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Wednesday 19 November 2008

Mercredi 19 novembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 19 novembre 2008

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by an Islamic prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM
APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2008 SUR
LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES
ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE
DE CRÉDITS (NO 2)

Mr. Arthurs, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 114, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate? The member from Pickering–Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to just begin by saying it's my intention to divide my time with the Minister of Finance, as the expert in the area.

I'm pleased to rise on third reading of Bill 114 this morning, the fall economic statement. Clearly, this continues to be a time when it's important for us to focus our attention on the economy, on where this province is, and where it's going, along with the provinces across this country, with our neighbours to the south and the international economic situation we're all faced with.

We've been diligent in our efforts to ensure that the province of Ontario has a clear plan in the context of how we see the best means by which to serve this province in an economic fashion. We have a clear plan. We've articulated that on numerous occasions and we'll continue to do so. We seek good ideas. It doesn't necessarily mean that all of the ideas that are presented to us, whether it be in this Legislature or elsewhere, will fit within the context of the plan we have for this province, even as we ad-

just and make the plan work for us here in the province of Ontario.

Bill 114 was our opportunity in this session, during the fall of this year, to put before this Legislature a number of matters of interest to the province, and of fiscal interest to the province as well. Certainly, during second reading in particular, the debate was extensive from all sides of the House. We look forward to continuing that debate this morning.

We are as well, at the same time as we're wrapping up Bill 114 in the House, preparing for our budget, coming in the spring. I know the minister, as well as the Standing Committee on Finance, are in the process of either continuing or starting their tour, as such, to hear from people of Ontario about what it is that folks are looking for in the province, what their priorities are—and at the same time an opportunity for them to express to us whether they feel we continue to be on the right track, or whether they feel we should be shifting course a little bit in that regard. So I know, as one of the members of the Standing Committee on Finance, I'm looking forward to that process, which for us actually begins as early as tomorrow morning at 8:45. That will be the first day of hearings held for the coming budget year. We look forward to the standing committee being able to go through that process, being able to hear from individuals and organizations throughout the province and, at the same time, to report back in that process to this Legislature, so that the Minister of Finance will have that advice in addition to all the other advice that he will have presented to him in the preparation of a budget for the 2008-09 fiscal year.

I appreciate the opportunity to spend a couple of minutes this morning to begin the leadoff on Bill 114. As indicated, my intention, obviously, is to share this time allocated to us with the minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I want to begin by thanking my parliamentary assistant, Wayne Arthurs, for all the work he puts into the budget, into the fall statement, into carrying legislation, chairing SCFEA. He takes on an enormous workload, makes an enormous contribution and, like so many members of the Legislature, has enormous input into government policy and helps us as we deal with these very difficult circumstances.

As I said on October 22 when I delivered the fall statement and introduced this bill, it is not business as usual in Ontario. We have seen in the course of the last six weeks developments that I don't think any of us ever contemplated, certainly not in this fiscal year or, for that matter, in any fiscal year. Yesterday, the province of Alberta indicated that their projected surplus has gone

from \$8 billion to \$2 billion in three months as a result of commodity prices. Ontario has been experiencing enormous challenges in its manufacturing and forestry sectors for some time, and we have laid out a plan that is reinforced by this bill and, through a whole number of initiatives, that is designed to deal with the challenges in our economy today.

It's interesting to see how other governments are now talking about the things that we have been talking about for more than a year. To a very real extent, because of the challenges in the manufacturing sector that became evident some time ago, we have had to deal with this reality longer than others. Let's talk about our five-point plan and let's talk about what we're doing.

Infrastructure: It's interesting that the G20 leaders, meeting last week in Washington, all talked about the significance of infrastructure. That is why, last year, we invested \$9.9 billion in new infrastructure, because the beauty of infrastructure is that it creates jobs in the short term and deals with economic productivity, our ability to compete in the world economy, in the long term. Just last week, I know members around the province had the opportunity to bring another \$1.1 billion in money to our municipal partners to help them fix some of their infrastructure and, again, these projects are ready to go and will employ people at this very difficult time in our economy.

Innovation is absolutely essential. I've been watching, over the course of the last 24 to 48 hours, the discussion around the Detroit Three and the debate around support to keep those massive employers operating in the short term. It's interesting that the debate is turning around not just whether or not to help, but if there's help, what do we expect back from them? What we're talking about is innovation. What we're talking about is new product mandates that'll meet the market demands of the 21st century. That's what we've been doing for some three years; first with AMIS, our automotive investment strategy, designing and helping those companies transition into the product mandates that people will demand in the 21st century. So those investments in research and innovation—that's the second component of our five-point plan. Again, we're seeing other governments starting to do what we've now been doing for some years.

0910

We have talked about the need for partnership, the need to work together as a province, a country, to work with our municipal partners. Earlier this spring, I was pleased to assist my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs as we reached an historic agreement with our municipal partners to upload a range of services that were downloaded by the Conservative government. It was the Conservative government that passed down court security costs to municipalities. It was the Conservative government of Mr. Harris and Mr. Eves that downloaded more social welfare costs. It was the Conservative government of Mr. Harris and Mr. Eves that downloaded a range of other costs and a net cost to municipalities that ranged somewhere between \$1.5 billion and \$3 billion.

While they were doing that, they managed to run up a deficit of \$5.5 billion.

We have reversed that. Between our taking office and the fulfillment of the agreements we've reached, we will have uploaded more than \$3.8 billion in costs, which will help manage property tax bills for people across the province. Then, my Conservative friends opposite are voting against initiatives in this bill which will give seniors an enhanced property tax credit, right at the time when we need that kind of stimulative measure as we move forward.

One other thing has happened this week that I think is really instructive. Later today, my colleague the Minister of Economic Development, Mr. Bryant, will be leaving for Washington with Mr. Clement, the federal minister. Three weeks ago, the federal government did not want to partner with us in dealing with the auto sector. I congratulate the Prime Minister, I congratulate Minister Clement, for wanting to work with Ontario for an industry that is not only key to Ontario but key to all Canadians. That is a very positive development.

I remember last spring, or I should say—not even last spring—when I first revealed to the public, once we had numbers that solidified, saying that Ontario will have a deficit this year. We were derided by our Conservative friends opposite that a government running a deficit is a horrible thing. Well, I listened very carefully to Prime Minister Harper and Minister Flaherty, and again I acknowledge what I think has been the right approach by the federal Conservatives, who now seem to get it, who now seem to realize that the challenges in our economy are real and present, and a deficit is actually—and I note the winner of the Nobel Prize in economics this year talked about the importance of deficits at a time like this, the importance of government spending.

We are going to continue to make the kinds of investments we've been making. Clearly, we have to manage that. We have to manage it going forward, but at least the accounting will be accurate, unlike the last Conservative budget that projected a balanced budget and actually had a \$5.5-billion deficit built into it. We actually passed something called the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act as a result of that. The Conservatives voted against that enhanced accountability, and it's that act that requires us to report in a more meaningful way to the Legislative Assembly, number one, and, more importantly, to the people of Ontario.

There is a range of initiatives in here; we've taken steps. I want to congratulate my friend Mr. Prue, the New Democratic Party member who raised an issue about granny flats with us, and I want to take a moment to thank him for that. This bill deals with the issue that he raised in the House, and I congratulate him and thank him very much for bringing this issue to our attention—and I hope he won't vote against it.

The other thing—our friends in the Conservative Party want to give tax cuts to oil companies and big, profitable companies and are going to vote against a tax credit for innovative Ontario firms today. They want to vote

against that. It's okay to subsidize Exxon, it's okay to subsidize all the big oil companies, but they want to cut corporate tax rates that won't benefit Ontario manufacturers—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Cambridge, come to order. Member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan:—which is absolutely scandalous and, I think, reflects the fact that the party is without—

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I don't think the minister is speaking to the point of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Well, I'm listening very carefully, and I'll draw his attention to that if I feel so.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This bill deals with appropriate tax cuts, and we reject your wanting to give tax cuts to companies that don't do business—

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: You don't know anything about—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Cambridge, come to order.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think what we see in the Conservative Party is a complete lack of leadership. One day they want to spend money; the next day they want to cut spending.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: He's not talking to this bill; he's talking about the Conservative Party.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Number one, the member for Cambridge hasn't been recognized by the Chair. Number two, you should take your seat. Number three, I'll listen very carefully to the debate this morning and I'm sure that we'll all learn something from it.

Finance minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This is very much about this. This is a budget bill. Perhaps the member hasn't read it. It is about budgetary policy, and what I'm saying is, we reject your ideas and your notions. They are rooted in a failed economic philosophy that has helped to put the entire world economy into the mess we are in today. You have said to cut health care spending by \$3 billion. We reject that. They have called for general, across-the-board tax cuts for corporations that won't benefit the very companies that aren't making money. They will help the oil industry in Alberta, but they won't help the auto industry here in Ontario. We reject that philosophy.

We reject the deregulation attitude that has led to the collapse of banks around the world and is central to Mr. Tory's party's philosophy. We have seen that game play out in Ontario. It left us with a horrible deficit. It left us with undermined public services. We have a plan that is working in spite of the enormous challenges in our economy today.

This bill provides tax relief. This bill provides stimulus. This bill helps maintain jobs in a very turbulent world. This bill deals with issues; as I indicated, Mr.

Prue's issues that were raised in this House. This bill invests in the people of Ontario; it maintains quality health care; it maintains education.

My friends in the Conservative Party will vote against infrastructure today. They will vote against the most innovative tax credit for small businesses around. I regret that they just haven't figured out what's going on in the world today.

As we move forward, as this bill passes today, as we partner with municipalities—and again I want to stress congratulations to the Harper government for working with us on the automotive sector, something that we've been calling for. I am personally pleased that Mr. Clement and Mr. Bryant are taking such an active role in trying to address a very real problem, recognizing that many of our citizens are concerned not only about their jobs but about the impact all of this will have, and making sure that if governments in the United States and Canada are able to come up with a package, it is fair to taxpayers as well as fair to those people who are so directly impacted by the industry.

We will keep investing in infrastructure. We will run a deficit this year.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Uh-oh.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Hudak should listen to Prime Minister Harper, and he should listen to his friend Mr. Flaherty. He should listen to people as divergent as Paul Krugman and George Bush. It's important that the provincial Conservatives and New Democrats get into the real world today—it has changed. Coming from a party that ran a \$5.6-billion deficit in its last year, contributed—

Hon. James J. Bradley: A hidden deficit.

0920

Hon. Dwight Duncan: A hidden deficit—we spoke about that a while ago. There's nothing hidden about what we're doing. We're being open and transparent with the people of Ontario. Let me reemphasize: We will continue to invest in infrastructure. We will continue to protect public services. We will continue to work to green and to update our environment. We will continue to work on innovation. We will continue to build partnerships, whether with the federal government or with our municipal partners. We've all got to work together now, more than ever. That is important. We will continue to offer the kind of targeted tax relief that will actually help manufacturers. We eliminated the capital tax and made it retroactive for manufacturers and our Tory and New Democratic Party members opposite voted against that. It put cash into the hands of those very industries that are struggling. The cash flowed this past summer. It has helped keep people working. It has helped keep production going. It was a stimulus package in the hundreds of millions of dollars. That was in addition to this year's \$3.9 billion in infrastructure.

Our five-point plan continues to be the right plan. We're hearing governments throughout the world, the G20, calling for spending on infrastructure. We're looking at partnerships. For the first time, the G20, the 20

largest economies in both the developed and developing world, are partnering, working together. That is absolutely essential.

Now the debate is around innovation and how do we transform our automotive sector to an industry that will survive and compete and thrive in the 21st century with appropriate product mix? We started that some three years ago. There are many challenges in the economy. This year will no doubt probably be the most difficult year that any of us have ever experienced in our lives. We have laid out a plan that we think is right. This bill provides tax relief. It provides spending stimulus. It preserves our ability to invest in innovation. It builds partnerships, as have been announced. We need this kind of package. We need it today more than we ever needed it. I urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this package, to put aside partisan and ideological differences and recognize the importance of working together. We're pleased to be working with the federal Conservatives on the industrial strategy, on the industrial situation. We look forward to working with all Ontarians and all Canadians in this very, very important endeavour.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think that the finance minister must have had a couple of different speechwriters there for 90% of his speech—a diatribe that was among the most partisan speeches in some time here in the Legislature, and then the second speechwriter comes on board for the conclusion and talks about reaching across the aisle and being non-partisan. I'm disappointed, I guess, in the tone that the finance minister decided to take on this bill—just when we thought we were seeing a more statesman-like finance minister in the vein of his predecessor, we saw the battled Dwight Duncan with his remarks today.

I won't dwell on it; it's simply reflective. I'd say my friend the Minister of Health—I know he wouldn't bring that kind of tone. He would probably be a little bit chagrined in his remarks with the nature of Bill 114's timeline. Let me give you an example. This bill was part of a rather sharp time allocation motion that ended debate when I think, only a handful of Liberals actually rose to speak on something that the finance minister boasts about as some sort of revolutionary piece of legislation. This bill was ordered referred to committee on November 4, 2008, and amendments were then due by noon of the 5th. Less than 24 hours after the bill was referred to committee amendments were due.

I do plan—and I apologize—to split my time with my good friend the very eloquent member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke

The amendments were due by noon on November 5. The deadline to speak to the committee to apply was 5 p.m. on the 5th and public hearings were limited to one day of deputations only in the morning of November 6. This is where it gets interesting.

People were making their presentations and offering improvements to the bill on November 6, but motions to

amend the bill were due on November 5. So I guess we all needed to hop into Dwight Duncan's time machine to go back 24 hours in order to bring forward amendments that we heard the next day.

Mr. John Yakabuski: H.G. Duncan.

Mr. Tim Hudak: "H.G. Duncan," my friend says, with his masterful time machine.

That certainly was, sadly, disdainful of any kind of public input on this bill. Today, we are responding to the bill. We have one hour of debate split among the three parties, 20 minutes each, for a bill brought in the day that the Dalton McGuinty government returned to deficit financing in the province of Ontario, projecting at least a \$500-million deficit.

Kevin Gaudet—I'll just read some excerpts from his presentation to the committee—was one of those who was on the ball and able to register to the committee with barely 24 hours of notice. Mr. Gaudet of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said:

"With respect to Bill 114, although I'm pleased to be here, I must say that the process through which I've come to be here is a little bit disappointing and frustrating. It does provide, I would argue, an undue imposition on the public or organizations when the Legislature does put together such committees and deputations in such a short period of time. We're aware of the existence of the bill, but less than 24 hours' notice for individuals to come to committee is an onerous burden. A lot of people are either unaware or are incapable of making it.

"At the risk of being solely polemic and perhaps a bit philosophical, it's disappointing at a time when, two days ago, we saw important change in our sister country south of us, an opportunity where people reached across the aisle looking for hope and change. There's a concern that I have that this Legislature is becoming increasingly disdainful of the public, and this is an example of that."

Mr. Gaudet goes on to say, "The last time I was at committee was the health tax review. To call it a review—it's an abuse of the language to have called it a review. The deputations were, at best, heard, if not properly undertaken, and no changes occurred."

So Mr. Gaudet of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation would certainly take significant issue with the finance minister's conclusion to end partisanship and to get on board, when the government itself has shown—

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's why they brought in that time allocation motion—non-partisan, of course.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Exactly. The time allocation motion was anything but non-partisan.

So Mr. Gaudet is speaking, I think, for the general public here in refuting the minister's argument that this bill has been brought about in a non-partisan fashion.

I know my colleague Mr. Yakabuski wants to bring forward remarks on behalf of his constituents. He has thought heavily about the economy and the impact in his riding and in the province.

We do need to note that at the time when Bill 114 was brought into the Ontario Legislature, the minister had made an announcement, I think that very same day, that

Ontario would be returning to deficit budgets. We would join Prince Edward Island as the only provinces in Confederation running deficits in 2008-09. What's particularly alarming about this is that revenue to the Dalton McGuinty government has increased by some \$28 billion, largely because of increased taxes on working families and seniors in our province, increased taxes on small businesses that are struggling to get by, and increased transfers from the federal government. That's about \$6,100 per household in Ontario, \$28 billion in increased revenue. Let's put that in perspective: \$28 billion in increased revenue is greater than the combined total budgets of all the provinces in Atlantic Canada. You total up Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and PEI's total budgets: \$23 billion. The increase in revenue to the province of Ontario exceeds that by \$5 billion, a \$28-billion total. Another comparison: If you combine the entire budgets of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, they're lower than the total increased revenue to the province of Ontario.

What did Dalton McGuinty's government do? They blew that out the window. They frittered away this massive revenue increase.

Let me give you a few examples of some of that spending: \$2.3 million spent by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. on the opening gala at Caesars Windsor. No doubt, some members of the Liberal cabinet, decked out in their finery, some in tuxedos, and staff and Liberal hangers-on probably had a good time at the opening of the Caesars Windsor casino—but \$2.3 million in expenditure. And \$8 million as a bit of a going-away gift to former finance minister Sorbara for a tourism study that I'm sure will include a lot of world travel. To his credit, he was the chair of two successful Liberal campaigns. I know he's close to the Premier. But I think an \$8-million expenditure on this when the tourism market is hurting will be at odds with what most people would see as a priority in spending on tourism. Then there's the \$3.5 million spent by the Ministry of Education on hotel and conference facilities, \$6 million to remove the "C" from the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., \$20 million to quietly give raises to appointees to government agencies and boards—I could go on and on.

0930

I bet if you ask the average Ontario family, if you ask a senior in Grimsby or Binbrook if they have seen improvements for the additional \$28 billion in revenue, they'd say, "Far from it." Worse still, under the McGuinty government's failed and outdated tax-and-spend policies, total debt has gone up in the province of Ontario to \$172.3 billion. That's \$13,000 in debt for every man, woman and child in Ontario; and total debt per household has increased under the McGuinty government by almost \$9,000. So in times when revenue is coming in, flooding into the treasury, the Ministry of Finance and the McGuinty government chose to spend at such an alarming rate that it would make Bob Rae blush and have run up the debt by nearly \$9,000 per family.

If you look at the increases in the health tax, electricity, new driver licence renewal charges, delisted

health care services like eye exams and chiropractic care, cancelled tax reductions that were in play, for a typical family in the province of Ontario the cost is some \$2,000 or more, even for some individuals, the increase in costs and expenses as a result of the McGuinty government's decisions in their time in office. Sadly, the failed tax-and-spend policies of the McGuinty government, the outdated philosophy, has now tragically reduced Ontario to have-not status. For the first time in our history, Ontario is receiving equalization payments, the equivalent of welfare payments, the welfare rolls of Confederation. Instead of the Premier calling in his economic minister, saying, "Come hell or high water, I will not allow Ontario to remain a have-not province; we're going to grow our way out of this," it's almost like from the musical *Oliver!*. It's almost like, "Please, sir, may I have another?" with their hand out, continuing to ask for more money instead of trying to grow our economy and restore Ontario's strength as a leader and a job-creation engine in Confederation.

The finance minister improperly, and I think intentionally, mischaracterized our opposition to the bill. We reject the outdated tax-and-spend policies of the McGuinty government that have plunged us further into debt and have restored deficit financing in the province of Ontario, and for the first time in the history of this great country have made Ontario a recipient of equalization payments as a have-not province. They have no plan whatsoever to remedy that tragedy.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the comments of my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I do appreciate the comments of my colleague from Niagara West-Glanbrook and also our critic for finance.

What's remarkable is that we are in a time, and the finance minister spoke about it, where the G20 had this conference recently. The issue that everybody is talking about, not just the First Ministers of those countries, but everywhere—you go on the street, and what are people talking about? They're talking about the economy.

But the reality in this chamber is that this government doesn't want to talk about the economy. In fact, they've stifled debate on Bill 114 so that the members of this Legislature cannot talk about the economy. We're down to another eight minutes and 18 seconds to talk about the economy because this government has stifled debate on this bill and brought in a time allocation motion. The newscasts of every evening are talking about the economy and how we might deal with it. But this government doesn't want to talk about it. They want to put their head in the sand and hope that the issue takes care of itself.

Our leader, John Tory, recently proposed some possible solutions that this government could look at, and one of them was getting control of its spending. My colleague Mr. Hudak talked about how this government has been awash in revenue for the last several years and mismanaged it, and now, when the revenue is about to drop, they don't know how to deal with it. And the first

thing they are not doing that they should be doing is getting control of their own spending.

Randall Denley wrote in the *Citizen* this past weekend how other governments understand the reality of the economic situation and they're taking control of it. In your own home, if your revenues drop, if your income drops, you have no choice but to do something about your spending. It's happening all across the province, as people lose their jobs in McGuinty's Ontario. All across the province, people are realizing that they have to do something to deal with their own spending, because the revenue in their personal household is down.

The finance minister talks about our party being in favour of big tax cuts for big oil. How false is that? It's just unbelievable. What our party wants to see is tax cuts that will help all businesses in this province. How about the forestry business, which is in big trouble as a result of your regulatory regime and your tax policy? I asked the Minister of Natural Resources: How about some tax relief so that these companies can get some assistance with transporting their products further away because of the closure of mills under your policies? No go. No help for the forestry industry, and this government talks about trying to assist. The minister said, "We're going to help to try to save jobs in this province." But every month, what happens? The job picture gets more gloomy.

Our party has asked for specific relief for small business, and what do small business and all other businesses in this province get? They get Bill 119, the WSIB bill, which is going to hammer more of them and quite likely put some of them right out of business. But this government continues to spend money on the things it wants to spend on: bigger government.

I want to read what Randall Denley had to say in his column in the *Citizen* this past weekend:

"Harper and his finance minister, Jim Flaherty, were hitting ... the right tone on the key points this week. Harper says he wants to be pragmatic in dealing with the economy.... In have-not Ontario, McGuinty is cheer-leading for the auto sector while doing next to nothing to get his own government spending under control....

"In Ontario, McGuinty has made minuscule cuts in government spending and delayed some expenditures until next year.... It's not nearly enough. As Ontario Progressive Conservative leader John Tory pointed out this week, the provincial government is still conducting its own affairs as if it's business as usual. Despite already being in deficit, the government is looking for 154 new employees, half of them earning more than \$80,000 a year. The government spends \$92 million on travel and \$1.2 million on administration...."

What John Tory proposed was "a public sector hiring freeze, a salary freeze for senior management, a 10-per-cent cut in administrative expenses and a reduction in government advertising. These should be self-evident actions for a government in deficit, but McGuinty hasn't taken them."

This is how the minister opened his address this morning: "Ontario is facing serious economic diffi-

culties." In difficult times, what would be more prudent than to look at where expenses could be cut? But, no, they don't look at that. "Let's hire, bigger offices." How many more people are working in ministers' offices today than five years ago? Exploded—it has exploded. The number of people working in ministers' offices, the Premier's office, is at an all-time high, and this is at a time when the people of the province of Ontario are being faced with: "Are we going to keep our jobs? Are we going to lose our homes? Are we going to be able to pay for the children's post-secondary education in McGuinty's Ontario?" But this government just keeps waltzing along and spending like drunken sailors. My apologies to sailors.

0940

Mr. Tim Hudak: At least they spend their own money.

Mr. John Yakabuski: But at least they do spend their own money.

So how are we going to address this if the government refuses to change any of its behaviour? They're addicted, totally addicted to spending, but they won't get the help they need. When our party talks about sitting down and striking all-party committees to try to work towards solutions on these problems in a non-partisan way, we're scoffed at. We're scoffed at from the other side of the House. They think it's a big joke. "No, no," they say. "No, we've got all the answers."

Well, the people in the province of Ontario beg to differ. They're seeing the evidence of your answers. Just trudge along, doing business as usual, spending, spending, spending, not reining in waste in this government and, as my colleague Mr. Hudak said, a \$28-billion increase in spending in five years—\$28-billion spending, from \$68 billion to \$96 billion. That would be like an individual going from \$68,000 to \$96,000 in their own home. How many people are in a position to have done that? Very, very few in this province. But this government—and whose money do you think it is? It's not coming off trees. It's coming out of the people's pockets.

Now, when this province is in trouble, they're going to continue to try to take it out of the people's pockets. There soon will be nothing left in those pockets but lint. But this government doesn't want to change its behaviour. It's addicted to spending. It has to change that mindset.

We're not talking about shutting things down. There are good programs that need to be supported; we understand that. But the problem with this government is, it wants to buy every vote out there. It wants to buy every vote out there so that by the next election, they've somehow done something to buy each individual vote in the province. It's not going to work. You've got to behave yourselves.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Interesting discussion we just heard from the Conservative Party. It always amazes me: No matter when I've been in this House over the last 18

years, the debate is about the same. Everything is a tax cut, everything is reduction of services, and that's the way you're going to get the economy going.

I think Ontarians, North Americans and the world have come to the conclusion that government does have tools at its disposal and government has to use the instrument of government and its taxation powers in ways that are able to advance our causes within the economy. So I just—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I know. I know you're out of my camp now, Tim, but I just have to open with that.

What's incumbent upon us is that we have a debate here in the House today about how we deal with the problems that we're having in the economy.

The government's got quite a large bill here. There are some things—and I'm going to say it up front—there's some stuff in here that I support, that to me makes some sense. There are other ones that are completely in the wrong direction, and it puts you a bit at a loss in opposition. You wish sometimes that you'd be able to support a bill outright. But such is the government's choice in mixing everything together to make it rather difficult to take a position of supporting the government on their bill.

I just want to say there are things in here that I think are a step in the right direction. Is it the be-all and end-all to dealing with what's ailing our economy? Absolutely not. There are a lot of things that we're missing, and that's what I want to talk about. I don't want to spend my time criticizing the Liberal government. I think the public will decide that in the next election. I want to talk about what it is that we here in this Legislature should be doing in order to advance what's important for Ontarians.

There's one section of this bill, and I think it was not a bad idea, and that's the amendment of section 43.5 around the Corporations Tax Act. Yes, I'm a New Democrat, and I understand that taxation is an issue and an instrument that government has to use in order to assist the economy to rebound. What the government has done here is allow for the refundable tax credit to move from a \$2-million to a \$3-million threshold if they're going to be doing investments basically in research and development, moving into new technologies within their plants. Not a bad thing, but is that really the only thing that needs to be done in order to assist the small business sector, and more importantly, entrepreneurs in this province, to leverage the kind of investment that they need to make in their companies in order to compete in the economy of tomorrow? Here's the problem: Ontario will never be able to compete with China, India or other countries when it comes to a low-wage economy. We all agree with that.

What do we do as a province in order to give our entrepreneurs and our businesses an edge so that they're able to move forward and build the economy of tomorrow? I think what you need to do, and I think most people in the House would agree with me, is to always be one or two inventions or one or two products ahead of

everybody else. Ontario needs to be seen in the world as the economy that is on the cutting edge, that is developing the technologies and products of tomorrow that people want to buy. If we're doing that, then everybody is trying to catch up to us, and it allows us to position our economy in a way of really adding value to what we do in this province and giving entrepreneurs the opportunity to make a few bucks and people an opportunity to get good jobs that pay a good wage in a meaningful career.

How do you do that? I think this bill does some of that, but it doesn't do the kinds of things that need to be done. For example, this amendment around the Corporations Tax Act: Is the \$2-million to \$3-million threshold enough? I say no. I've talked to a number of entrepreneurs over the last couple of months as I run around this province in this leadership contest. What I find is that a lot of people are saying, "The big difficulty that we're having is that we are a cutting-edge company. We have some products that we're working on developing that we're bringing into the market, but we can't leverage the dollars to invest in the research and development necessary to move that product forward as far as development."

Here's the other kicker: Once they've done the research and development—if they're that lucky—how do you capitalize the change in the plant that needs to happen in order to accommodate the production of a new product? You go to the bank. The bank won't lend you money. Certainly the stock market—people are somewhat nervous to put money in the market, especially when it comes to investments like Canadian equities. They're having real difficulty trying to raise the dollars.

I think the corporation tax amendments in here are a step in the right direction, but I think we need to be a lot more aggressive. We need to understand that if we're going to assist the entrepreneurs of the province of Ontario, somebody who says, "I'm prepared to invest in research and development," should be supported to the full extent. In other words, if the person has research and development costs of \$500,000 or research and development costs of \$10 million, we as a province should be saying, "Okay, we understand that, and we are going to give you a tax credit in order to write that off against your corporate tax if you happen to be making any profit. If you're not, we advance it as a credit on your taxes," so that they can offset some of the cost of doing the research and development.

I was talking to somebody—I think it was up in London. They were a small entrepreneur making equipment that monitors pipe construction and how pipes are deployed within industry, making sure that they're to the standard that they need to be for the utilization that they're in. He was just talking about one example. He's developing this new technology that would allow him to position his company in the market with a product that everybody would need, and nobody else has got. The cost of the R&D on that thing, he was telling me, is anywhere from \$5 million to \$7 million. Will this amendment that the government has under the Corporations Tax Act

help? Of course it will, because it will allow him to write off not \$2 million, but \$3 million. But the actual cost is \$7 million. What this gentleman is telling me is, "Allow me to make those investments in R&D. I don't mind paying taxes. I understand as an entrepreneur that a society is basically measured by how we treat each other, and for that to happen, I as a corporate citizen have to pay my fair share of taxes. All I'm asking for is that at the front end, you assist me so that I can position myself to make money so I can pay those taxes." His argument was that we need to have a refundable tax credit similar to what my leader, Howard Hampton, has been talking about for some time, which allows you to basically draw down cash by way of the tax system to be able to invest in research and development. I think that's the key: You tie it to research and development.

The second part is capitalization. What do you do once you've invented the new product that everybody wants, and now you have to invest in your plant in order to be able to bring it into production? There lies the other problem: the capitalization issue. Many entrepreneurs are really cash-strapped. They're basically running on very small margins—some of them are losing money, unfortunately—and they don't have the money to make the investment to produce that new product that will be sold in tomorrow's economy. They need to find ways of being able to capitalize themselves.

0950

One of the things that I've been thinking about for some time, in discussion with people, is that we should, and I propose this as a New Democrat, have a system where we backstop loans; that the provincial government says—and in partnership with the federal government would be even better, but it doesn't mean to say we can't do it if the feds don't jump onside—in a case of bringing new products online, that if an entrepreneur wants to invest the money in their plant to sell that new product, we will allow them to go to a commercial lender, because we don't need to be administering this as a government, and the commercial lender does the due diligence on the loan. And if the loan makes some sense and there's a business plan for this to happen that makes sense and balances out at the end, and if the entrepreneur is able to show that he or she is bringing forward some cash to that investment, the province secures part of that loan in order to give the banks some comfort in being able to advance the money to the entrepreneur.

I'm just going to take a round number. Let's say this investment is \$5 million. The entrepreneur, if he or she mortgages his or her house and goes out and gets some local investments in the community, is lucky to raise maybe a million bucks. Where do you get the other \$4 million? The person goes to the banks in Canada and the banks say, "Oh, we're not doing this; we have very restricted lending policies nowadays."

Why don't we, as a province, say, "We're prepared to backstop some of these loans" so that we'll give the banks some security in the sense that we're prepared to assume a 20%, 25% or 30% share of the liability on the

loan? If the plant is being built somewhere in an economically depressed part of the province, we should increase that percentage so that we don't allow all of the development to happen around the 401, because one of the issues we now have is that the infilling of industry around the 401 is making it unsustainable from an infrastructure perspective. We can adopt a policy that says that if the person wants to invest in Sarnia, Kingston, Sudbury, Timmins or wherever it might be, rather than a 25% security on loan, we'll give the person 35% as an incentive to go there.

There are things that I think could have been done in this bill that weren't done. Quite frankly, the government should have taken the time to listen to what the opposition was saying, but more importantly to what the public was saying, in order to help drive our economy into the next century.

I'm wondering if my colleague wants time on this.

Mr. Paul Miller: No, I'm okay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're okay? All right, because you're our industry and trade critic, and I know you're very interested in this issue.

So from that perspective, I think the corporate tax changes are okay, but they're not anywhere near what they need to be in order to assist the economy.

As I've travelled around the province—it's an interesting process to run in a leadership campaign, because you get an opportunity to talk to lots of people, not only within your party, but out in Ontario around issues that you're interested in. One of the things that has been coming up more and more as I talk to small business people is, they say, "You know, Gilles, I'm a hard-working person. I've got a small business; I employ a couple of people. My wife and I are working 12- and 14-hour days, and we want to pay our taxes and we want to be good citizens, but I'm tired of the government coming into my business and auditing me four or five times a year for different things."

I was in Ottawa the other day. I was meeting with a small business person, and the person said to me, "You know, at the beginning of the last summer, the WSIB people came into my company"—it was a construction firm—"and basically audited me for workers' compensation to make sure I did the proper remittance." He said, "I don't have a problem. I understand I have to be audited, but as soon as the WSIB people were gone, the federal government was coming in, and they were auditing me on another matter. Now I just got notification that they're going to come in and they're going to audit me for my health tax remittance. For God's sake, why doesn't the government just hire specialized people who basically do auditing and can do the audit once and look at all of it, rather than disrupting the small business person and having them open their books and having somebody there to assist the auditors three, four, five times a year to do what essentially are auditing processes?"

I don't pretend to understand how practical this is. I haven't looked into it in any detail, but it seems to me it's a reasonable thing that we should be looking at and

asking, "Is there any way of amalgamating auditing services for the province of Ontario and possibly the federal government to one audit process?" That we randomly select people whom we think need to be audited, as we do now, or if there's an indication there may be a WSIB problem or a HST problem or whatever it might be—when the auditors go in, they should look at the amalgamated expenditures and revenues of that company and say, "All right, now we're going to report on the overall," so that you don't have a disruption in the small business sector four or five times within a year, sometimes, with various auditors coming in. It seemed to me that that was a pretty reasonable proposal and something that we could have been looking at in this committee in order to, first of all, avoid having the small business person be sidetracked by these audits, but also for us as a government to do more things efficiently. We are really hard-pressed when it comes to having the amount of staff that we need within government to provide some of the services that we do. We might be able to do some reshuffling of staff by eliminating the need to have a whole bunch of people in the auditing sections, to amalgamate them under one organization and then redeploy staff into areas that would be of more use for us as Ontarians and as a government.

The other thing that we could have been looking at, and this is something that seems to me to be a bit of a no-brainer, is the situation in the retail sector. One of the really big problems is the collection and remittance of both PST and GST. The rules are sometimes complicated as to what products get charged GST and what products get charged PST. The small business person tries as best they can to figure it out and they hopefully program their cash registers to get it right, but far too often there are problems because tax codes change and the person trying to collect the tax sometimes gets it wrong.

The other problem is that there's a fairly large, onerous responsibility on the small business sector to do, first, the collection of the PST and GST, account for what was collected, deposit it in an account, and then write a cheque every month or every three months, depending on your situation, over to the provincial government for the remittance of PST and GST. Once you've remitted, you then get audited, and far too often, auditors come in—basically the same stories I was talking about before—and find something that's wrong. The small business person now is scrambling because they owe money that they didn't think they owed, and it creates all kinds of hardship on that particular small business.

Why not have an automatic remittance system? It seems to me that in this province today, we have the ability to develop technology that allows the automatic collection of PST and GST through the cash register, so that we as a province put into the software that there's a 7% tax on a chocolate bar, a whatever per cent tax on a pair of jeans, or whatever. When you put that all into the software, then as I go in, as a consumer, and make my purchase, the tax is automatically collected from me. The money from the cash register is then accounted back to the government account, so that there's an automatic

collection in real time of the taxes being paid by consumers. At the end of the day, there's a report to the small business retailer that says, "Here are your total sales for the day. Here is the breakdown of PST and GST that was collected. Thank you very much; you've now paid your bill." It seems to me that it's just a simpler way of doing it, because then we're able to be in control, as a province, of what items are taxed at what rate. There's no error as far as collection, and we get our money right away.

One of the big problems that we have in the PST system—and I think most members who have been here for a while have gotten calls from small business people who are dealing with PST—is sometimes we spend far more money in collection than we get back in remittance when it comes to PST and GST, because sometimes the small business person, and I don't want to say this derogatorily, lacks the sophistication of how to manage the books when it comes to the collection. Sometimes things are done improperly and it causes all kinds of problems for the small business person, and then they owe a big whacking tax bill to the province or the federal government for PST and GST, and it puts them in peril.

We've spent a lot of money trying to do the collection of monies that were paid on goods that were purchased, and it seems to me that there's a simple way of dealing with that, and that is to have an automatic collection system tied to the cash register. You should make it voluntary, I think, at first. You should say that those who want to opt in have an opportunity to do so. The government can subsidize the software and the hardware needed in order to do this collection. I think that as more small businesses were to get into that, they would say, "Heck, it's saving me time from having to collect PST and GST, it's saving me time having to do with how we collect the money and how we account for it and how we pay for it, so now I can spend my time doing what I do best within my small business, and that is running the business that I have."

So I think there are a lot of things that this government could be doing that they're not doing in this particular area.

The last one I want to stop on is the hydro electricity rates. My leader, Howard Hampton, and others in the New Democratic Party have been calling on this government to have an industrial hydro rate. It just astounds me that the Liberal government is stonewalling on this particular issue. I remember Dalton McGuinty and I remember Dwight Duncan when they were in opposition to the Conservatives, when the Conservatives started the deregulation and the privatization of our electricity system. They were apoplectic, they were in orbit, they were opposed to what the Tories were doing, and said that if they were elected government they were going to reverse the harm that was done. They haven't reversed the harm. Quite frankly, they've done a worse job of it than the Tories would have done and they've accelerated the deregulation and part-privatization of the system. The result has been that electricity rates across this province have

skyrocketed, and for many industries where electricity is a large part of doing business it's a huge problem.

If you're in the manufacturing or the resource sector, you probably need to have a lot of electricity to operate your plant, and one of the real advantages Ontario had for many years is that we developed a public electricity system that says, "We will produce electricity and we will sell it at cost to industry and consumers." Why? It will allow investment to flow into Ontario because electricity costs are a big part of doing business. If we can give an advantage to people investing in Ontario by way of saving money when it comes to energy, we can make those investments and have those investments in Ontario in a much more important way.

That was the decision made over 100 years ago and it served Ontario well. Pulp and paper mills sprung up across northern Ontario and southern Ontario. Why? Because we had a good electricity rate as compared to other jurisdictions. Much in the way of the industry that we see has been developed in southern Ontario in regard to the automotive sector and others in the manufacturing sector was set up partly because they were able to get electricity at a much cheaper rate.

I say to this government: You should heed the advice that you're getting, not only from us as New Democrats, but from industry and communities that say electricity is one of the key components to cost and that we need to basically have an industrial hydro rate.

You may not want to believe Howard Hampton, you may not want to believe the New Democrats, but why don't you try the chamber of commerce? For example, the Northeastern Ontario Chamber of Commerce adopted that position as an official policy and are saying, "We are calling on the provincial government to have an industrial hydro rate" for the people that they represent, because they understand that it is one of the key cost factors for many of the businesses in northeastern Ontario. They are saying that we need to have an industrial hydro rate.

The government then says, "Oh, well, that means to say that the consumer will have to pay more as an individual because they will have to offset." Absolutely not—and rubbish. For years we had a public utilities system in Ontario that basically provided electricity at cost, not only to industry, but to the consumer, and ours were amongst the cheapest hydro rates in North America.

Since the Liberals have come to power, electricity rates been raised, not only for industry but also for consumers. So it's not a question of robbing from Peter to pay Paul, it's a question of providing an industrial strategy, an electricity strategy that says, "We will produce electricity at cost as one of the key economic factors in helping to develop a strong economy."

With that, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the vote on this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 3, 2008, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Arthurs has moved third reading of Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations

and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This vote will be deferred until after question period this morning.

Third reading vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day? A point of order? No?

There being no further business, this House is recessed until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1004 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to introduce, in the east members' gallery, Mr. Tim Armstrong from the great riding of Oak Ridges—Markham, father of page Amanda.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to introduce, in the west gallery, Jordy Smyth, paramedic and member of CUPE 416.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to take the opportunity to introduce some students from OUSA, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, who are present with us in the members' gallery.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Bill 119, which you are ramming through this House, will require small business owners in the construction industry to pay WSIB premiums for themselves and their office staff, even though they may never set foot on a construction site. Can you explain to this House how this is going to improve workers' safety?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to my good friend: I would hope that he would understand the value of fairness and a balanced playing field when it comes to business. I would hope that he would understand the value of safety when it comes to our workers. I want to ask the member—I don't know if he has spoken to the leader of his party, because here's what the leader of his party had to say to the—

Interjection: What's that guy's name?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: That guy's name is John Tory and here's what he had to say to the Interior Systems Contractors Association of Ontario just this past spring. He said he understood the need to be able to bring forward mandatory coverage within the construction sector. So they've written him back just recently, and they say, "I am very disappointed in you, John. You released, for

you flip-flopping and changing your decision, a reversal of a position that you brought forward”—

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Well, Minister, I'm not going to ask questions of people that aren't here today; I'm asking this question of you. Why don't you just admit that this bill has nothing to do with workers' safety? It's a tax grab, plain and simple, and so many small business owners who have joined us in this gallery today—they're here to tell you that this new tax is going to put them out of business and their employees out of a job. Minister, can you tell these hard-working job creators, the backbone of Ontario's economy, why you have silenced them by limiting debate and refusing to hear them at committee?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again, if passed, this legislation would help level the playing field in the construction industry and will be good for construction employers and employees.

Now let me get back to your leader. Here's what they had to say to your leader: "You have now completely reversed this position," Mr. Tory, "which is unacceptable. Our members feel that you have neglected to fully honour your commitment and they are questioning their support" or any support "of your party. It is our fear that your objectivity has been clouded"—clouded—by different stakeholders.

"We are encouraged by the minister's announcements on Bill 119 and I think this will help our 10,000 construction workers."

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Minister, these small business-people that are here today are not the only ones who object to this new \$11,000 tax grab by you and your ministry. This list also includes Mark Marmer of Signature Electric in Don Valley East, Christine Crewe of G&C Roofing in Brant, the Greater Barrie Chamber of Commerce and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. These business owners want you to know that they already have insurance, more than adequate, that costs less and provides far more coverage than the WSIB. So Minister, if you're going to require them to have insurance, why don't you give them a choice?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member opposite, I don't know who's speaking for that party. You hear one thing in the spring from Mr. Tory; now you hear another thing from the member from Sarnia-Lambton.

The member from Sarnia-Lambton has been reading some letters and comments into the record here. I would like to read him one from one of his constituents. Let's look at what Doug Chalmers, the director of Aluma Systems has to say. Well, Doug says, "Congratulations! Absolutely brilliant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and improve the quality of life for all of us."

Maybe this member is unaware that we've had many tragic stories of construction workers who are not insured and find themselves dealing with a lot of hardship. We

want to make sure that they are taken care of, that they're safe and that we level—

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

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Premier, and it's on the same issue, Bill 119.

Premier, in June this year, you said, "Listen, why would you raise taxes in a time of economic challenges? Is there anybody that supports that? Not even the NDP support that." Now, five short months later, at a time of widespread uncertainty about the economy and where it's headed over the next few years, hundreds of thousands of jobs already lost and many more in jeopardy, your government, through Bill 119, is imposing up to a \$11,000 tax on small businesses.

Why in the world, in this environment, would you, as Premier, given your own words in June, allow this bill to go forward?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. The spirit that informs this bill is one of fairness and safety for our workers, and we also want to be fair, given the economic context. That's why we have delayed costs until 2012. My friend is not suggesting, I am sure, that somehow the global economic crisis will continue to prevail until 2012. We are confident that the economy will be much stronger by then. That's why we have taken the prudent measure to ensure that costs don't arise until four years from now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, the bottom line is that the Premier's words and \$1.50 might buy you a cup of coffee. That's a reality.

This new tax can't be justified on any common sense grounds, and as a result, the government has cut off debate and limited public hearings. In the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's response to this new tax, they state, "At a time when Ontario's economy is in turmoil, an added expense can, without a doubt, impact an employer's ability to continue to operate." That's what they're talking about with respect to this new tax. The chamber, the CFIB and hundreds of small businesses have warned you of the dangers of this legislation, yet you continue down this road. What's the real reason you're doing this? What's really behind this? Let's hear about it.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, this is about making sure Ontario workers have the protection they need if they get injured on the job. It's about bringing more fairness into the sector as a whole.

I think it's worthwhile listening to the words of the president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, Mr. Ian Cunningham, who said, "This is a timely issue, as the construction industry is actively seeking to proactively improve workplace safety across the industry and address the often thorny issue of coverage for independent operators."

I think it speaks to fairness; it speaks to safety for our workers. And we've taken the economic circumstances

clearly into account by ensuring they don't kick in until four years from now, in 2012.

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The sad and, in many respects, disturbing reality is that there is no justifiable, or in our view, legitimate reason for this bill. Perhaps the truth can be found with the list of witnesses the government has chosen to hear from on this bill: the Ontario Pipe Trades Council, who donated \$400,000 to Working Families; the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council—a fellow by the name of Pat Dillon, their manager and a principal of Working Families; the council's director of government regulations, who doubled as a CFO for Working Families.

Premier, why do these unions take priority over the hundreds of thousands of small businesses who are the backbone of this province's economy? Why are you doing this?

1040

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: When we received complaints as a result of retroactively cutting capital taxes for Ontario businesses, when we received complaints for doing something which was pretty well without precedent, I don't recall the leader of the official opposition standing up and saying, "This is unfair to the labour community, and if there's any money available, you ought to be putting it into the labour sector."

What we're trying to do is to be fair here. What we're trying to do is to be fair to all people working in the industry, we're trying to be fair to all employers working in the industry, and we're trying to be fair given our economic circumstances. That's why we have delayed implementation, from a financial perspective, until 2012. I think that is fair. Just as we were fair when we retroactively cut capital taxes for business, we also think it's fair—

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

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: A question to the Premier: Just a couple of years ago, the McGuinty government said that its auto sector strategy was going to guarantee the jobs of General Motors workers across Ontario. Since that time, we've witnessed the loss of thousands of jobs at General Motors. Today, the Premier is saying, "I think there is something else we need to grab hold of here. I think we're going to end up with a smaller auto sector in the province of Ontario. I think we're going to end up with fewer jobs than we have at present in the province of Ontario" in the auto sector.

Premier, your government, the McGuinty government, has had five years to reposition the auto sector in this province and ensure sustainable jobs. I want to ask this: What have you been doing over the last five years? You've had lots to say, but now we see fewer and fewer jobs and the risk of losing thousands more.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague knows of some of our genuine successes in a very troubled time for the global auto sector. He knows that we turned 500 million public dollars into leveraging \$7 billion worth of new investment. We have created or secured thousands of jobs. He's also very much aware, I know, of the global economic crisis, which is having an influence on us, and I think he's also aware of the fact that there is an excess of capacity in the North American market, particularly when comes to the Big Three. We learned in the newspaper yesterday that if we shut down all of the Ontario production alone, there would still be excess capacity in the North American market.

That's why we're at the table working with the federal government, and with the Americans now, to ensure that we are not disadvantaged as a result of the continuing restructuring.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government wants to talk as if somehow what's happening here is a surprise. The fact of the matter is that this has been a continuing issue for five years. Just a couple of years ago, the McGuinty government was patting itself on the back and saying, "Oh, we're moving ahead, and this is going to guarantee jobs" and you were shovelling hundreds of millions of dollars out the door to auto companies.

My question is this: While the McGuinty government was shovelling that money out the door, why didn't you insist that products like more energy-efficient cars would be produced in Ontario's plants? Why didn't you insist on some job guarantees in return for the hundreds of millions of dollars that the McGuinty government shovelled out the door?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm trying to figure out where the leader of the NDP stands on this, because some days he's telling us that we should avoid any kind of financial association with the Ontario auto sector. He talks about shovelling money out the door in support of our auto sector, in support of those 400,000 Ontario jobs, in support of those 12 Ontario communities, in support of an industry that benefits the nation as a whole—he refers to that as "shovelling."

We are going to continue to work hard and well with the federal government, with the Ontario auto sector, with the CAW. We're going to work as hard and as well as we can with the Americans now to ensure that as this restructuring continues, we are not disadvantaged here. We want to build a strong foundation that shows great promise for the future. I am confident that we will get this right and that those 400,000 working in this industry—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, I'm concerned about your track record. I'm concerned that companies like General Motors have got close to \$200 million and there was no guarantee of more energy-efficient cars or trucks in Ontario; that the General Motors half-ton plant is being closed and moved to Mexico. I'm concerned that this is a government that has boasted over and over again

that it has a strategy for the auto sector and all we're seeing is the loss of thousands of jobs.

Given your track record over the last five years, why should Ontario workers in the auto sector have any confidence in the McGuinty government now?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm going to be meeting with the leader of the CAW shortly. I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of our auto sector, the Detroit Three, and Honda and Toyota. I've had an opportunity to talk to the Prime Minister about this. Ministers Bryant and Clement are in Detroit, and shortly they'll be going on to Washington.

I'll put our record as a government up against any American state. You should ask them what they think of Ontario and the fact that we remain, now, for five years running, the number one producer of vehicles in North America. Ask them what they think about us landing \$7 billion worth of new investment in the last five years. I'll put our record up against anybody else's.

What's at stake right now is the future of the sector. There are some important questions yet to be answered in this regard. We will keep working hard and well with all concerned. We will build a solid foundation that shows great promise for the future of the auto industry in the province of Ontario.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: What Ontario workers have seen is that as the McGuinty government continues to talk, thousands more workers lose their jobs.

To the Premier: It's not just the auto sector that's in serious trouble. Four years ago, five years ago, the forest sector came here to Queen's Park and said to the McGuinty government, "Your electricity policy is going to drive thousands of forest sector jobs out of this province." The McGuinty government said, "You don't know what you're talking about." Well, here we are now, and Ontario has virtually the highest industrial hydro rates in Canada and, no surprise, thousands of forest sector jobs have been lost.

Premier, here's your track record: You preside over the loss of thousands of jobs in the forest sector; now you preside over the loss of thousands of jobs in the auto sector. Why should any worker in either of those sectors have any confidence in anything that the McGuinty government says or promises?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, it's hard to keep up with the leader of the NDP in terms of his shifting views on these kinds of issues. One of the things that he is talking about now is that we should be subsidizing electricity prices, but this is what he has said in the past: "Industrial energy price subsidization can be attractive in theory, but tricky in practice.... I think it far better to work with industry to lower its energy costs through greater efficiency, not through a scheme of subsidized rates." He put that in his book *Public Power*. He was right at that time. That's the kind of policy that we have adopted. That's the kind of thing that we'll continue to

do, working hand in hand with the forestry sector in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: A thoughtful industrial hydro rate has nothing to do with subsidization. A thoughtful industrial hydro rate has everything to do with valuing good manufacturing jobs.

Let me give you an example of what's happening. This is the example, again, from Dryden, Ontario, one of the most modern paper mills in all of Canada. It's had over \$3 billion of new investment in the last 15 years, but the mill is now shut down. Meanwhile, the company that shut it down is going to operate 10 uncoated free-sheet paper mills of the same kind in the United States. How could that happen, Premier? No mill in Ontario providing uncoated, free-sheet paper, which is photocopy paper, but 10 of them continue to operate in the United States. How could that happen, Premier? What's the explanation of the McGuinty government?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Without doubt, we've been giving \$146 million in electricity rebates to the major paper and pulp companies in Ontario. The reason for that was to help them deal with pulp, because it's an expensive product to produce.

If you read what they are saying when these companies are closing down for long, short or permanent periods of time—and they are doing it in Newfoundland, they are doing it in BC, they are doing it in Quebec—electricity isn't the issue. They do not have a market for their products.

They are speaking about inventory, they're talking about liquidity, and they're dealing with a worldwide crisis in the forestry sector. The challenges we face here in Ontario are being faced right across the world in terms of dealing with the forestry sector. There isn't the market for the products. They're going through the transition. They know they have to deal—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the minister, again, demonstrates what planet the McGuinty government isn't on.

The fact of the matter is, world newsprint consumption is going up, but newsprint mills in Ontario are shutting down. The fact of the matter is, there are 10 mills producing photocopy paper in the United States now, all owned by Domtar, and they don't operate one mill in Ontario. The fact of the matter is, no paper machines have been shut down in Manitoba, no pulp machines have been shut down, but more than 10 machines have been shut down in northwestern Ontario.

I say again, why should any forest sector worker have any confidence in what the McGuinty government says when your track record is destroying literally thousands of jobs, month after month, mainly across northern On-

tario? Why should anyone have any confidence in what you say or promise now?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: We have flowed over \$407 million to the forestry sector to help them deal with challenges that they're facing. Whether it's the uptake of the roads for primary roads for logging, whether it's putting through additional prosperity fund grants for added value marketing or for new—

Mr. Howard Hampton: While mills shut down.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Excuse me—or for new saws for mills. The fact of the matter is that if the member would do a little better research, he would actually find out that since the Olympics ended in Beijing, the worldwide paper total has gone down—not up, but down.

So what we're doing is working with the forestry companies, not the rhetoric that you hear from across the floor, sitting down and talking about how we move two years, three years from now into a viable, sustainable industry.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have representatives of the Muskoka Builders' Association—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Question?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's to the Minister of Labour, Speaker.

I'm pleased to have representatives of the Muskoka Builders' Association in the public gallery today. Their president, David Nodwell, wrote to you about Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. He's here today so you can answer his question for a change.

Mr. Nodwell writes, "We are deeply concerned with the extension of mandatory WSIB coverage to partners, executive officers and owners. Currently key company personnel carry private insurance." He goes on to say, "...are owners really likely ever to make a claim when doing so would raise the premiums they would have to pay for their company." He's also very concerned about the speed that this bill is moving through the legislative process.

Minister, if you're not going to implement this bill for three years, why won't you allow the committee to travel the province and hear the concerns of construction businesses like those behind me in the gallery today?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I, too, welcome the Muskoka builders and thank them for being here and for their consultation on this very important piece of legislation.

For 15 years, this piece of proposed legislation has been debated. The last consultation process took place in 2006.

We often forget why we're doing this, but we're doing it for those construction workers. We want to make sure that they are safe in the workplace. We've seen too many serious injuries. We've seen fatalities. We want to make sure that they are insured, that their families are taken care of and that there is fairness, but also, during these consultations, as well as now in committee, we are always open to strengthening the legislation to make sure

that we get it right so that we can close the loopholes of misclassification of workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, small business people take pride in doing business the right way. As a construction-related association, they place health and safety as a top priority. The underground economy is a concern to them and they would welcome changes that address this issue, but this bill doesn't.

Minister, about a third of the members of the Muskoka Builders' Association took a day off work to come down here. They are obviously very concerned about your bill. They are asking you to take the time to get this bill done the right way. They are very concerned about the lack of specifics in your bill, so maybe you could actually answer President Nodwell's question, which is, "What specific mechanisms exist in this legislation that will reveal underground operators?" And he is here today.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can tell the member, the Muskoka builders and all construction workers is that this proposed piece of legislation will close those loopholes. It will not allow people to misclassify workers. It will make sure that companies don't under-report the number of employees that they have and that they all pay their premiums, because we want to have a fair, level playing field.

Let me read you a story of somebody who was hurt on the job site, a fatality. One example comes to mind, a construction worker who left behind a spouse and children. He died from a fall, but he did not have optional WSIB insurance. That means his spouse and children were not entitled to lump sum benefits, reimbursement for burial expenses—they wouldn't receive those from the WSIB during that very difficult time. This will address that. The spouse and young children also have not received the—

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

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The 10 highest salaries for university presidents range from \$311,000 to \$504,000 a year. The top 10 payouts when they leave range from \$360,000 to \$1.3 million, and these numbers do not include the allowances for residence, cars, and clubs.

When students are struggling with rising tuition and crippling debt, how does the minister justify these kinds of salaries and payouts to university presidents?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to answer a question about student assistance and support for students. I feel the member's question may have been prompted by the presence of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance here today, who are joined by the college student association. I had a very productive meeting with them yesterday.

The McGuinty government is very proud of what we've done in terms of student assistance. With the intro-

duction of the Reaching Higher plan, \$1.5 billion of it was earmarked specifically for student assistance. We've doubled our investments in student aid since 2003-04. We're helping 150,000 students per year with financial assistance. We've tripled the number of grants available to students. Right now, one in four students—approximately 120,000—receive non-repayable grants, and we've increased OSAP maximums by 27%—

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know the minister has a Ph.D. and he would have understood my question. He didn't answer my question. These salaries are just not right. The Premier makes \$200,000 a year, and he gets beaten up here every day answering our questions.

Tuition is going through the roof, we don't have enough full-time professors, our class sizes are just too high, and your government just hands out tax dollars to universities and lets them do whatever they want with them. Universities are not autonomous; they are public institutions and they answer to you.

When will your ministry do its job and impose limits on these contracts that are being given to university administrators?

1100

Hon. John Milloy: The issue at hand is making sure that post-secondary education is affordable for Ontario students. Since we've come to power, we've significantly increased per-student funding to both college and university students. Colleges have seen a 43% increase, universities a 25% increase.

Let me continue with some more statistics for the member. Recently, we introduced a \$27-million distance grant which will benefit 24,000 students, assisting with transportation costs for students in remote and rural areas. We've limited students' annual repayable debt to \$7,000 through the Ontario student opportunity grant.

Mr. Speaker, I will put our record up against theirs any day. Let me remind him of theirs. They cut student aid by nearly 50%. They cut funding to post-secondary education. They promised to eliminate tuition, then freeze it. Instead, they increased tuition fees by—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The Member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I know that this government has been working hard to increase access to health care. Today, 630,000 more Ontarians have access to a family doctor than did in 2003. But there are still Ontarians left without access to a family health care provider.

I know the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care recently travelled to northern Ontario, a region where there is significant demand for family doctors. While he was there, he announced the expansion of an innovative program which is currently providing Ontarians increased access to care. Can the minister tell the House

how he is helping unattached patients in northern Ontario get the health care that they need?

Hon. David Caplan: I'd like to thank the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for his advocacy in this area, and I'm proud to tell the House that we have issued a call for proposals for three new nurse-practitioner-led clinics in the Sault Ste. Marie and Erie St. Clair local health integration networks, and in the North West Local Health Integration Network. Nurse-practitioner-led clinics are an innovative way to improve access to high-quality care. Nurse practitioners are able to treat common illnesses and injuries, and they can write prescriptions and order lab tests and X-rays, among other things. Through collaboration with physicians and other health care partners, these new clinics will focus on chronic disease management and prevention, as well as health promotion.

It's a model that's already working incredibly well in Sudbury, the home of Canada's first nurse-practitioner-led clinic. Already, the Sudbury clinic is providing primary care to nearly 2,000 Ontarians who otherwise wouldn't have access to family care. This is an innovative model. It is something that I'm very proud of—

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

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I'm glad to hear that the Sudbury clinic has increased access to health care for Ontarians in need. Still, I'm hoping that the Minister of Health will be able to elaborate further on the effectiveness of nurse-practitioner-led clinics. Some say that these clinics reduce the likelihood of further investment in the province's family health teams. I ask the Minister of Health to address these concerns. How can he be sure that nurse-practitioner-led clinics are effectively delivering health care to Ontarians?

Hon. David Caplan: That is an excellent question. First of all, I would like to say that I'm extremely proud of what our first nurse-practitioner-led clinic has accomplished in Sudbury. I know that members from the Sudbury area share that view. Moving forward, we will evaluate the clinics' performance to find the best practices and identify ways that we can improve the model. But I'm sure of this: Nurse practitioners deliver high-quality care and effective quality care for Ontarians. They are an integral part of our vision for the health care of Ontarians.

Our plan is not a choice between two models of care. We are committed to creating another 50 family health teams, which will bring our total to over 200 teams. This plan complements our commitment to opening a total of 25 nurse practitioner clinics right across the province of Ontario. Both initiatives are part of our family-health-care-for-all strategy, a strategy that aims to improve—

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

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Over the past two committee days, as a result of you shutting down public debate on Bill 119, we heard

from a small number of groups. Over half of them were union representatives, each of which has made significant donations to the Ontario Liberal Party, and the Laborers' International Union of North America—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just caution the member on where she may be going with this question and remind her of standing order 23(i).

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Laborers' International Union of North America was invited by you to speak to the committee, a union that supports the Working Families Coalition. Minister, can you tell the people in the gallery today why the Ontario Liberal Party's website is advertising a \$3,000-per-table event hosted at this union's main hall in Hamilton on December 2?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member—maybe she has not heard me here in this House—that this proposed piece of legislation is about fairness, levelling the playing field, and the safety of our construction workers.

I know that your leader—I hope you can find him—got it right at one point this past spring when he said and he understood—and let me read you something from some comments from an association, what they said about John Tory: “I understand that he insists that a level playing field should be created throughout the bidding process, and that any unfair advantage to the underground economy should be eliminated.”

I would hope that the member would speak with John Tory so she can get an understanding of why it's important to bring forward this proposed legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Minister, you can't duck and dodge. Construction workers are already covered by WSIB, so there's no valid reason for this bill.

The International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, which you invited to present at committee, refers to itself as a special-interest group that strongly supports Working Families Coalition. Another invitee of yours, the Ontario Pipe Trades Council, in their presentation, referred to non-union construction businesses as “unscrupulous” and non-union apprenticeships as “so-called apprentices.”

Minister, do you agree with the Ontario Pipe Trades Council, which gave Working Families Coalition \$400,000 in 2007? Do you think that non-union small businesses are unscrupulous, and do you think that non-union apprentices should be referred to as “so-called”? Because, certainly, one of your generous friends thinks so.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I believe is that we should take care of those hard-working men and women in construction—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the members to allow the minister to answer the question. I'm asking difficulty hearing his answer.

Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: As I said, we should make sure that those men and women in the construction industry are taken care of, that their safety is taken care of.

Your leader assured the construction industry in the spring of 2007 that he understood that the WSIB reform was essential to the health of the construction industry.

What I can tell you is the McGuinty government, through ReNew Ontario, is investing \$30-billion-plus in infrastructure. The people who build that infrastructure are those men and women. We want to make sure that the businesses are on a level playing field and those men and women—

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

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: To the Minister of Community and Social Services. Government members have accused me of fearmongering, whistle-blowing, and using grandparents raising their grandkids as a political football, having you believe that I fabricated the eligibility changes to the temporary care assistance program. The fact is that grandparents came to me for help, and I brought their concerns forward. If this is being a whistle-blower, I'm proud to be one.

I will ask this minister once again: Will she come clean to all the members of this House that she's cutting off temporary care assistance to grandparents who are raising their grandkids?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I think that it's important to reiterate what temporary care assistance is. Temporary care assistance is a program that is offered to provide financial support to non-parental caregivers who are temporarily caring for a child that they have no legal obligation to support. This could be grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbours, friends, for example, caring for a child that the parents are not able to care for because they're being hospitalized—for different reasons; they could be subjected to domestic violence and drug addiction. This program is offered to support those people.

This government is very pleased to be supportive, and every year we increase the budget. When we came into power, the budget was reduced by the previous government. We increased it from \$8 million to \$12 million, and we will—

1110

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Yesterday, the minister stood up in this House and said: “The people who are looking after children who are in need today will continue to receive the support that this government is offering.” I'll let the House be the judge of this statement.

We have word today, Minister, that Brant county grandparents are the next to be completely cut off from temporary care assistance. Brant's director in charge of temp care met with grandparents last week in her area and informed them that not one of them meet the minister's new eligibility criteria and they will be cut off in the new year. Both the minister and the PA have said that grandparents should expect no changes to their

assistance. Tell us how many more grandparents raising their grandkids should expect to ring in the new year cut off?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's very unfortunate that this member is telling—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It is very unfortunate that this member is telling grandparents that they're going to lose their temporary care assistance. This is not true. Those people who are eligible today will be—

Mr. Paul Miller: Resign.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind, and I've reminded the honourable member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek on a number of occasions, about personal comments directed at individuals. I just ask you to be cautious of your comments.

Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's very unfortunate. I will repeat it in this House: The grandparents that are eligible today will be eligible tomorrow. This member brought grandparents to my parliamentary assistant's office and you know what, Mr. Speaker? None of them have been cut off. He's scaring the grandparents off and it's very unfortunate. This program has been in place for 30 years and will continue to be in place.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. I know that modernizing Ontario's Mining Act has been a priority for this government. Minister, I understand that since formally launching this process in July, you have held a number of public and stakeholder consultations as well as a series of workshops with First Nations and organizations, and meetings with tribal councils. These consultations and workshops were originally to wrap up on October 15, with legislation being introduced in December this year. However, last week, your ministry announced the second extension in the dialogue process. Minister, please tell the House why it is important to extend the deadline for a second time, how it will affect the industry, and if the government will be able to keep its commitment of having new Mining Act rules in place in 2009.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you to the member for Huron–Bruce for the question. Of course, the member is the MPP for North America's largest salt mine, so thank you very much for your great support.

After ongoing concerns were expressed by First Nations communities and their leadership, my ministry, along with the significant involvement of my colleague, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, was able to come to an agreement with our First Nations partners to extend the consultation period to January 15, 2009. We believe this extension will allow First Nations communities more time to discuss, consider and provide input on their position regarding changes to the Mining Act.

We believe this extra time is extremely important in order to achieve effective and appropriate legislation.

During this time, as well, we will continue our outreach with industry and we will welcome additional input from them and other stakeholders. This extension will not affect our overall time line, though. We still plan to introduce legislation in the spring session of the Legislature and we still propose that the new rules—

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

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Thank you, Minister, for elaborating to the House on the extension of the consultation process of the Mining Act review. Minister, I know that over the past several years our government has been working very hard to continually improve relationships and our engagement with aboriginal people. Your ministry has done so by responding to First Nations' concerns over consultation time lines about this review. Could you please, Minister, elaborate on how First Nations and organizations across Ontario have responded to the extension of the consultation process of the Mining Act review?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm pleased to stand in front of you today to say that we listened, we respected and we responded. I think it may be safe to say that in previous governments of all stripes, when issues like these were raised by First Nations, they probably would not have been taken so seriously. We believe in this new relationship, and we've demonstrated that by respecting the concerns expressed by the First Nations. I don't expect unanimity with the 133 chiefs across Ontario, but I believe that this gesture of goodwill and government-to-government respect will help lead us to a position on the Mining Act that can be acceptable to the First Nations, the government of Ontario and the mining industry.

We have found the responses from the First Nations leadership to be supportive. I want to thank Regional Chief Angus Toulouse and Grand Chiefs Beaucage, Kelly and Phillips for their efforts and leadership. I'll do my best to ensure that their voices are heard both in this process and throughout the government of Ontario.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE BOARD

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a simple and direct question for the Minister of Labour: What is the current value of the unfunded liability at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The member may be aware, or not, that the WSIB is an arm's-length agency of the Ministry of Labour. They are the fourth-largest insurance company in all of North America. They do have a large fund, and they do have an unfunded liability. They do have a plan to reduce that liability, although all of us in this House know with our own—my own personal RRSPs have gone down 20-odd per cent; there are many different funds. The WSIB works diligently on reducing that unfunded liability. They have a financial committee in place that works on it, and I know that they will

continue to be diligent about their work on that plan to reduce that unfunded liability.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm shocked to learn that the Minister of Labour does not know what the level of unfunded liability is in the province of Ontario.

Employers and workers know that an unfunded liability at the WSIB means the board does not have enough money set aside to pay its future obligations. It means higher premiums down the road or reduced benefits for injured workers, or both.

This government is circumventing normal debate, trampling on democracy, ramming Bill 119 through this House, bringing in a new job-killing tax on small business, sending the wrong signal in a time of economic crisis. At the same time, they're playing a shell game with the board's investment portfolio at a time when the stock market has lost 30% of its value this year alone. It all adds up to irresponsible financial management that is unsustainable.

When will the minister acknowledge the concerns of small business, withdraw Bill 119, and table a credible long-term plan to pay down the unfunded liability at the WSIB?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: First, I'll speak to the WSIB as an agency of the Ministry of Labour. The WSIB has been around since 1914, almost 100 years. They have a legacy of protecting workers, but also working with employers. The WSIB meets both with employers and employees to decide on their premiums, to make sure that it is done in a balanced way, to make sure that there is stability—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I warn the member from Renfrew that his comments have been a little loud, and it's very difficult—please consider that as a warning.

Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: —and to make sure that there is fair and reasonable compensation for injured workers and financial stability for employers. That's what they do.

We believe that workers should have that safeguard of WSIB coverage. We will continue to work with them to make sure that they address any financial—

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

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Will the minister explain to this House why he is allowing the erosion of resources for services to children with complex disabilities in Sarnia-Lambton?

Hon. David Caplan: I don't believe that the premise of the question is correct. In fact, we're seeing an increase in resources in our health care system—over \$11 billion, a 37% increase. If the member has some information to share, I think she should perhaps correct her record and not create the impression that there has been

an erosion of resources but rather, under this government, there has been a significant increase in resources.

This has been one of the achievements of this government, that we have been able to whittle down a \$5.5-billion deficit that was hidden, that was left behind by the previous government. But because of recent economic—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member from Nepean-Carleton knows that we generally are not raising points of order in question period.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment she just made.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I withdraw.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, the minister should know that last night, parents in Sarnia-Lambton met to object to the government's cut-throat bidding process that caused the CCAC's decision to eliminate speech and occupational therapy and physiotherapy services, provided by Pathways Health Centre for Children, for kids with disabilities. This means a difficult transition for those children and breaks their continuity of care, the familiarity and quality of services that they have been receiving through Pathways, some of them since they were born. Pathways is being forced, in the meanwhile, to terminate staff at a time when waiting lists for these kinds of services are growing longer and longer.

Rather than shirking responsibility, will the minister respond to the parents' concerns and move to fund and protect the Pathways program in Sarnia-Lambton?

Hon. David Caplan: Unfortunately, the member presents false and inaccurate information. I understand that the community—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It goes both ways within this House. Stop the clock for a moment, please.

It's one thing to be making a comment. But to start to impute motives one way or the other—it's not helpful for trying to maintain decorum in this House. I just ask all members to be a little conscious of the language that they use, because you can see how it causes disruption within this chamber.

I would hope that members would have listened to all the speeches yesterday in Ottawa about trying to bring decorum. We've been doing very well but today we just seem to be losing it a bit.

Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I understand that the community care access centre has selected a new service provider—which was providing subcontracted services for Pathways—and that the transfer of providers will take place by early December; that there will be—and I want to be categorical—no break in service for the children, and they will most likely maintain the same speech pathologist.

We are going to continue to support Pathways Health Centre for Children in their role as a children's treatment centre to provide kids with the support that they need.

We are working diligently to provide greater access to services for special-needs children and youth and reduce wait times for those services.

Unlike what the member has indicated earlier, these are the real facts: that we have increased funding for CCACs by—

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

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, will you release the impact cost analysis that should have been prepared before you introduced Bill 119, and make public what these changes will mean to the thousands of small businesses across Ontario?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can tell the member is, what this will mean is that we will safeguard thousands of construction workers who today do not have insurance coverage. What I can tell the member is that the revenue leakage to the WSIB that is happening will be curtailed. What I can tell the member is that those good players, the good businesses that are paying their premiums, will have a level playing field. That's what we're working toward.

I don't know if the member understands that, but we are fighting for fairness here, to make sure that we level the playing field and to make sure that we safeguard those hard-working construction workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I don't know if the minister understands this. My question was, "Are you going to release the impact cost analysis that should have been done before you introduced Bill 119?" Bolton Electric, in Dufferin-Caledon, has done that impact cost analysis, and in their case they are looking at a \$4,600 increase in their WSIB premiums. Bolton Electric has 12 employees, and they've been doing all of the right things to protect those employees. The time and money Bolton Electric invests yearly in staff safety has proven that their proactive approach has reduced lost-time accidents substantially. By forcing them to insure under WSIB, you are directly affecting their competitiveness.

Minister, I ask again, are you prepared to direct your ministry to prepare and release the impact cost analysis so that you can understand how this change affects small business in Ontario?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'm glad that the company mentioned is investing in their employees and in health and safety. This is what this is all about: making sure that companies do bring those safeguards to their employees and making sure that we level the playing field. For too long, there have been organizations, businesses out there, misclassifying their workers and putting their workers in precarious situations. I've spoken to one of the cases in the letters that I got where there was a fatality of a construction worker and he was not insured, and what happened to that family—where they did not get any benefits. We want to make sure that those families do get benefits. We want to make sure that those workers, if

they do get injured with that company and all construction companies in Ontario, are insured and that we safeguard those employees.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Yesterday, we heard from the lawyer for a Scarborough man found not criminally responsible for killing his family because he suffered from schizophrenia. It's believed this tragedy could have been prevented if Ontario had better mental health care programs available in the community. Why does the minister continue to treat community mental health as the poor cousin of health care?

Hon. David Caplan: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Thank you for the question. I really don't know what the adequacy of the mental health provisions are, but I know that, in this particular instance, the member opposite had asked for an inquest. I would suggest to both parties that they would certainly look to advise the family of the opportunities open to them to deal with the local coroner and ask that local coroner to make a decision. Then, if they're not satisfied, I would encourage the members to advise the individuals concerned that they could appeal to the regional coroner and have him or her make that decision, and if they're not satisfied with that, then obviously they can appeal to the chief coroner.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I know I said it in French, but usually he understands.

I want to know why we continue to treat mental health as a poor cousin. Here's what the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario, which is with us today, has to say: "The number of people with mental disorders in the justice system is increasing at the rate of about 10% a year." According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario spends less per capita than any other province, and despite increases over the last four years, mental health spending has declined and represents only 3% of the health care spending of this province.

I ask again, to the Minister of Health, when will this minister truly support community mental health programs so that terrible tragedies like those experienced by the Chau family can be averted in the future?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. David Caplan: I think it's important to put this in a little bit of context. New Democrats, when in power, cut mental health funding by \$23 million in 1992. They cut mental health funding again in 1994 and 1995 by an additional \$42 million. The Conservative Party had no base increase for community mental health services in eight years.

I want to contrast that with this side of the House. We've had \$270 million in new funding that has expanded services to over 200,000 Ontarians and hired

1,100 new mental health workers. So if there is a comparison between the commitments for mental health between the various parties and the actions that have been taken, I am happy to compare the record of this party and this government to the New Democrats and to the Conservatives any day of the week and twice on Sunday.

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

Mr. David Zimmer: My question is for the Minister of Culture. After a year of renovations, the Art Gallery of Ontario reopened its doors to the public this past weekend. Admission was free for the weekend. The reopening was covered extensively by the media, including the foreign media, most particularly a really rave review by the New York Times.

I have to say the new AGO is stunning. More than 3,500 donors and various levels of government contributed to the renewal of this cultural icon and, truly, the newly transformed AGO does not disappoint.

Minister, what was Ontario's role in the renewal of this cultural icon?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I'm delighted to respond to my honourable colleague. Last Friday, I was fortunate indeed to participate at the reopening of the Ontario art gallery. Frank Gehry's magnificent architectural treasure will engage, captivate and inspire Ontarians and tourists for generations to come. It is a jewel that links the historic buildings, the marvellous modern addition, the streetscape and the neighbourhood where Gehry grew up.

The wisdom of this government is mind-boggling in investing \$39 million in the Ontario art gallery's restoration and reconstruction. May I say that our international reputation has gone right off the charts. It will bring countless international visitors to this city, celebrating the renaissance that is Toronto and that is the hub to this wonderful province.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The clock was below zero.

DEFERRED VOTES

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS (NO 2)

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 114, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters, to amend the Ottawa Congress Centre Act and to enact the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 114, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation

anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions, modifiant la Loi sur le Centre des congrès d'Ottawa et édictant la Loi de 2008 sur la Société ontarienne de financement de la croissance.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1133 to 1143.

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

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol
Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza
Arthurs, Wayne	Duncan, Dwight	Naqvi, Yasir
Balkissoon, Bas	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Oraziotti, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Gravelle, Michael	Qadri, Shafiq
Best, Margaret	Hoy, Pat	Ramali, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Mangat, Amrit	Smitherman, George
Carroll, Aileen	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Chan, Michael	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Watson, Jim
Craitor, Kim	McMeekin, Ted	Wilkinson, John
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Milloy, John	

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

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Bailey, Robert	MacLeod, Lisa	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Marchese, Rosario	Savoline, Joyce
Bisson, Gilles	Martiniuk, Gerry	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Miller, Norm	Shurman, Peter
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Paul	Sterling, Norman W.
Gélinas, France	Munro, Julia	Tabuns, Peter
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Jones, Sylvia	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakubuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 59; the nays are 30.

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

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise today on behalf of my constituents whose voices this government have ignored, and whose businesses are in jeopardy if and when Bill 119 becomes law.

The McGuinty government's WSIB legislation is a slap in the face to construction industry owners who are

already looking after the health and safety of their employees. It is an insult to insinuate that the small and medium-sized firms are not safeguarding the well-being of their employees. Their employees are an investment in their company, and they're doing just that.

Thanks to the regressive apprenticeship policies of this McGuinty government, they need to keep their skilled tradespeople healthy and happy, and they do.

The construction companies are asking you, Premier, to back out. They are already struggling to keep their heads above water between your excessive corporate taxes and health taxes.

Premier, you have hidden your head in the sand for too long instead of dealing with our sagging economic situation. Now we are in a recession and our small businesses will be exceptionally hard hit. With all that going on, you pick this time, Mr. Premier, to kick these businesses while they're down.

I'm sure there's no correlation between the unions that pushed you to bring Bill 119 forward and the Liberal fundraisers being held in union halls, but perception is reality. So then why now, and why are you in such a hurry?

CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Today I rise in the House on World Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Day—COPD.

Today at 4 p.m. on the legislative grounds, the Ontario Lung Association will be joining patients who suffer from COPD. These patients have walked, cycled, jogged and rowed thousands of kilometres to reach Queen's Park in celebrating COPD Day. They come from every riding to connect with MPPs, to tell us how important it is for the government to support the Ontario lung health framework that supports COPD programs and services across the province.

COPD is a term referring to two lung diseases: chronic bronchitis and emphysema. COPD is the fourth leading cause of death in Canada, expected to be the third in about 10 years. About 500,000 Ontarians have COPD, and there is no cure. We know, though, that pulmonary rehabilitation works.

Even though the lung association does incredible work, awareness about COPD still remains low. The celebration today brings to the forefront the importance of understanding this chronic disease, the need for greater diagnosis, education and management as well as the benefit of pulmonary rehabilitation. I encourage members to make their way to the front of the Legislature to welcome these sufferers and to listen to their stories.

SAUGEEN TERRITORY AWARDS OF RECOGNITION AND SUCCESS

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Today I would like to congratulate my constituents who were winners at the 2008 Saugeen Territory Awards of Recognition and Success.

The STARS awards were held on October 29 in Arthur, and were presented by the Saugeen Economic Development Corp. and Industry Canada, in conjunction with local chambers of commerce and business associations.

The Falls Inn, owned by Meg and Dwayne Hallman of Walters Falls, was the winner of the Entrepreneur of the Year Award and Company of the Year Award with over 15 employees. The Entrepreneur of the Year Award was awarded because they have shown initiative and innovation in business with the introduction of their new service to the community. The Company of the Year Award was received for company growth, employee relations, safety workplace and environmental awareness.

Sean McGivern of Desboro, owner of Grassroots Organics, was winner of the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award. McGivern's company grows and mills organic grain on the property. The grain is used to produce flour, cereal and pasta and is sold locally.

Sidekicks Café in Markdale, owned by John Daley, was the winner of the Corporate Citizens of the Year Award. Daley and his café were given this award because of their outstanding charity work in the community.

Top O' the Rock in Eugenia, owned by Debbie Clark, was winner of the Company of the Year Award for under 15 employees. The Top O' the Rock experienced a fire, forcing the company to rebuild. They have demonstrated growth, good employee relations and safety in the workplace.

Markdale Foodland, owned by Doug Crawford, was awarded the customer service excellence award. This award is given to the business that provides consistent exceptional customer service.

Again, I would like to congratulate my constituents for winning these awards and for providing my riding with excellent products and services.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Toby Barrett: More evidence of the outrage felt by businesses across Ontario at this government's blind rush to ram their WSIB bill through to appease their cronies—many of the voices from ridings with McGuinty representatives falling on deaf ears.

In the riding of Brant, four companies wrote to me—a roofing company, a homebuilder firm, a manufacturing and a contracting business—asking for their representative to listen to sense and vote against this legislation. I know there is a lady here today from Paris in the members' gallery.

In Elgin–Middlesex–London, there's a construction firm attempting to relate their concerns of the dire impact this may have on business at a time when this government has already deep-sixed the economy. A London plumbing firm has indicated, "It will increase underground business in an industry where such activity is already pervasive."

My colleague from Oxford has related concerns from his riding. A metal fabricating facility calls this "just a tax grab when we can least afford it." An Oxford area

electrician states, "It seems that Labour Minister Fonseca is only trying to drive out the small companies. All he seems to care about is the construction unions and their big business buddies."

Of course, in my riding of Haldimand–Norfolk, there is no end of businesses concerned. I get e-mails from construction companies, greenhouses, contractors and machine manufacturers.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in the House today to stand up against bullying.

This week is Bullying Awareness Week in Canada, an opportunity to raise awareness about a very serious issue. Whether it happens in person or through technologies like cellphones or the Internet, it can have a lasting impact on the individuals involved.

Yesterday, in my great riding of London–Fanshawe, over 11,000 students and staff at Thames Valley District School Board participated in a Sea of Pink campaign. Students and staff wore pink T-shirts bearing the words "Be a someone" and "Take a stand."

Throughout the week, schools in Thames Valley will be addressing the problem of bullying through media campaigns, classroom activities, workshops and other special events.

I am so proud of the leadership these students and staff have shown. If we want our schools to be welcoming places where everyone feels safe, comfortable and respected, we all have a role to play. Helping to raise awareness about this issue is one important step towards preventing it, and I encourage everyone to do their part and stand up against bullying.

I want to also wish the Thames Valley board and all the students who participated in this event good luck, and I know they are going to be successful because they are doing it because they care about others. It's important for all of us in this House to remember this week and, hopefully, in our way, participate in this event.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. John O'Toole: I rise on behalf of the small business persons in the riding of Durham who have objected to the added fees—you might say taxes—by this government imposed through the WSIB bill, Bill 119. In fact, they're calling it a tax grab, which is an additional cost of around \$11,000 for a typical small business in tough economic times. Rather than enhancing workplace safety, this legislation is more likely to drive business into the underground economy.

Previous Ministers of Labour have agreed with organizations such as the Ontario Home Builders' Association that has said that forcing mandatory coverage would be burdensome to small business.

The builders, contractors and many other small businesses in my riding have suggested a "named insured" program would be of greater benefit to all concerned, and I would urge the minister, who is here, to listen to the

advice introduced by my constituents. They wrote to him directly, and some I know personally as highly responsible and respected members of our community: Mario Veltri, for instance, from Marianna Developments, a long-time builder in the region of Durham; Peter Saturno, who was the head of the home builders of Ontario, from Midhaven Homes; David Veenstra, from Veenstra Design and Fine Home Building. All of these are respected small businesses employing real people, real families in the province of Ontario. They see this as a step backwards—

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

1510

LEGISLATIVE INTERNS

Mr. Michael Prue: A lot of concern has been raised about the decreasing voter turnout amongst Canadian youth. The view is that young people today are not so interested in the political process. The question invariably comes to us as elected members: What can we do to ensure that the next generation of public leaders can continue the work of building a stronger and more just society?

I'd like to take this opportunity to shine some light on a group of young Ontarians who have broken this trend and have taken it upon themselves to become educated on the work of serving the public interest. Each year, the Ontario Legislature internship program chooses 10 of the brightest university graduates from across Canada and gives them the opportunity to learn, on the inside, how Ontario is governed on a day-to-day basis.

The 10 interns—Chelsea, Meghan, David, Kim, Tejas, Rosanne, Emma, Igor, Angela and Waqas—are hosting a reception here at Queen's Park this afternoon and into tonight to thank all the members and staff for their ongoing support of the program. It has been running successfully now for some 35 years and counts amongst its graduates members of Parliament, members of provincial Parliament, political staff, senior public servants and other public advocates. These interns work long hours for a modest stipend. We hope that all members will show up tonight, all staff hearing this, all people who can get into the Legislative Building. Come and congratulate these remarkable young people.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. David Oraziotti: I'm pleased today to comment on our government's initiative to help young people prepare for the future by investing in career-related work placements in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie.

This past week, our government made new investments of nearly \$4.3 million for internship and co-op work placements, including 34 in my community of Sault Ste. Marie. Employers in the Soo are receiving a total of \$663,000 for this program. The program provides a wage subsidy to help employers invest in the training of young people. Some of the local employers offering youth internships include organizations such as KPMG, the

Rotary Club of Sault Ste. Marie, the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre, St. Marys Paper, Sault College, the Group Health Centre, the Art Gallery of Algoma and the children's aid society. Since we launched the program in 2005, the province has provided more than \$21 million for over 1,000 placements.

It is of vital importance that northern Ontario is able to attract and retain highly skilled young people, and we recognize the value of programs like this in helping to achieve this goal. This investment will encourage Sault Ste. Marie's youth to explore future opportunities in the north, while providing a boost to our local economy. It is also part of our government's strategy to help Ontario's youth gain the skills and expertise they need to ensure that our province has the type of workforce necessary to be successful in the new economy.

I'd like to wish all those youth in my community of Sault Ste. Marie the best of luck on their placement.

YORKTOWN FAMILY SERVICES

Mrs. Laura Albanese: November is Woman Abuse Prevention Month, as the minister responsible for women's issues acknowledged in the House earlier this month. I want to speak today about a great non-profit organization which serves women and children living in Toronto, including my community of York South-Weston. Yorktown Family Services is a vital community resource for thousands of children, youth, women and families, and it is the only agency in Ontario that operates a children's mental health centre and a shelter for women and children. This allows the organization to offer a safe and stable environment for women and children who require assistance or need to remove themselves from an abusive relationship. I have witnessed firsthand how the organization is helping women who are vulnerable and who, at times, may not have the capacity to help themselves.

Recently, the organization launched its facilitator's guide for delivering culturally responsive parenting programs. Funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the guide emphasizes culturally sensitive services and is based on Yorktown's experience in delivering successful programs for the Somali community. By linking residents with resources and organizations available in the community, Yorktown is working hard to build programs that reflect the needs of the diverse individuals it assists.

HATE CRIMES

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm honoured today to rise in recognition of the Community Alliance Forum, a conference organized by the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada, which took place in Willowdale on November 3 and 4. My colleague David Zimmer, parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General, delivered opening remarks at this innovative conference, which was partially funded through a grant from the Ministry of the Attorney General.

I would like to take this opportunity to applaud B'nai Brith for organizing the Building Partnerships to Counter Hate conference. I'd also like to acknowledge the community, ethnic and religious groups which participated.

The conference brought together community stakeholders, educators, the justice sector and victim services providers, and in doing so, has helped establish links to better address hate crimes in diverse communities across the province. Such an initiative not only raises awareness but also empowers communities to establish strategies to combat intolerance and prevent the reoccurrence of hate crimes.

I would like to congratulate all those involved for their dedication to this issue, and for the holistic approach that has been taken to address hate crimes and intolerance across the province.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

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

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

Bill Pr12, An Act to revive Porcupine Goldtop Mines Limited and to change its name to Porcupine Goldor Mines Limited.

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

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CHRISTOPHER'S STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT (SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY AND ELECTRONIC SEXUAL MATERIAL), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT À LA LOI CHRISTOPHER (REGISTRE DES DÉLINQUANTS SEXUELS ET DOCUMENTS À CARACTÈRE SEXUEL SOUS FORME ÉLECTRONIQUE)

Mr. Martiniuk moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 128, An Act to protect our children from sexual predators and exposure to electronic forms of sexual

material by amending Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000 and other Acts / Projet de loi 128, Loi visant à protéger nos enfants contre les prédateurs sexuels et contre l'exposition à des documents à caractère sexuel diffusés sous forme électronique en modifiant la Loi Christopher de 2000 sur le registre des délinquants sexuels et d'autres lois.

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. Gerry Martiniuk: I am very pleased to introduce a bill that would require Internet filtering software to be used on computers in libraries and public schools in the province of Ontario. This bill also calls for the province of Ontario to allow public access to the sex offender registry. The intent of this bill is to protect children from sexual offenders and exposure to pornographic material on the Internet.

My former bill, calling for the sex offender registry to be accessible to the public, passed second reading in 2006. Today, I have amended that bill to include the requirement that all public schools and libraries in Ontario install Internet filtering software to avoid the screening of harmful material.

Although some school and library boards use filters on computers, it is not required by law. This issue came to my attention recently when a retired police officer, Rob Nickel, spotted a library patron printing pornographic material.

I ask all of you in the Legislature to support my private member's bill and give our children this extra measure of protection.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
AMENDMENT ACT
(STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS FOR HEALTH CARE
AND EDUCATION), 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
(COMITÉ PERMANENT
DES COMPTES PUBLICS
SUR LES SOINS DE SANTÉ
ET L'ÉDUCATION)

Mr. Ouellette moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 129, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to establish the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for Health Care and Education / Projet de loi 129, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative pour créer le Comité permanent des comptes publics sur les soins de santé et l'éducation.

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. Jerry J. Ouellette: Being that the ministries responsible for health care and education utilize in excess of 62% of the provincial budget, this bill establishes a new committee whose sole focus is working with the Auditor General directly in completely reviewing the ministries' operational and financial aspects pertaining to health care and education in the province of Ontario.

1520

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE
FOR ROAD CRASH VICTIMS

Hon. James J. Bradley: I rise in the House today to mark the first annual National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims, and it's my understanding that in the House of Commons today, Minister Baird rose on the same issue, as the minister responsible for transportation nationally.

In our country of Canada, today has been designated as our nation's day to remember those we've lost in traffic collisions, to honour their lives, mourn their deaths and acknowledge our responsibility to prevent future injuries and deaths on our roads.

An international day of remembrance for road crash victims is observed in many countries as part of the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration. It is important that we speak out against the human devastation caused by carelessness, recklessness and impaired judgment on our roads.

Impaired driving remains the leading criminal cause of death in our country of Canada. About one quarter of all traffic fatalities in our province are alcohol-related. Families, friends and communities are devastated when the actions of an impaired driver take one of their own.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving has taken a leadership role in Canada's inaugural national day of remembrance, which focuses on victims of impaired driving. Margaret Miller, the president of MADD, has pointed out that this kind of nationwide recognition is significant. She said the following: "This day helps family and friends who lost loved ones with their grieving process and it helps us, as a society, focus on solutions to reduce the loss of life on our roads."

I wish to share with the Legislature a few steps that the McGuinty government has taken to deal with impaired drivers.

Ontario has some of the toughest drinking and driving laws in all of North America. Drunk drivers face stiff fines, licence suspensions, mandatory alcohol education or treatment, and an ignition interlock program.

Yesterday in the House, I announced the latest steps in our efforts to reduce drunk driving collisions. As many of you here today already know, young drivers aged 19 to

21 are overrepresented in drinking and driving collisions. Our government wants to put a stop to this by making it illegal for any person aged 21 or younger to drive after drinking any amount of alcohol. That means having a zero blood alcohol concentration whenever they are behind a wheel. It is part of a package of reforms introduced yesterday that is aimed at giving young and novice drivers the skills they need to enjoy a lifetime of safe driving.

To help police get drunk drivers off our roads, the bill would also allow police to immediately impound—for seven days—vehicles being driven by impaired drivers, and drivers who do not have a ignition interlock installed when required.

We will soon be putting in place new sanctions for drivers with a blood alcohol concentration from 0.05 to 0.08—what is referred to as the “warn range.”

People need to understand that driving with a blood alcohol concentration in the warn range, while not a Criminal Code offence, still poses an unacceptable risk to their safety and the safety of other road users.

As well, new measures are already in place to seize and forfeit the vehicles belonging to repeat drunk drivers.

My ministry continues to work closely with the police and other road safety partners in communities across the province to raise awareness about the dangers of drinking and driving. These measures are working. Our latest statistics show that Ontario has the lowest impaired driving offence rates in Canada, 39% lower than the national average. This is part of a long-term trend that has seen drinking and driving fatalities drop by more than 60% in our province since 1988. This is a good indication that, together, our hard work and dedication is saving lives.

Together we are driving home the simple truth that the basics of good driving skills can prevent traffic injuries and deaths. Together we are reaching out to Ontario drivers with a single resounding message: Drunk drivers have no place on our roads. That is a message that is true not only today, this National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims, but every day, all year long.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Statements by ministries? Responses?

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR ROAD CRASH VICTIMS

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to respond on behalf of our leader, John Tory, and our critic, Frank Klees, as well as the PC caucus. We also thank Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Transport Canada, the Ontario Provincial Police and the many organizations that are to be commended for promoting this initiative.

Personally, I would like to begin with a remembrance tribute to a promising young hockey star who died in a single-vehicle crash this past summer. It was a sad day for Sonia and Karl Ramolla. On June 28, 2008, their son, K.J. Ramolla, was killed in a tragic single-vehicle rollover off Highway 400, near Gibson Lake Road in the

Muskokas. There was no alcohol or speed involved. It was just two young boys on the way home from the cottage for a home-cooked supper.

K.J. is the nephew of our senior House adviser, Julie Kwiecinski. K.J. was a promising young hockey star who had been represented by Bobby Orr for over five years. He had been drafted by the Kingston Frontenacs to the Ontario Hockey League and the Indiana Ice of the United States Hockey League. He was actively scouted for a hockey scholarship at Princeton and had just needed to top up his SAT scores to be admitted to Princeton. He was set to play in the New England Pro Am Hockey League’s elite Chowder Cup tournament this past summer, just before he was killed. K.J. played his last two hockey seasons as a forward and assistant captain with the Newmarket Hurricanes Jr. A Hockey Club, where he was voted by the players and fans as the most popular young player in both years he played.

K.J. was loved by all during his short time with us. K.J. was known for helping those who cannot help themselves and making others smile and shine. K.J. played hockey in the same manner as he conducted himself in life. He shared the puck, and worked just as hard at making others look good on the ice as he did on his own time on the ice.

K.J.’s last hockey number, 19, will be retired at a special benefit hockey game at the Ray Twinney complex in Newmarket on Saturday, December 27, 2008, beginning at 7:30 p.m. It will be a memorial game for K.J. and Josh Sedore, the young son of the Newmarket Hurricanes’ assistant coach, who passed away on the same weekend as K.J. Proceeds for this game will be split between two: the K.J. Ramolla Memorial Fund, administered by the York Region Community Foundation, and the Southlake hospital cancer centre.

The Newmarket Hurricanes will take on the Couchiching Terriers, K.J.’s former OHA team. Anyone who ever played with K.J. on either of these teams will be eligible to play in this charity event.

This is just one story of the devastating loss of a young hockey star in the prime of his life. It reminds us of the real cost and consequences of road crashes, the purpose of this remembrance day. It is a call for all Ontarians to adopt safer driving habits and to increase their knowledge and awareness of their responsibilities. We mourn these young people and indeed all those whose lives have been cut short through needless traffic fatalities, and we express our support for the injured. We show our sympathy and our support for all those whose lives have been tragically changed forever by car crashes.

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With the tabling, as the minister said, of Bill 126 yesterday, we are also reminded of the deaths of three young Toronto men—Tyler Mulcahy, Cory Mintz and Kourosh Totonchian—in a Muskoka car crash last July, another needless tragedy.

I’d like to briefly mention some of the victims whose lives have been affected in the riding of Durham. Lisa, the 24-year-old daughter of Uxbridge Councillor Bev

Northeast, and her husband were both killed by a drunk driver in a crash that left their three-year-old son Mathew an orphan. Mathew, now 19, was raised by his grandmother, Councillor Northeast.

The impact on lives is visited, I'm sure, in each riding across Ontario. It's an important time to remember and take the necessary action like Bill 126 and indeed Bill 118—anything we can do to make our roads safer.

In 2006, 199,690 people were injured on Canadian roads. Of those, 2,892 died, while 15,281 were seriously injured. The social costs are unimaginable and the real-life cost and the needless waste is something we should all be reminded of and take whatever action we can to make our roads safer.

JOURNÉE NATIONALE DU SOUVENIR DES VICTIMES DE LA ROUTE

M. Gilles Bisson: Aujourd'hui marque la première commémoration annuelle de la Journée nationale du souvenir des victimes de la route. On doit dire ici à l'Assemblée que nous, comme législateurs et aussi comme membres de familles, on comprend très bien notre responsabilité et ce que nos actions doivent être à travers cette législature pour s'assurer que nos routes et que les lois qui gouvernent ces routes soient les meilleures au Canada pour être capables de sauvegarder les individus sur nos routes.

Mais c'est le temps aussi de réfléchir un peu sur la perte de ces personnes. Les victimes d'accidents mortels sur les routes à travers cette province et ce pays, c'est une tragédie que je pense que nous pouvons tous comprendre. Pour la plupart de nous autres, cela nous est arrivé dans nos familles, dans nos voisinages ou avec nos amis. On comprend très bien, quand il y a une telle perte, que c'est tragique non seulement pour la famille et certainement pour ceux qui sont proches à cette personne, mais aussi pour notre communauté.

On doit tous dans cette province, législateurs, police et autres, faire ce qu'on peut pour s'assurer qu'on a des routes qui sont les meilleures dans le monde, que nos lois sont parmi les meilleures, et aussi qu'on a un système policier, à la fin de la journée, qui peut facilement et avec efficacité assister pour assurer que les lois sont suivies.

Mais il y a une responsabilité individuelle là-dedans. C'est important, je pense, qu'on reconnaisse que nous, comme conducteurs et comme membres de familles et de cette société, devons prendre nos responsabilités et ne pas accepter que tout peut être légiféré. Il y a des fois que nous, comme personnes d'un voisinage, voyons quelqu'un qui fait quelque chose qui n'est pas sûr sur la route, et il faut que nous, comme citoyens, prenions notre responsabilité pour dire à ces individus, « Ce n'est pas acceptable. » Par exemple—cela nous arrive tous—on s'en va à un party de famille, on s'en va à une célébration quelque part : un peu de boisson, un verre de vin, deux verres de bière. Éventuellement, la personne dit, « Je vais embarquer dans mon auto » ou dans son camion pour aller à la maison. On a la responsabilité comme

citoyen de dire, « Écoute. Il faut se sauvegarder, et moi, comme citoyen, je prends ma responsabilité. » Il ne faut pas seulement dire, « La police va te poigner » ou que c'est la législation dans la province qui va trouver une solution. Nous, on a besoin de prendre la responsabilité.

Quand ça vient aux jeunes et aux moins jeunes qui utilisent leur automobile, eux-autres aussi ont besoin de prendre la responsabilité. J'ai dit justement dans cette Assemblée il y a quelques jours que conduire, ce n'est pas un droit mais un privilège. On doit accepter qu'avec ce privilège de conduire nos automobiles nous avons, comme citoyens, une responsabilité de nous assurer, premièrement, que notre voiture est en bonne ordre, deuxièmement, qu'on est bien entraîné pour conduire de manière sûre et que, plus important, on prend notre responsabilité de manière sérieuse : qu'on n'utilise pas un téléphone cellulaire quand on conduit une automobile, qu'on fait attention à l'environnement autour de nous pour nous assurer qu'on conduit d'une manière qui est sûre non seulement pour nous mais, plus important, pour les autres qui sont sur la route.

Le point que je veux faire est que oui, c'est la journée de se rappeler ceux qu'on a perdus dans notre société et d'accepter que c'est une tragédie. Oui, comme législateurs, on a une responsabilité de s'assurer qu'on a de bonnes lois dans cette province. Mais finalement, vous comprenez aussi bien que moi que c'est notre responsabilité comme individus et que nous, comme individus dans cette société, devons faire tout ce qu'on peut pour s'assurer que le monde prenne leur responsabilité et que, comme citoyens, on comprenne que conduire une automobile n'est pas un droit mais un privilège et que l'on a besoin de le respecter.

PETITIONS

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a number of petitions, brought down by Muskoka Builders' Association members who are still here are in the gallery, to do with Bill 119. It reads:

“Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes the WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

“Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

“Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

“Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

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

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with the affected businesses."

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition sent to me by Karen Webster of Manor Road in Oakville. It is addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It deals with the proposal to build a western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

I am pleased to sign and support this petition, and to ask page Sahara to carry it for me.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank my colleague Mr. Miller and Lakewood Construction of Port Carling for sending this petition to me.

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes the WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

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

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with the affected businesses."

I agree with this petition and have signed it.

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PROTECTION FOR MINERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of Deep River and Chalk River.

"Whereas the current legislation contained in the Ontario health and safety act and regulations for mines and mining plants does not adequately protect the lives of miners, we request revisions to the act;

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

"Section R-60 (page 60 of Mining Regulations), paragraph 74 states that, 'A shaft, raise or other opening in an underground mine shall be securely fenced, covered or otherwise guarded. RRO 1990, Reg. 854s 75(1).' The stope where Lyle was killed was protected by a length of orange plastic snow fence and a rope with a warning sign. These barriers would not have been visible if the bucket of the scoop tram was raised. Lyle's body was recovered from behind the scoop tram.

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

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the clerk's table with Luis.

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

“Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight-to-10 bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

“Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes.”

I affix my signature and give it to the page.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition—it actually could be called the Bob Bailey petition, but I’ll leave it for others to decide. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes the WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

“Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

“Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

“Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

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

“To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with the affected businesses.”

I am pleased to sign and support this, and give it to one of the new pages.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: I present this petition:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has launched a blatant attack on our province’s grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren by cutting off access to the temporary care assistance program;

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

“That the Legislature call on the minister to overturn her July 2008 directives outlining the temporary care assistance program and grant all grandparents raising their at-risk grandchildren access to this much-needed financial support.”

I agree with the petition and affix my name to it, and Kush will bring it down.

PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY FRANCHISE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I’ve got a petition that reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment has the highest average ticket revenue per game in the National Hockey League; and

“Whereas the Toronto Maple Leafs are ranked the most financially valuable team in the NHL; and

“Whereas many Hamilton and greater Toronto area hockey fans are unable to attend professional hockey games due to a lack of adequate ticket supply; and

“Whereas the Hamilton and greater Toronto area boast the biggest and the best market in the world for hockey fans, with Maple Leafs Sports and Entertainment bringing approximately \$2.4 billion to the local economy over 10 years; and

“Whereas a new franchise in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area is valued at \$600 million by some economists; and

“Whereas competition in both business and sports is healthy for both the Hamilton and greater Toronto area economy and sports team performance; and

“Whereas despite having the most loyal fans in the world, the Toronto Maple Leafs have not won the Stanley Cup in over 40 years; and

“Whereas Hamilton and greater Toronto area fans deserve competitive professional hockey teams;

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

“To request that the government of Ontario express its strong support to the board of governors of the National Hockey League for the relocation or expansion of a second NHL hockey team in the Hamilton and greater Toronto area in order to realize the economic advantages to the taxpayers of the province of Ontario and to provide healthy competition to the existing Toronto NHL franchise.”

I agree with this.

EMANCIPATION DAY

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

“Whereas the British Parliament abolished slavery in the British Empire as of August 1, 1834, as a result of the work of abolitionists; and

“Whereas the Ontario Black History Society has for several years been advocating for the commemoration of August 1 as Emancipation Day; and

“Whereas there remain in Ontario clear and visible signs of the province’s early Black presence; and

“Whereas the freedom offered by emancipation day facilitated a Black presence throughout the province and fully sparked the northward movement of enslaved Africans from the United States into Canada on the Underground Railroad; and

“Whereas Bill 111, An Act to Proclaim Emancipation Day, is the first bill in Ontario history to be co-sponsored by two MPPs of different political parties, Ted Arnott and Maria Van Bommel;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support Bill 111 and recognize August 1 formally as Emancipation Day.”

I'm pleased to say that this petition is signed by a former Speaker of the Legislature, Alvin Curling, and I, of course, have affixed my signature as well.

SECURITY LICENCE FEES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of my riding, and they draw attention to the following:

“Exorbitant annual costs of the new security licence of \$80 per year are imposed on some of the poorest-paid Ontario workers.

“We understand the need for regulation of the security seal through Bill 159.

“However, we request that fees be adjusted to a more reasonable rate, perhaps more along the lines of Ontario driver permit fees of \$75, that would be renewed every five years.

“Security guards are among the lowest-paid workers in Ontario, and in most cases, the cost is absorbed entirely by the worker.”

I will affix my name to it and send it with the page.

HOSPICES

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from citizens in Georgetown, Brampton, Mississauga and Toronto.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

“Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

“Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight-to-10 bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

“Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes.”

I agree with this petition and will give it to page Kush.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is also regarding Bill 119.

“Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes the WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

“Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

“Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

“Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

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“Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

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

“To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with affected businesses.”

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition here. I thought the time was going to run out.

“Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes the WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

“Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

“Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

“Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

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

“To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with affected businesses.”

I agree with this petition wholeheartedly and affix my name to it and pass it down with Jenna.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for petitions has expired.

OPPOSITION DAY

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I move that, whereas Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insur-

ance Act, 1997, will impose an oppressive \$11,000 new tax on small construction companies in Ontario; and

Whereas the notion that the bill will improve workplace safety is questionable, as it includes thousands of office workers who never set foot on a construction site; and

Whereas there are still serious and alarming concerns about the wisdom of the McGuinty Liberals imposing this additional tax burden on business, especially during a severe economic downturn in this province; and

Whereas the changes proposed under the bill will not come into effect until 2012, giving the McGuinty Liberals more than adequate time to allow a much more democratic process before they push the bill through using their majority;

The Legislature of Ontario calls on the McGuinty government to extend public hearings on the bill to communities across Ontario in early 2009 and allow all members to speak to the bill before it becomes law.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 5.

Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It brings me no pleasure to rise today and speak to this motion, but it is a matter of necessity. It's the duty of a loyal citizen of this province to stand up and speak out when he or she sees their government doing something so wrong, so dangerous, so counterproductive in this difficult economic climate. It's also a duty for that citizen to stand up for democracy and the principles that are supposed to guide all public officials, even those in a majority government. Today, both of those causes have prompted our party to issue this motion.

The last few weeks have seen what I think could accurately be described as shocking developments in our province. We've seen the McGuinty government take Ontario into deficit, creating higher taxes and a larger debt for future generations. And we've seen the McGuinty government, for the first time in Ontario's proud history, allow us to become a have-not province, accepting handouts from other governments. What we have not seen is any plan to turn things around, to bring Ontario back to its rightful place as Canada's economic engine. Worse than that, Mr. McGuinty's team has blatantly continued along the same failed path of increased taxation, regulation and bureaucracy, the same discredited policies that have weakened our economy and made us much more vulnerable to global problems.

We're here today to discuss just one example of this unthinking and unblinking attitude, what amounts to a tax hike on business, particularly small business. As unbelievable as it is, with our economy in tatters, tens of thousands of jobs lost, the McGuinty Liberals feel this is a fine time to increase the cost of doing business. Figure that one out, Speaker. This is a job-killing measure that was created without consulting the people who will be impacted, and it's being rammed through this Legislature with arrogant speed. It's another frustrating example of a government that pays lip service to the ideas of part-

nership and consultation, but then does just whatever it pleases. And worse still, it is the latest illustration of how this government does not understand or doesn't care how its policies are driving jobs out of Ontario.

Speaker, we want to share with you some of the facts of the issue, including the devastating impact the Liberal plan could have on small businesses, which are essentially our greatest job creators in this province.

What's being proposed by the McGuinty government sounds like a simple technical change. Their Bill 119 would amend the legislation governing the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. However, this legislation, if passed, will impose a major and expensive burden on Ontario businesses. It will force them to purchase workplace insurance through the WSIB, whether they want it or not, whether they can afford it or not and whether or not they already have insurance. This is imposing a significant new cost on doing business in Ontario, especially for smaller businesses in the construction trades. It's effectively a dramatic tax hike on small business.

Not only are the McGuinty Liberals introducing a new tax on small business, but they introduced it following Small Business Week, when they're supposed to be helping and celebrating small business, not slapping them in the face. Even more mind-boggling, they've introduced it during an economic slowdown, when Ontarians need every possible job, not a new tax that will further discourage growth and job creation.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has made it clear that this bill will impose an average \$11,000 a year in extra costs on small companies in the construction sector—\$11,000 more per year. Many of the small business owners who have talked to us about being affected by this were here today in the Legislature to express their anger and frustration. They told us, as they've told this government and its members, who are essentially ignoring them, that this bill does nothing to enhance worker safety. Requiring people who go nowhere near construction sites to obtain WSIB coverage has nothing to do with safety. It has everything to do with a revenue grab, and it has everything to do with satisfying certain friends of this government. As I outlined earlier today in question period, that's outrageous, and some—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's payback time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): If you could just take your seat.

The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, I would like you to withdraw that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I was just doing my work here—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Withdraw what you said. I'm asking you to withdraw.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: For the sake of the viewers, I'll repeat that comment, Speaker. This legislation has everything to do with a revenue grab and everything

to do with satisfying certain friends of this government. As I outlined earlier today, that's the outrageous and, some might suggest, ethically challenged bottom line here. The evidence is clear. The people that this government chose to consult with are not representatives of the companies that will be affected. They are all connected directly to the Liberal Party or indirectly to it through a group known as Working Families. For those viewing who may not have heard of this organization, Working Families is a compilation of unions that spent millions of dollars in the past two provincial elections essentially in support of the Liberal Party of Ontario.

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In that vein, I'll remind you of the list of people this government invited to testify before the committee reviewing Bill 119. I mentioned some of them today; I'll go over it again. The Ontario Pipe Trades Council donated \$400,000 to Working Families. The Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council—a fellow by the name of Pat Dillon, the manager of that group, was a co-chair of Working Families. The same council's director of government relations doubled as the chief financial officer for Working Families. The Ontario Council of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades describe themselves as supporters of—

Interjections: Working Families.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: —Working Families. Finally, the Labourers' International Union of North America, coincidentally I'm sure, are hosting the Liberal Party's 2008 Holiday Trillium Dinner.

It's pretty obvious what's happening here and who is being pandered to. When you design a bill to satisfy one special interest group without any balance, you're going to end up with a lousy piece of legislation, and that's what is happening with Bill 119. The stench is pungent and very telling. Outside of the fact that it will cripple many employers at the worst possible time, when Ontario needs every job and every investor it can get; outside of the fact that this rotten idea is being falsely wrapped up in pretty paper and labelled as a safety issue—outside of those considerations—it is simply a badly designed bill.

First of all, the legislation forces owners of companies to join the WSIB insurance plan, which frankly is a ridiculous idea. It means that owners will get to decide if they're injured or not, and opens a potential flood of incorrect or false claims. It's also an unfair extra burden on business owners who already have insurance from private companies, but now the government will force those owners to pay for WSIB coverage as well as paying their own insurance premiums.

That takes me to a second point, which is that this bill robs businesses of freedom of choice and may rob people of better protection. Most private insurance offers coverage 24/7, 365 days a year, while the WSIB not only offers less coverage in many respects, but it's also more expensive. It's the worst of both possible worlds for business owners and their workers.

This clearly points out the third problem: that there was absolutely no consultation with Ontario's employers,

the people who would ultimately foot the bill. The Small Business Agency of Ontario looked at this legislation last year and said it was a bad idea. Then the government failed to consult the CFIB, which represents over 40,000 businesses in Ontario. Yet the Liberals did do—seem to have done—a fine job of consulting with their friends and financial supporters. Not surprisingly, this legislation seems to have been custom-made to fill their wish list.

The Liberals claim that this bill is needed to crack down on the underground economy, where workers may not have insurance coverage, and on fraudulent claims. If the government were serious about stamping out fraudulent claims, they would simply move to a named insurance system, so that they would know exactly who is covered and who is not.

In any circumstances, this would be lousy legislation. It takes away freedom of choice, it imposes new paperwork and regulations, and it treats people like business owners and office workers as though they are doing dangerous jobs atop a skyscraper. But today in Ontario, with businesses struggling to survive, imposing extra costs on them is simply inexcusable. The bottom line is that Ontario businesses and our economy cannot afford a significant new business tax today, when Ontario has already gone from first to worst in economic growth in this country, not when this government has dragged us down from being Canada's breadwinner, with money in the bank, to the equivalent of being in debt and on welfare.

The Premier famously said, just five months ago, that tough times like this were no time to impose a new tax on business. He was right then, and he's wrong now to allow this legislation to go forward.

If Ontario is going to fight its way back to the top, and it must do so for the sake of our families, our future, and the good of this nation, if we're going to restore Ontario's economic strength, this government must stop taking actions like this. It must stop imposing new regulations, new fees, new costs, new paperwork and other burdens.

The other alarming element of what's happening here, and you should be concerned, Speaker, and I'm sure you are, is this government's efforts to close down debate and limit public input on this bill. They've time-allocated House and committee debate and banned—banned—hearings outside of Toronto. What we're witnessing is the very dark side of majority government: public input on a bad special-interest-benefiting bill being drastically curtailed, with no rational explanation as to why. Of course, there is no rational or reasonable explanation for doing this. The deep thinkers in the Premier's office are trying to get this dirty piece of laundry out the door as quickly as possible, before too many people notice. And to date, with regrettably a compliant press gallery, they seem to be succeeding. Somebody has to say it.

If the government insists on ramming this through in an undemocratic way, it will send a clear message to every current and potential employer in Ontario that someone else is pulling the strings.

This is a time for Dalton McGuinty to decide where his loyalties lie and what his job really entails. If Mr. McGuinty understands that job one right now in Ontario is restoring our economic strength, not pandering to special interests at the expense of workers and employers, then he will instruct his members to support our motion. What we're asking for is very, very reasonable and fair: Extend public hearings, and allow all members of this House to speak before it becomes law. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I will be joined this afternoon by our WSIB critic, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

This is a most interesting debate. I want to explain. I find myself almost congenitally incapable of voting with Liberals on any matter in this chamber, and when I find myself forced into a position that some might interpret as aligning with Liberals, I feel compelled to be even more specific about my position and the position of the NDP caucus.

Look, New Democrats oppose the time allocation motion that the Liberals imposed on this Parliament and on this process, and they brought this upon themselves. They brought a time allocation motion on a bill that they knew was contentious. I acknowledged when I spoke to Bill 119, as did the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, that this was a contentious issue. There were two sides to the matter. I don't agree with the Conservative position, but the Conservatives speak for a community that doesn't support this legislation. I understand that. I support this legislation. New Democrats believe that all workers should be participants in the WSIB, the workers' compensation system. As a matter of fact, you'll recall that we berated the government for, in the process of bringing along Bill 119, not including financial services workers. The Liberals obviously didn't have the stomach to take on the big banks and the insurance companies and any number of call centres because it tragically remains that, notwithstanding Bill 119, there's still going to be a huge chunk of workers in this province who are going to be denied WSIB workers' comp coverage, and there's going to be a huge number of employers in this province who are going to be relieved—and some of the wealthiest employers: the banks, the insurance companies, financial institutions, call centres—of any obligation to participate in the pooling of funds necessary to finance a healthy and effective workers' compensation WSIB system.

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The time allocation motion that the government brought was regrettable. During the debate on the time allocation motion I recall, along with my colleague Paul Miller and other New Democrats, pointing out that the committee process was an ideal venue in which to address the concerns that people have expressed about this legislation—an ideal venue. It was precisely in committee—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh, the member for London–Fanshawe, Mr. Ramal, is muttering, “We did, we did.” Oh, horse feathers, Mr. Ramal, because the time allocation motion gave the committee one day for public participation and one day for clause-by-clause, which is going to come on November 24. There was no opportunity for people who had concerns about the legislation to be responded to in an intelligent, rational way to, quite frankly, calm them and help them understand that this isn't some movement that's designed, notwithstanding the CFIB's best efforts and my dear friends Ms. Swift and Ms. Andrew I say sarcastically, because I don't think they are, although I would like them to be, but I don't know what more I can do to make them want to be my friends.

My experience, based on the calls we got in the office, is that there's a huge amount of misinformation about this legislation. We're getting calls from small, family-run retailers indicating that they have been led to believe that this was going to draw them into the WSIB system. We had to explain that no, that's not the purpose of Bill 119, that Bill 119 is designed to cover de facto construction workers who are working in an inherently dangerous occupation, trade or profession and who don't have workers' comp coverage; nor are they part of the accident prevention process that participation in WSIB provides.

For the life me, I don't understand why the government, in its time allocation motion, didn't provide for several days of public hearings. I indicated quite clearly that I disagreed with the Conservative position on this. The New Democrats agreed with me. The Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council has been struggling for 15 years to get this legislation enacted, and we, the NDP, supported their efforts, but that doesn't mean that there shouldn't be an adequate amount of political discourse, exchange, either here in this legislative chamber or in the committee.

The government could have provided for but a few more days of public hearings, and there undoubtedly would have been more advocates for the legislation appearing, as well as people who were critical of the legislation. I say that's fine. As I said, New Democrats weren't afraid of the argument being made by the Conservatives. We don't agree. We think they're operating on some false premises, but the fact is that in a parliamentary process that's why you have opposition parties. It's only in the darkest days of the politburo that everybody agreed, or at least that was the presentation being made.

So I don't understand why this government would not have in its time allocation motion—I still would have opposed it because I don't support time allocation motions, never have—accommodated those people who want to be critical of the bill. There are people who are going to be critical. God bless them. Quite frankly, there are elements of the bill that New Democrats are being critical of: one, that while this brings in a huge number of construction building trades workers into workers' comp—

WSIB coverage, it still leaves thousands upon thousands upon thousands of workers, assuming they still have their jobs tomorrow, who are not covered by WSIB because they're in workplaces that are, by legislation, exempted from coverage, notwithstanding—and again, during the debate around Bill 119 on second reading, we talked about how the financial services sector is one of the areas. I've got call centres down in my riding where I come from. They employ a whole lot of women, and women who are middle-aged. Carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive strain injuries, RSI, are rampant in that sector, yet there's no access to workers' comp, which means they're sweet out of luck, as Mr. Yakabuski mentioned a couple of weeks ago when he used the abbreviation SOL. These workers have to be told that they can sue if they want, but what that means is hiring a lawyer and paying tens of thousands of dollars in retainer and risking not winning at the end of the day and being no further ahead.

Workers' compensation is a historic system. It dates to the earliest part of the 20th century. It was a revolutionary proposition. The goal was to ensure that no worker in this province who was injured, maimed or slaughtered in the workplace would have to litigate and prove negligence. It's a no-fault system. The issue of causation isn't relevant to the compensation. It should be very relevant, obviously, to make sure accidents don't happen again and injuries don't happen again.

So we remain concerned about the exemption of—and the language in the drafting. Again, because tomorrow is the day for the submission of amendments, we don't know whether the government is going to respond to the concerns about the wording of the renovator section of the bill. The New Democrats raised that. It talks about “independent operators ... who perform no construction work other than exempt home renovation work.” Well, does that mean in the last 12 months? In the last two years? Or, they have done new construction work, but they promised to only do renovation work down the road? Quite frankly, it's a very clumsily drafted, ineffectively drafted, section of the bill that generates fears that this will become the new big loophole—and for that matter, the obvious proposition that the roofer putting new shingles on my two-and-a-half-storey old house in Welland is performing as dangerous a job as the roofer putting shingles on a two-and-a-half-storey house in a subdivision that's being newly built and is new home construction. Far be it from me to impute motive—you know that; I'm loath to do that—but it begs the question as to who the government was accommodating with the exemption. I don't know. They haven't been forthcoming. Maybe if there had been a couple more days of committee hearings, we would have been able to wring it out of them, like in those old detective movies with the bright lamps and the good cop and bad cop, with somebody hammering his billy club on the table and the other one saying, “Here, pal, have a coffee and a cigarette.” We might have been able to get it out of them. As to the motive—and I'm not imputing motive; I'm just asking

what it is because I don't know what it is. We're not suggesting it's anything less than benign, although I think you can read my mind, can't you? It's like those old MAD Magazine cartoons: what he's saying and what he really wants to be saying. He's saying, “I'm not suggesting that it's anything less than benign,” but what he's really saying is that second balloon above his head.

So, we have concerns about the renovation; so do people who participated in the public hearings.

The LIUNA representation, which, while Mr. Miller was sitting in on the hearings, I read carefully—I'm impressed with it, pleased with it.

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So for 15 years, the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council has been looking for this bill. We support the proposition, but notwithstanding that we support it, we also support the right to have the matter debated and we support the right of members of this Legislature to disagree.

We believe that an honest exchange would have done far more to enlighten people than the jackboot tactics of harsh time allocation. The problem is that Mr. Runciman, in his motion, in the preamble, forces those who would want to support his motion to support propositions that this is a new tax and that it's a new tax on small construction companies. The preamble to Mr. Runciman's motion requires people who support it to concur with his proposition that whether or not the bill will improve workplace safety is questionable. I can't adopt that position.

I think that inclusion in the WSIB system, participation in the workers' comp community, does improve workplace safety. Furthermore, I believe that fair contribution to the pool of funding for WSIB and workers' comp is incredibly important if we're going to maintain a healthy workers' compensation system wherein workers can be fairly and adequately compensated—workers who suffer injuries, who are maimed, poisoned, slaughtered in their workplaces.

So by virtue of my and our caucus's opposition to this motion, we in no way, shape or form endorse this government's approach by way of time allocation to this matter. We fundamentally disagree with the Conservatives about the interpretation of the legislation, but unlike the Liberals, we're not afraid of a debate. Unlike the Liberals, we're not afraid to have issues explored fully. Unlike the Liberals, we in the NDP believe that an honest and thorough exchange is the healthiest way to develop policy in this province and that adequate public hearings would have enabled those who are fearful about this bill to have those fears calmed by rational explanation and by thorough analysis.

My fear with the time allocation motion, and this bill being rammed through committee, is that important amendments that ought to be made, that are consistent with the interests of working women and men, the interests of building trades workers and the building trades council—my concern is that by this government ramming this bill through, those interests of the building trades and

their workers, and the workers who are contemplated as being new members of this WSIB community protected by WSIB coverage, won't be addressed by way of amendments that otherwise would have been put to the bill to enhance the protection and correct shortcomings in this bill when it comes to workers' health and safety and their protection in workplace. Because, you see, the same time allocation motion means that most of the amendments that are put forward on table won't even be debated, won't even be read. This, of course, is a guillotine when it comes to that process.

The New Democrats support Bill 119. We wish we had an opportunity to more fully examine it with a view to ensuring that appropriate amendments were put forward and debated and voted upon, and hopefully passed. We support the right of workers to be covered by WSIB, and we believe that WSIB participation, yes, enhances workplace safety. We will not, however, be supporting Mr. Runciman's motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: The legislation that this motion refers to, Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, has been through wide consultation over a number of years. It is based on results of these consultations conducted over the past few years that the government believes extending mandatory coverage in construction will benefit the overall construction industry.

I want to talk about what this legislation aims to do, and I want you to know that I have been a part of the debate on this bill in the Legislature. Over the past two days I have been a part of public hearings on this bill where we have heard from many stakeholders from the construction industry. We have heard from labour groups, employer groups and employee groups.

We're taking steps to promote health and safety in the Ontario construction industry by extending Workplace Safety and Insurance Act coverage to categories of individuals currently not covered. Extending Workplace Safety and Insurance Act coverage to more individuals in the construction industry will help to fight the underground economy. If passed, our legislation will help to level the playing field in the construction industry and will be good for both construction employers and employees. This legislation is about making sure Ontario workers have the protection they need if they get injured on the job. This legislation further proves that the health and safety of Ontario workers is our number one priority at the Ministry of Labour.

Underground economic practices threaten health and safety, undermine labour standards and erode construction quality. Throughout our consultations, we have heard that this legislation will help level the playing field in the construction industry. Right now, there are some workers who come to construction sites and are not covered if they get injured. For companies that are not currently paying their WSIB premiums, this puts businesses that play by the rules at a competitive disadvantage.

Throughout the consultations, we have heard that there are some bad-apple companies who are not paying their fair share, not paying their premiums for insurance. We have heard that the changes proposed in this legislation will make sure that if workers do get injured or hurt, they are covered and have benefits in place to take care of themselves and their families. We have also heard that businesses need time to adjust to these proposed changes. That is part of the reason for the proposed phase-in of fees, with full implementation in 2012, so businesses can make plans in advance.

We're taking steps to promote health and safety in the Ontario construction industry by extending the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, WSIA, coverage to categories of individuals currently not covered. Extending Workplace Safety and Insurance Act coverage to more individuals in the construction industry will help to fight the underground economy.

This legislation will assist small businesses. This is part of our government's effort to help small business in the province of Ontario.

We're lowering the cost of doing business in Ontario. In the 2008 budget, the government announce \$750 million in tax measures over four years, starting in 2007-08, that would provide support for businesses, including Ontario's struggling manufacturing sector. These tax measures are in addition to the government's plan to eliminate the capital tax for all businesses on July 1, 2010, and to reduce high business education tax rates across the province by \$540 million over seven years.

This is not all we're doing. We're cutting red tape in order to make it easier for small businesses to operate and to do business in Ontario. In the 2005 throne speech, the government identified reducing red tape as its top priority. The small business ministry staff has been working with the Ministry of Government Services staff to reduce red tape through the paper burden reduction initiative to minimize the amount of red tape that small businesses face in their dealings with the provincial government.

Our government also has a variety of programs and resources designed to support our small business and medium-sized enterprises. There's a lot that our government has done to assist small business and there's a lot more to be done.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Interjection: Part two.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Part two. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity today to speak to Bill 119. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in support of my colleague's motion to reopen the public debate on Bill 119.

Since the introduction of this bill, my party and I have repeatedly made the case that this bill will only punish the backbone of Ontario's economy: our small business. We have been flooded by hundreds of e-mails and letters from small businesses around Ontario saying that they

are against this bill. The government keeps reading one letter of support. Is that the best they can do: only one person who's willing to go on the record to support it? Let's look at what this bill will do to small business.

The government claims that this bill will improve workplace safety, which we all know is a bunch of nonsense simply because those who would be newly protected are office workers who never set a foot on a construction site. The minister claims that this legislation will level the playing field; however, I don't believe it would. In fact, this bill would actually tilt the playing field in favour of big labour, big firms and big Liberal donors. At the moment, all construction companies, both big and small, have an exemption for owners, directors and executive officers, but with this legislation all firms will be required to pay to insure their office workers. Proportionately speaking, this tax is a much larger hit for a small firm than a large one.

This minister also states that this piece of legislation would help to crack down on those who are cheating the system. I, along with many in this Legislature, would agree that we must do everything we can to drive those out of the underground economy. However, the Ministry of Labour already has the power and tools to crack down on cheats. All they have to do is perform more audits and get out of the office and into the field. In reality, the first people who are going to be impacted by this piece of legislation are those in the above-ground economy, not the cheaters, and the WSIB already knows who those legitimate guys are, because they are registered with them. The legislation allows cheaters to prosper while cracking down on the good guys, the low-hanging fruit. The day after this bill is enacted, the WSIB will ask the above-ground operators to pay more on their owners, officers and directors. The bad guys in the underground economy aren't going to surface anytime soon. In the meantime, office workers will be footing the bill of the WSIB cheaters, as owners, directors and executive officers are a far much easier group to find than the actual cheaters.

This is why, on this side of House, we believe that the government shouldn't waste their time on this type of program when their energy and resources should be spent on creating a named insurance system so that we know exactly who is covered and who is not. In fact, I heard the Minister of Labour today advocate for such a system if someone could show him how it would work, a named insurance system, and we intend to work with him to do that.

If the minister were sincere about that, he wouldn't be targeting owners of small business; he wouldn't be targeting people who have to work even when they are hurt and can't get the full benefit of WSIB coverage even though they are paying for it. The minister also wouldn't be forcing executives to give up 24/7, 365-day-a-year coverage, far superior coverage that they pay for separately, for a more expensive coverage that doesn't offer them the same protection they need.

This bill is all about tilting the playing field in the construction industry in favour of big labour and big Liberal

donors. No one should be fooled about this bill. This bill will be one of the biggest tax increases ever levied on small business in this province. If implemented—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I just caution members to not go too far in impugning motive. Thank you.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Point taken.

If implemented as written, it may put many of these small businesses out of business. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has indicated to us that, from their members, they have calculated this levy will cost each employer up to \$11,000 a year on their small business. Despite that, the government is still forcing it through—this from the Premier who said he would not be raising new taxes; the finance minister, the Treasurer, said the same just last month. The financial impact on our small businesses will be huge in this province. If passed, this act will put many people out of business and will do nothing to take the unscrupulous people out of the equation.

Some people have raised the issue: Why weren't more small business people here to oppose it? We advocate that most of these small business people are out there today, at this moment, trying to make a living. They don't have high-paid lobbyists that are able to come and advocate on their behalf. So I do want to pay tribute to the home builders from Muskoka who are here with us today in the gallery, who took the time, spent the whole day here, and lobbied and talked to many of the members from all sides of the House.

This will impose a new tax on small business. This government should not be trying to tax small businesses, which employ more than half of Ontarians. Moreover, this government should not tax these businesses at a time when Ontario needs to maintain all the jobs it can.

I can't figure out why they are rushing this bill through so quickly. With an implementation date of four years from now, they have more than adequate time to work with small business, to work with the opposition and to work with the stakeholders to make the improvements to this bill that it needs, but to date they have indicated no desire to do so. We have something back home that we call the "red face" test, and I don't think this will pass.

Anyway, we will be making amendments to the bill that will remove owners and company directors from mandatory WSIB coverage. We will also be making an amendment that will make insurance coverage mandatory for all construction workers, but they will have the option of finding private insurance instead of WSIB coverage.

On this side, we also believe that the government needs to refocus its energy on developing that named insurance system, like they do with OHIP, so that WSIB knows who is insured and who isn't. We think this just makes common sense. As I say, the minister himself earlier today said that he would look at something like that.

In closing, we don't believe that imposing a new tax on small business will do anything other than drive more

of them out of business. We support going after the cheats and deadbeats and the underground economy, but we believe that this government has the power to do so now, and they need to use the rules that already exist.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'd ask the table to stop the clock for just a moment so we can carry out a matter of other business.

I beg to inform the House that the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka has filed notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer given to his question on November 6 from the Minister of Labour concerning WSIB mandatory coverage. This matter will be debated today at 6 o'clock, and I'm sure everyone will want to be here to listen.

Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: First, I'd just like to start off by expressing my deep concern about the lack of public participation in this bill and the time allocation motion, which we feel, from our party's perspective, was totally unfair and pushed through quickly. I concur with my colleagues in the official opposition that several days could have been set aside throughout this province for consultation with small business owners and other affected parties.

Given that, I'd also like to say that we in the NDP have discussed this at length, and why we feel the legislation is necessary, starting off with the ongoing abuse in the system of independent owner exemption: no restrictions on who can be classified as an IO, and workers being forced to choose between having a job or having coverage.

In the past 15 years, the construction industry has been substantially restructured by the practice of hiring and subcontracting to independent operators. This legislation, in our opinion, will help the WSIB on its Road to Zero mandate, the elimination of lost-time injuries and work-related deaths. As I say that, it may help it on its road, but anyone in this House who believes that injuries and lost-time accidents won't happen is a little naive. Speaking from my own experience in heavy industry for over 30 years, that will not happen. Injuries happen. People are human. They make errors. Machinery breaks down. Things happen.

With thousands of unregistered independent operators in construction, there is no method for these workers to receive health and safety training. Health and safety training is the lifeblood of safety.

In the place where I worked, as early as the mid-1970s we had monthly safety meetings. We had safety tours; we had stewards assigned to go with management on tours to recognize unsafe working conditions or unsafe working practices—extremely beneficial to our lost-time and injured workers numbers.

But I must say, I myself have seen, witnessed fatalities. I've seen a lot of lost fingers and toes and broken bones. You name it; I've seen it over the years.

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So when opposition people say this will have no impact on safety, I disagree totally. The WSIB has in-

spectors who go out. They also have connections to health clinics; they have connections to other health organizations in the province that give extended coverage under WSIB that may go on for years, as opposed to private insurance companies, which have limits. As you well know if you've ever dealt with an insurance company on claims, it can be very difficult to get that cheque. I know from my own experience that if you make three or four claims, then you become on the high-risk area and it's very difficult to collect your money. I would assume that under these private plans—a lot of people who presented in front of this committee said, "Well, you know, I have a private plan that covers me more, 24 hours a day." I'm not sure why you would need coverage 24 hours a day unless you are working three shifts. I assume that the WSIB covers you when you're on a work site, and that's the only coverage I ever received over the years. I didn't have coverage driving my car home unless I had personal life insurance or other situations. So I'm not quite sure about this 24/7 argument they have been putting forward.

Loopholes in this legislation: I would say that I personally oppose the exemption for home renovations. I think it wasn't well thought out, and I think this government, in committee, should change the home exemption renovation clause, because that's going to encourage more small outfits to go into that line of work under that umbrella to avoid the situation of paying WSIB premiums.

I also am not overly thrilled with the executive officer part of the legislation. I know that in large companies, you have to own or be a certain percentage—I believe it's 30%—and then you are considered an operating officer. But I know that in a lot of smaller companies, superintendents go to job sites. They could be owners, they could be the president, they could be CEO, but they're still actually functioning and working within that environment. A lot of these owner-operators also have a hands-on mentality, where they like to take part in it; maybe they even like to lead a work crew and be on the job to instruct in the way things are going, to speed things up, or maybe they're on the job for financial reasons—they're falling behind on their contract. For whatever reason, they do show up at job sites, and they should be covered too.

There is an argument that if they're in a tower or in a large company, they don't go to the job sites; that's quite possible. But I don't know anyone who owns a company and has never gone to a job site. If they do go to the job site, maybe the WSIB could make a percentage. If you're going to be 30% on the job site and 70% in the office, then those premiums should be the example to go by, so they don't have to pay a full premium when they're not on the job site 100% of the time.

It also levels the playing field so that everyone is playing by the same rules. Not having coverage gives some people a competitive advantage in bidding for work, because they don't have the cost. Why should the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act be the

source of economic advantage between similar firms in the same industry? We in the NDP don't agree with that; we believe in a fair playing field.

This legislation provides greater certainty and clarity of coverage. There may be as much, it has an estimated, as \$350 million in unpaid premiums. It erodes the construction coverage base and drives up costs for employers who pay into the system. Also, this legislation could lead to lower costs for legitimate contractors now paying astronomical costs into the system. The construction industry has been calling for action on this for over 15 years.

A point that was brought up by one of the former speakers about the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades—I must say that of all the presentations, 75% of the people who presented in this limited exposure were from large unions that have large numbers of workers under their umbrella. I would say it took up a good chunk of the province's workforce, and they all seem to be in favour of Bill 119, but they do have some concerns which I've addressed before and will address before I'm finished.

But one that really stood out for me was brought up by the Ontario Council of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, when they said, "First, if passed, Bill 119 will close the loopholes in the existing legislation which exempt independent operators, sole proprietors and company executives from mandatory WSIB. These loopholes have led to widespread abuse in the system." In fact, many of their members have come to their office complaining that their employers want them to sign declaration forms stating that they are independent operators so that their employers won't have to pay WSIB premiums.

We vividly recall the example of José and Maria, two married new Canadians from Venezuela who joined this union to work in the residential painting industry. When they reported to work with one of our smaller residential painting companies, they were clearly told, "Either you sign the form or you can't work for us." They were perplexed and frustrated as to why their employer wanted them to be classified as independent operators when they reported as employees and knew absolutely nothing about independently operated businesses. They were also shocked to learn about the precarious position they would be put in if they signed this form and were later seriously injured on the job site. They were very worried. Construction workers in this province should not have to be forced to make a decision between having a job or having WSIB coverage. Ontario construction workers deserve better.

Another incidence was a drywall contractor who informed us that they had each of their employees buy one share in the company for one dollar. As such, they were now part owners of the company and were given ridiculous titles, like director of coordination or director of policy and production, in order to avoid paying WSIB premiums under the executive exemption. It's unbelievable that people would go to that length to avoid their responsibility to workers.

According to the union, there are too many unscrupulous contractors working in construction to allow for the type of loophole that can always be manipulated and lead to these kinds of abuses. This bill has to be very clear: If you are involved in the construction industry, WSIB coverage has to be mandatory. This is why, although we are in support of the bill, we are against the type of exemption that currently exists in the bill, particularly the home renovation exemption, as it no doubt will lead to manipulation and abuse. That is not part of this bill. It's mentioned in the bill, but I think this government should take another look at it and not have any exemptions, except for chief operating officers, who in our opinion should pay a percentage. For instance, if they're on the job site 25% of the time, their premium should be according to the amount of time on the job site.

The second reason is, as I said earlier and will reiterate, that this bill, without question, will lead to greater health and safety education and training of construction workers and will assist the WSIB in meeting their Road to Zero mandate, and will hopefully eliminate some of the lost-time injuries and accidents. These workers will have access to all sections of the WSIB as far as rehabilitation and clinics and all the things that go along with WSIB coverage.

As I stated earlier, the number of unregistered independent operators working in the construction industry today is staggering, and there's no method whatsoever in place for these workers to receive any form of health and safety training. WSIB statistics also clearly reveal that the majority of workplace injuries and fatalities in the construction industry fall upon workers who have not had proper health and safety training. In other words, a properly trained worker is a safe worker. If this bill is passed, and all independent operators have to apply for WSIB coverage, this will force them to have direct contact with the WSIB and, by extension, with organizations such as the Construction Safety Association of Ontario for safety training.

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So, as we move along, the number of people who presented to this committee were just—it was the same theme from all of them. They were concerned about the two loopholes, the home renovator exemption and also the operating officer's exemption, so they wanted those closed.

This home renovator exemption could become the new independent operator problem. Exemptions should be removed or become more restrictive. There may be liability issues for the homeowner under subsection 26(2) of the existing act. This could happen. The point of the act is to ensure that the worker cannot sue the employer. Thus, under Bill 119, the home renovator could potentially sue the homeowner for negligence. The legislation must clarify who is responsible to pay WSIB premiums. Workers should not be forced or coerced into paying premiums.

The implementation date of January 1, 2012, is too far away. As my colleagues in the official opposition pointed

out, with four years to go, I think we would have had more time to discuss this very important bill.

Don't get me wrong. The NDP is not against small business owners. We support small business owners and their right to have their day in court. Their opinion is valued by our party, valued by the opposition and I'm sure the government, but this process has not given them the ability to have their day. They have to continue to struggle, come to Toronto for a two-day event which, before half of them even knew, was over; and the e-mails are flying in, and I think out of due respect for them and for the rest of Ontarians, they should have had their say.

I'd like to compliment my colleague Mr. Kormos from Welland for his wonderful presentation. Mr. Kormos has a way of bringing a human factor into all of his presentations, which I am going to cherish during my years or time with him as I pick up on his expertise. He's one of the best orators I've ever dealt with.

I must say my frustration continues—I've only been here a little over a year in this House—as I see that, once again, the NDP are doing what's best, in their opinion, for the people of Ontario. We are voting with the government. When we, as a party, see something that benefits the people of Ontario, we put aside our partisan politics. We do.

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Miller: The member laughs over there. That's amazing that he would laugh, considering—I've been here a year, and we've supported them on seven bills, I'm proud to say. They have supported us on none. They have shot down our bills in committee. They have shot down the Conservatives in committee. The only bill that I think they're going to agree to—and it was a good bill—was the member from Oxford when he brought forward signs on farm property to advertise their produce, and that may get stopped, too.

What I really have disdain for—maybe I'm a little naive, but when I came here, I thought we were all supposed to work together for the betterment of the people of Ontario. That's not happening. It doesn't happen every day in here, and I continue to shake my head at some of the things that go on in here, and this particular case that I'm on now is mind-boggling. You would think that a government, from an economic standpoint—and I'm talking about, of course, the grandparents, which isn't really related to this bill, but—

Interjection: No, but it's an example.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's an example.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Some of those grandparents worked in construction.

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, some of those grandparents used to work in construction. And now, at the end of their life—

Interjections.

Mr. Paul Miller: At the end of their life the rug is being pulled out in from under them and they're going to have to work until they're 85 to bring up, God bless them, their grandchildren who are in distress. It's really sad when I have to stand up day in and day out and fight

for a few hundred dollars for these ex-construction workers.

Mr. John O'Toole: Madam Meilleur doesn't care. She doesn't care.

Mr. Paul Miller: They don't care and it's sad, but they'll be willing to put those hard-working construction workers' grandkids into a foster home and pay \$1,500 a month, or into a group home and pay \$176 a day or—oh, I'm getting off topic, I can see.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I think we're stretching it just a bit. Okay? Back to the motion, please.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your indulgence, but I don't know how many of them have applied for WSIB. I don't think any of them; I think they probably don't qualify. That's a word I've been hearing a lot around here: "You don't qualify."

In closing, I would just like to say that it was a privilege today to stand up with Mr. Kormos and talk about worker protection, worker safety in this province. I am hoping it's moving in the right direction. We do need some amendments in this bill. I hope the government is willing to listen to some of our amendments and adopt some of them instead of railroading everything they think is right for the people of Ontario. Believe it or not, the people on the other side of this room, my fellow friends from the opposition party, the NDP, some of us have good ideas too, and we just want to share them with the governing party. Hopefully they'll take a couple of our ideas and maybe run with them, or they may appear a year later, after everyone else has forgotten about it, and resurface under their jurisdiction. It's unfortunate.

I would like to say thank you for the time today. I hope we can discuss this at more length in committee. I hope that we can work hand in hand with the government and bring forth some of our good ideas and some of our concerns to rectify this bill that I don't think is what I would call perfect—far from it—but it is a move in the right direction. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you for giving me the chance to speak and comment on the PC opposition day motion. I heard the Leader of the Opposition speaking earlier this afternoon about WSIB coverage. As you know and many people know—I've said it many different times—I was a small business owner for many years. Five to 10 to 60 people worked with me at my company. We used to do different types of work, and these types of work sometimes required one to use some kind of equipment or travel from place to place, so sometimes the workers who used to work with me exposed themselves to dangerous equipment. I was always concerned about their protection, about their safety. I always used to go to training sessions and read books and manuals to see how we could create safety for the people who worked with me because I was one of them, working with them day and night, in order to make sure the business ran smoothly and safely.

I listened to the Leader of the Opposition speaking about safety and about small business, and as I mentioned, I was a small business owner. I know how much small business owners contribute to the economy of Ontario, how much effort and time they put in in order to be successful at the job they do on a daily basis. Therefore I'm showing my support for small business and I appreciate the job they do.

The core of our economy is built on small business. But the most important thing, we have to remember, is the safety of our workers across the province of Ontario. I was listening one day to Mr. Kormos speaking about protection of workers. A worker is a worker. Whether you work in a small company or in a large company, you require protection; it doesn't matter where or when or the circumstances. For the people who work on construction sites, construction sites are very difficult. They work outside, they use heavy equipment and they are subject to many different dangers, obstacles and equipment. So therefore our duty, our responsibility, is to create some kind of safety mechanism for them.

1700

I listened. I got the chance to serve in the committee the last two days—Monday and Tuesday. We listened to many different people who came from different groups to present different sides of the spectrum, some supporting the bill and others against the bill. Everyone out of this group eloquently presented their views.

I listened to the member opposite speaking about how the safety mechanism can be replaced by private insurance. I was in the committee and a question was asked to one of the presenters against Bill 119, "How many people in your organization are covered by that insurance?" She couldn't answer; she had no answer for that question. So this opened the big question to all of us: What about the people who work in that company? They're open, not protected, not being provided a safety mechanism which is badly needed if somebody gets injured or hurt on the job.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, yourself, myself, many members of this House always welcome many constituents who come to our offices complaining about many different issues. I'll give you an example: One day I was in my office. Somebody came to my office and he was complaining. He went to work with a company and was working with them under the assumption he was covered by WSIB. Then when he got hurt, he came to us when he discovered that he was not covered, was not insured. Nobody looked after him. He came complaining because no insurance was in place to cover him; there was no WSIB coverage so he came seeking support and help. He has two options—either go to the ODSP or go to Ontario Works—to be able to receive some money to support his family, the people he looks after.

Sometimes it's difficult to be able to enrol in ODSP. You have to prove a lot of things. And if you want to be a Ontario Works recipient, you have to have lots of proof and you cannot own certain assets or money etc. It's not fair for that person who has been working for that company for many years.

After that, he discovered he was working as a subcontractor in that company. This was the way, I guess, for the owner of that company to get around the rules and regulations: Give him the job and not give him the protection he needed in order to protect himself.

It's bad, and I think every person who works in the province and gives his or her thought, skills or knowledge to this province should be protected. That's why we listened to many different people speaking about private insurance. We learned in this committee that private insurance doesn't provide continuity of health service, and WSIB is the only mechanism to be able to assess that worker—if he has been working from job to job, WSIB will cover him all the time. If that person—who hopefully wouldn't be injured—does get hurt, they will be able to assess his situation and then will know if he's eligible to be covered or not.

Therefore, I think WSIB is the only united mechanism that has been in place for the last hundred years to protect the people of this province. You cannot just depend on an insurance company. As you know, most of the time when you apply for service or coverage with an insurance company, they give you a hard time. They're not responsible for continuing to look after you if you do not fit under their criteria; most of the time there's a lot of fine print when you sign the insurance policy which makes you ineligible to be protected or to be covered under that insurance. Therefore, when we have coverage under WSIB, which is a non-profit organization founded in the province of Ontario to protect hard-working Ontarians, they can go to work with peace of mind that if something happens to them, somebody will look after them.

I'm going to vote against this motion. This is not a motion we can support because it will be against the workers of this province. I know the members opposite stated many times that this bill will bankrupt businesses, this motion will not allow the people to be prosperous at the job they do, but I don't agree with that. I think it's our obligation as a government, our obligation as the people elected to this place, to protect the workers in the province of Ontario. I'm not going to support this motion, and I hope the members opposite change their mind and we can work together.

We heard a lot of recommendations from many different presenters who came to the committee. Some of them talked about an office executive who cannot go to work. Hopefully, after we collect all this information and consult with WSIB, we can have some exemptions for people who never go to construction sites, so we have some kind of flexibility in order to address a logical approach. The most important thing is that the workers in the province of Ontario should be protected.

As I mentioned many different times, I listened in the committee, and people were saying we don't listen to the opposition, we're not listening to people from both sides of the spectrum. Many people came, more than 20 or 30 groups, representing thousands and thousands of businesses. They talked about their issues and they talked about their organizations. They told us what they think.

So I think that whether it was two days here or one day in London or Ottawa or whatever, the most important thing is that all the main representatives of the major organizations across the province of Ontario came before our committee and spoke and advised our committee about many different elements that should be changed or taken into consideration when we go to clause-by-clause.

I hope we can collect all this information from the people who came before us in the last couple of days and come up with a bill that can protect the people of Ontario, can protect the workers, and can be an example that will be felt across the whole nation.

I want to say that I'm against this motion and I'm going to vote against it. I'm going to work hard to make sure we have a WSIB bill to protect the workers across the province of Ontario and a bill we'll be proud of, not just today, but in generations to come.

In the end our focus is the workers; our focus is the safety of our people. That's the aim of the bill, and that's why I'm not supporting this motion.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Members, I draw your attention to the west end of the Speaker's gallery, where we're joined by the Honourable Hugh Edighoffer, Speaker from June 4, 1985, to November 19, 1990, the member for Perth in the 29th to the 34th Parliaments. Welcome, sir.

Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: As a former Minister of Labour, I'm certainly pleased to join the debate and discussion on this opposition day motion.

I hope the Liberals understand what this motion actually says. It actually speaks about the concerns that are still outstanding about Bill 119, an Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, and then it simply calls upon the Legislature of Ontario to extend public hearings on the bill to communities across Ontario in early 2009 and allow all members to speak to the bill before it becomes law.

It's obvious that the people speaking today have no idea what they're speaking about. They don't realize that they have been, I guess, guillotined in the same way every member of this House has been and prevented from going out and listening to people throughout the province of Ontario and hearing the very legitimate concerns and making some real, honest effort to forge some compromises to ensure that the very legitimate concerns are addressed.

A bill like this takes lots of consultation. It has not been done at all. This bill was attempted by the Liberal government in 2006. They faced significant opposition, and for some reason they've brought it back now in 2008. Again, there was no consultation, although we do hear that there was consultation with the unions. We know that the business community had no opportunity at all for any input. I find that unbelievable.

1710

When we were in office, when we were in power, I can remember the days and weeks and months of consul-

tation that we had when we made changes to legislation. We met with unions; we met with business people. These people have just totally neglected and ignored the fact that the people who pay the bills certainly should have an opportunity for some input. I'm simply appalled that the Liberals would just say no, that two days of public hearings is enough. They're going to be in Toronto. We're not going to travel the province. They have totally ignored the voices of the people in this province. But we see that happening more and more. In fact, I would say to you that recently it's déjà vu all over again.

I am reminded of 1990 to 1995, a time when we saw the politicization of what was then the Workers' Compensation Board like we had never seen it before. It had started under the Liberal government. Then, of course, we made changes. We overhauled it. We gave it the name WSIB, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. We made sure that the changes reflected input from all of the stakeholders.

We're going back to what I would tell you is politicization of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. This bill is unfair. It's unfair to people in the province of Ontario. As it is currently written, it perpetuates a tax grab on the construction sector, and it needs to be addressed.

We have all received letters from our constituents about the financial impact of this bill, and certainly that needs to be considered. For the minister to say this is all about safety, I would want to tell the minister that he doesn't know what he's talking about. In fact, I've been pretty disappointed in his attempts to explain or defend the legislation. He has not even been able to do so, and the reason he can't do so is because he never engaged in any thoughtful or extensive deliberations with anybody who was going to be impacted by this legislation if they happened to represent the business sector.

This is becoming a very common practice in this Legislature when there is any legislation introduced by the McGuinty government. They only listen to the people that they know are going to support them.

I don't know what's happened to democracy, because this is a government that used to champion democratic renewal. They were going to change the way this House operated. They were going to get lots of public input in order to ensure the best legislation for all of the people in the province. All they do today is trample on democracy. They don't allow enough time to debate, to discuss, to get input and then make any meaningful changes to the legislation. As I say, it's déjà vu all over again. I hope that it leads in 2011 to the defeat of this government, because they are ignoring the voices of a majority of people in the province of Ontario. You just need to know that if you continue down this path, you will suffer the consequences.

It's been just appalling to see that this minister and this government have never done a detailed cost-impact analysis whatsoever. That also happens now with legislation. They don't bother to look at the impact, the consequences, and to consider them. They just decide they're going to bulldoze and ram everything through.

So this is what we've got now: We've got a bill that's going to have a very unfair and huge financial impact on many small businesses throughout the province of Ontario. Any reasonable, thoughtful person knows that a bill of this magnitude, a bill with this type of implication, needs to be discussed and debated for at least six to eight months, and here we've had this bill here for a couple of weeks and they decide they are going to guillotine and cut off any further debate. I am simply appalled.

This bill leaves so many unanswered questions. I want to know, why is this bill being fast-tracked in 2008 when it's not scheduled for implementation until 2012? One theory that has emerged and that I've been hearing a lot about recently is the fact that you have mismanaged the WSIB. The unfunded liability is now reaching a historic high—we hear it might be as high as even \$8 billion, \$13 billion, \$15 billion—and you've got a real problem. Under our leadership, the unfunded liability went down. Under your government, you are facing a crisis. So maybe what you're looking to do is some Enron-style accounting. Maybe you want to mitigate this unprecedented spike in the UFL. How could you do this? It's been suggested that maybe what you want to do—and that's the reason for your haste in passing it in 2008—is create a fictitious, overstated stream of potential future revenues. You want to build that into the unfunded liability projections by the end of 2008, and by magic the unfunded liability is going to be lowered. Well, eventually, in four or five years, you will be found out, if that is what you're doing. Your fictitious accounting's going to be discovered. But obviously it's not the problem that you have today—and you've got a problem today.

I don't know why the haste, why you won't listen to the people in the province of Ontario, but I would say to you, you're making a grave mistake by not consulting with the people who are going to be impacted by this bill. I don't like to hear people say, "Shame on you," but I'm going to say to, shame on you. People in this province deserve the opportunity to put their legitimate concerns on the record. They also have the right to be heard by this government, and you've refused to do so.

Please, support the motion today. All we ask is that you listen to the people in the province of Ontario who have elected you and do what's best.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm happy to join in this debate. We should move on and get this bill passed. The thinking behind the bill of arranging for or bringing in universal coverage for the workers who aren't covered and doing something about these artificial schemes to keep certain workers off coverage has been talked about, debated and thought about for years and years in this Legislature. It's now time to move ahead and put this behind us and get the coverages in place for the people they should be in place for.

I want to make a couple of points. First, whenever a piece of legislation comes before this body, I think the

first thing we've got to ask ourselves is, what problem is the legislation designed to address? That's what this body is all about, fixing problems. Here are a couple of problems that this legislation is designed to fix, and these are problems that have been around Ontario for years and years.

First of all, there's the issue of the coverage loopholes in our system. What do I mean by coverage loopholes in our system? An insidious practice has grown up where some contractors, some employers are misclassifying employees. What they're saying to these employees—they're coming on to the construction site, they should be employed as workers of the employer and then they would be covered by the WSIB. But what some, not all, employers are doing is putting pressure on the employee: "Look, if you want to work on this site, I want you to set up a relationship with me where I'm going to consider you as an independent contractor. And because you're an independent contractor, I pay you a base rate and I don't have to cover the WSIB payments." By misclassifying the worker, that's an abuse of the expectation that the worker, if he falls victim to an accident on the site, is going to be covered for those injuries and the consequences of those injuries. The employer, in my view in a very short-sighted way, is saying, "If I classify the employee as an independent contractor, I'm going to save some money. I don't have to make the WSIB payments" and so forth and so on. But what happens is that the employee is placed at some real serious risk: no coverage in the case of an accident.

Now it gets even a little more insidious because typically in these situations where an employer has asked someone to, in effect, commit to being an independent contractor, more often than not those persons are the vulnerable workers—new immigrants, people who desperately need a job. They don't have any real choice. They've got some bills to pay. They're feeling the pressure. "Anything to get a job—sure, I'm an independent worker." It's that very, very vulnerable person who then is put at the greatest possible risk. That's not fair to the employee.

1720

Now let me speak about it from the employer's point of view. This bill advances employer interests. We've heard from the official opposition that the employer is placed at a disadvantage because the employer is going to have to make these extra payments to WSIB. But the majority of employers are playing by the rules. The pressure they find themselves under is that they're bidding on a job site; they want to get job X, a small construction project. Those employers are playing by the rules. They're treating their employees as employees, not independent contractors. They're not misclassifying them. They're making the WSIB payments. They're bidding on a job. They're at a competitive disadvantage because they've got an extra cost factor built into their proposal, their bid to get the contract. They're competing against employers who are not playing by the rules, who have artificially created a financial advantage to them-

selves on the backs of the employees, often the backs of the most vulnerable employees.

So now we have two unfairnesses: unfairness to the vulnerable employee and unfairness to the employer who is playing by the rules. That's not fair. Everybody should be treated the same in this. So in many ways, if this bill goes through, we're eliminating that unfair competitive advantage that an employer who's not playing by the rules has over an employer who's playing by the rules.

Employee stakeholders and employer stakeholders, when they listen to this argument that I have just made, accept that this bill is a good thing. Here are some employer quotes of support.

This is from Doug Chalmers, the director of Aluma Systems, Sarnia, past chair of the Sarnia Construction Association: "Congratulations! Absolutely brilliant. This will make Ontario a safer workplace and improve the quality of life for all of us."

Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations: "This is a timely issue as the construction industry is actively seeking to proactively improve workplace safety across the industry and address the often thorny issue of coverage for independent contractors."

Andrew Sefton, executive director of the Ontario Painting Contractors Association: "Not only has the recent announcement shown that the Ministry of Labour supports the most economical insurance option available for the construction industry, the Ministry of Labour has embraced the notion that the construction industry should aspire to the highest common denominator from which all society shall benefit"—that is, the employer and the employee.

This quote is from Derek Smith of the London and District Construction Association: "This legislation will provide for accountability from operators that may not currently be participating in WSIB, what's more, an initiative such as this will result in levelling the market opportunities for our members as a whole." He's referring to members of the construction association.

Those are employers who are supporting this legislation for all the right reasons.

It has wide support in the labour community. I am quoting Carmen Principato, business manager, Labourers' International: "I am certain that once passed this legislation will assist us in our goals of making Ontario's workplaces the safest...."

There are several other quotes from the employee side of the equation here.

In short, this legislation should move forward now, not wait months and months. The legislation, if passed, will be implemented in about a year. If there's some tweaking that has to be done in the regulations or something, that's where we'll do that, but this is essentially about fairness: fairness for the employees, fairness for the employers, fairness for the public and especially fairness for the vulnerable.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 119. On October 28, the McGuinty government introduced Bill 119, which extends WSIB coverage to thousands more employees in the construction industry.

The key sector targeted by the Liberal government is small construction business. Why is this bad for small business? Small construction businesses cannot afford a new tax, estimated by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, CFIB, to be an average of \$11,000 annually. The new taxes will put many of these businesses at risk and may drive some out of business.

The government keeps on trying to suggest that the debate is about the importance of workplace safety and the danger of fraud. That couldn't be further from the truth. Many small and medium construction businesses already have private insurance which in many cases offers great coverage than the WSIB for about a third of the cost. Even worse, this bill comes at a time when the province is slipping into recession and businesses are looking at how to survive, not how to deal with higher costs of doing business. The fact that Ontario is now officially a have-not province is again further evidence of this.

Given the fact that this resolution today is asking the government to extend public hearings, I thought that it was an important opportunity—a very limited one—to give the government a sense of the kind of difficulty that people in my riding are having at the prospect of this initiative of Bill 119. I quote from Rob Rymell:

"As a single employee in a consulting business in the construction industry, this is very concerning.

"The marketplace is already very competitive and rife with extreme expenses ... which can be in the tens of thousands per year.

"Any additional costs for individuals such as myself will create yet another burden and barrier to growth. In a province where growth is a priority, this is contradictory.

"I understand the need to provide coverage for workers where injury is a real possibility; however, for professionals such as myself who are just making ends meet, this is not justified and in the end will hurt all similar small businesses and stop that needed growth."

Mike Foley of Foley Restoration in Schomberg:

"As a business owner in the construction field in Ontario, I am quite concerned with the government considering mandating owners to be covered by WSIB.

"I presently have liability insurance on my myself, which is better coverage for a lower price than WSIB can offer.

"As such, why on earth would I want to pay more money for less coverage?

"I understand why WSIB wants to have all business owners covered; it is simply to increase the amount of money that flows into their organization.

"Being a business owner in our economy as it is, I think that we as individuals know how to take care of ourselves and our well-being better than WSIB.

"I feel that this should not be mandatory, but rather optional.

“If a business owner feels that WSIB is the coverage that they want, then they can opt to take the coverage and pay the premiums.

“Let me as a business owner decide what is best for me and my family.

“I also feel that if this bill passes, you will see more small business owners close their doors due to the increased costs.

“This in turn will have a more negative impact on our economy than forcing owners to take on this additional coverage.”

These are real people—real people trying to make a living, real people obeying the law, doing the best for themselves and their community. What this bill does is put that process and those people and their families and communities in jeopardy.

1730

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I want to just briefly intervene on the side of some sense here. We hear the opposition talking about time allocation and how the debate is being cut off very, very early. But for some of us who have been in this place for more than a few terms, we are finding it rather strange that the Progressive Conservative Party could even keep a straight face when they talked about time allocation motions. During their period in government—that dark period—they managed to, on a regular basis, in every session, bring forward time allocation motions as if it were the only way to pass legislation.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Say it isn't so. What did they do? How many times?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: That's a good question the member from Peterborough raises, the question of how many times the Conservative government of Mike Harris and Ernie Eves cut off debate, used time allocation motions because the opposition was, in their view, asking for debate. Do you know how many times? Sixty-seven times. There's the answer. Our friends in the New Democratic Party managed to do this far less frequently during their five years—I think it was 24 times—but they managed not to sit one complete year. They didn't think 1995 existed, and so Parliament did not debate anything during that period of time.

No one in this place likes time allocation motions, least of all myself or my colleagues, but when met with the kind of opposition that we're getting today, I think most of us would think that it's time to move on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to speak for a couple of minutes on this debate. I do have a late show after the vote which I will use as well, and I know the member from Renfrew would like to speak to the bill.

I would like to use the couple of minutes that I have left to thank the Muskoka Builders' Association, who have been here for the day in the gallery to watch the proceedings; I thank them for taking the time to come

down. They all run their own businesses, and to take a day away from work costs them money. It just shows how concerned they are with this bill, and I would ask the minister, who is in the House at this time, to make sure they respond to the many questions the Muskoka builders have asked him in a letter to the minister. I was hoping to get their whole letter on the record.

I would just comment that one of the members from the Muskoka Builders' Association handed me a handwritten sheet of paper asking, “If you're not going to implement a bill with so few specifics for three years, why are you in such a hurry to pass this bill? Why are you not allowing the majority of stakeholders in construction to understand the details of the bill and to discuss the details of the bill?”

That's really all the resolution this afternoon is about. Often, opposition day motions are not very reasonable. This is one that's pretty reasonable. All it's asking is to extend public hearings on the bill to communities across the province, because most businesses are totally unaware of this. They don't know this is going on, and that's your plan. You're trying to get it through before they know anything about it.

What else does this motion ask? It asks that all members be allowed to speak to the bill. That's a pretty reasonable opposition day motion, and I would ask the government members to support this motion.

I'll have an opportunity to raise more concerns in my late show, but thank you again to the Muskoka builders for coming down today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: It's been interesting hearing all the members speak on this proposed piece of legislation and the importance of it to the construction sector. I say to all those watching and listening that this bill is solely for the construction sector. I know some have talked about other sectors. It is for the construction sector because of the unique characteristics that exist within the construction sector. It's for the health and safety of those who work in construction, and it's for fairness for those companies that are part of that very, very important sector in Ontario. It is something that we believe in; we believe in construction. That's why the McGuinty government is investing over \$30 billion in infrastructure. Those are those roads and hospitals and schools and community centres that make our communities the places they are. Homebuilders want to build in those communities that have access, that have public transit, that have infrastructure.

If we are going to invest \$30 billion in infrastructure, we're going to want to make sure that those who are building it are taken care of, that their safety is ensured. That's why we can't have construction workers out there in a very high-risk environment where at times they are putting their lives on the line—we want to make sure that if they are to get injured, they will be covered, they will have benefits.

The WSIB is the best system in place to take care of those construction workers. I was talking to a lawyer,

actually, on the weekend, and he was telling me that somebody had come to his office about 10 years ago, and this person had said, “You know, I need your help. I’m in construction. Someone told me, ‘Don’t get workmen’s comp; don’t get WSIB. Go to private insurance.’ I did. I got some private insurance. I got two years’ worth of coverage. I didn’t think anything was going to happen to me, so I wanted to go with as low a rate as possible. I didn’t want to pay much out.” Well, this person wrenched his leg—he was a bricklayer—and now he’s trying to find a way to sue some of the people who had given him advice to go the private route. This lawyer friend said, “Why didn’t you get workmen’s comp?” He said, “Well, you know what? I didn’t want to spend the money,” etc, and this person finds himself in a very tragic situation. We want to make sure that doesn’t happen with others. We want to make sure that all those working in construction, all those independent operators, are covered. This is about their safety, their well-being.

I want to share with you another story, and this is a serious one. Every year there are examples of very serious injuries in construction, as those who are in the gallery and watching on TV would know. Sometimes there are fatalities that have caused additional financial and emotional hardship to families. Following a serious workplace incident where the self-employed worker dies without WSIB coverage, here’s what happens. One example that comes to mind—

Mr. Peter Kormos: What do you mean, “comes to mind”? You’re reading it off a note.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: —is a construction worker who left behind a spouse and children. He died from a fall but did not have the optional WSIB coverage or insurance. That means his spouse and children were not entitled to the lump-sum benefits and the reimbursement for burial expenses they would have received from the WSIB during that very difficult time. Also, the spouse and young children have not received the monthly benefits they would have been entitled to or some of the additional programs the WSIB offers, such as bereavement counselling and labour market re-entry services for the spouse. In addition, had this worker been covered under the WSIA, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, compensation for the children would be included in the monthly benefits. These benefits continue until the children have completed their education, including post-secondary.

Can you imagine what a different life it would be for that family, and now the hardship that they have to endure, not just the loss of the spouse but the financial hardship that they are going to have to go through? We want to make sure that we’re—I’m not reading these stories here. We want to make sure that these construction workers and their families have benefits in place and are taken care of.

1740

Also, within the WSIB there are the health and safety associations which provide best practices and help businesses. I believe that when you look at health and safety and you invest in health and safety and you’re

proactive about it within your organization, you’re the type of organization that workers want to stay with. They want to be with you. Those are the types of businesses that we want to grow in Ontario. Businesses that are on a level playing field are out there. Yes, they have to make a profit, they have to be viable, but they’re going to be most viable if everybody is on that level playing field, if everybody is paying into WSIB.

For too long, these nefarious practices have taken place where some businesses, these poor operators, as we’ve heard here in the Legislature many a time, have asked individuals who have worked with them, maybe even for years, to declare themselves as independent operators, which we know they’re not, so that they don’t have to pay the premiums and have a way to undercut when they’re trying to get a contract. This is unfair to those workers. This is unfair to those businesses that they’re competing against.

The principle of fairness is one that I believe all members in this chamber believe in. It’s a value that we cherish, that we hold, that we must do the utmost to protect. I would hope that the members opposite would see that in this light.

This piece of legislation has actually been consulted on, in terms of mandatory coverage, for over 15 years. In 2006 we did have a consultation, and in that consultation we had almost 400 deputations, people coming forward, stakeholders coming forward, explaining why this was important.

I thought that even the leader of the official opposition, John Tory, had gotten it, because just this past spring, in March, he went out to the Interior Systems Contractors Association of Ontario, met with them, and assured the construction industry that he understood the WSIB’s reform was essential to the health of the construction industry. Actually, I’ll tell you, they were very disappointed in John. They call him “John.” They don’t call him “Mr. Tory” or the leader of the official opposition. They know him on a first-name basis. He had been there. They said:

“Hi John,

“I am very disappointed that today you released a press release urging the Minister of Labour to repeal Bill 119.

“As you know, you visited our association in March, at which time we raised the issue of mandatory coverage, and you assured our members that you agreed with our position that WSIB reform was essential to the health of the construction industry in Ontario”—big flip-flop here. “At the same time you insisted that a level playing field should be created throughout the bidding process, and that any unfair advantage to the underground economy should be eliminated.”

Mr. Norm Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The minister knows he’s using that quote out of context.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It’s not a point of order.

Minister.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: He said to John, “You have now completely reversed this position, which is unacceptable.

Our members feel that you have neglected to fully honour your commitment and they are questioning their support of your party. It is our fear that your objectivity has been clouded by” some differing groups that are out there.

This speaks volumes. I know that the leader of the official opposition has lost his way. I don't know where he is, but he has lost his way.

What I can tell you is that we on this side of the House want—and I thank the NDP for their support on this—

Mr. Mario Sergio: We want fairness.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We want fairness, yes. We want stability. We want to make sure that there are safe work conditions and that all those in the construction sector are covered. This is what is important.

There has been a lot of consultation. We will look at what has come from the standing committee and see how we can strengthen the legislation. We will continue to work with stakeholders, reach out to stakeholders and make sure that we can safeguard our workers the best possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to put in the last couple of minutes on behalf of the official opposition and the leader of the official opposition, Bob Runciman.

Over and over again we have asked the Minister of Labour to tell us how this bill was going to improve health and safety for workers. He has been unable to or has refused to answer that question. Over and over again he's been asked how this is going to eliminate or reduce the underground economy. He has refused or has been unable to answer that question, because that is not the intent of this bill. This bill is intended to satisfy those people who have been so good to the Liberal Party in the past.

The crux of the matter—and the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka has touched on that—if this bill is so important to you, even though it is doing grave harm to people in the construction business and other trades, then why are you not implementing it until 2012? You are not implementing this until 2012. What is the hurry? There is ample time for many, many more hearings than a few days down here in Queen's Park, where you just brought in your union friends to the hearings. There's ample time to travel throughout the province, get people from all corners of the province to speak on this, give all members of the Legislature an opportunity to speak to this bill. What is the hurry?

The hurry is that you made a deal that you're going to have this bill passed before Christmas; yet you're not implementing it until 2012. What sense does that make? There's no need. There's no requirement. This is, in the most egregious way, an insult to the process in this House: a bill that does not become law until 2012 but has to be rammed through this Legislature in a holus-bolus way with no regard to the members of this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: First of all, to all the men and women who work in construction, who have worked in construction, who do such fabulous work throughout the province of Ontario, we say thank you. For almost a century, this province has stood with all political parties and said that we should make sure that workers in construction are insured, and that's why we have the WSIB system today.

There are three main reasons for ensuring that this legislation proceeds. First, we want to make sure that every business can compete fairly. Those who are paying premiums and the workers of those businesses who are paying the taxes should not be put at a competitive disadvantage by others who found a shortcut through the system. It eliminates business competitiveness.

Secondly, this is the tip of the underground economy. It's estimated the Ontario government loses up to \$400 million a year because people are not paying all their taxes. Sounds easy, straight cheque. But what would the people of Ontario do with \$400 million every single year?

Third, health and safety: At the end of the day, people who start work in the morning, or whenever they start it, should come home safely in the evening. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and the system surrounding it help ensure that. We need to support this legislation, support the men and women—employer, employee, workers—who are in this system. We need to pass this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Runciman has moved opposition day number 5. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay”.

In my opinion, the nays have it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1749 to 1759.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those in favour, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
MacLeod, Lisa

Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Runciman, Robert W.
Savoline, Joyce

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

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher

Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Hoy, Pat

Moridi, Reza
Oraziotti, David
Phillips, Gerry
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Ruprecht, Tony

Best, Margaret
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim

Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Leal, Jeff
Mangat, Amrit
Matthews, Deborah
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol

Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

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

The ayes are 17; the nays are 40.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

SMALL BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We have a late show this evening standing in the name of Mr. Miller, addressed to the Minister of Labour. So I would ask the members for leave quietly so that we can continue.

The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Two weeks ago, I asked the Minister of Labour during oral questions in this House a serious question posed by a small business owner. He asked if you would extend public hearings on the bill to communities across the province. Specifically, the question I asked, just to refresh your memories, “Minister, will you do what my constituent is asking for and extend public hearings on the bill to communities across the province?” You didn’t even attempt to answer that question. Frankly, your answer was appalling in that it showed a complete lack of respect for the small business owner.

During the supplementary question, I asked a question posed by yet another small business owner who was looking for some assurance from you that your government would not be extending mandatory WSIB coverage to all sectors. Specifically, I asked, “Will you listen to this constituent’s concerns and give your solemn promise not to extend mandatory WSIB coverage to other sectors?” Once again, Minister, you didn’t even attempt to answer the question, and I found your answer showed a complete lack of understanding for the business community. That’s why I filed for this late show, to give you another chance to actually answer the question, not just go on with your quote you had from some e-mail about something John Tory said before this bill was introduced. Please save us that response this time. Try to actually answer the question.

Small business is worried—with good cause. That’s why 30 business owners from Parry Sound–Muskoka have been here the whole day—and they’re still here—taking time off their business, taking time out from work to be here, to show their opposition to this bill being rushed through the Legislature.

I’d like to get on the record some other concerns I’ve received from other businesses in Parry Sound–Muskoka. A Parry Sound business writes, “This is nothing but another tax grab. Mandatory WSIB coverage for a small business would cost us thousands of dollars a year, which would be very harmful to our business. We have been in business for over 30 years and each year it is harder and harder to stay profitable due to government requirements and legislation. Please continue to fight hard to stop this legislation from taking effect.”

Another businessman writes: “I would like to stress to you how concerned I am about the proposed changes to WSIB coverage being forced on small business owners. As you may recall, I am self-employed in a fibreglass repair company. Our business is already under serious financial difficulties due to several factors that are also affecting most businesses these days. My customers are cutting back on their spending and unfortunately being in an industry that deals with recreation, we are the first to bear the brunt of such cutbacks.

“I fear that any further expenses put on businesses like ours will only push us closer to the edge. This is quite simply a tax we cannot afford. I trust you will do everything in your power to stop these changes from being forced on us.”

A Bracebridge business owner writes: “It is concerning to hear that the Liberal government would like to push this legislation through without first allowing committee hearings throughout the province to take place and to consider other options to mandatory coverage by WSIB.

“This will not be any benefit to small business, but will only benefit large unions. Even though we are not part of the construction trade it is worrisome that my exemption status as an executive officer of a corporation could change in the future if this legislation is pushed through.”

Another business writes: “We are a small family construction business that is paying a large amount of WSIB already. One of the main issues that we have with WSIB is that the rate that we have to pay for the people in the office is the same rate as the people in the field. The degree of injury and possibility of injury is far greater in the field.”

I can see that I’m running out of time, and I have more quotes, but I would like to get on the record the Muskoka Builders’ Association president, Dave Nodwell, who’s still here today: “As a construction-related association, we place health and safety as a top priority. We are also concerned with the prevalence of the underground economy. That said, after studying the bill, we don’t see how either of these concerns will be addressed.... We urge you to make any action necessary to require the committee responsible for this bill to hold Ontario-wide consultations with stakeholders prior to passage.”

Minister, these are real concerns from people who drive our economy. Don’t they deserve a chance to be heard? You’ve moved this bill through the House in record time. There are business owners out there who

still don't know what's going on. They don't have any idea that this bill is being debated. Why won't you show these business owners the respect they deserve? At least give them the chance to be heard.

To refresh your memory on my question of two weeks ago, will you extend public hearings? Will you assure owners who are not in the construction sector that they will not be the next industries to be covered by this WSIB legislation? Thank you.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I can say to the member is that we can agree that construction workers are hard-working individuals in a very risky business. I have many in my family and many friends who are carpenters, pipefitters, electricians, who work in roofing, and I want to make sure that they're safe. I want to make sure they're insured for their benefit and for the benefit of their families.

To those who are here from the member's constituency who work in construction, I understand how hard you work, and I understand that you work on some very risky job sites. I commend you for taking on best practices when it comes to health and safety. This is a piece of legislation that is being brought forward for the construction industry because of the unique characteristics that exist within that industry. We want to make sure that all those working in that field are safe, and this will go a long way to doing that. So today, where you have a lot of independent operators who are being misclassified, you have companies that may have 10 employees but are saying that they have five out there, and they're not insuring the other five, and using different loopholes to be able to undermine the system and, yes, create revenue leakage with the WSIB. I think this is unfair. It's unfair to those who are paying their fair share. What I can say to the member is that today, and if this legislation is to be passed, we want to make sure that the enforcement is out there to clamp down on those poor operators, those who are not paying their fair share. We want to make sure that they're paying their premiums because it's only fair to everybody.

In construction, it is a big family. If you meet those who work in the field, they come together. They understand that they toil in the same industry. They build our

communities, our schools, our homes, our community centres, our hospitals, all the things we need and that make up our community.

What I can say to the member is that we will continue to reach out to stakeholders. There have been over 15 years of consultation on mandatory coverage—over 15 years. In 2006, we received almost 400 deputations from all groups—from labour, employers, employees—sharing their stories on how they feel we should move forward. We've taken all that into account. What we want to do is make sure that we shut down these nefarious practices that are taking place out in the field. There are some poor operators who are undercutting business, and we feel that should not be happening. We want a fair, level playing field and that the safety of all construction workers should be taken into account. With WSIB coverage, if a worker were to get injured, they are covered up to 85% of what they would earn over a 12-month period to age 65. This is about the best coverage you can get out there. We support those workers.

They also have labour market re-entry programs to help workers. If somebody has been injured and maybe can't use their arm or can't do exactly what they were doing before working in the construction sector, we can bring them in, retrain them, help them so they can get back into a job. We know you want to keep working, and you would love to keep working within the field that you were working in because that helps with your self-esteem.

The companies that are the good players out there understand the importance of the WSIB coverage. They understand the importance of taking care of their employees, and we want to back them. We want to back them because they are the types of companies that we want here in Ontario. We don't want fly-by-night organizations. We don't want organizations that are not taking care of their most precious resource, and that's their human resource.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. This House is adjourned until 9 of the clock Thursday morning, November 20.

The House adjourned at 1813.

ERRATA

No.	Page	Column	Line(s)	Should read:
89	4015	2	8	Reubin Cipin. He lives at number 2 Neptune in my riding.
89	4015	2	30	Reubin Cipin and all the good folks at number 2 Neptune,

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permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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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: Trevor Day

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