer from the minister, one that I think was expected, as in most government questions, but he stood up again and he again pushed the view that this House and this ministry and this government should be seeking to reconcile with all sides of the House on issues of fundamental importance.

I don't know how to tell the members opposite, especially my colleague and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, the member for Pickering-Scarborough East, but I think the time has come in this House, on this issue, to put down the gloves. I think the time has come in this House to seriously look at having an all-party select committee to look at one of the fundamental issues that is hitting this province, hitting this country and perhaps may affect the entire world.

1630

I looked at the terms of reference, and I must state that the member from Pickering-Scarborough East was correct: Some of the language used by the mover of the motion was emotive. Some of it did use phrases and suggestions that would not garner a feeling of camaraderie. But put those aside for a moment and look at the body of the motion and what is intended to happen.

The motion suggests that we first strike an all-party select committee. The first thing it contains is that the first item that would be looked at is the government's five-point plan, whether that five-point plan is bearing the fruit it should be bearing if it is in fact going to protect jobs, if it is in fact going to move the economy forward, if it is in fact going to position Ontario for the

21st century and for the new economies and the new jobs. It sets out fundamentally and persuasively in the first couple of lines that that is the first job of the all-party select committee.

It then says that we need to look at both the opposition and the third party amendments that have been filed in this House in accordance with that plan, which was debated last week and continues to be debated this week, and that we look at what some of the recommendations are that are being made and whether they fit into the fabric and rubric of the province of Ontario, our economy and where we need to take it.

It seems to me to be very much in line with what the Premier has said during answers in question period, that he wants to look at the best ideas from all sides of the House. It seems to me that we need do that and that's all that is being suggested.

It goes on to talk about the short-term recommendations that need to be looked at: how to get the Ontario economy moving, how we need to protect the jobs, how we need to do something about the 230,000 jobs that have been lost in this province in the last couple of years. It talks about the short-term solutions that an all-party select committee would need to explore. Then it goes on to talk even more fundamentally about long-term solutions.

It is quite apparent to those who are watching world-wide markets that the economic climate, the economic fabric of the world, is starting to unravel. This has happened before; this is not unique to the year 2008. This happened in the 1970s, the 1950s, the 1930s, and back in the 1890s. It happened at the time of the Industrial Revolution. In fact, if you go back far enough, it started with the agricultural revolution first of all, because as economies change, as conditions change fundamentally, so do the structures that support them.

I think we need to look very strongly and very hard in the long term at where we position Ontario when this financial crisis subsides. When the markets recover, where do we expect Ontario to be? Do we expect to have a huge manufacturing sector? Is the automobile still going to be king? Are we going to look to technologies of change? Are we going to look at green technologies that have taken off in many parts of the world? Where is Ontario going to be? I think that this committee, if set up, would be a mechanism to look at that.

Much was said by my friend the member from Pickering–Scarborough East about this not being a non-partisan committee because the structure of the committee would change. He correctly pointed out that I have been a member of the finance committee now for a number of years. I have travelled the length and breadth of this province with him and other members, Liberals and Conservatives. I'm always the lone New Democrat. It seems that I'm always the one who goes there and tries very patiently to listen to what is said and tries very patiently to make key recommendations to the committee, who in turn forward them to the minister in time for the budget each and every year. We travel, we listen

and we do, I think, good work. I would agree with the member that we do do that good work, but let us not forget that that committee is a partisan committee. That committee has been set up on purpose with a majority of Liberal members. It has five Liberal members and a Chair who is a Liberal as well. The opposition has a combined total of three members, being two Conservatives and one New Democrat. The committee is set up to make sure that the government has the weight to push forward the issues that it wants to push forward. The government has that legal role and mandate because the people in Ontario, in their wisdom, elected 72 Liberals, they elected 24 Conservatives—now 23—and they elected 10 New Democrats. We now currently have one independent member. That's what the people in their wisdom did. I can't turn that around, nor should I want to turn that around. That is the reality, and that is how the committee is set up in that way: in order that the Liberals have an opportunity to make the finance recommendations that they wish. They are the government and they have that authority.

What is being recommended here is fundamentally different. What is being recommended here is that we try to do something which this House has not been very successful in doing, at least not in the seven years plus that I have been here, and that is to act in a non-partisan way to confront the enormity of the situation that is happening here in Ontario, and it is an enormous situation that is happening—230,000 jobs lost, communities devastated, the forestry industry not being able to keep the jobs going, whole towns going out of business, families suffering, the downturn in the United States, and the economic downturn in other places.

I even read today that the downturn has started to affect China, that powerhouse. It is starting to affect them. We have seen banks fail in Ireland. We have seen them fail in Iceland. We have even seen the Dutch ING needing billions of dollars of subsidies. We have subsidies being proposed federally, here in Canada, to help the big banks. This is a huge phenomenon that is upon us.

Do we or should we be partisan, as the member suggests? Should we continue to just have the finance committee travel around with a majority of Liberal members to do whatever they want, or do the people expect us to do something different? I would suggest that the member from Oakville hit on it today when he said that young people expect us to do something different. I certainly know that when I went out to talk to a high school group last week just before the election—I was there on Friday at East York Collegiate Institute with a group of grade 10 individuals who are studying politics. I went there to talk to them about the parties and the election structure and what it was like to work here in the Legislature, what they could see in the federal elections and what to expect. I also described in some detail my lengthy period in municipal government, both in East York and the city of Toronto.

The questions they asked me over and over were incredulous questions about how and why we did not get

along in this House, how and why there was one side over there that seems to ignore this side over here, or the side over here that would taunt the government side over there, and why we acted like that; why we didn't all work together for the common good. That's a hard question to answer sometimes. I know that the cut and thrust of debate here is entrusted to all of us and I know that we are partisan individuals and we represent different parties and come from different parts of the province, but fundamentally I believe that all of us have a duty to the people of this province—and, through this province, to the people of the country, because we are the economic engine—to work together to solve this problem.

I am supporting this motion because I do believe in bipartisanship. I do believe that people of goodwill can get together and work together and do something, and that we have that obligation to do it. We need to put down the gloves. We need to see how we can work together. We need to make recommendations. In the end, this is a bipartisan committee to make recommendations to the government. It doesn't matter what is passed or how it's passed; the government, in the end, has to use its best judgment and has to determine whether or not they are going to proceed with it.

1640

I have had the opportunity, as a few members of this House did have, including my learned colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East, to be on, I think, the only other committee that was struck similar to what is being suggested here. That had to do with the committee to discuss electoral reform. We went across this country; we even made a trip briefly to Germany and to Scotland to study their electoral systems. We came back and we made recommendations. Those were not binding recommendations on the government of the day. It was merely that the all-party committee came to a consensus on what needed to be done and gave their best advice. The advice was given.

The government took that advice and changed certain aspects of what we had to say. I remember we recommended forcefully in that case that there be a 50%-plus-one plurality in order to make changes. The government changed that. They changed to it a 60% plurality. That certainly made me angry, but I understand they had the legal authority to do that, and they did it. I understand that other suggestions we made they proceeded with. They set up the citizens' committee. We gave them the advice, we gave them our best knowledge and our best expertise, and the committee itself was then disbanded.

That's what's being suggested here. Do we have a select committee which is non-partisan, which can give the best advice possible to the minister and to the government, or do we continue to have a partisan committee that will travel the province in December and January and possibly February and listen to deputations?

There's another fundamental difference between the two committees: The select committee can call its own witnesses. I know the Standing Committee on Finance can do that as well, but generally it is driven by people

who come before the committee who offer to make deputations, and we hear the number that we can hear. We don't hear them all but we hear those that want to come forward.

Generally they fall into two groups. There is the group that is advocating for change, that wants to see changes in the legislation. Then there is the group that is advocating for additional monies, and a lot of these are the social welfare groups and others who come forward looking for money for any range of prospects, from autism to finances to banks. You name it, there are people who come, and they want to seek additional government funds.

This select committee, as I envision it—although there will be some people who will ask to have standing to come and make deputations, it would be an opportunity for the select committee to determine who they wanted to hear from, whether we wanted to hear from economists, whether we wanted to hear from people from other jurisdictions or other countries on how they were resolving the issues of banking, how they were resolving the issues of new economies or how they were restructuring in order to make or create jobs in the green economy. It would be an opportunity for all of those people to be brought forward. It would be an opportunity for the committee to travel to locations across the province to see first-hand the downturns in the economy, the devastation that is visited upon the city of Windsor with 17% unemployment, look at what it means to have another shift taken out of the GM plant in Oshawa, at what it's like in Thunder Bay with the unemployment, at what it's like in Atikokan when the forest mill shuts down—at what it's like in Toronto, even, where the number of jobs is declining, house prices are falling and other things. It's an opportunity to look at all of that and much, much more.

I think it's a good idea. I commend the member from Oakville for what he asked today and the way he was able to phrase it in the scant two minutes available to him. I would say what he said to this House in his question: The Liberals should have listened. They certainly listened to his question; the minister answered it. But I don't know whether they're hearing the same thing this afternoon, and I think they should.

For too long governments have hidden from the reality of what is happening worldwide. I know that more than a year ago questions started to be asked in this House about mortgage-backed paper. Questions were asked about the downturn in the United States and the number of people who were walking away from their homes, about the mortgages and the number of homes that were now empty. Questions were asked about Bear Stearns and about Lehman Brothers. Questions were asked about the downgrading of Wall Street stock and the fleeing of capital. Questions were asked about other jurisdictions and other countries with whom we have trade. Questions were asked about the 230,000 jobs that were lost. And throughout all of this, there was a government that looked at the world through rose-coloured glasses.

I don't blame them; it is their job to push Ontario. I stood in this very House and I said that what the Minister of Finance federally had said when he called our Premier the small man of Canada was wrong, and that the Minister of Finance who said, "You shouldn't trade in Ontario" was wrong, because it is up to the government to see things and to put things right and to reassure the public that things are all right.

I understand why the government made those statements, but I don't think the government can say them any longer. The government needs to acknowledge now that we are in a time of financial crisis, and it's not just to "Do as I say" or "Let's just have an economic statement tomorrow and be done with it." It is to try to bring together the best minds and the best ideas from all sides of this House, and indeed from all sides of this province. I think that's what this mechanism can do.

Over the last little while, as I said, the government tried to put on a brave and reassured face. Last December, when delivering his fall economic statement, the finance minister said, "The fundamentals of our economy are vital and strong." This was December 13, 2007, some 10 months ago. He said that then. I don't know whether he firmly believed it, but that's the statement that he made. He went on last spring, when the asset-backed commercial paper mess was beginning to unravel and bank economists were lowering their expectations. The finance minister stated on March 18, 2008, and I quote him again, "The economy is fundamentally strong and resilient..." That was sort of what was being said. I'm not sure that the finance minister is going to rise in his seat and make that kind of statement tomorrow. I don't know how he can and I don't believe he will.

What has happened, quite frankly, in Ontario since those statements were made has been devastating. Just a few of the people and a few of the economies that have suffered: The first one, Sterling Truck in St. Thomas—700 jobs lost. That was on top of the 600 jobs it had lost and announced earlier. DDM Plastics, an auto supplier in Tillsonburg, lost 430 jobs. John Deere of Welland lost 800 jobs. Henniges Automative, also known as GDX, in Welland, lost 300 jobs. PPG Canada, of Mississauga and Owen Sound, lost 320 jobs. Volvo in Goderich has announced that it's shutting down: a loss of 500 jobs. AbitibiBowater in Thunder Bay had the hours reduced for 150 workers. AbitibiBowater in Thorold closed the plant in November: 480 jobs. Toyota in Woodstock postponed plans for a second shift at the sport utility plant. Progressive Moulded Plastics in the GTA announced a loss of 2,000 jobs. Magna's Formet Industries factory in St. Thomas is closing; that's 400 jobs.

It's not just the job loss, but the statistics coming out of Statistics Canada, the banks and the financial institutions are painting an equally bleak picture. By reading the financial pages of the newspapers and other sources, you can see that manufacturing sales in Ontario decreased 3.1% between July and August. That's a reality of what is happening in our economy: 3.1% between July and August. That is because we are an export nation—

Canada is—and Ontario particularly is an exporting province. Not only do we export to other parts of Canada, but we export around the world, but primarily to our chief trading partner, the United States. Sales and business in the United States are declining at a huge rate.

1650

I saw an article last week where Mr. Lewenza, the new leader of the Canadian Auto Workers in Canada, talked about the reality of why cars were not being produced. He made some pretty strong economic sense when he said that it's true that in Canada retail sales of automobiles went up 1% that month and that people in Canada were still buying cars and people in Canada were still buying the cars that Canadians make. But the sad reality is that there was an 18% decline in car purchases in the United States. Those cars that are produced jointly in the United States and Canada through the free trade agreement and the former auto pact are not selling there, and so the layoffs are taking place not because Canadians are not buying the Canadian product but because the American economy is in such doldrums.

We also see that primary metal manufacturers experienced a 13.4% drop in the period from July to August, and that, I think, is reflected in that the large construction, automobiles and other things for which primary metal is produced have declined. The transportation equipment industry also reported lower sales in August, as sales decreased 4.2% between July and August. Investment in machinery and equipment declined 1.9% in the last quarter. Investments in new residential structures declined 3% in the last quarter. October 20 Management Issue Survey results of companies across Canada stated that 80% of respondents expressed negative sentiments towards rising costs on transportation and shipping, materials and energy, and 34% of respondents are expecting their sales to decline in 2009, compared with only 17% who believe their top lines will grow next year. The outlook for investment is also negative, with only one third expecting to increase spending on production facilities, in machinery and equipment and in research development in either 2008 or 2009, and at least 14% expect to decrease investment in these areas over the next two years.

We have to do something in this province. We have to do something to change all of that, the perception, the hopes; we have to assuage the fears. We have to do everything that is necessary and possible to keep Ontario as the heartland of industry and commerce in this country. If all that is and if all we can do is to have a committee that is bipartisan to listen to all of the best advice and to advise this government, then we should do it.

Now, I also support this amendment because we, in this party, have brought forward a number of things that we think will help. I don't expect the government to buy into all of them. I certainly am not naive; I have been around here for some seven years, and I have seen many things that I think would aid and assist various bills seem to die when we get to committee. I propose them in good faith, and I think members from all sides of the House

will admit that I do so in the hope not to destroy bills but in fact to make them better, because I honestly believe that we have, and I have, that obligation, sent here by the electors of Beaches–East York, to try to make government work. I know I'm in opposition, and I know my job is to be critical, but my job is also to help. I want to put forward these ideas and I want to have them discussed in the same vein that the Premier said, on numerous occasions over the last couple of weeks, that he wants to hear all good ideas.

The ideas that I put forward on his motion, which is still being debated before this House, were such simple ideas as an industrial hydro rate. I believe that an industrial hydro rate, even in the short term, may be something that we should look at. Certainly countries like Germany have an industrial hydro rate. In many places in Europe they have an industrial hydro rate. The reason that the decline of manufacturing is less severe in both the province of Quebec and in the province of Manitoba than it is in Ontario is because our hydro rate, quite frankly, is higher. We need to look at ways of helping industry to get over this hump, over this bad period, and if one of those is to help by reducing the hydro rate, at least in the short term, then I think we should look at it. They may also have some very long-term strategies which could be examined as well—whether or not, if we are to continue as a manufacturing entity, that hydro rate should be lowered in order to attract and keep manufacturing industries and the jobs that go with them.

We talk here, oftentimes, about a job commissioner. I know that the Minister of Finance has said that he doesn't think that it will work and points to what he considers to be a failure in British Columbia. But I would advise the members opposite that it did work in British Columbia for a long time and was done away with by a new government, and oftentimes new governments have different ideas. During the time that it continued to operate, it operated very well and did save a number of factories from closing and a number of industries from shutting down. I think it's an idea that needs to be explored, whether it can work here or whether it's necessary here in these times of economic turmoil.

We advocate, and I have put forward a motion, in part, for a Buy Ontario policy. I believe with all my heart that we need to buy the goods and services of people locally, that those are the taxpayers who live here, those are the taxpayers to whom we have or should have first allegiance. It's not always the right thing to buy the cheapest product. It is always the right thing to buy locally so that you can secure the jobs and keep the economy prosperous.

I do know that this was the exact policy that we had when I was the mayor of the borough of East York. It was the exact policy that helped during times of economic turmoil while I was mayor. I was mayor from 1993 to the first day of January 1998. It was in that period that we were also in recession, but as a municipality we understood that we had an obligation, when we were buying goods and services, to buy them locally. We

had a policy that we would first buy from any industry that was located in East York and then Toronto and then Ontario and then Canada, and it fanned out, and that we would buy from those groups—local groups, Toronto-based regional groups, provincial groups and national groups—provided that the cost was within 10% of the lowest cost.

So we had a keen eye on a bargain, but we also knew that if we took that bargain, if it came from offshore, if it came from another country or another jurisdiction, it wasn't going to help the people that we represented. I don't remember at all in the five years that I was mayor or in the time preceding that when I was a councillor in the borough of East York that we once awarded any of the awards offshore. I do know, when I went to the city of Toronto following amalgamation, there was a similar policy and that the city of Toronto attempted, wherever possible, to buy locally. When the subway cars were ordered from Thunder Bay, we knew we might be able to get them cheaper from China, we knew that we might be able to get them cheaper from Holland, we knew that they might be able to come from Germany or some other jurisdiction, but we also knew that by buying them locally we were protecting jobs in this province. We are asking that the Ontario government consider doing the same thing.

In our amendment, we are also asking for tougher plant closure legislation that would ensure that everything is done to prevent a profitable plant or mill from closing, and enhanced mandated severance. I do know that in my own history, when I was a young man, much younger than today, I worked at a place called Dunlop's on Queen Street in Toronto. It was a rubber factory. It had been on that same site for probably 60 or 70 years by the time that I worked there. It was a big, smelly place full of danger. There were people who were missing limbs and things from the machinery. But it was a place that provided good and steady employment for those who worked there. I remember the day that they closed. They closed that plant, or announced they were closing it, following a merger between Dunlop and Pirelli of Italy, and so it became Dunlop Pirelli. They closed the plant, not because it didn't make money—because it was still profitable—but because there was more money to be made in the Italian jurisdiction and by bringing in the supplies from Italy.

1700

I look back on that day with a great deal of sadness because the government of the day allowed that to happen, and workers lost their jobs and we lost a very venerable institution that produced things like conveyor belts and other commodities that were used in industry. Since that time, Canada really has not been able to produce what we need; we buy it offshore.

I look at the expansion of severance—we've talked about eligibility—and increasing advance notice in mass layoff situations. I know that my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek put forward Bill 6 and fully expected that we would be able to help people with their

pensions and in terms of wage protection, pensions and severance eligibility, only to see that dashed in the committee process, because of course this is a partisan place. Had his bill been sent to an all-party select committee, I am sure that it would have received much wider attention and possibly would have become law by now, because it was a good idea. We are putting forward those same good ideas and would like to have them debated again.

Last but not least, we're talking about a refundable manufacturing and resource investment tax credit that we think will reward companies that choose to stay in Canada, to expand, to keep the jobs and to keep the manufacturing base alive and well here. It is different from what the government does because the government, quite frankly, has chosen simply to reduce corporate taxes. We think it needs to be targeted to the manufacturing sector because that is the sector which is under the greatest stress at this time. If we are going to do it, that is the area where the taxes should be reduced, and they should be reduced in conjunction with job guarantees—something that this government has not done in the past.

In the couple of minutes left, I would say that we also put forward some other ideas relating to stock markets and securities which I think need to be developed and looked upon, if not in this select committee, then at least they need to be heard, because people have invested their life's savings in the stock market—people whom one would not ordinarily think of—through teachers' pension funds and stocks. They need to have those protected.

We need to have some fundamental reforms at the Toronto Stock Exchange as well. The all-party select committee needs to look at such things as creation of a financial product safety commission, just like we have for consumer goods, to make sure that when people invest their money, there is product safety.

We need to ensure that regulators oversee areas of finance that are unregulated. Right now, large pools of capital are not regulated at all. When we studied this in the finance committee a year and a half ago, we discovered that more than one case per day is found where people are making shady deals—I don't know how else to put it—in the stock market and are caught. The Toronto Stock Exchange uncovers at least one a day, and at least one a day is prosecuted in some form.

We need to ensure that when the regulators oversee this, they have more authority. We need to make sure that they have at least the same kind of authority they have in the United States. We need to strengthen the regulation that restricts leverage of all financial companies. We need to deal with conflict of interest, because certainly we don't have any of those regulations. These are just a few of the proposals that I think should go before this committee.

I've spoken now for nearly 40 minutes, and I would like to reiterate one final time that I believe that the proposal put forward by my colleagues from the official opposition is a realistic one. People will look back and say, "Was this Legislature willing to act in our best interests? Were they willing to put down the gloves?

Were they willing to work together in this time of financial crisis, or did they consider this to be just business as usual?"

If the government considers this to be just business as usual, then I guess what is going to happen is, there's going to be the give and take that we have here every day. If they recognize that this is a real crisis that needs to call all people together, then we are here to assist.

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

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's my pleasure to join in this discussion today with my colleagues and to discuss the opposition day motion. I wanted to take the motion today piece by piece and explain to Ontarians why this motion is redundant, and I'll give concrete examples to prove it.

The motion states that—and if it's okay with you, I'd like to read it from my notes—the Legislative Assembly—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Will the member please take her seat? I'd ask the member for Durham to come to order and allow the member from Kitchener–Conestoga to make her comments.

Member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The motion states, "That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the Ontario government to establish a select committee ... to address the challenges faced by Ontario families and businesses in the province's current weakened economy."

I've had the privilege to travel this great province and to hear from the people of Ontario, to hear their opinions, their concerns and their recommendations around finance and the economy. I'm proud to have travelled as a member of the government's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

This government is ahead of the opposition and the recommendation for a select committee, as we have already been travelling throughout the province. The committee that the opposition proposes already exists. The people of Ontario have responded and thanked us, and I just wanted to take a moment to acknowledge some of the people who we met in our travels across the province who support all of the hard work of this committee.

Chief Dean Sayers says, "My name is Chief Dean Sayers. I am the chief of the Batchewana First Nation here in the local area. I want to first of all thank all of those individuals who made their way here. I'm sure there are more than just members of the provincial Parliament, but I thank you guys for coming up and giving us an opportunity to have some input...."

Chief Isadore Day from Serpent River First Nation says, "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. On behalf of Serpent River First Nation members, staff and leadership, I want to thank you for your time here today."

Mr. Brian Brown, president of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, said, "I'd like

to begin by thanking the committee members for their hard work and for having us here today. We very much appreciate the opportunity to share our research on post-secondary education.”

Mr. Sid Ryan, president of CUPE Ontario, said, “Thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation here today.”

Mr. Peter Woolford, vice-president of policy development and research for the Retail Council of Canada, said, “Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting us here this morning. It’s a pleasure to be back in front of the committee. It’s been a couple of years since I’ve been here, and on behalf of Retail Council of Canada, we’re very grateful for the opportunity to provide the thoughts and concerns of our members to the legislators today....”

This one I’ll save because it’s from my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, so I’ll come back to it.

I’ll just end at this point with Ms. Lynn Peterson, the mayor of the city of Thunder Bay, who said, “I would like to first take the opportunity to thank you for being in the city of Thunder Bay. The weather’s not always this cold; I’ll let you know that.” It was a pleasure to meet her that day.

The motion also states, “The committee shall be empowered to invite witnesses to appear before it as it deems necessary,” and we just heard commentaries and quotes from witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs. We had the opportunity to listen to a plethora of stakeholders, a true representation of all Ontarians, and to hear their input, suggestions and recommendations. We had the opportunity to hear about their lives, their businesses, their communities, their groups and organizations.

I thought I would just share one of those stakeholders and his comments. Mr. Art Sinclair is the director of economic development with the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. He said, “I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear this afternoon on this fine southern Ontario day in January.” Mr. Sinclair goes on to say, “We proposed a series of recommendations related to infrastructure development and tax cuts which we considered as priorities for both our region and businesses across Ontario. We would like to commend the provincial government for delivering on these proposals, which provide fiscal relief to our members and initiate some critical infrastructure projects that are central to our local capacity and ability to manage growth in Waterloo region.”

The next piece in the motion states, “It shall make recommendations on specific measures to be undertaken by the government in the short term to address Ontario’s ... pressing challenges.” Again, the McGuinty government is way ahead in that this committee not only already exists, but its mandate is to report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province of Ontario.

The motion also states that the committee shall be composed of government members and members of the official opposition and third party. Again, this already

exists. I sit on this committee with members of the official opposition and members of the third party. It already has all-party representation. Every budget bill goes to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; other finance-related bills go there.

The committee will report to the House: The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs has travelled the province extensively, and we will continue do so.

The fundamental responsibility of this committee is to seek out new ideas and to consult Ontarians: I tell you—no, I reassure you first-hand, as a member of the finance committee—that this is exactly what we are already doing. It’s clearly working, as we see the opposition motion today is calling on this to happen. In effect, then, they are supporting this committee and the work that we do and our mandate, however peculiar it is that some of their members participate on the committee, and today’s motion would indicate that they are unaware of all of the great work that this committee does.

Perhaps yet another endorsement: In my community of Kitchener–Conestoga and Waterloo region, school boards and health care providers gave personal thanks—they sent them to the Office of the Premier; they sent them to my office—for taking the time to come out and to listen to them and to hear what they had to say. Mr. Wayne Buchholtz said as he appeared before the committee, “Thank you very much, first of all, for the opportunity to meet with you again this year. My name is Wayne Buchholtz. I’m the chair of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board.”

So I have lots and lots more quotes, more support, more commentary. At this point, I will wrap up my comments to give my colleagues some time to speak as well, but I did want to end with Mr. David Musy, who appeared before us as well. He’s president and CEO of the Windsor Regional Hospital, and he says, “Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today regarding the Ontario health premium. In my opinion, up to this point we have made substantial progress as a health care system, along with the ministry, in achieving each and every one of these items.”

So it has been my pleasure since being elected to serve on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and I look forward to continuing to do so on behalf of the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: You know, as this debate goes to and fro on the need for a select committee on the economy, we do recognize the damage that has been done. Five years of overspending and five years of overtaxing and year-end spending sprees have left us weakened and vulnerable. The money has been spent. The recipients will not be returning any of it. The votes have been bought and we’re really in one heck of a jam right now, as banks tell us we’re going into a recession.

Even though we had five relatively good years, nothing was salted away for the rainy days that are now

upon us. It's sad, really, but, as they say, the toothpaste is out of the tube. This government needs help. This government needs advice. It needs direction, the kind of advice you could get from the establishment of a select committee.

We could debate economic theory in this House until the cows come home, but to what purpose? We need expert advice, again, through the kind of committee that we are proposing. We need the advice of the ordinary man, the ordinary woman who would come forward during hearings. After all, their neck is on the line. It's their house, it's their pension, their farm, their business, their source of income. Many of these people didn't really reap the benefits, the largesse, if you will, of the past five years; others did.

There are more reasons for Ontario to have a select committee on the economy, not just finance committee hearings like the ones coming up this Friday. In fact, this Friday there is only one witness coming forward. The rest of the day is cancelled. I sit on finance. It's not really the mechanism to deal with the magnitude of the kinds of problems that we're looking at now in the province of Ontario.

Thousands and thousands of families are leaving because they don't see opportunity here; they don't see a future here. Young people don't see a future here. This is what happens when you get the fundamentals wrong. You start to slide. Soon the decline picks up speed and, before you know it, we have a situation, as we have now, where Ontario is dead last in Canada as far as economic growth.

We need a structure. We propose a select committee. Bring in business, bring in unions to testify. I think of the example of a small businessman who wishes to hire an apprentice. Under McGuinty government rules, if he's in the electrical business, for example, he's forced to hire three unionized electricians for every one apprentice. Now we know why that particular business is not growing. Now we know why young people would move to the province of Alberta, for example.

When the Ministry of Labour conducts something called an ergonomic audit on a small business and orders them to spend tens of thousands of dollars on new chairs, again, we understand why they aren't able to invest in new equipment to offset the dollar. We need a business like that to come forward before a select committee and to explain basically why we've gotten into the pickle we're in now.

We know that Ontario has the highest taxes on new business investment in all of Canada. We also know why risk-takers and entrepreneurs are taking those investments and the dreams and the jobs that go with them somewhere else, and they are taking thousands of our brightest and youngest with them. That is why young people are leaving Ontario. When our young people take leave—when they take our future with them, it will not come back. Hence, we need a select committee on Ontario's economy, we need an awful lot more deliberation, and we do have to hear from the experts.

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

Mr. David Oraziatti: I have the opportunity today to speak to the opposition day motion, and I'm certainly pleased to do so.

I think the point has been made quite clearly by members on this side of the House that the committee that is being proposed already exists for all intents and purposes, and it's called the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, for those people who may be out there watching. The committee's mandate is to "report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province" of Ontario. We all know the importance of this committee, and I think most members in this House have participated in one way or another on that committee and have travelled the province and have participated in the prebudget consultations to gather the very important information that we have the opportunity to hear that comes from individuals from many walks of life in the province of Ontario. We certainly think that's a very important committee.

Every budget goes to the standing committee. Other finance bills related to the business of the province go before this committee. We present our budgets in the Ontario Legislature. Unlike the opposition, we don't hold them at auto parts plants. That committee has all-party representation, that committee will report to this House, and the fundamental responsibility of that committee is to seek out new ideas and consult Ontarians.

1720

We take advantage of all the ideas that are put forward by everyone who comes with a good idea. I was certainly a member of this committee, and I had the opportunity to serve with members in the opposition party, some of whom I see here today in the Legislature. They know very well that we've travelled to many different communities, like London, Windsor, Timmins, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and St. Catharines, to get advice and input from leaders from all sectors of Ontario, including finance and manufacturing, the natural resource sector, education and, of course, health care. The information that comes forward through that committee is incredibly important.

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is just one of the ways our government consults with Ontarians on economic issues. In fact, very shortly, in the next few weeks, I'll be welcoming the Minister of Finance to our riding of Sault Ste. Marie for one of his scheduled prebudget consultations. I think that's another example of the important work that we do to gather an effective strategy for our budget process.

In my community, we're going to be inviting a wide array of leaders, including representatives from the school boards—the Algoma District School Board, the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board—Essar Algoma Steel, the Algoma public health unit, the Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce, the children's aid society, Sault College, the Sault Area Hospital and the

city of Sault Ste. Marie. The list is very lengthy, and we're very appreciative of all the input we get at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The counsel that we receive from these Ontarians and from members on all sides of the House helps to shape our economic policy. We know that today in the province of Ontario, there are over 449,000 net new jobs more than there were in 2003, and more than 72% of those are good-paying, full-time jobs. From January to August this year, Ontario in fact created 60% of all the net new jobs in our country. However, as we all know, the recent financial struggles that many countries are facing have affected our manufacturing sector, and it continues to struggle, as does the manufacturing sector in many parts of the world. But I would rather be in this jurisdiction than many others, because we have a plan in Ontario, and it's working well.

We've made strategic investments in the auto sector and we've secured \$7.5 billion in new investments, like the new Toyota plant that's being built in Woodstock. We've created a Next Generation of Jobs Fund for job creation, a \$1.5-billion strategy to help new companies grow. While the whole world is looking for new green technologies, we're going to be working with our innovative industrial manufacturers to ensure that we can design them here in Ontario and we can sell them to other countries.

Our government has a five-point plan to support economic development in these challenging times that all countries are facing and all jurisdictions are facing, and I want to talk a little bit about that. First of all, we're talking about cutting business taxes. We've enacted \$3 billion in cuts and rebates. We've eliminated the capital tax for manufacturers in the resource sector, which was retroactive to January 2007, and it has amounted to \$190 million in rebates. We've also cut the capital tax for other businesses by 21%. We're cutting the business education tax and are accelerating that cut for northern Ontario businesses. In my community of Sault Ste. Marie, what it has meant is \$6.5 million less in business education taxes paid over three years. I'm not sure why the Conservatives didn't support that or why, frankly, they didn't do that while they were in government for eight years, but that didn't happen.

We're also investing in infrastructure. We committed \$60 billion over 10 years to build hospitals, schools, courthouses, public transit projects, roads and bridges, which is creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in the province of Ontario. We've created an Investing in Ontario Act for municipalities. It's \$1.1 billion, and it has created 11,000 jobs.

In addition to that, we have our \$6.2-billion Building Canada fund, which is an agreement with the federal government. Our \$1 billion to municipalities this year for transit, roads and bridges and affordable housing has really helped to alleviate some of the pressure that our municipalities are under. In addition to that, we've provided \$450 million for a municipal infrastructure program and over \$700 million for college and university construction projects.

In my community, it's meant great news for people in Sault Ste. Marie. We have our \$408-million hospital under construction in our city. I'm not sure why the Conservatives didn't move on that when they had the opportunity, but it was sorely needed. It's a community project that is very welcome.

Over \$46 million has been allocated to build new schools in Sault Ste. Marie. For the first time in 35 years, our community will be seeing new schools built. We've provided \$17 million for road upgrades and improvements, and we've built a new youth centre, at the cost of about \$8 million. This was great news to our community, since the Conservatives closed the last youth centre that we had, sending the 30 jobs out of our community. In addition to that, as far as infrastructure goes, we also built an additional OPP forensic lab, at a cost of about \$5.6 million, something that was sorely lacking.

As part of our five-point plan, we're also investing in innovation. As you know, we created a new Ministry of Research and Innovation. We've introduced a \$165-million venture capital fund that is helping to create new, high-paying jobs. We've added \$250 million to laboratories for equipment and to enhance our research capacity in the province of Ontario. In addition to that, \$150 million has been allocated for biopharmacy investment in Ontario to attract new pharmaceutical projects and initiatives to this province.

Our standard offer program, I think, is very unique, certainly unique in this country. It has helped to encourage investment in green technology. In my community it has meant the largest wind farm in the country, a \$400-million investment, creating additional jobs and clean, green, renewable power. I'm not sure why the opposition didn't lead with some of these initiatives when they had the opportunity, but they didn't do that, for whatever reason.

In addition to that, a \$360-million investment for our solar project and a \$135-million capital project at Algoma Steel for our cogeneration project has been great news in our community.

We've been partnering with business in things like our auto investment strategy, and our Next Generation of Jobs Fund has been certainly bearing results. We're investing in the skills of our people. We have 100,000 more college and university spaces today, are graduating 10,000 more students from high school, increasing our apprenticeship spaces by 50,000, and we're on track to increase that a further 25%.

I could go on and on about the initiatives that have been positive in our community. I know our investments and our plan are working. So when I hear the comments from the opposition around this motion and this committee, frankly, it's smoke and mirrors. We have a committee. We're on track with the investments. We're on track with a plan. They've had three plans in the last four to five years, and I'm not sure which plan it is this week, but we have a plan that we're going to be sticking to and continuing to invest in the strength of our people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always a pleasure to respond on our opposition day motion. I think it's important for the viewers today and those present to reflect for a moment on the civility and tone of the resolution itself. It is very conciliatory to the government in the idea of establishing, in fairness, a select committee, the structure and the chairing of which would be completely in the government's favour. As well, from the experience of select committees that I've been part of in the past, it is certainly the right thing to do.

I think a good example of this would be—two things, really. Just recently, last night, in fact, on TVOntario—Steve Paikin has a very interesting show, *The Agenda*, and is really, I believe, taking the initiative himself. I congratulate Steve Paikin for that, for the people of Ontario watching that non-partisan show. He had all of the stakeholders on. He had Wayne Samuelson from the Ontario Federation of Labour. Joe Cordiano, the former minister, was on there, and people of all political perspectives—Catherine Swift from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and I would say that the competition people were there as well.

1730

But the point is this: The dialogue, and the genuineness of the dialogue, was instructive to the people of Ontario. Ontario is in an economic challenge—you could say it even more dramatically, I suppose: a slump. It's not all Dalton's fault, I understand that, but it's what he hasn't done. It's a lack of steadiness on the expenditure side of the budget. If you listen to the people there, the competitiveness academics, who speak to that issue—Roger Martin and others, and Jack Mintz—they're saying that we're the least competitive jurisdiction in the world. This is not John Tory or Bob Runciman saying it. It's academics who are saying that Ontario needs to be competitive in this global context of a recession, and our dependence on manufacturing must be more innovative. When you look at the bill that's before the Legislature—it's before committee now; Mr. Barrett was talking about it—there's nobody appearing before the committee. In fact, the general public are convinced that no one will benefit from Bill 100. It's what they're not doing that causes me problems.

I had the privilege of being on a select committee when we were government. On that committee—it was chaired by Doug Galt. I'm just going to go through some of the members. It was a very distinguished committee—most of the people, anyway: Sean Conway, who was well respected on the energy file—it was a select committee on alternative energies—and who was very eminently respected and highly regarded. The Vice-Chair was Dr. Marie Bountrogianni from the Liberal party. She's since resigned—or didn't run again; I don't know why. There was also Marilyn Churley from the NDP. Marilyn Churley is a strong advocate for the environment, and indeed on the energy file, and she was very well informed.

On our part, our side, was Steve Gilchrist. We called the final report the Gilchrist report. That always made

Steve feel good. Jerry Ouellette, who is from the Durham region, was on that committee—Oshawa is his riding; he's still here—John Hastings was on the committee, and I was on the committee. In my riding, of course—all of us have an interest, but I have a nuclear plant in my riding.

I should tell the members here today that that select committee, structured as it was, came up with a unanimous report dealing with things like the supply mix, which included the debate on nuclear. It talked about incineration; it talked about all the innovation that you can think of on the energy file. That unanimous report served as the basis for the Ontario Power Authority and their supply mix report. So it can work, it should work, and the time is now for the government at least to have the courage to implement this committee.

It's such a contradiction when you think of the politics of this and the opportunities. Last week, when we had the Premier make the statement on economics, which we were debating earlier today, he was saying that it's basically someone else's fault for all of this stuff. I expect that tomorrow when we have the economic update, we're going to hear the same thing: It's somebody else's fault. Well, if none of it is his fault, he can't be taking credit for any of the successes. Do you understand? What goes around in this debate has to be accountable.

I would say to you that if you look at, most recently, the evidence, the truth is, the future predictor is current behaviour—or, past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. Just last week we had a couple of signs. We had the Ontario Energy Board introduce higher rates, up to a 12% increase in the electricity rates. We also had the transportation charge, up 8% in some jurisdictions of Ontario. Those are tax increases.

Just this morning, we had Mr. Gerretsen, the Minister of the Environment, talk about shifting the load and who's going to pay for Waste Diversion Ontario. He's going to load it onto business.

Interjection: Another Green Shift plan.

Mr. John O'Toole: Another Green Shift plan by Mr. Gerretsen. You can see that their plan is—clearly, they don't know how to control spending. It's up some 40%. You have to ask yourself, is it any better?

I've made my case: Have a select committee and let's get talking to and listening to the experts of Ontario.

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

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm very pleased to participate in this debate. As a number of my colleagues have indicated, we won't be supporting this particular motion.

This is very much inside baseball. People, if they are watching this, are wondering, what is the difference between a select committee, which the opposition is proposing, and a standing committee? Let me read you what it says about the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on page 53 of the standing orders:

“Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, which is empowered to consider and report to the

House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province and to which all related documents shall be deemed to have been referred immediately when the said documents are tabled.”

Now, that’s inside baseball, but what it says in a nutshell is that it allows our Legislative Assembly to refer matters of an economic and financial nature to a standing committee that is already in existence. It’s rather underwhelming that the entire Conservative Party response to the economic crisis is to have a new committee go and travel the province and ask questions about what’s wrong with the economy when in fact we already have a mechanism in place that’s funded by the taxpayers, and quite frankly, it’s worked very well.

Let me just give you three examples of three individuals who appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. John Cartwright, president of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, said, “Clearly, your committee understands the context of the budget preparations in the same way we do, that the drastic loss of manufacturing jobs is a crisis for the people of Ontario; that growing poverty and disparities in our society is a crucial issue which the government has pledged to start addressing;”

Hugh Lawson, whom I had the pleasure of spending some time with on Friday, who is president of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association—they met in Ottawa just last week—appeared before the committee and said, “At the outset, let me say how pleased we are to see issues related to affordable housing and a commitment to poverty reduction finally taking a priority on the government’s agenda.”

Doug Reycraft, who is the outgoing president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and also the mayor of Southwest Middlesex, said, “Municipalities are pleased with the progress that is now being made. A key milestone was reached last August when Premier McGuinty announced a timed, full upload of two entire, key social programs: the Ontario disability support program and the Ontario drug benefit program. As a result of that announcement, by 2011, the province will have reduced its reliance on municipal property taxes by \$935 million a year.”

We in fact do have a plan. It’s a plan that’s often been talked about and we’re proud of—the Premier’s five-point plan—that is well beyond the simplistic solution of setting up a select committee. The plan deals with investing in skills and knowledge. I’m proud of the fact that our Premier was in my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean several months ago and announced a \$35-million investment in the Algonquin College skilled trades building, and that my colleague Phil McNeely made an announcement that several million dollars was going to go into la Cité for their skilled trades building. Now, we are still waiting for the federal government to come to the table. They had made a grand commitment to support the Algonquin project and la Cité, but regrettably, we have not seen them come to the table with anything but a press

release. Regrettably, you can’t endorse the back of a press release and get money from it.

Let me also tell you also about some of the other investments that have been made in eastern Ontario that I’m particularly proud of, investments that are helping to spur the economy. There’s no question that there’s an economic challenge facing us, and while I appreciate the opposition coming forward with their new one-point plan, which is to strike a committee to travel the province, our plan is working because, as the Premier said today, we actually repaired the roof before it started to rain. We built the foundation of the house of Ontario.

We’re investing in health care. The cancer centre at the Queensway Carleton Hospital is a good example.

Interjections.

Hon. Jim Watson: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member from Lanark is not in his chair and I’d ask that he come to order, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It’s not your role to ask members to come to order, but I appreciate your intervention and assistance. I would ask all members of the House, on all sides of the House, to refrain from heckling so that I can hear the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I’m the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, not Lanark. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you for that clarification as well.

I’ll return to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

1740

Hon. Jim Watson: I’d ask for an additional 15 or 20 seconds because of the time that was taken.

I know the honourable member from eastern Ontario was particularly embarrassed by his time in office because, in health care, they tried to close the Montfort Hospital; they tried to close the CHEO cardiac unit; they did close the Grace hospital; they did close the Riverside Hospital. I am very proud that our members from eastern Ontario have stood up. We’re doubling the size of the Montfort Hospital, we’re building a new cancer centre at the Queensway Carleton Hospital, we’re expanding the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario, and, in the process, we’re creating thousands of jobs in construction and in health sciences.

In addition, the work that we have done with the municipal sector, I’m particularly proud of.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the House to come to order so as to allow the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to make his presentation.

I recognize the minister once again.

Hon. Jim Watson: I know that some members here have dreams of joining the Senate, where they can act like this, but in this Legislature we expect a little more decorum because we’re proud of the fact that this government is finally standing up for eastern Ontario and the municipalities of eastern Ontario.

Let me talk about Smiths Falls for a moment: \$6.2 million on our MIII infrastructure program; Brockville, \$800,000 for their arts centre; \$20 million for the city of Ottawa for their archives building, located at Centrepointe. These are real investments, not a paper exercise of establishing some committee that is going to go around the province and listen to people whom we've already listened to.

We have a plan. It's working. We need the support of the federal government to ensure an element of fairness in the plan. We're proud of the work that we're doing for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I'm pleased to recognize the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today to speak in favour of our opposition day motion to create a select committee on the Ontario economy, a non-partisan committee to hear what Ontarians have to say, not the committee that the Liberals suggest is doing the job, because they aren't doing the job or we'd be seeing more action out of the present McGuinty government. They try to slip something through at the last minute, debating an economic motion here: no discussion with the opposition leaders; just kind of slip that in to cover themselves off, to pretend to say that they're listening.

Let's hear what's happening out there in Ontario. Let me see. We've got a struggling economy, with over 200,000 lost manufacturing jobs. What's wrong with a meaningful debate about what would be in the best interests of Ontarians, and to support this non-partisan committee that we have suggested? We in the PC Party in opposition have been trying to assist the government with ideas for Ontario's struggling economy. This committee would be more accountable. There would be a proper, thorough process in order to make the most out of the thoughts and ideas that come forward, not the partisan committee that they think is working, the finance committee. It's all lopsided and it's not working. It's time to move forward in the proper way, to chart a new course for Ontario's struggling economy and all the hard-working families.

It seems that every day we're hearing about more and more job losses. I think they've turned the earmuffs on over there. But the fact is, the Liberal government imposes the highest marginal tax rate on business investment in the world. If it were in Canada, that would be bad enough, but it's the highest marginal tax rate on business investment in the world. You should be embarrassed over there.

Instead of doing things to increase the interest in investment, Dalton McGuinty is doing when he likes to do: He's licking his tax-loving chops and telling people, "Hey, come on over here because we're a lovable government. We want your tax dollars. As a matter of fact, we want them so bad that we've got the highest marginal effective tax rate on business investment that you'll ever find."

In Canada, we actually have an NDP government in Manitoba, a Conservative government in Alberta and a Liberal government in British Columbia that all have lower effective tax rates on investment. This isn't right for this province, but hey, it's tax money, and Dalton McGuinty is so famous for "I need your money." Let's not forget: This is a Liberal government that is so weighed down with ideology and saying, "We know what's right. Just trust us."

Hon. Jim Watson: Laurie, it's supposed to be non-partisan.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who is never partisan—I never hear anything partisan from you at all. You're famous for being non-partisan, I say.

Hon. Jim Watson: Listen to your leader, Mad Dog.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I am, and I say, you should support this opposition day motion—a non-partisan committee. It's a fair and reasonable thing to do, to have a select committee that isn't so biased, like your present Liberal finance committee. But—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the House to come to order so that I can hear the member make her presentation.

I'll return to the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for telling them on the opposite side of the House to just tone down and maybe listen a little bit.

So this select committee is not a partisan political gesture. It's fair; it's a reasonable thing to do. It's designed to help real Ontarians in order to simply make ends meet. They have every right to be concerned about their jobs. It's a direct attempt to strengthen the economic debate and give the accountability that it should have. So frankly, if the Premier and his finance minister feel so strongly about your so-called economic debate motion, then be accountable; put it to the test. If the Minister of Finance feels so strongly about his so-called five-point plan, put it to the test and be accountable to the people of this province. If you feel strongly about your economic update tomorrow, then stand behind it and provide a real accounting of complete government finances. My guess is, the minister won't do it, but if he feels strongly about his measures to address Ontario's economic challenge, just put it to the test and be accountable by not blocking the proposed select committee from presenting a report and measures to be undertaken, and give it the proper weight it deserves.

Premier McGuinty opened the economic debate by saying that he's doing this in order to hear and listen. Then, Premier, why don't you hold yourself to that commitment? We're talking about families here. We're talking about the future of Ontario. Anything less is simply window dressing. God forbid that accountability and results be part and parcel with a Liberal policy, but it's pretty clear that Liberal policies are about headlines and photo ops. Results don't seem to be an important

measure of success as much as the amount of ink being covered in the papers and websites. Frankly, if you take away the sense of entitlement that Liberals attach to their policies, all you're left with is David Dingwall's skeleton. I know that Halloween is just a few days away, but that's just too scary.

Broken promises and empty partisan gestures that take tons of taxpayers' time and money are the Liberals' order of the day. We're asking for a non-partisan select committee to really hear what the people of Ontario are saying. I encourage the government to support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I'd just like to talk a little bit about the composition of this committee and compare it to some degree to the public accounts committee, which operates in a non-partisan way. In fact, over the last five years on the public accounts committee, I think we have had one vote on which there was a division between the opposition and the government side.

The difference between this select committee and the sitting economic committee is the balance between the government members and the opposition members. Under the economic committee, which is now sitting in the Legislature—the standing committee—there are five Liberal members and three opposition members. This motion puts forward a committee which balances that between the opposition and the governing party.

I can understand some reluctance on the part of the government to give that kind of power to the opposition parties. However, I would remind them that we are going into a very difficult period of time when all members of this Legislature are going to have to act in a responsible manner. I can't understand why the government would not want to share the responsibility with the opposition to come up with solutions to our present economic crisis that we now face.

The power of this committee is only to make recommendations to the government and to comment on the plan put forward by the government. If the opposition came back with silly recommendations or a silly response, we would be hurting our credibility as much as the government would be. Quite frankly, I cannot understand why the government does not want to share that responsibility with all members of this Legislature, and I urge them to support this resolution in that light.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Runciman has moved “that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls upon the Ontario government to establish a select committee on the Ontario economy to consider and report on options to address the challenges faced by Ontario families and businesses in the province's current weakened economy.

“The terms of reference for this select committee shall be as follows:

“The committee shall, among other matters, review the government's current five-point economic plan and

the proposals raised by members of this House during debate on the government motion on the economy tabled October 7, 2008. It shall make recommendations on specific measures to be undertaken by the government in the short term to address Ontario's most immediate and pressing challenges, as well as recommendations for a long-range, multi-year economic recovery plan.

“The committee shall be empowered to invite witnesses to appear before it as it deems necessary.

“The committee shall be non-partisan in makeup, being composed of five government members, three members of the official opposition and two members of the third party. It shall be chaired by a government member, and a member of the official opposition shall serve as Vice-Chair. The membership of the committee, including the identification of the Chair and Vice-Chair, shall be filed with the Clerk of the Assembly by the whips of the recognized parties no later than October 31, 2008.

“The committee shall have the authority to meet concurrently with the House and during any adjournment of the House, notwithstanding prorogation.

“The committee shall have the authority to commission reports relevant to the terms of reference and to travel within Ontario if the committee deems travel to be necessary.

“The committee shall present an interim report with recommendations on immediate measures to be undertaken by the government no later than December 11, 2008, and the committee shall present its final report to the Legislative Assembly no later than March 15, 2009. If the House is not sitting, the committee has the authority to release any report by depositing a copy of it with the Clerk of the Assembly, and, upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair of the committee shall present such report to the House in accordance with the standing orders.”

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members.

The division bells rang from 1752 to 1802.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day motion number 2. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Barrett, Toby	MacLeod, Lisa	Sterling, Norman W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Elliott, Christine	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gélinas, France	Prue, Michael	
Hardeman, Ernie	Runciman, Robert W.	

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

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Orazietti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Pendergast, Leeanna
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Best, Margaret	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brown, Michael A.	Jaczek, Helena	Ramsay, David
Brownell, Jim	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Chan, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Greg
Craitor, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Dickson, Joe	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	
Duncan, Dwight	Naqvi, Yasir	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):

The ayes are 16; the nays are 43.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE**TOBACCO CONTROL**

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question last Thursday given by the Minister of Health Promotion concerning tobacco investment. The member has up to five minutes to debate this matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant has up to two minutes to reply.

I recognize the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: My reason for this request, pursuant to standing order 37(a), is that I'm unsatisfied with the complete non-answer from the Minister of Health Promotion and her avoidance in addressing the question I posed last Thursday, October 16. The question that I asked was a pointed and direct question pertaining to investments made by government-paid—therefore taxpayer-paid—money that is being invested into tobacco stocks in the USA. This avoidance of answering questions has become nothing short of a routine by the Minister of Health Promotion. Let me quote from the Toronto Sun not so long ago:

“Best’s response to an earlier question from Norm Miller so baffled the veteran Tory MPP that he raised a point of order.

“Doesn’t the answer have to relate to the question?” Miller asked Speaker Steve Peters.

“Well, yes it does. And if you keep up this kind of patronizing gobbledegook, you will reduce question period ... to a complete farce.”

This is an opportunity for the minister to respond with something more than gobbledegook.

As a matter of fact, the response the minister gave last Thursday was the very reason for asking her the question:

that tobacco and smoking cost this province too many lives and too many health care costs. That’s clear, but it doesn’t answer the question I posed.

The OP Trust, the OPSEU pension plan fund, has \$21 million invested into Philip Morris companies, the largest tobacco company in the USA. The Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan has nearly \$80 million invested into Altria Group, Inc., the parent company of Philip Morris—let me repeat: the largest company in the USA. On September 4, nearly seven weeks ago at estimates, I asked the Minister of Research and Innovation if the Ontario venture capital fund, which he oversees, invests in tobacco-related stocks. Despite the minister promising to table that information on a simple question, I have yet to receive any information—a little bit of a pattern forming here.

I don’t know if it would be the Minister of Health Promotion who will be responding to the statement and questions today or if it’s the parliamentary assistant, but I would say to the parliamentary assistant to the minister, the member from Oak Ridges, who is also a former health professional and former medical officer of health: Does she agree with this type of investment? That’s the question that I hope will be addressed here after my few minutes.

The member from Oak Ridges has spoken many times about the challenges she faced trying to get her patients to quit smoking. Does investing millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money into the USA’s largest tobacco company help or not help people quit smoking? That was the question I asked, which the Minister of Health Promotion did not answer. I hope to get an answer to that question today.

This is a question about protecting young people. Teachers have a profound influence on the youth of Ontario. So the question is, do you agree with the teachers’ union of Ontario and their investment of \$79.9 million in the USA’s largest tobacco company? There’s your so-called three-step approach to battle smoking; it does include public education. I would suggest that teachers are considered very important in the role of public education. Their millions of dollars of investment into Philip Morris, the leading tobacco company in the USA, appears to fly in the face of everything that the Minister of Health Promotion is pretending to fool Ontarians into thinking. Tobacco farmers in Ontario are being treated like second-class citizens by the Liberal government, yet Minister Best and Dalton McGuinty feel it’s perfectly fine to invest in tobacco outside of Ontario.

The member from Oak Ridges–Markham was in fact quoted right here in this chamber when referring to reducing tobacco use: “Consistency is a major issue.” She also stated, “The US Environmental Protection Agency has officially labelled second-hand smoke as a class A cancer-causing substance.” So it’s okay to quote the US Environmental Protection Agency, but apparently she also feels it’s perfectly okay for both the OP Trust and the teachers’ federation to invest millions of taxpayer-paid money in the largest tobacco producer in the very same USA.

Consistency is a major issue; I agree. So I challenge those on the Liberal benches to be consistent, and not just talk about it. Lack of consistency certainly lies completely with the Liberals, the Minister of Health Promotion and the member from Oak Ridges–Markham.

Let me quote a line from the Minister of Health Promotion's standard go-to sheet. She said in April, "Selling cigarettes when you buy candy and milk only makes cigarettes seem normal to young people, and that is just plain wrong." So I say to the minister that spending \$56 million per year on getting Ontarians to reduce tobacco use and then allowing taxpayers' money to be invested into over \$100 million of tobacco stocks in the USA—I wonder if she doesn't think that's just plain wrong.

I don't have much time left. I just hope that I get some answers to this question that I have today.

1810

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health Promotion has five minutes to reply.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I certainly appreciate the opportunity to be here today to respond to the question from the member opposite.

As I had responded before, the McGuinty government is committed to the health of Ontarians, and the mandate of the Ministry of Health Promotion is investing in programs to benefit the health of Ontarians. The programs are to prevent chronic diseases, among other preventative initiatives. That is what we in the Ministry of Health Promotion are mandated to do, and that is what is within the purview of this ministry.

We are reaching out to Ontarians to lead healthy, active lives. This government is not waiting for Ontarians to get sick; we are taking measures to prevent them from getting sick in the first place.

On one end, we are investing in chronic disease prevention and diabetes prevention. On the other end, we are investing in sport infrastructure so that Ontarians have access to the amenities they need to lead active, healthy lives. This is within the purview, again, of the Ministry of Health Promotion.

In this regard, I would like to speak to the McGuinty government's leadership in making Ontario smoke-free.

Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario, and we are well aware of that. That is why we have many different programs that we have started in this ministry to address that issue. That is why our government has brought in the toughest smoke-free legislation in North America, the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

The McGuinty government is committed to a multi-faceted approach. We are helping Ontarians to quit

smoking. We are preventing young people from starting to smoke. We prohibited the sale of tobacco to any person under the age of 19. We have made it mandatory for anyone who appears to be under the age of 25 years to present an ID before purchasing tobacco.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's hypocrisy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the member for Nepean–Carleton to withdraw that unparliamentary remark.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdrawn, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: We have brought in the tobacco display ban. We have banned smoking in cars with young children. We are indeed protecting Ontarians from second-hand smoke.

Ontario's youth are Ontario's future. Studies indicate that if a person does not start smoking before the age of 19, it increases the chances that this individual will never smoke. That is why the McGuinty government has taken decisive actions to protect young Ontarians from the harmful effects of tobacco products.

Since 2005, we have invested approximately \$37 million in innovative programs designed to prevent Ontario's children and youth from starting to smoke. That is what is within the purview of this ministry.

Our plan is working. In a 2007 survey by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 72% of students in grades 7 to 12 reported never—and I repeat, never—smoking a cigarette in their entire lifetime. That is 15% more students than from 2003.

Our plan is to help smokers quit and prevent other people from starting to smoke. Our plan is working, as many Ontarians have quit smoking. We continue to work with our programs to help people to quit and to help prevent people from starting to smoke in the first place.

That is what is within the purview of the Ministry of Health Promotion, and we continue to work on our programs and our initiatives aimed at getting people to quit smoking, getting people to recognize that tobacco is bad for their health. That is what we will continue to do so that generations to come will benefit from a smoke-free Ontario and the decisive actions of the McGuinty government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. It being past 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1815.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

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

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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Broten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
		Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture
		Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
		Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
		Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
		Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldeep (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
		Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Tim Hudak
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Garfield Dunlop
Gilles Bisson, Kim Craitor
Bob Delaney, Garfield Dunlop
Tim Hudak, Amrit Mangat
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jean-Marc Lalonde
Sophia Ageloni, Ted Arnott
Wayne Arthurs, Toby Barrett
Pat Hoy, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Leeanna Pendergast, Michael Prue
Charles Sousa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Linda Jeffrey
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: David Oraziotti
Robert Bailey, Jim Brownell
Linda Jeffrey, Kuldip Kular
Rosario Marchese, Bill Mauro
Carol Mitchell, David Oraziotti
Joyce Savoline
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Présidente: Julia Munro
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Michael A. Brown, Kevin Daniel Flynn
France Gélinas, Randy Hillier
Lisa MacLeod, Julia Munro
David Ramsay, Liz Sandals
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Christine Elliott
Peter Kormos, Jeff Leal
Reza Moridi, Yasir Naqvi
Lou Rinaldi, John Yakabuski
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
Kevin Daniel Flynn, Sylvia Jones
Norm Miller, Mario Sergio
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jerry J. Ouellette
Laura Albanese, Ernie Hardeman
Andrea Horwath, Phil McNeely
Jerry J. Ouellette, Liz Sandals
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craitor, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Laurel C. Broten, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Helena Jaczek
Dave Levac, Shafiq Qaadri
Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott
Peter Shurman
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Select Committee on Elections / Comité spécial des élections

Chair / Président: Greg Sorbara
Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Continued from back cover

L'Oréal Fashion Week	
Mrs. Christine Elliott.....	3443
Cardiac care	
Mr. Bill Mauro.....	3444
Ontario economy	
Mr. Toby Barrett.....	3444
Manufacturing jobs	
Mr. David Ramsay.....	3444
Islamic History Month	
Mr. Yasir Naqvi.....	3444
Walkerton Clean Water Centre	
Mrs. Carol Mitchell.....	3445
Annual report, Environmental Commissioner of Ontario	
The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	3445

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS / DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI

Single-Use Bottled Water Ban Act, 2008, Bill 112, Mr. Kular / Loi de 2008 interdisant les bouteilles d'eau jetables, projet de loi 112, M. Kular	
First reading agreed to.....	3445
Mr. Kuldip Kular.....	3445
Diabetes Awareness Month Act, 2008, Bill 113, Mrs. Mangat / Loi de 2008 sur le Mois de la sensibilisation au diabète, projet de loi 113, Mme Mangat	
First reading agreed to.....	3445
Mrs. Amrit Mangat.....	3445

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Local Government Week / Semaine des administrations locales	
Hon. Jim Watson.....	3445
Road safety	
Hon. James J. Bradley.....	3446
Waste Reduction Week	
Hon. John Gerretsen.....	3447
Local Government Week	
Mr. John O'Toole.....	3447
Road safety	
Mr. Frank Klees.....	3448
Waste Reduction Week	
Mr. Toby Barrett.....	3448

Road safety	
Mr. Gilles Bisson.....	3448
Waste Reduction Week	
Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	3448
Local Government Week	
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	3449

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Emergency dispatch services	
Mr. Norm Miller.....	3449
Emission-free vehicles	
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	3449
Lupus	
Mr. Kim Craitor.....	3450
Sexual reassignment surgery	
Mr. Jim Wilson.....	3450
Tuition	
Mme France Gélinas.....	3450
Child custody	
Mr. Jim Brownell.....	3451
Gasoline prices	
Mr. John O'Toole.....	3451
Hospital funding	
Mr. Joe Dickson.....	3451
Logging route	
Mr. Norm Miller.....	3451
Federal-provincial fiscal policies	
Mr. Bill Mauro.....	3452
Sexual reassignment surgery	
Mr. John O'Toole.....	3452

OPPOSITION DAY / JOUR DE L'OPPOSITION

Ontario economy	
Mr. Robert W. Runciman.....	3452
Mr. Wayne Arthurs.....	3454
Mr. Frank Klees.....	3455
Mr. Michael Prue.....	3456
Ms. Leeanna Pendergast.....	3461
Mr. Toby Barrett.....	3462
Mr. David Orziatti.....	3463
Mr. John O'Toole.....	3465
Hon. Jim Watson.....	3465
Ms. Laurie Scott.....	3467
Mr. Norman W. Sterling.....	3468
Motion negatived.....	3469

**ADJOURNMENT DEBATE / DÉBAT SUR
LA MOTION D'AJOURNEMENT**

Tobacco control

Ms. Laurie Scott	3469
Hon. Margaret R. Best.....	3470

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Tuesday 21 October 2008 / Mardi 21 octobre 2008

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Ontario economy

Mr. Bill Mauro	3421
Mr. Norm Miller	3424
Ms. Laurel C. Broten.....	3427
Mr. Frank Klees	3429
Debate deemed adjourned.....	3431

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Ms. Laurel C. Broten.....	3431
L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur	3431
Ms. Cheri DiNovo.....	3432
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	3432
Mr. Peter Kormos.....	3432

Legislative pages

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	3432
--------------------------------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Ontario economy

Mr. Robert W. Runciman.....	3432
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	3432

Ontario economy

Mr. Robert W. Runciman.....	3433
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	3433
Hon. Dwight Duncan	3433

Manufacturing jobs

Mr. Howard Hampton	3434
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	3434

Poverty

Mr. Howard Hampton	3435
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	3435

Small business

Mr. Norm Miller	3436
Hon. Harinder S. Takhar	3436

Soins de longue durée / Long-term care

Mme France Gélinas	3436
Hon. David Caplan.....	3436

Municipal government

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn.....	3437
Hon. Jim Watson.....	3437

Violent crime

Mrs. Christine Elliott.....	3437
Hon. Christopher Bentley.....	3437

Property taxation

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	3438
Hon. Jim Watson.....	3438

Workplace safety

Mr. David Oraziotti	3438
Hon. Peter Fonseca.....	3439

Diabetes treatment

Mr. Frank Klees	3439
Hon. David Caplan.....	3439

Information and Privacy Commissioner

Mr. Gilles Bisson	3440
Hon. James J. Bradley	3440

Northern Ontario heritage fund

Mr. Bill Mauro	3440
Hon. Michael Gravelle	3440

Skills training

Mr. John O'Toole	3441
Hon. John Milloy	3441

Hospital services

Mme France Gélinas	3442
Hon. David Caplan.....	3442

Temperature in chamber

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	3442
--------------------------------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	3442
--------------------------------------	------

Sign language

Hon. Ted McMeekin	3442
Motion agreed to	3442

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

Orangeville Public Library

Ms. Sylvia Jones.....	3442
-----------------------	------

Hospital services

Mr. Peter Kormos.....	3443
-----------------------	------

GO Transit

Mr. Bob Delaney	3443
-----------------------	------

Continued on inside back cover