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Tuesday 25 November 2008

Mardi 25 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

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The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COUNTERING DISTRACTED DRIVING
AND PROMOTING GREEN
TRANSPORTATION ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 VISANT À COMBATTRE
LA CONDUITE INATTENTIVE
ET À PROMOUVOIR
LES TRANSPORTS ÉCOLOGIQUES

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 20, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 118, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of devices with display screens and hand-held communication and entertainment devices and to amend the Public Vehicles Act with respect to car pool vehicles / Projet de loi 118, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d'interdire l'usage d'appareils à écran et d'appareils portatifs de télécommunications et de divertissement et modifiant la Loi sur les véhicules de transport en commun à l'égard des véhicules de covoiturage.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm glad to be here among all of my colleagues in the opposition in order to have a discussion about this bill. I want to say up front—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There we go. I'm glad my colleagues are showing up in great numbers. This is very good. Thank you very much.

First of all, I want to say up front that I think this bill represents an interesting step forward in trying to deal with the issue of making drivers safer—not only drivers, but quite frankly, anybody who is travelling on our highways or walking down the sidewalk, when it comes to trying to make things safer for people. The bill is trying to deal with how we are able to deal with the distraction that drivers have within the automobile or the truck when they're driving.

I think generally there's support. Most people think it's a bit of a no-brainer, and understand that using your BlackBerry—and by the way, Mr. B., if you can take mine away; I forgot to turn off my telephone. I just

thought of it as I ran into the House. See, I'm describing myself and I'm saying, "Yes, I have a problem, and I'm working on it."

I do want to say that first of all, we all agree with the direction that this legislation is going in. I think we can all agree that when it comes to distractions when you're driving your car or your truck, it's certainly an issue that we need to take seriously in Ontario. But I want to also say that drivers need to take this seriously. We need to understand that driving is not a right but a responsibility. With the responsibility that you're given when you're given your driver's licence comes a certain amount of responsibility on your part to make sure that you are doing what you can to make yourself as safe a driver as possible, by way of your driving habits and your skills, following the rules of the road, but also recognizing that the vehicle you're driving is a lethal weapon. We know that far too often in our province, as across this country and across this world, automobiles are involved in many fatalities, either directly in an automobile accident, or somebody else being struck by an automobile at a speed. You're talking about, basically, a lethal weapon. We need to view our responsibility when it comes to driving from that perspective. We need to be aware of what's happening on the road around us and we cannot be distracted when we drive. This particular bill tries to deal with the use of how we're able to ban cell phones and how we're able to ban other electronic devices within the car or the truck so that we are not distracted from being able to drive.

I want to do a little poll: Who here in this Legislature has never used a cell phone in their automobile? I don't see any hands going up. That's true, because we're all guilty. Let the record show that all of us, myself included, have been known to utilize BlackBerries and other cellular devices within our automobiles or trucks as we're driving from point A to point B.

For my good friend Mr. Gravelle and me, it's a bit of a—we have long distances to drive from one constituency meeting to another. We can drive three, four, five hours just moving from point A to point B, and sometimes—well, always—the use of a cell phone is a very handy thing if you can get cell service on the road that you're driving on, which is a whole other issue for us in northern Ontario. What certainly is true is that this new device has caused greater unsafety on our highways, and I think that's what we're recognizing in this debate.

I will say up front, as all members of this assembly and probably most members of the public who have cell phones or BlackBerries, I've used my cell phone while

driving. I thought at first, "Oh, I'm in control. I'm a great driver; I haven't had a speeding ticket." We were just talking about that the other night. I bet since I got to this place, at least 18 or 19 years—I did get caught once for something else, but it had to do with throwing a Fudg-sicle out my window, but that's a whole other story. We'll tell that one a little bit later. It was a very hot day somewhere on Highway 11 and it wasn't the smartest thing to do. I learned my lessons and I've reformed on that one as well. But I would say that we've all used them and we all thought we're invincible, that we're great drivers, that we're great at what we do and we can multi-task and we can certainly drive a car. We can certainly talk to somebody on a cell phone and deal with all the other myriad of things that are going on around us as we drive our vehicles. Well, I think we're starting to recognize that's not the case.

I'll just give you one very short example of what happened to me that pretty well put me off using my cell phone in my car, unless I'm using one of those devices that you plug in your ear and you've got a little mic on it. I was driving from home about two or three years ago. I was going off to a constituency event, and as I drive down Cameron Street and turn right down Middleton and turn right on Cameron, I get to the four-way stop. When I got to the four-way stop on the corner of Commercial and Cameron, I fully stopped the vehicle. I looked and I saw there was another car coming. I allowed the other car to proceed. The phone rang and I picked up the phone and I said, "Hello, how's it going? Gilles here." When I knew that the car had gone by I decided to start advancing and a woman was walking across the road and had to slap the top of my car. I didn't see her coming from the left-hand side, and why? Because I turned to the right to grab the cell phone in order to say "Hi," and I was still concentrating on the car that I saw to my right. I didn't see her to the left because she was coming up sort of parallel to a fence so I didn't see her.

So the point I make: Man, it happens just like that. You think it can't happen to you? I was lucky that that woman had the good sense to realize that I wasn't looking her in the eye and she slapped my car when she noticed what I was doing. It has taught me something when I'm a pedestrian or when I'm driving a motorbike or I'm riding a bicycle. I always look for eye contact whenever I'm looking at a driver. If I'm crossing a street, I don't care if I'm on a green light; I look over to see that the person actually acknowledges me in their eyes before I cross, because far too often I've seen people blow stop signs and red lights because they're not paying attention. They may be distracted by tuning in the radio or putting a new CD in the CD stack, they might be talking on their cell phone, or maybe they're just distracted and thinking about something else and they're not paying attention to what they're doing.

So it comes to the point that I made originally, which is, we need to make sure that, as drivers, we take our responsibility. I think if there's one thing that we should be trying to do in this province, it's to say we need to engage in a campaign in this province where we basically

try to engage drivers, young and old, to understand that driving is not a right but a responsibility, and with that responsibility comes your requirement to make sure that you drive safely, that you're better trained, your car is in good condition and all of the things that need to be done to make it safer.

Let's get on to the subject of the bill; well, this is the subject of the bill, but the actual details of it. The government in this bill is saying that they want to ban the utilization of all electronic devices that are hand-held. They would allow you to have a dash-mounted GPS unit for navigation. You'd be allowed to have a radio or a tape deck player, satellite radio, devices that are normally utilized in cars, except of course for TV monitors to watch a movie as you're going down the highway. But they will allow certain devices as long as they're mounted on the dash of your vehicle. I think that is a fair compromise.

0910

But I want to caution that these devices as well can be pretty distracting. Trying to navigate a GPS when you're going to a strange location and you don't know where you're at takes—I wouldn't even argue it takes a special skill; I think it takes a bit of planning before you get in the car. You should be looking at where you're going. You should be, in your mind, looking at the GPS before you go, "What are the exits that I have to take so that I know how to get there?" so that you're not trying to read the GPS and set the settings as you're going off the off ramp going into London or you're turning off one street onto another, because those dash-mounted devices can be just as distracting as my picking up a cellphone and chatting.

I guess this is the point that I want to make: We can't legislate our way out of making drivers responsible. I think we can all agree on that. That's one of the things that we need to look at when it comes to an overall transportation or driver training policy and making drivers safer on our roads.

Dash-mounted devices will be allowed, but I just want to caution that these things are still a problem. I'm not arguing for a second that we don't make them legal, but I'm just saying we need to recognize they're an issue as well. Something as simple as a radio, you're turning off one street to the other, and you don't like the song, and you're trying to search for a song on another station. That can distract you just as much. I think we need to recognize that we have a responsibility as drivers.

As for hand-held devices, banning a hand-held cellphone, absolutely; banning other devices such as MP3 players and stuff, maybe to a degree. But certainly we need to move to not allowing people to utilize cellphones and other devices such as BlackBerries as they're trying to text their way into the next meeting while driving. And how many times have we seen that? It's problematic, quite frankly, so banning those particular devices is not a bad idea.

Once we get to committee, I think we need to look at, is this bill doing this in a practical way? Are there other devices that maybe should be exempted? I'll speak to that

a little bit later in regard to the courier industry and those people who transport packages from one point to another, because they have special devices that may be caught up in this legislation. I think we need to look at that so we don't end up crippling an industry and making them much less green and less efficient when it comes to the work that they do.

But certainly, on the principle of banning a BlackBerry or a telephone, that makes a lot of sense. I'm just amazed, and we all see it as we drive. I was coming up Bay Street this morning to come to this debate. As I'm driving up, in the car beside me the guy was driving, and he had one elbow on the wheel and was texting something on his BlackBerry. Come on. Give me a break. People need to understand that we have responsibilities as drivers.

The other one we all see is somebody driving down the road and they're eating their hamburger or chicken or whatever. It is not a restaurant; it's a car. I can tell you, I am of Latino decent, as you well know, and we francophones and other Latinos enjoy our food, but we need an ambience to eat in. A car? Monsieur, c'est donc—I don't know. What are we thinking of? I think eating is an activity that should be conducted in a more civilized environment.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Show of hands.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Show of hands. My Latino friends are putting their hands up with me. Eating, I think, is something that requires a much better ambience than a car.

I guess the point I make is that if we are making BlackBerrys illegal to use, should the McDonald's hamburger be included? I just raise that. I'm not pointing at McDonald's. I'm just making the point. How often have we seen people driving down our highways and roads eating a McDonald's hamburger or Harvey's burger or Kentucky Fried Chicken, and all of a sudden the pickle fell on their shirt, and they're trying to take off the pickle and the mustard and everything else?

Quite frankly, aside from bad culinary habits, I've got to say, my Lord, maybe it's a question of making sure we have legislation that allows police officers, when they see this kind of thing, to say, "Hey, listen, a hamburger is just as distracting and probably more distracting than a phone call coming in," especially if it's a bad burger. I just raise the point.

The other example we see is people shaving or we see people doing their hair as they're driving down the highways—how often have you seen it?—or doing their nails.

Mr. Dave Levac: And other things.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And other things. Okay, I'm not going to go there. But the point I make is that there are all kinds of other distractions going on in the car. I've seen it I don't know how many times, when I'm driving down the 401, or going up the 400 or Highway 11, and you're in a lane next to somebody on a two- or three-lane highway, or you're passing somebody and you see the person shaving as they're driving down the road. I've seen that more than once, I would say, in the last year, or

somebody trying to do their hair. The point that I'm trying to make is, yes, ban cellular devices and BlackBerrys and other such hand-held devices in the car, but I think we need to really educate drivers on the responsibility of driving, and making sure that they're not doing other things that are probably as dangerous as using a BlackBerry. I think those are some of the conversations that we need to have at committee.

Now, I want to say up front, and I have been saying this for a while around transportation issues: You can't legislate everything away. I think the parliamentary assistant and the ministers who are here will agree that, yes, we have a legislative responsibility towards trying to make our roads safer, and of course Legislatures have that responsibility and should take it seriously. But I really want to make the point that you can draft all the legislation you want, but I think there are two factors we need to look to see if it's effective. One is, is there a fear of being caught? If I don't think there are police officers out on our highways and roads who are going to be monitoring me and I can get away with whatever—talking on a cellphone, eating a hamburger, doing my hair, speeding or improper passing or whatever it is—I'm probably going to continue doing it. I think one of the things that we need to do is to instill within the public, by having adequate policing on our highways, and maybe the use of other electronic devices, a real sense that, "Hey, if you do this kind of stuff and we see you, we're going to do something about it." That is the biggest correction, I think, to behaviour that we can do in order to make our roads safer.

I remember back in the early 1990s, our government introduced photo radar. Now, it was a huge thing at the time, where the opposition parties, both the Liberals and Tories, were in opposition to photo radar. I was too, initially, to tell you the honest-to-God's truth. I thought, "Oh, my God. Politically, this is an unpopular thing. We're going to take more flak than we need." We were a government in the middle of a recession, and why were we asking for more trouble? That's kind of how I viewed it. But I do have to say, after photo radar came in you noticed a huge difference on the 400-series highways. I remember driving on the 401 or up the 400 from point A to point B, and speeds were actually much more moderate. Because speeds had come down overall, we were actually getting from point A to point B faster, because there was less stopping and going. In other words, you didn't have people speeding at 10, 15, 20 over the limit on the 401, and all of a sudden having to touch their brakes because somebody did something that caused a distraction on the highway or caused an accident. Therefore, the speeds were slower, there were fewer accidents and incidents, and in fact traffic moved a lot easier. I really noticed it.

I remember when photo radar was first instituted, I jumped into my rented vehicle, I think at Toronto Pearson airport. I had been used to the fact that when you come off the ramp onto the 427, you had to be up to a certain speed in order to just go with the traffic. Lord, I

had to slam on my brakes when I got onto the 427. I remember, “Oh, jeez, look at this, everybody’s going slower.” I think it actually did improve traffic flow to an extent.

Am I saying we should reinstitute photo radar? No, that’s not what I’m saying. What I’m saying is that we should be looking at technologies that are available to us in order to properly monitor our roads so that we can give police officers the tools they need and the staffing levels they need in order to be able to assist drivers in making sure they take their responsibilities and drive safely.

One of the other discussions we should have in committee is we should be inviting our police officers forward to speak to us. I think a lot of them will speak in favour of the bill, to be blunt. But what other things can we do? Are there things that we can do to assist them to make their jobs easier? Are there things that we can do as a Legislature that allow the public to understand that there is a consequence to their bad actions when it comes to driving, and that if they do step out of the law, either by way of speeding or other violations, or the use of hand-held devices, in fact there will be a real possibility of being caught—and I think that feeling of being caught, in the end, will be the biggest deterrent to people not doing bad habits when it comes to driving. I want to put that on the record.

Now, here are some of the concerns that I’ve heard from people who have talked to me out there in regard to this legislation. The way the legislation is written now—and it’ll be interesting to see how this unfolds. I’m not pretending that I’m saying for sure it’s this way, but this is something I think we need to look at. There are some devices that are utilized by different types of businesses that are hand-held and are part of them doing their jobs. For example, the people in the courier industry, the Canada Post people, the Purolator people and other people who deliver parcels from point A to point B use a hand-held tablet. The hand-held tablet dispatches the person where to make pickups and where to make deliveries to. One of the questions I’ve heard from people who have come to me is, will those hand-held tablets be banned from use? I see the parliamentary assistant saying no, and I think that’s good. We need to clarify that and make sure that is the case, because the argument is, if I’m picking up parcels and I’m running from the north side of Yonge Street, let’s say at the 401, and driving down to Bloor Street, they dispatch the person in real time to pick up parcels along the way, and they need to be able to look at their hand-held device and say, “Whoops, one just came in three blocks down. I’ve got to stop and pick up a parcel.” From an environmental point of view, this is a good thing. Why? Because it means far fewer people travelling up and down the road and crossing each other in order to pick up parcels; that is harder on our environment. From an environmental point of view, efficiency in how we utilize and dispatch couriers and taxis and other such vehicles is important. We don’t need them running around the city, going back to get information about where they’re supposed to pick up a parcel when they

just drove by that door in the first place. There are people who have approached me, who have said they’re concerned that we need to very much clarify in legislation that those hand-held devices, which are the tablets that do the dispatching, need to be allowed.

0920

Now, I think we can talk about how you use those things. I know, from talking to the people that I spoke to on the weekend back home and some of the people who were here to lobby me—I think it was last week—they were saying that if you look at the safety statistics for the courier industry, you’ll see they’re fairly safe, as compared to others, because they don’t drive at high speeds, they’re generally just flowing with traffic, and for the most part they don’t pick up the tablet and input while they’re driving, as some other people do with Black-Berries. It’s something you do when you’re at the red light: You look down and say, “Okay, I have a pickup at 2047 Yonge Street; I’ll stop on the way by”—that type of thing, and you press the button to acknowledge.

The other one is an issue that was raised by a couple of taxi drivers that I had a chance to talk to as I was driving around Toronto to different events. A few of them recognized me; when you’ve been in this Legislature for some 19 years, you get to be known by some, and I’ve done work with the taxi industry over the years, so some of those people know me. One of them said, “Hey, Mr. Bisson, our two-way radio and dispatching system”—the dispatching system is fixed to the car; it’s a dash mount—“will it be excluded?” I said, “As far as I know, the answer is yes, it shall be excluded.” He said, “What about the two-way radios? Is a two-way radio a hand-held device that will be prohibited?” I said, “I don’t think so. I would imagine we’re not going to be as silly as to say, ‘You can’t use a two-way radio when working in a cab.’” But it was a question that was raised, and I think we need to go to committee and look at that and make sure that is the case. Because you don’t want to have taxi drivers—all of us have large taxi industries within our constituencies, and that is how they are dispatched. Somebody makes a call to the cab stand, the dispatcher calls over the radio and says, “Car 44, such-and-such an address,” and the person rogers that on the radio. I don’t think it’ll be excluded; I don’t think it’ll be banned, the way I read the legislation. But you know, there are those people out there who have that concern. So I think we need to look at that as well. We need to make sure that we’re not banning that.

The other one, and I thought it was an interesting one—and I hadn’t thought about this—is these push-to-talk radio cellphones. A lot of people are starting to use those now as part of doing business. There is a contractor that I know back home who uses that on job sites in order to communicate between the superintendent and the foreman and other key people on the job site. These things have quite a range, because they piggyback on the cellular network, and rather than dialling the phone number and having somebody answer a cellphone at the other end, they’re using push-to-talk technology, which is

basically a cellphone with a radio in it. So the question becomes, is the push-to-talk technology going to be banned? That's a good question. I think it might be, the way I read the legislation. I see the parliamentary assistant sort of nodding that probably it will be. But we need to have a discussion about that, because I think that is a different device. If I pick up a device that happens to be a cellphone as well as a two-way radio, it's a bit of a different thing. If it's one of those push-to-talks where you're doing one of these—it's not an earpiece; it's basically, "Yeah, I'm coming on the construction site, I'll be there in an hour and tell so and so to do whatever." Maybe there are ways that we need to look at how we approach that push-to-talk technology so that we're not biting off our nose to spite our face. So I think it was one of the other things that was raised that we need to look at.

All in all, as I said, it is a bill that I think most of us in this Legislature can support and it's one that certainly needs to go to committee. We need to have some time in committee in order to deal with this in a way that we're able to look at where the pitfalls are in this legislation? What are the strengths, how can we make them better. How can we assist police officers in order to make sure they can enforce this as they can enforce anything else? Are there any other technologies that we can use out there to give police officers the tools that they need in order to better do their jobs in monitoring our streets and highways across this province? I think those are some of the things that we're going to have to take a look at when it comes to committee.

With that, I've made my contributions. I think sometimes you don't need to speak the full amount of time in order to make your point because, quite frankly, enough has been said. With that, I look forward to questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I thoroughly enjoyed the remarks this morning from my colleague from Timmins—James Bay. He certainly brings unique insight in his riding in northern Ontario, the city of Timmins. He's on the road frequently, probably more frequently than some of us who have ridings in southern and east central Ontario. So he spends a lot of time on the roads and certainly has a history in this House of being a strong advocate over his 18-plus years for road safety and, certainly his work in the, I believe, three private member's bills from my friend for the riding of Durham, Mr. O'Toole.

Here we have Bill 118, that has been introduced by the Minister of Transportation, our good friend Mr. Bradley, looking at ways to improve safety on our highways, which I think is a non-partisan issue. Everybody on all sides of the House certainly wants to bring in measures and have them enforced and improve safety on our roads.

The member from Timmins—James Bay makes an interesting point about the courier business. I know in my case, at my constituency office in Peterborough, there's a Purolator person that comes everyday. He has been doing our route, now for five-plus years. I'm always struck

watching him and how carefully he drives in the downtown area of Peterborough, obviously making numerous stops. The member makes a good point, because often when they're out and about they get a call on the device that they use, really, to make their jobs more efficient. If they're in an area where they can make two or three stops along the way with the valuable information they receive through that digital device, that helps them do their job, by the hour, frankly. When this bill goes to committee, it will be the opportunity to look at things like that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to add some comments to the speech from the member from Timmins—James Bay talking about the cell phone ban bill. He was very forthright in talking about his own experiences driving and using his BlackBerry or cell phone. I think anybody who's honest who has used a cell phone in a car will remember instances when they weren't putting all of their full attention to the activity of actually driving the car.

So I support this bill; I certainly have questions as well to do with it. I support being able to still use a hands-free device in the car. I know one of the vehicles that our family owns has a UConnect device in the car that allows you to have two hands on the wheel and not be fiddling with small numbers on a BlackBerry or whatever, as we shouldn't be doing.

This bill has been brought forward by the government. I don't know how many times the member from Durham, as has been mentioned, brought a private member's bill before this Legislature proposing similar legislation. I have had questions from constituents to do with the effect on GPS devices in cars. I know that GPS devices are becoming more and more popular and useful, I would say, to people driving their cars; to find their destinations, to not be fumbling with a map. I would hope, and I believe that in this legislation, a GPS device is still allowed in a car as long as it's affixed to the windshield or a permanent part of the car. I hope that is the case, because I believe that the GPS devices are very useful. Certainly, in the job of being an MPP and getting to an appointment on time where you're not sure where it is, it is very, very useful.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I really enjoyed the comments by the member from Timmins—James Bay on this issue. I think what he struck was something very important, namely, a kind of a balance, and balance, in most of our bills, is very important. On the one hand, I certainly agree: Anyone who's driving a car can see what's sometimes called a horror show on the road. Just the other day, I saw a woman doing her lipstick in the mirror while she was driving. Obviously, this sometimes happens at stop signs and intersections. I was driving with my own mother one day, when she was eating, not a hamburger, when she was eating Chinese—good thing she didn't

have any chopsticks with her. But certainly, I said, “You should really pay more attention to how you’re driving.”

But it’s easy to do that, especially when you are taking a long-distance road. It’s easy for the member from Timmins–James Bay, who spends so many hours on the road, to get into Latino foods; it’s easy for him to get into using the cellphone and so on, whereas city driving is probably more—not that people are not as often getting into those bad habits, but especially for country driving and long-distance driving, it’s even more important.

The point is that government has to find a balance. While we can’t legislate everything, every item, from the radio to shaving in the car, certainly what’s important today in this bill, which I agree with, is to find a balance, and I think that’s been done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O’Toole: It’s always a pleasure to respond to the member from Timmins–James Bay, who has had a very large role in this bill, and I think the minister acknowledged that in his opening remarks on Bill 118. I would also say the reason I’m standing here is that I’d certainly like to think I’ve had some role in bringing this kind of issue to the floor.

Applause.

Mr. John O’Toole: I appreciate the applause from the other members. All members of all sides like to make a contribution to making Ontario a better place to live; in fact, our roads safer.

I’ve listened carefully to his comments, and the question becomes not one that this bill isn’t needed; I think it is. In fact, much of the research that I’ve heard from experts in the area, whether the CAA or the Insurance Bureau of Canada or the Ontario Police Association and others, is that this is a new tool and an important tool to make our roads safer. I think it took 10 years since I first introduced the bill.

Now, the bill was brought to my attention, in all due respect, by a constituent who observed someone going through a red light, and they said that—I didn’t get it at first—the person was completely unaware that they’d gone through the light because they were on a cellphone. I started to look at other jurisdictions and happened to mention it to my daughter, who at that time was living in Australia, and she said, “Well, in Australia, it’s banned.” That’s really where the idea came from. So it’s wonderful to see this thing before us, and I thank the minister for bringing it forward.

I would have more to say on this bill, depending when I get the opportunity to speak, but it’s almost like an anniversary for me because it’s almost 10 years. By the time this is law, June 2009, it will be 10 years. So from concept to implementation is a long wait, and I’m glad to still be in the Legislature to see it happen, to give birth to the child.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Response by the member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the member from Durham, happy anniversary, I guess, would be the comment.

I think we recognize that everybody played a role in this, especially the member from Durham, who first championed this some 10 years ago. I know a number of other members have raised this, either by way of questions in the House or letters to the ministers or bills themselves. I think it’s one of those ways that private members’ bills serve this Legislature well. A member finds something, as the member from Durham points out, basically tries to do something about it and eventually—the bill may not make it past second reading. Normally, bills will get to second reading. Very few private members’ bills make it beyond that, but eventually governments say, “Hey, not a bad idea. Let’s pick up the ball and run with it.” Is that partisan? You can argue on both sides of it. I would prefer that governments would give private members the ability to actually pass their bills, if they’re good bills, and the bills should stand the test of the subject matter that they’re trying to deal with. Governments, I would argue, of all stripes should allow private members’ hour to work more effectively. But, in this case, it’s moving forward. So to the member from Durham I say congratulations.

I do want to echo again the point that I was trying to make. One is, you can’t legislate everything away. At one point, drivers need to take the responsibility. We need to understand that getting a driver’s licence is not a right in this province, it’s a responsibility, and people need to look at it that way. Two, if we’re going to ban cellphones, what about the hamburger? I made the point. What about the razor? What about other distractions in the car? I think we need to look at that when it comes to committee.

I guess the other point is that we really need to give police officers the tools they need to properly enforce these laws. You can write all the laws you want, but in the end, if there is no fear of being caught, people are going to continue doing what they’re doing. Only when there is a fear of being caught do people start to change their habits. So I’m not convinced that we’re doing what needs to happen at the police staffing level and the resources we need to give them to make that happen, but we’ll see when we get to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate? I recognize the member for Durham.

Mr. John O’Toole: It’s a procedural comment, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to make sure that we stand down our lead. I would seek unanimous consent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Durham is seeking unanimous consent to allow the official opposition to stand down its leadoff speech.

Mr. Mike Colle: No.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): There is no consent? There is no consent.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Has it already been—

Mr. Norm Miller: Excuse me. On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think the member probably didn't realize we've already had and received unanimous consent to stand down the lead.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I just need to consult with the table for one moment.

I recognize the member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's a pleasure again to speak on Bill 118, on second reading.

This is a bill that was introduced by the honourable James Bradley on October 28, 2008. It's really a two-part bill. It's addressing the issue of hand-held technology, which could be defined in regulation, as well as the idea of redefining the Public Vehicles Act dealing with carpooling which the member from Timmins—James Bay had a private member's bill on. So in the case here, we almost have a consensus issue with respect to the legislative initiative here. There may be some fine-tuning and some process things that need to be addressed, and I'm confident, in fact, I would put it on the record, that there should be some public hearings on it, because there are a number of stakeholders and some issues on both sides.

I would be supportive, in the first instance, of the issue of carpooling, given the current economy, the environment and the need to address issues to encourage people to have more than one passenger. The HOV lanes are a good example of supporting an initiative of more than one passenger or one person in a car. I think this goes a long way to addressing and encouraging, and in fact incenting, the carpooling initiative in the bill.

On that issue, I would like to suggest that there's an ability of the owner-operator of the vehicle to charge a reasonable fare. A reasonable fare was the issue; if it's just a friend that are you giving a lift or a convenience to, it's one thing, but when there's money exchanged, that's another issue. It's competition with couriers, other taxis, limousine services and other providers and a whole different type of licensing. In fact, there are insurance issues themselves.

0940

I would like to think that the government could really be even more creative in this area. Specifically, without being critical, I'm just suggesting the opposition has positive ideas. I see the parliamentary assistant is here listening, so that's good. I think there could be encouragement by the government to facilitate carpooling to destinations. In fact, carpooling isn't just a car; perhaps the size of the vehicle could be addressed as well.

By that I mean that when I was the transportation critic, I talked to the Ontario bus operators and they said to me that now they could cluster services—and I will take some time to define it briefly. The impression I got from their presentation to me was that they could provide a service by a luxury coach—it could be a large van; it could be a large bus for that matter—into Toronto, for instance to the financial community on Bay Street, to the legal community of Bay Street or to a ministry office. They could collect the people at a satellite site; it could be from Barrie, it could be from Kitchener—Waterloo or it

could be from Durham region. You could have a depot where the people met and parked and then bring them into Toronto. However, the problem was, as they understood it, because of licensing and other agreements, they could not bring any kind of courier-type service into Toronto because of the TTC. So there are existing rules that need to be addressed. I think the province should take a role in facilitating smaller footprints in moving people in public transit modes, of which this bill talks a bit.

I won't go on except to say that we need to be more creative for reasons of the economy, the environment and the convenience of individual people, as opposed to other large organizations that are intransigent. They don't want to change from the big, 50-passenger bus problem.

Now, in my riding of Durham, what I see is the wish from the municipal leadership, the region of Durham primarily, to encourage buses in our communities. My communities would include three major communities: The municipality of Uxbridge, the township of Scugog and the municipality of Clarington. Within each of those three communities—those are the major centres, Uxbridge, Port Parry and Bowmanville primarily—there are smaller towns. The connectivity between those smaller towns: A good example might be that where some people are on the 401 east of Oshawa, there you would find the municipality of Clarington, but in it you would have subordinate towns, smaller communities, like Courtice, Bowmanville, Newcastle and Newtonville. These are all communities along the 401, going from west to east. They could be easily connected by bus, and in fact, they are being connected by bus. Durham Region Transit is making every effort to connect those communities. The problem is there's really not a lot of money in it because, often in the rural communities, there are retired people or people who aren't necessarily going to major urban centres. I think—just to be brief on this part; I don't want to spend all the time on this part—they could listen to the people and move a little bit forward and they should have smaller buses, because these big buses are probably about \$250,000 to \$300,000. It costs about \$50,000 a year for the person driving it and there's nobody in the buses. I've ridden on the bus. Three different times I've ridden on the buses and, I say that on the public record here, no one got on or off the bus; it was just the driver and myself. Now, I didn't explain that I was looking at this. We need the service and the reliability and predictability of the service. We saw yesterday the TTC's \$60 million to reduce the wait time on their complete route. So I think on that section of the bill, they could probably listen to public input and even go a little bit further to encourage this whole idea of carpooling and moving people in a broader or bigger footprint.

The other really important part, and I don't want to go on too long on it because I may get to speak at another time, I guess—I'm not sure, but certainly during public hearings. I want to give a bit of a playback, a refresher course on the genesis of the idea in Ontario. In 1999, almost 10 years ago, I introduced a bill. The first bill I

introduced was Bill 102, and of course, legislation has three steps—really, primarily four steps, but three steps in the formal sense. First the bill is introduced and you get to say a few things on the record. Second reading, like this bill that we are dealing with, Bill 118, is when it's actually debated in the Legislature. Normally, that's the case. Often bills can be sent out, if it's a government bill, to stakeholders, in fact, even after first reading. The purpose of first reading is, the bill is printed and then it's sent out to the stakeholders who want to comment on it. The author of the bill—in most cases, it's a ministry that authors the bill; you hear input and you revise the draft and you introduce it in second reading of a bill. And you could amend it, technically.

Now, at second reading, which we are involved in here, there's a discussion and some points are raised. Obviously, people keep notes—then it could be referred to a committee. That committee would attempt to draft the bill and revise or amend the legislation. Then it would come back for third reading as an amended bill. That's the three steps. But that does not become law until the regulations are often in force, and these are actually the will of the bill. In fact, if you look at this Bill 118 that we're debating, in the very last part of the bill—it's not a very large bill—it says, "This act comes into force on a day to be named by proclamation of the Lieutenant Governor." In other words, there's no assurance that this bill will be introduced just when it's passed third reading. They will go through a series of implementation issues on how and where the resources should be; should there be money for the police to enforce this? Should there be an education component for rolling it out? We're not sure exactly—in fact, I know right now that there is a bill that was passed in 2002 that still is not proclaimed. There are many bills that never really become law. So I don't want this to die on the order paper. I think it's important to implement it in such a way that it's, first, enforceable, and makes our roads safer—the real intent of the bill.

The next time I introduced the bill, we prorogued the House. That means that all legislation was removed from the order paper and we had a throne speech and started a whole new sort of agenda. In 2001, I introduced Bill 49. Each time I introduced the bill I tried to modify it, from comments from the public and the stakeholders. Those stakeholders would be the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Canadian Automobile Association, the safety league, the Ontario Medical Association, the OPP; I'd spoken to the chiefs of police and the police associations. The wireless association were also quite interested at that time. I think they were probably least accepting of this idea to prohibit or limit the amount of use of cellphones while driving. But there were a couple of things that I said to them. I said, "Why don't you go into this bluetooth technology, so it's hands-free?"

I have my little device with me here. In fact, this is the bluetooth. It's wireless. It's a demonstration, Mr Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I appreciate that, but I have to caution the member that he is not

allowed to use props like that, even though he wants to use those props to illustrate his points during this debate.

I return to the member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm just so enthusiastic about this discussion that I would say I think the bluetooth technology is here to stay. I think that even the new gadgets we have, the BlackBerries which we are not allowed to use in here, are all bluetooth-compatible. In other words, what I'm saying here is that I encourage the industry to advance their use, eliminating the physical distraction as much as possible. Now this is important. This is exactly what the minister is doing here. He's saying you cannot have a hand-held device, whether it is a DVD or an iPod or fiddling with some gadget as opposed to driving and operating the motor vehicle safely. That's the whole point of this bill, and it's so important in that respect.

0950

I've got about four points that should be made because of input I've received, and thanks to all of the stakeholders. I was on programs with Dr. Redelmeier, who started the intellectual academic debate on the risk. He said you're four times more likely to be involved in an accident if you're using technology. There's scientific evidence here that I listened to, and I think the ministry and ministry staff did as well. There are four things that I want to see in the bill, so I will be moving amendments on the bill—with due respect, in co-operation with the minister; we're interested in improving it and making it better—from the input that I've received over the last several years.

First of all, education: When you make a change in what's expected of driver behaviour, education is extremely important, to educate the public about the change and how to change. You change behaviour by education or demonstration. That would include, I believe, the broader issue of the driver education program itself.

There should be a whole module on distracted driving. Distracted driving is not just cellphones. A cellphone is just a piece of equipment that is multi-functional. A cellphone today is not the same as a cellphone 10 years ago. The cellphone today is basically a telephone, a camera, a recording device, GPS; it has the functionality of a computer, you can text message, you can surf the Internet, and in the future you will do more.

It is the young people, the pages here—good to see these young people here—it's really more about you. There are two bills here: Bill 118 is one, and the other affects your own graduated licensing system. We'll talk about that at another time.

But I cannot stress that education component enough. I would also say I have seen a demonstration by the Insurance Bureau of Canada, which is a simulator to demonstrate to drivers, experienced or new—and this isn't all age-contingent. I think young people are more adaptable to the technology than some of the more advanced people like myself, that technically you're used to a lot of those multi-tasking things in life, or at least you're going to have to be. Now, I'm saying the education is very important. I don't want to go on more than

that, and I think I'll be insisting that they examine or address the whole driver education thing and in fact consult with the Ontario Safety League.

The reason I say that is, one of the penalties for breaking this law should be a requirement to take a driver education course, an updated, modern version of it to say the rules of the road have changed—the habits of the roads have changed. Some people coming into Toronto would not know anything about an HOV, high-occupancy vehicle, lane. Not to be critical; they're just not in large cities all the time unless they're going to the CNE or to the opera or something. I'm not sure they'd be going to the opera, but that's another discussion.

The other part, too, is to modify the accident investigation report. It's very important, and I'll tell you why. When Dr. Redelmeier and others did studies, there were experts who disputed the studies they did. They did a statistical analysis of accidents and the persons involved and their cellphone usage. They did a crossover study which said the more you use technology, the more probable it was you could be back in an accident. People disputed those statistics and the methodology.

What I've suggested, working with Dr. Redelmeier and others, Cam Woolley, who was an OPP commentator, an interesting fellow—the accident investigation report today is an actual form, and on that form, they're required to account in an accident, "Were seatbelts being worn?" There is a box; they have to check that off. There's also a portion, "Did alcohol play a role?" Comment on that. They're mandatory boxes. I'm suggesting there be another, "Was technology a contributing role?"

Why do I say that? Well, I want to bring this down to a practical thing.

A tragedy occurred during the time when I had introduced the bill, and I attended an inquest into the accident. An inquest was held into the death of Richard Schewe, who was 31, of Ajax, Ontario, and his two-year-old daughter, Mikaela. They were crossing a railway crossing on May 7, 2001. Mr. Schewe was talking on his cellphone when he drove through a flashing light at a level crossing into the path of a train and both he and his daughter were killed. This was a tragic incident directly related, in the inquest, to the use of a cellphone. He was on the phone and passing it to his young child, who was saying goodbye to the mother. Can you imagine the tragedy? I think it just superimposed on me the importance of this legislation. It made it real to me when I saw the impact on the family.

If we could save one person's life by educating them to not do things that they shouldn't do when it isn't safe to do them, we would be making a contribution to Ontario.

That inquest was an event that told me that this accident investigation report is important, because two years from now, like in the case of seat belts—we know there's a relationship with saving lives, and I think we do lots of things here that are less important than that. I would say that that's what motivates me and that's why I want that second change in the bill.

The third one is the issues around enforcement. How do you enforce this bill in a practical way? At night, with tinted windows in the car, if somebody is using a cellphone or some other hand-held device like their GPS to change their destination, it's difficult to enforce. They said the same thing about seat belts many years ago. I think there need to be educational blitzes. Don't start with writing the ticket. That's not the right way. Don't use the club; use the pencil to educate people.

The last one is setting up a framework of regulations that allows the changing and adaptation of the penalties, the demerit points and the fines and whether or not they have to take a course, as well as the devices themselves.

As I said to you before, I worked in the technology business for about 10 years. The changes are profound. In fact, all vehicle manufacturers today, like Ford, Mercedes, General Motors, have a service provider; some use Microsoft, others use other service providers. These service providers—even satellite radio—are showing you the future. There are going to be more distractions, not less. In fact, you'll see electronic billboards on the Gardiner Expressway. These are distractions.

I think we need to make sure that the people operating a vehicle know, first, that it is a privilege to drive, not a right; and that the fundamental thing—it's as simple as this—is to keep your eyes on the road, your hands on the wheel and your mind on the job. Drive safely.

This bill makes a great contribution to making our roads safer. I will be supporting the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I had a chance a little while ago to speak to this bill, and I again say to the member from Durham, job well done on raising and bringing to this Legislature the issue of banning cellphones.

In my speech, I didn't talk about the section of the bill that deals with carpooling. That's something that I've been after going back six or seven years, by way of motions to this House and questions to ministers within both the Conservative and Liberal governments. I was glad to see that Mr. Bradley, in this bill, acknowledged that there's an issue to be dealt with when it comes to making the carpooling that goes on in this province legal—agencies such as Allo Stop, which is one that we used to deal with out of Montreal, and PickupPal, which is the one that we know here in Ontario.

I think we recognize that there is not good intercity bus or rail service everywhere. Far too often, those schedules are not conducive to the needs that the rider has. There may be other reasons why somebody just doesn't want to get on a bus or a train. They might have a phobia about driving with a lot of people on a train or a bus. It could be that the schedule doesn't work, or there might be medical reasons. So PickupPal, Allo Stop, those types of organizations that organize carpooling, provide a service to Ontario that we need to recognize. That it was illegal, I think, was wrong; that it is being made legal, I think, is right. We need to take a look in committee to make sure that we're getting to where we've got to go.

1000

It's also a question of the environment. If we're serious about trying to green our environment, one of the big things is the greenhouse gas emissions, and one of the biggest causes of greenhouse gas, aside from coal-fired plants, is automobiles. We should be doing all that we can to move people out of cars into carpooling, move people off cars into intercity bus or rail, finding ways to move people in larger numbers with fewer vehicles in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That's one of the reasons I was a champion of this particular issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I was sharing, in my thoughts, when the member from Durham was speaking about the trials and tribulations of private members' bills, and I think he gives good advice to the new members. It took him 10 years to get this into law. I see some new members stand up, they present a private member's bill and they say, "Oh, the government's not going to pass my bill. It's a great bill." I think it's really incumbent upon all of us, if we've got a good idea, to stick with it. He stuck with it, and now we've seen the law.

I've had similar experiences myself with red light camera legislation. The member would remember that, when I introduced the bill to install red light cameras at dangerous intersections. The government at the time of Mike Harris yelled and screamed, "We can't have red light cameras at intersections like photo radar at every corner." Anyway, we now have red light cameras at dangerous intersections.

This is how this place works, but it takes time, it takes dialogue back and forth. This bill is now before us and I think it's obviously of great benefit.

About carpooling, I should mention that I think the best thing they've done with carpooling lately is that you'll see a lot of the carpooling lanes, the diamond lanes—now two drivers make you eligible. Originally, a lot of the carpooling lanes required three. It's literally impossible to get three Canadians in one car, it seems. As you know, if you stop at any major intersection, you'll see that 90% of the cars in Toronto have one occupant in them—one car, one occupant. That's all you can get in a car.

The other thing is, we're doing something about cell-phones in cars. The paradox of this is, we're worried about them having cellphones, yet you can basically drive around the city with guns in your cars and the police can't really do anything about it. If you want to talk about distractions, why not take the guns out of the cars? I know a lot of the police would like that law to be in place—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to add my comments and congratulations to the member for Durham for his tenacity in sticking with his good idea on banning cell-phones and hand-held devices. It's an example of better late than never.

The government brought this bill in and, as the member said, our caucus is going to support it. I hope that when we do consultations on these types of bills, as opposed to Bill 126—they haven't had any consultation on that. I understand that there are 105,000 hits on Facebook from young drivers and their parents who are opposed to that bill because there hasn't been consultation on that. When the member from Eglinton–Lawrence talked about seeing at intersections one driver only in a car, if that bill passes, you'll see a lot more single passengers. They will be teenagers and they will be alone.

Again, I'd like to pay tribute to the member for Durham for sticking with that. It was a good idea. We have seen many tragic circumstances from people talking on cellphones, being inattentive. I've tried to change my habits because of realizing the dangers, so I do not do that as much as I used to.

When you talk about the education aspect, I think the young people will be the ones who will help sell this. With my grandchildren, when you get in the car, the first thing they say is about putting your seatbelt on. They've been inundated with that in either preschool or through advertisements about always having their seatbelts on, so I think it will be the really young people—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes. They'll be talking and reminding us not to use our cellphones when we're driving—just like it is about using our seatbelts. I think our future is with the youth of the country, so I hope that they'll do their part to encourage their siblings, their parents and grandparents to not use these cellphones.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): There's time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I've got all the time in the world for the member from Durham. He, not infrequently, has expressed his affection and admiration for me. On one occasion, in this very chamber, he made it clear that he still thought I was number one. That, as a matter of fact, is a very popular YouTube hit. If people want to access it on YouTube, type in the appropriate keywords and you'll watch the very film footage of John O'Toole making it clear to the world that he thought that I was number one. A misplaced digit perhaps, but in the excitement of the moment, I understand—and perhaps there were some arthritic conditions that prevented him from raising the index finger.

Let's not be naive. With all due respect, the member from Durham didn't drive this legislation. I wish he did. The Premier had a chance, when it was first introduced some years ago, to seize the moment and be on the leading edge. But no, the Premier looked out and saw the weather vane, and there was still some very libertarian opposition to governments telling people that they could not use cellphones.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He licked his index finger and put it up to the wind.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Mr. Yakabuski is very, very clear about the manner in which this government tests the audience before presenting legislation. So here we are

trailing the pack, instead of leading the pack as O'Toole would have wanted us to do. The praise for Mr. O'Toole, these efforts to co-opt him—it sounds as if the government thought they could scratch him behind the ears and he was going to follow them home. I know better. Mr. O'Toole is not going to be duped by these false words of praise coming from government members.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Durham has two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: I thank all the members: the member from Timmins–James Bay, certainly, for his role, and I did comment at some length about his contribution here, and I would hope all people are on the same wavelength; the member from Eglinton–Lawrence; as well as the member from Sarnia. I'm sure the member from Sarnia is relieved that Bill 119 has left the docket, because he was speaking every day for weeks, trying to bring some logic and commitment into Bill 119, and he sadly failed in that task.

He did speak directly to youth when referencing Bill 126 and the implications for the graduated licence for young people.

There's no question that I certainly have affection for the member from Welland. Whether he's number one is another issue, but I certainly respect his contribution here as well—on most days.

The other part I would like to say on the bill is that I want to remain committed to working with the ministry from the information that I've received. This information I've received is from knowledgeable stakeholders, and I have, in some instances, sent it on to the minister on my journey towards this bill, over the last eight or nine years, on the cellphone and the hand-held technology. I believe he's on the right track. There are some minor, I would say, administrative amendments that would help it. In that case, I would just like to have the bill renamed the John O'Toole Act. That's said in jest.

What I meant by that is that all of us here want to make a contribution, and this is one more example in this bill where two members, the member from Timmins–James Bay and myself—representing three different parties, because it is a Liberal bill—I think would be happy to see these changes made and vote in support of the legislation, but we'd like to have public hearings to make sure that the minister and ministry get it right.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being close to 10:15, this House is in recess until 10:30 later on this morning.

The House recessed from 1009 to 1030.

WEARING OF RIBBONS AND BUTTONS

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I seek unanimous consent for members to wear white ribbons and rose buttons in support of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which are available in both lobbies.

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome, from the riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London, in the Speaker's gallery, Cathy Topping, a member of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada government relations and social action committee, and Pat Chatten. Welcome to Queen's Park, Cathy and Pat.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. Premier, yesterday we heard reports that US president-elect Obama is pressing Congress for an economic stimulus package as quickly as possible, well before the new administration takes office. Today, we hear that Finance Minister Flaherty intends to table an early federal budget because, as they see it, of the urgent need for action.

Premier, can you indicate what your government plans to do in this regard? Are you planning an early budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: No final decision has been made with respect to the timing of the budget and obviously, we want to do that in keeping with public interest. But I can say, on the issue of stimulus, that I'm proud to report that we have a stimulus package under way. Just this past summer, Minister Watson announced that we're putting out \$1.1 billion through our municipal partners to invest in infrastructure projects. We've got about a hundred major public construction projects under way right now. We've got a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure plan that will create some 100,000 construction jobs. Our stimulus package is under way.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think that perhaps everyone around the globe, with the exception of the Premier, recognizes that there's been a sea change in not just Ontario's economy but worldwide over the past few months. Your government's reaction, or perhaps lack of reaction, certainly doesn't elicit confidence. You're leaving the impression, perhaps an accurate one, that you have no plan to confront the current economic challenges.

Premier, if that's not accurate, tell us, for example, what you're doing to change the Next Generation of Jobs Fund and the Second Career strategy so that they can actually help employers and people who've lost their jobs.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're working on those fronts as well. We've not had a lot of support, I must say, from the opposition in the past when it comes to these kinds of programs.

Let me speak for a moment about our Second Career strategy. We've got a program that's the first of its kind.

It's designed to help up to 20,000 Ontarians who've lost their jobs and provide them with thousands and thousands of dollars by way of support for tuition and any back-to-school expenses. But we've been having a hard time encouraging people who've lost those jobs to come and participate in this program, so we're speaking to those folks to find out what we might need to do in order to tweak that program to make it more attractive and more affordable for them to remove themselves from the economy for up to two years' time. It's not an easy thing to do—we understand that—but we'll keep working with folks who've lost their jobs to make sure we get it right.

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: This is clearly a government adrift. They're not even willing to put the sail up because they don't know which direction they want to go in. They're cramming the finance committee's pre-budget process into one week before Christmas. We're told this is being done to accommodate an once-in-a-lifetime vacation for one of their members. We have a so-called emergency resolution sitting on the order paper dealing with the economy never being called for debate. I have to ask: What planet are you operating on over there?

People need to know you have a real plan of action. Will you commit, Premier, to bringing in a budget no later than February 1 of this coming year that spells out a real economic action plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I had the opportunity this morning to speak to these kinds of questions raised by members of the media. The point I made then is the point I'll make again. I think it's important to draw a distinction between being precipitous and moving ahead with action that's grounded in thoughtfulness. I know that the global economy remains in a state of flux. I understand that it's affecting Ontarians different ways on different days; I understand that. But at the same time, I want Ontarians to take heart knowing a few things. Number one, of all the places on this planet in the which to seek shelter from this global economic storm, there's no better place than Ontario, Canada. I saw Prime Minister Brown last night on TV, speaking about how they were aspiring to take on some of the policies that we've taken here in Canada. So I think I would ask Ontarians to have some confidence in the foundation that we've built together over the years and to know that we're on the job and we're moving ahead with our five-point plan to strengthen—

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

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is also for the Premier. Is there currently a surplus of hospital beds and nursing physicians in our province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll give this to the Minister of Health.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I'm quite pleased with the level of investment. We've seen an over-\$11-billion invest-

ment—a 37% increase—in the province of Ontario: over a billion dollars to reduce wait times; funding for over 8,000 new nurses. I would compare and contrast that with the member opposite. During their time in government, we saw a reduction in the number of nurses by over 6,000 under their watch.

We've seen innovative new programs like family health teams, 150 to oversee 1.8 million additional Ontario patients. We're expanding family medical school residency spaces by 87% and medical school spaces by 23%. We have over 100 major hospital capital projects which are currently underway through ReNew Ontario, our government's capital infrastructure—

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

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Mr. Speaker, through you to the Premier: Your minister's answers continue to insult the intelligence of people in the province of Ontario who are seeing a decreasing access in care when it comes to health. First of all, let me remind the Premier that we added 12,000 nursing positions and, I would also say to you, currently we are seeing hundreds of nursing positions cut by this government, outpatient services and beds. Hospitals are desperately trying to balance their budgets at a time that they have fixed costs of about 5% as a result of heat, hydro and salary increases.

You said you would protect public services. I ask you today: How many more nurses and patient services and beds are going to be cut and eliminated?

Hon. David Caplan: I think I've highlighted the difference and contrast between the approach of the member and between this government. In fact, it is the avowed position of the member opposite and her party to eliminate the Ontario health premium that funds health care for \$3 billion annually in the province of Ontario. I think the member quite rightly points out that there would be bed reductions and layoffs to the extent that we've seen previously if they were allowed to form the government and to be able to cut vital services to the tune of \$3 billion in the province of Ontario.

Ontarians, a year ago, rightly said no to that approach. They said that they wanted to see a collaboration, the introduction of family health teams, the introduction of nurse practitioner-led clinics. They wanted to see some of the investments, as we have previously, where we have over 7,000 more front-line staff for long-term care homes and restored staff. We have over 227,000 more Ontarians receiving—

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

1040

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Those responses continue to insult people in the province of Ontario who continually are waiting in emergency rooms for hours. We have long-term-care patients wallowing in beds in hospitals. When is this minister finally going to realize he has a responsibility and an accountability to people who are increasingly, day by day, seeing hospital health care cuts?

I'm going to put the Premier on notice. Starting today, we will track every nurse you fire and every bed you cut.

You've already fired 791 nurses. Taxpayers deserve to know about your haphazard actions.

I ask you today, Premier, where is your plan to prevent the erosion of our health system and access to health care?

Hon. David Caplan: The member is quite incorrect. She equivocates to this House.

Wait times in this province are down, and that's because of sustained and persistent effort. I'll share with the member—in fact, the information is publicly available on a website—angiography wait times are down 53%; angioplasty wait times are down 50%; cataract surgery wait times are down 63%; hip replacement wait times are down 52%; knee replacement wait times are down 51%; CT scan wait times are down 46%; cancer surgery wait times are down 19%; MRI scan wait times are down 18%; pediatric surgery wait times are down 21%; general surgery wait times, in fact, are down 4%.

I've had the great privilege to unveil a pediatric strategy and further general surgical wait times strategy in order to drive wait times down even further.

The real danger would be if that member were—

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

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier: With each passing day, it becomes clearer that this government has no clue how to deal with Ontario's growing auto jobs crisis. When the Premier is asked about the government's plans to deal with the credit crisis seizing the auto industry, he trots out programs that were announced years ago and have very little relevancy today. When will this government quit harping on the past and instead table a real plan to invest in Ontario's auto strategy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know the member knows that the challenge before us when it comes to the auto sector is truly national in scope. If it were a simple matter of Ontario competing against Michigan in terms of supports, that would be one thing, but it's the US federal treasury which I believe will ultimately come to the table and provide support to the sector as a whole in the United States of America.

That's why we're working hand in hand with the federal government. That's why I've had a conversation with the Prime Minister. I know that Minister Bryant and Mr. Clement are working closely to ensure that we come to better understand the nature of the challenges that are being put forward by the Big Three in particular, so that we can confirm for ourselves the economic veracity of those challenges and confirm that they are pursuing transformational initiatives. We need to confirm those things before we can come to the table with taxpayer dollars.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: What the auto industry really needs is a credit lifeline that will allow them to survive this unprecedented North American drop in demand for cars.

The Premier keeps talking about other jurisdictions and waiting for other people to come up with a plan. The bottom line is, we know that the car companies get it, the autoworkers get it, Ontario mayors get it; it's only this Premier and this government that don't seem to get it. How much worse does the auto crisis need to get before this Premier gets it and does something about it here in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Although there's a lot of goodwill, there's also a healthy skepticism felt by many taxpayers, not only in Ontario, but nationally, with respect to providing additional support to the auto sector. So we need to, on behalf of taxpayers, make sure we are thoughtful as we approach this determination to provide support. We're going to take a good, long, hard look at the books and confirm the numbers as put forward by the auto sector. We want to make sure that they're pursuing transformational changes. We want to make sure that there's a solid foundation on which we can build, a basis for growth and opportunity long into the future, but that takes a little bit of time, and every single day we are in touch with the auto sector to make sure we're getting this right.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, that's the problem. There isn't much time left. The auto industry is saying that it is very quickly running out of cash. Hundreds of thousands of Ontario jobs are on the line because of the shortage of working capital in the industry, yet the government still has no plan. It looks to Washington, it looks to Ottawa for a plan. When will this Premier realize that the plan needs to start right here in Ontario, realize that it's time for a made-in-Ontario, made-for-Ontario plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I appreciate the passion and the sense of urgency, but we have an additional responsibility on this side of the House, which is to be thoughtful, and we are going to work closely with the federal government. In fact, I can say we'll be looking to the federal government in large measure, if not wholly, to come to the table when it comes to addressing liquidity issues.

If you take a look at what's been happening around the world when it comes to lending support to the auto sector in the face of liquidity challenges, it is the national level of government that provides that support. So we will continue to work with the federal government. I know our two ministers are working closely together. We'll continue to work with the CAW, with the auto sector and with the suppliers at large, to make sure we land something that everybody can live with, that's responsible and that will ensure the ongoing vitality and viability of the auto sector.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier will know that a recent report by Roger Martin found that per capita incomes in Ontario are falling relative to other jurisdictions. In part, Mr. Martin blamed complacent govern-

ments. Hundreds of thousands of laid-off workers in the manufacturing and forestry sectors know the McGuinty government's complacency all too well. Now that Ontario is in a recession and layoffs are just rolling through in other sectors, when will the Premier take a real plan to sustain and create jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, I'm sure we can be accused of all kinds of things, but I don't think complacency is one of them, especially when it comes to developing our human capital, the skills and education levels of our people.

In the last five years, as a result of the efforts that we have made, we've got 100,000 more young people in our colleges and universities; 50,000 more young people pursuing trades; and we're graduating somewhere from 10,000 to 11,000 more young people every year from our high schools who used to drop out.

That has required a significant new level of public investment. We're proud to do that on behalf of Ontarians. It has required a real commitment and understanding to where the economy is going in the future, and it's a knowledge-based global economy. That's why we have so effectively, I would argue, invested in the skills and education of our people.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, complacency is how the 250,000 workers who've been laid off out of forestry and manufacturing feel, frankly.

For five years, New Democrats have been, however, putting forward real ideas—real ideas—to protect Ontario's manufacturing and forestry jobs. Meanwhile, the McGuinty government has been missing in action, as these jobs have disappeared across the province. With surveys and reports indicating even more job losses are looming across all sectors of the economy, Ontarians want to know if their government is going to be there for them.

My question is this: Will the government be up to the challenge or will more Ontarians be told that they're on their own when it comes to protecting their jobs in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, it is true that some Ontarians have in fact lost their jobs. We're doing everything we can to support those workers and those communities with additional financial supports and new retraining opportunities for folks who have lost their jobs.

But I think it's important to keep the big picture in mind as well. There's a lot of bad news that's coming across the TV, in our newspapers and on the radio these days through all the various news media, but there are some good sides to the story as well. In the last five years, we got about 500,000 net new jobs in the province of Ontario. Real incomes are up in the province of Ontario. Our unemployment rate is down in the province of Ontario. So I want Ontarians to get the full picture. I don't want to be Pollyannaish on this, but I want them to get the full picture. There is some good news, and we're going to continue to work, particularly with those folks who lost their jobs, to find better opportunities, training

opportunities for them, to strengthen them, so they can get some of the jobs that are out today which are going begging.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, the Premier talks about retraining programs that have been a dismal failure in this province, like the Second Career program.

The Prime Minister and other world leaders have talked about speeding up infrastructure projects as a way of stimulating the economy, but this government's last economic update suggests very clearly that less money for job creation from municipal infrastructure projects are ready to go. Combining immediate funding for these projects with a Buy Ontario policy is one way to sustain and create good jobs in this province. Why won't the Premier table a real jobs plan that includes speeding up infrastructure projects?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's really important that we all find ways at all levels of government to accelerate our infrastructure projects. That's something to which the Prime Minister has now committed himself when we had our meeting of the first ministers. But again, I'm proud to report on some of the stuff that we've already done. Just two weeks ago we rolled \$1.1 billion out the door to our municipal partners so that they could pursue infrastructure projects that are already on the books and that they had fully planned. We also have, as I mentioned a moment ago, about 100 major construction projects underway in the province of Ontario today. It takes a long time to put in place all the plans to ensure that you get those shovels in the ground, but we've got work taking place now. Thirty billion dollars over five years is the total of our infrastructure plan. There's always more that we can do, and in particular we're looking forward to working with the federal government as they roll out, in a more accelerated way, their infrastructure dollars.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Labour. This past Friday I met with senior management of eight manufacturing companies in the automotive sector employing some 3,000 people in the GTA. We all know the challenges that this sector faces. I asked them what message I should bring to the government's attention. Not one of these companies asked for a bailout. What they did ask for is respect; respect from the people on the front lines representing the government—example after example of disrespectful treatment and intimidation by representatives, agents, specifically of the Ministry of Labour. One of those representatives gave me this tape, which contains a conversation of an agent of the ministry. I'm going to ask the minister this: Will he agree to listen to this tape and will he agree to meet with the employer—

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

Hon. Peter Fonseca: What I'll say to the member is that we are here to protect Ontario workers. We are here to make sure that workplaces are safe and are fair places to work. Our government has an excellent track record of working with labour, with employers, with employees, with businesses. Those inspectors that go out there into the job sites work with employers. They want to make sure that those workplaces are safe for those workers. We know the costs, not just the human costs but there are financial costs when those workers are injured on the workplace or, God forbid, when there's a fatality. I don't see the member standing up when fatalities happen in the workplace and going against what our inspectors are doing. Our inspectors are doing their jobs that they're meant to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: I am asking one thing of the minister—just one thing—and that is that he would agree to listen to this tape to see how his representatives are conducting themselves on the front line with employers in this province. That's all I'm asking. And that he would agree to meet with these employers so that they can tell him first-hand how they support workplace safety, but how they would like to get some respect and work in a positive way with representatives of his ministry. Will the minister agree to listen to this tape so that he knows first-hand what is going on, and will he agree to that meeting?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: We respect employers and employees. We work on the principle of fairness and partnership. What our inspectors are doing—and I can tell you those 430 inspectors that are out there in the field are looking to reduce workplace injuries. We have a track record where we've reduced by over 20% lost-time injuries in the workplace. We now have a program called Safe at Work Ontario. Safe at Work Ontario is about working with employers and employees to change the culture in the workplace to address safety. This is good for business, it's good for the bottom line and it's good for Ontario workers.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The minister and I disagree on the impact of recent changes to the definition of eligibility for temporary care assistance. We keep hearing from more and more grandparents who have been cut off. We need to get to the bottom of this and that's why I'm proposing the appointment of an independent expert to review this program and report back to this Legislature on the state of the temporary care assistance program. Will this minister agree to this?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek keeps saying in the House that there are so many grandparents that have been cut off and now he's saying that the program has been eliminated, which is not true. He was not even able to find grand-

parents to bring into the House to say that their TCA was cut off. He got up and introduced five grandparents; none of them have been cut off. The program is there, to continue; the program is there.

Again, let's talk about facts. In Hamilton, in July, there were 181 cases; in October, 185 cases. This is in Hamilton; it's going up.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I appreciate the minister's response. I guess those three busloads meant nothing, and all these other people that are phoning us. The numbers that the minister is quoting could be new cases that have been added on, not counting the other ones.

Grandparents raising their grandkids need and deserve our full support. They and all Ontarians deserve to know that the TCA program is working as it was intended to work. The only way to do that is to bring an independent expert to review the program and make recommendations on how to improve it. I don't know what the minister's afraid of, if everything is as usual. Why doesn't the minister agree to this?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I know very well the program is working because there are more and more grandparents and friends and neighbours and aunts and uncles who are participating in the program, and on a yearly basis, we have about 5,000 children who are benefiting from this program. The program is here to stay.

Let me give other facts, not what the member is saying. Provincially, in July 2008, there were 4,027 cases. In October 2008, four months later, 4,136—more than 100 cases.

The member is going out and scaring grandparents by saying this program has been cancelled. That's not true.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Mario Sergio: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. As you know, York University is in my riding of York West. The strike started over two weeks ago. It has cancelled classes for approximately 50,000 students. I have heard from many students who are concerned about their studies and are left wondering what will happen to their semester if a resolution is not reached shortly.

Minister, it is unfortunate that a disagreement between the union and the university is adversely affecting York students. I have heard from many people in my community who feel that they are unfairly caught in the middle of this dispute, and there are many questions about what compensation the students will receive for lost time in the classroom. I would like you to tell the House and disconcerted students and parents just what is being done to get students back into classes.

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to thank the honourable member for his question and for the concern that he has shown, as well as a number of members of this Legislature, for the situation at York University. I appreciate this concern for the students and I want to express my disappointment that both sides were not able to reach an

agreement. I strongly encourage both sides to get back to the negotiating table and reach an agreement as soon as possible that's in the best interests of students.

I think, as members are aware, universities are responsible for their own labour relations and I do not have the authority to intervene in such matters. As a result, I will be passing the supplementary to my colleague the Minister of Labour.

1100

I do want to point that any questions concerning compensation for missed classes must be directed to the university, as this is a decision that's made by their board of governors. However, I'm monitoring the situation very closely.

I understand that both the union and the university have been posting daily updates—

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

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'd like to thank the minister for the concern he has expressed. As well, I would like to echo the comments made by our Premier this weekend on the importance of education and the need for us to have a well-educated workforce to keep Ontario competitive in the future.

I understand that the union and the employer are responsible for resolving their differences at the bargaining table. I also understand that the Ministry of Labour has mediators assisting the parties—the employer and the union—during their negotiations. My question to the minister is, what role is the government taking in this matter and how can they assist in bringing the parties back to the table?

Hon. John Milloy: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Our government understands the importance of stable labour relations. Fair and stable labour relations is the cornerstone of Ontario's economic success.

The Ministry of Labour promotes a constructive labour relations climate and fosters productive workplace relations in Ontario. Over the past few years, more than 97% of negotiations have resulted in settlements with no work stoppage. That's an outstanding result.

We've come a long way, and our success is due, in part, to our government's approach to labour relations. The ministry's labour relations activities focus on settling workplace disputes and assisting in the settlement of collective agreements.

Ministry of Labour mediators are available to assist parties at the negotiating table at York University. It's our hope that the parties get back to the table and come up with an arrangement that is beneficial to both parties.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. We have all heard the horror stories about the deaths of Jeffrey Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson. The Attorney General introduced a bill yesterday to help protect children in custody cases.

Minister, your ministry is responsible for the child protection system in Ontario. Will you tell this House what specific steps you have taken to protect children at risk, in response to the Baldwin and Sampson cases?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Of course, the member opposite raises an issue that is of great concern to every member in this House.

I want to express my support to the Ministry of the Attorney General for the proposed amendments to the Children's Law Reform Act. Several measures are being proposed to provide the court with comprehensive information when making a determination about the best interests in custody cases.

Our plan to improve the safety of children has four parts. I probably will need the supplementary to continue, but if the Speaker will indulge me, every person applying for custody of or access to a child would be required to complete a sworn statement that sets out all the facts and circumstances that relate to the child's best interests. This would include how they propose to care for the child. It would apply both to parents and non-parents.

I will continue in the supplementary—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm hoping that you can answer, in the supplementary, the question I'm going to ask.

The only bill that your ministry currently has before this House is to move convicted young offenders from one ministry to another. Why is there no bill before this House from your ministry to reform the child protection system? When will we see a bill?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me just begin by saying that we are working very, very hard with the legislation that we have to implement the improvements that have been made to the system since we were elected.

In addition, the bill that is before the House will require that a non-parent who is applying for custody of a child be directed to submit a recent police record check as part of the application process. It is a similar requirement that already exists for volunteer positions that involve direct access with children, such as child care workers or Boy Scout leaders. Non-parents applying for custody would be required to provide the court with information about any file or record that they may have had with a children's aid society. This is a change that my ministry and the Ministry of the Attorney General have worked very closely on to make sure that that information is before the judge.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, currently in Ontario, a 16-year-old can get a private pilot's licence and fly multiple passengers in a private plane. In Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, that same 16-year-old driver will not be allowed to carry more than one passenger while driving a car. Isn't the real issue how we train drivers? If we can train a 16-year-old to fly a private plane, shouldn't we be able to train 16-year-olds to drive a car safely?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, I know that the member is sincere in his question. I know he will be just as sincere when five kids are killed in a car accident and the matter is raised in the House, because on many occasions, members have legitimately raised issues when young people have been killed in car accidents. As you know, they are three and a half times more likely to have an accident than someone, for instance, aged 30 to 35—three and a half times as likely to have those accidents when there are a number of kids in the car.

Every group that we consulted on this which was involved with safety, including some parents who had gone through this, indicated they wanted to see this extension that exists already from midnight to 5 a.m. They wanted to see it extended, for the one year of graduated licensing, for the entire day.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I'd be interested to know how many young people that minister actually consulted on this bill.

The point is this: We currently have people who are 16 years of age who can be trained as private pilots in this province, as across this country. The safety record is impeccable. There are no statistics that indicate a 16-year-old pilot is any more safe or any less safe than a 50-year-old pilot, and they're able to carry multiple passengers in a private plane. The issue is that of training. Shouldn't we be putting our emphasis on making sure that we properly train young drivers in being responsible and understanding what needs to be done to be as safe as possible? Or is this strictly discrimination on the part of this government towards young people?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member would be aware that that's exactly what we have done: We have changed the training program. The young drivers who are now going through graduated licensing have a far superior program to what they had many years ago.

It was your government, I remember, in the 1990s, who brought in legislation of this kind. I remember there was a lot of opposition to it; probably if you went back in Hansard, you might even find me raising those kinds of issues. I shouldn't do that. But that's exactly what happened, and as a result of graduated licensing—that your government can take credit for—I'll tell you that the roads are a lot safer.

British Columbia, as you know, has this legislation in place at the present time. In fact, the British Columbia legislation is even more onerous. I know it's an imposition. I'm looking forward to the input that will come from committee. I know the member's looking forward to that as well. We're always looking at the quality of arguments put forward and we're always prepared to enter—

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

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is to the minister responsible for women's issues. Last week, I

had the privilege to go on a ride-along with the Hamilton Police Service downtown. I witnessed first-hand the professionalism and courage with which Hamilton's officers combat violence against women in our community. Although this is an integral part of supporting women in our communities, I know that there is much more to do.

Violence against women remains a horrible reality in our communities. The need to address this problem has been recognized throughout the world. Nine years ago today, the United Nations declared November 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Can the minister please tell this House how the government is recognizing this day?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Everyone has the right to live without the threat of violence, and that includes all women in Ontario. I am pleased to rise today to recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Marking this day reminds us all that many women do not enjoy the fundamental right of safety.

Today marks the beginning of 16 days of activism against gender violence, including Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6, and ends with Human Rights Day on December 10. During this time, our partners in the community are leading important awareness campaigns, including the White Ribbon Campaign and the YWCA rose button campaign. We have buttons on hand for all members to wear. I invite you to wear them to show your—

1110

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

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: While it's good to know that our government is once again joining the call for the elimination of violence against women, we must ensure that resources are provided to help our communities stop this violence and support victims of abuse.

There are agencies working to prevent violence against women through awareness and outreach. In addition, they provide the necessary shelter and support to help women get their lives back on track. In Hamilton, we are fortunate to have Interval House as a safe haven which is free of violence and full of support for women. However, organizations like Interval House need our support in order to make a difference in the fight against violence against women.

Can the minister please outline how the government is supporting these community partners?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our government believes in partnerships. We can't do it alone. The reality of violence is ugly. It devastates lives. It psychologically scars children. It has no place in a civilized society or a healthy community. That's why our government is doing the work to move us further along a better path to a society free of violence against women.

I acknowledge the extraordinary people, organizations and agencies across the province that work so hard to help abused women start new lives. With our community

partners across the province, we're committed to supporting women to turn the page, to begin to live their lives in peace, security and safety, as is their right. We are investing \$208 million annually in programs and services that tackle violence against women. Since 2003, it's an increase of funding to community-based services for abused women by 40%—

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

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Minister of Finance: I attended the Coalition After Property Tax Reform's convention this weekend, taxpayers who have been whacked by massive property assessments under Dalton McGuinty's new scheme. They pointed out that in Dalton McGuinty's have-not Ontario, real estate prices in Toronto have dropped by 13%, the biggest drop in 17 years; in the GTA, it was an 8% drop. But under your new assessment scheme, homeowners are locked into values as of January 1, 2008, at the height of a hot housing market. In short, if you get hit by a massive assessment increase, you are stuck with higher property taxes, with no hope for relief until 2012.

Minister, given the drop in real estate prices in the area, do you think this is fair?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I remind the member that an increase in assessment does not mean an increase in property taxes. You can say that a thousand times, and you might even believe it, I say to the member, and you might try to convince other people of that. It is simply not the case.

The assessments have gone out across the province. They do not imply or otherwise suggest a tax increase. Municipalities have the tools available to them to equalize it; that is, to not see an increase resultant from a change in assessment. I would ask the member to bear that in mind in all these discussions. An increase in assessment does not translate into an increase in taxes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: If the minister had tried that line in front of 400 or 500 beleaguered homeowners and taxpayers at the CAPTR meeting, they would have laughed him right out of the room, because they know that Dalton McGuinty's massive assessment increases are leading to higher property taxes across the province on the backs of already beleaguered taxpayers trying to make ends meet.

Minister, you've also long maintained that only the rich benefit from assessment caps. In reality, homeowners with modest incomes have seen some of the highest spikes in assessments under your new scheme. For example, in Toronto, working families have seen a 28% increase in Parkdale–High Park, a 32% increase in Trinity–Spadina and a 33% increase in Danforth. These are hard-working, middle-class families already struggling to make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Or, Minister, do you believe these families are simply the rich and famous?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I just have to re-emphasize that an increase in assessment does not lead to an increase in property taxes.

Now, I understand why the member opposite wouldn't take my word for it, but let me read to him a quote from somebody I am sure he would put great confidence in—Ernie Eves, in Hansard, November 30, 2000: "I want to get a point across because everybody, whether you're a homeowner or whether you're a business owner, is now getting their assessment notice. The assessment notice is not a tax bill. It is a statement of what the assessment corporation believes your property to be worth...."

In addition to that, we have provided a property tax credit for seniors and enhanced it. Both times, that member and his party voted against it.

Ontarians need to understand: An assessment increase—

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

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. A letter from the Minister of Energy was published today in the Globe and Mail, indicating that the Ontario government is committed to no new nuclear. Does this mean the government has finally abandoned its risky and costly plan to build new reactors in Darlington and instead will replace coal plants with conservation and renewable energy? Tell us it's true.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think the member is very much aware that our commitment is to maintain existing nuclear production and to hold the line in terms of the capacity that's available to us in that regard. She'll know as well that we've made a specific commitment to eliminate coal-fired generation in Ontario by 2014.

Let me take this opportunity to encourage all Ontario communities—I know that there's a debate taking place in Toronto right now, and that's good and that's helping—to consider the benefits of our doing more together to harness renewable sources of energy like both solar and wind.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The minister stated clearly in his letter that the government is committed to no coal and no new nuclear. He failed to mention that the government plans to build two new multi-billion dollar reactors in Darlington.

Will the Premier ask his minister to write to the Globe and Mail to retract his misleading statement and clearly indicate—

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I will withdraw.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: —to retract his unfortunate statement and clearly indicate to Ontarians and Canadians that the government does in fact plan to spend tens of billions of dollars bringing on new nuclear energy in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It is hardly a surprise, because we have gone through a lengthy process to make sure it is as fair and transparent as possible, that we are going to be building new nuclear reactors in Ontario. That's not a surprise, but we're going to maintain the capacity level at its existing level. We want to do that as part of a comprehensive long-term plan to ensure that we have, as much as possible, clean, affordable, reliable sources of electricity in Ontario.

Again, if my friend wants to bring her passion to this—and I know she's got all kinds of that—I'd encourage her to encourage more Ontarians to take a look at the opportunities that we can find together by harnessing the power of the sun and the power of wind—by harnessing renewable sources of energy.

CARPPOOLING

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. With the public interest in green transportation increasing and with gas prices fluctuating the way they have been, the constituents in my riding and drivers across Ontario seem to be re-evaluating their driving habits. They are looking for ways to lessen visits to the pumps and ways to decrease the greenhouse gas emissions they produce.

I realize that this government has recognized these priorities, including its \$17.5-billion Move Ontario 2020 commitment for public transit. However, public transit is not the answer for everyone. It is important to recognize other practices that are also beneficial to the environment and to wallets, such as carpooling.

I'm wondering if the minister can share with this House what his ministry is doing to promote carpooling here in Ontario.

1120

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's an excellent question. I know the member has had interest in it for some period of time. As the member would know, the government of Ontario has introduced legislation that, if passed by the Legislature, will amend the Public Vehicles Act to make it easier for people to engage in carpooling. It will reduce the number of single-occupant vehicle trips, resulting in a decrease in air pollution. We recognize that carpooling is an important way to ease congestion and make travelling more convenient for those who are doing so.

I know my friend from Timmins—James Bay would agree with you and me, because he brought in a private member's bill in this regard, that this is an excellent part of that piece of legislation.

So, I want to commend the member for this. We have made it easier. I think ultimately we will see a lot more carpooling taking place.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Just for the members' benefit, the big print is because I can't see very well.

Again, my question is to the Minister of Transportation.

I'm pleased to hear that this government is committed to making changes to the current Public Vehicles Act to address the issues surrounding carpooling in Ontario. Sharing a ride with someone is a great way to save time and money and to help the environment.

Recently, there has been an issue raised surrounding carpooling and those who are trying to help the province to provide the service. This has affected many people in my riding and, I'm sure, others across Ontario.

Those who choose to carpool do not want antiquated red tape to stand in their way. I'm hoping the Minister of Transportation can share with this House how his ministry is proposing to remove the barriers and red tape associated with forming carpools in Ontario.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The legislation itself will be very helpful in that regard. The member knows that part of the legislation deals with hand-held electronic devices which are a distraction, but the second half of the legislation deals with a difficulty that people had encountered with carpooling that actually ended up before the Ontario transport board. Of course, as minister I am not allowed to comment on the Ontario transport board's deliberations or rulings, but I can tell you that when this matter was brought to our attention, we decided that we would proceed with this legislation. Indeed, I think we'll do it in such a way that it does not negatively impact taxi companies or bus companies. At the same time, the legislation will allow for carpooling on a much easier and informal basis than was the case in the past.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Minister of Labour. We are now in day 20 of the York University strike. Day seven marked the point of no return for students in all fall term half courses. On day 14, the university announced that all courses will need remediation adjustments. Students are desperate to know what the day of jeopardy is and what your plans are to address the strike issue. Students are contacting me and asking how they will be able to salvage their academic year and their postgraduate plans. I want to know, Minister, according to you, what is the day of jeopardy for these students, and whether it matters enough for you to act. When are you going to act?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the question. I want to echo some of the comments that the Premier made on the weekend about the importance of education and that we are able to compete globally in these very challenging times.

One of the things that has allowed us to compete globally is our labour relations. We have excellent labour relations in the province of Ontario. We believe in the collective agreement process; we respect it.

We want the parties to come back to the table. We ask them to double their efforts. We have a mediator working with the parties. I understand that they are coming back to the table. That's the right thing to do, to resolve their differences and get those students back in the classrooms.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Shurman: It would sure be nice to get an answer to the question.

You may know, Minister, that nine out of 18 CUPE locals at Ontario universities have contracts expiring in 2010, with five more in negotiations on contracts expiring this year, one of which is York. This means that in 2010 we will potentially be faced with a province-wide shutdown of most universities in Ontario, should those universities not cave to the union's future demands. If you are not willing to save York University students now, will you at the very least commit to protecting all Ontario university students, going forward?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member, it's best to take a balanced, stable, progressive approach, working with all parties, making sure that we assist with our mediators to bring the parties to the table so they can resolve those differences. The best agreements happen when all parties come to the table and resolve those differences. That is what we are doing.

We understand the importance, especially in the education sector, of getting those students back into the classroom. It's about our competitive edge, and we know that our competitive edge is with our human resources, our people, here in this province. That's why we have had stellar labour relations: 97% of all collective agreements are done without work stoppage. We will continue to work with those parties. We will continue to build on the success that we've had, and we will continue to focus on those students.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. By now, virtually all Ontario homeowners have received their property assessment notices. The government scheme of a four-year assessment does nothing for property owners whose homes have been valued on January 1, 2008. Today, 10 months later, values in places like Toronto have gone down 13%, and in other towns they've gone down by as much as 20% because of devastating job losses and the swiftness of the present economic downturn. My question to the Minister: What is the government's plan to assist people whose homes have been assessed at unrealistically high values?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I remind the member opposite again, the mechanisms are in place to adjust the tax rate. The calculation of property tax is the rate times the assessment. You can adjust the rates; the mechanisms are there for municipalities to do that. Again, I stress to the people of Ontario, an increase in assessment does not imply or necessarily lead to an increase in taxes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: I never once mentioned the word "tax." I'm talking about the assessment. The council of the city of Cambridge, and I suspect more municipalities will join in, has passed a resolution seeking the government's help. Cambridge council has requested that the minister help soften the blow and defer the four-year

phase-in for property tax increases by one year and make it from 2010 through 2013 in order to help assess the downturn. How will this government answer the city of Cambridge's request?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We won't agree to it. The assessment is phased in over four years. There are mechanisms to adjust so that taxpayers don't see an increase resulting from the assessment. There is no doubt that we've experimented on 100 different occasions. There are seven pieces of legislation by the previous government on this. The assessment notices do not imply a tax increase. We believe and agree with those, and there are many of them, including the Ombudsman, who say we are getting this right, and because of that, my inclination now is to say no, we don't agree with them.

MUNICIPAL TAXATION

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, in these tough times, a lot of municipal taxpayers and a lot of municipalities really fear what might happen if unemployment goes up and the welfare rolls increase. The question I have for you is this: For years we have been asking for welfare to be taken off property taxes. We've said take Ontario Works and upload it, because the last government downloaded all those onto the property taxes. So I'm asking you, Minister, in this new agreement that you've signed with the city of Toronto, and with AMO, what provision is in this new agreement that would alleviate some of the welfare pressures off property taxes? What is in the agreement to do that?

Hon. Jim Watson: I want to thank the honourable member, who understands the challenges municipalities face because of his time on municipal council in the city of Toronto.

When we signed the agreement, which was a 10-year agreement with the municipal sector through AMO and the city of Toronto, the number one priority from the municipal sector was to take the social income redistribution programs away from the property taxpayer and put it back to the provincial government, where it belongs. The president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Len Crispino, said this about the deal:

"The 10-year plan announced today to upload \$1.5 billion in social assistance benefits and court security costs from the municipalities will go a long way to easing the burden on the property tax base, and addressing the long held concerns of our members. Today's progress is even more significant because it represents a major step forward despite the challenges presented by today's economic"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Mike Colle: Minister, in these unprecedented economic times, all municipalities have increasing concern about the labour market in their cities. They're worried about taxpayers losing their jobs.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: I know the Conservatives don't care about people who are finding tough times, but the muni-

cipalities care about the workers and they want to make sure that we can get as many jobs as possible in our cities and towns across Ontario. What else has your ministry done to ensure that all the infrastructure work on bridges, roads, on public transit—that there's money for these jobs, for these workers, in municipalities across Ontario? Is there any infrastructure program—

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

Hon. Jim Watson: As the Premier said earlier, the Investing in Ontario Act, just about two weeks ago, saw \$1.1 billion in new infrastructure money go to every community, to all 445 municipalities in the province.

The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke asked, “Well, what about infrastructure?” The good people of Pembroke are receiving \$1.3 million in infrastructure money, and unlike the other government, it's not some novelty blow-up rubber cheque. This is money that is already in the bank, thanks to the Minister of Finance and the investing in Ontario program.

We're proud of the relationship that we have developed with the municipal sector over the course of the last five years, and we're not waiting to upload, we've already begun it: ODSP, ODP, the gas tax, land ambulance, public health, Ontario Works is coming down the line, and court security and prisoner transportation. These are significant investments and it will—

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

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Earlier in question period I asked the minister if he would listen to a tape recording of the conduct of his agents in the field. I appreciate the fact that the minister sent me a note agreeing that he would, in fact, listen to that tape.

I now would like to ask the minister this: Will he agree to the second part of my request, which is that he would meet with these employers personally to get a first-hand account of what is happening on the front lines by his agents and how they are conducting themselves in the field? Will he agree to have that meeting?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I am always open to meeting with employers. This is a partnership. It's a partnership between employers and labour and employees. We believe in partnerships; that's the way we strengthen Ontario. But we also believe that our inspectors are doing a job that is necessary, to go into workplaces and ensure health and safety for Ontario workers. They're doing a good job. We've seen the results and we want to continue to make Ontario the safest place to work.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No, sorry. The time has expired; no supplementary. The time for question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1500.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Introduction of guests?

Welcome to everyone visiting the chamber today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BUY LOCAL

Mr. John Yakabuski: A couple of years ago, the Renfrew county Buy Local committee was formed to encourage consumers to think local when planning their purchases. That campaign has been a huge success. Earlier this fall, over 6,000 people attended this year's Taste of the Valley event in Cobden, which showcases locally grown or produced food products. As committee member Dave Fisher said, people have recognized the value of keeping as much spending as possible within their own community.

As an extension of the Buy Local campaign, the community introduced the municipal challenge campaign. This was to recognize that municipalities can lead by example in keeping their purchases local. Each municipality was asked to track what percentage of their purchases were made within their own community or in the county of Renfrew.

As a former small business owner, I am pleased to advise the House that the township of Madawaska Valley is the winner of the contest—my home township. The township achieved an impressive 78%; that's right, 78 cents of every dollar were spent locally. I want to congratulate Mayor John Hildebrandt, members of council and all municipal staff for working together to reach such a high percentage. Their success in winning this award clearly demonstrates the commitment of the municipality to their local business community.

I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the Buy Local committee, particularly April Cappel, the former Buy Local coordinator, for coming up with the idea of the municipal challenge. It has helped everyone focus on the importance of supporting their own.

DEREK HATFIELD

Mr. Charles Sousa: I rise today to recognize the efforts of Mr. Derek Hatfield. Derek is a retired RCMP officer and an accomplished sailor. He sails out of the Port Credit Yacht Club in my riding of Mississauga South, and this year he is competing in the Vendée Globe.

This is a sailor's most valiant single-handed race around the world. The Vendée Globe is held every four years and allows only 30 sailors to compete for the trophy and the title of best single-handed sailor in the world. His boat is named the Spirit of Canada. Launched from France on November 9, it will take him around the three capes. Qualifying for the Vendée Globe is a particularly important achievement, as Derek is the first Canadian ever to do so.

But of course, his journey started well before the launch. After months of fundraising and practice, he set out to sail across the Atlantic and arrived safely in France on September 30. I had the pleasure of meeting Derek in June at the Spirit of Canada send-off at the Port Credit Yacht Club. In speaking with him, I was immediately impressed by his calm and resolve to accomplish this extraordinary goal. In fact, he is well known by all in Mississauga's sailing community for a steady hand and stalwart nature. By facing this enormous challenge with courage and determination, he is truly representing the spirit of all of Canada.

We in this Legislature are incredibly proud of his achievement and wish him well as he takes on the world's best while flying Canada's flag. Congratulations, Derek, and best of luck.

GROWTH PLANNING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Many residents of Caledon continue to express their disappointment in the decision by Premier McGuinty and Minister Smitherman to refuse to hold an inquiry into the challenges faced by Caledon in implementing provincial growth legislation. The town of Caledon has been threatened with a \$500-million lawsuit. A suit has also been filed against the mayor.

When the province made changes to the Planning Act, it removed the developers' ability to appeal urban boundary expansions to the Ontario Municipal Board. At that time, some developers made it clear that they would seek legal action to achieve their objectives. In the town of Caledon, developers have followed through on the threats.

Caledon's official plan meets the provisions of the government's Places to Grow Act. Caledon's plan calls for the protection of prime agricultural lands within and outside of the greenbelt, and their tri-nodal growth strategy is one of the mechanisms for protecting that land.

Even though the town's planning reflects the provincial guidelines, the province is unwilling to show leadership in ensuring the town is not subjected to unnecessary lawsuits from people who disagree with the plan.

Dealing with these issues is diverting time and resources away from other important local and regional initiatives. The challenges to Caledon's growth management strategy need to be addressed by this government immediately. Caledon needs a strong expression of support from the minister, if not in the form of a public inquiry, then, at the very minimum, a letter of support for the growth management policies in Caledon and for the process by which they were reached. It's the least they deserve to reinforce the town's work in managing growth.

AGRICULTURAL LABOUR POLICY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The fruits of labour were in full evidence on November 17. Eight days ago, the

United Food and Commercial Workers union won an important, hard-won and historic victory for Ontario's more than 100,000 agricultural workers. They toil in the fields, work in the factory farms; they plant and harvest our crops and perform incredibly dangerous work without proper rights, wages or protection.

Last week, the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld the UFCW's position that an Ontario law denies agricultural workers the right to form a union and violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Congratulations to UFCW's Wayne Hanley, Stan Raper, the Agriculture Workers Alliance and all the workers who could benefit.

The landmark ruling targets the Agricultural Employees Protection Act put in place by the Mike Harris government in 2003 after the UFCW won its first charter challenge at the Supreme Court of Canada in 2001. That law said that, unlike workers covered by the Ontario Labour Relations Act, agricultural workers could "associate" but not "unionize."

The Mike Harris Conservatives are long gone, but the McGuinty Liberals continue with the same backwards legislation that the Court of Appeal just struck down. Instead, they should say unequivocally that agricultural workers have the absolute right to belong to a union and that the unconstitutional law will be repealed. Send the signal now that Ontario respects the court's decision and will confer full labour rights on Ontario's agricultural workers.

To date, only eerie silence from the Premier and his ministers. I call on them: Break the silence.

OAK RIDGES-MARKHAM MUSEUMS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I wish to congratulate the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum, the King Township Museum and the Markham Museum and Historic Village, which will collectively receive over \$95,000 between 2008 and 2009 under our government's community museum operating grant program.

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum was established 37 years ago and features historic landmarks, including an 1857 Bogartown schoolhouse; the Brown house, an 1857 Victorian farmhouse restored to replicate the 1880s; and the Vandorf Public School, built in 1870. The museum will receive \$28,809, its first grant increase in at least 15 years.

The King Township Museum will receive \$13,511. Housed in an old school built in 1861, it boasts a collection of over 1,800 artifacts, all relating to the rich history of King township.

Markham Museum and Historic Village will receive \$53,143. Established 37 years ago, it features indoor and outdoor exhibits of more than a century of pioneer history.

One does not need to walk far from this chamber to see the impact that museums have on our communities. On the main floor of this Legislative Building, the King Township Museum's glass display case captures the

town's significance to the cultural heritage of both Oak Ridges–Markham and Ontario.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Norm Miller: I have an e-mail from Patsy Beynon of Gravenhurst, Ontario, in opposition to Bill 126 and demonstrating why we need consultations. I will attempt to get most of it onto the record in this short minute and a half.

"I am writing this to let you know how upset I am with the new young drivers law. We, as many others in this province, have chosen to live in an area where there is no public transportation. Because of this, our children need to use their or their parents' vehicles for employment, education, sports etc.

"Many young adults carpool to Georgian College in Barrie, Orillia, Bracebridge or Nipissing or Lakehead University. Carpooling has enabled many to attend post-secondary education. It is difficult enough for many to attend, and this new law would make it even more so.

"As Canadians, our ancestors fought for our many freedoms, which we seem willing to sit back and allow our politicians to take away. We've discussed this new law in my family, and a number of my children are concerned about how it will affect them and any children they may have. We believe that it is discrimination, and does our Constitution not state that we cannot be discriminated against because of age?

1510

"A number of other issues that have been raised regarding this law are:

"—we can go and fight for our country and our freedom at 18;

"—we can vote at 18;

"—we can marry at 18;

"—we can drink at 19;

"—we won't be able to drive;

"—it will affect the drinking and driving as a number of these people have a designated driver and now that person will only be able to have one other person with them;

"—it will affect the employment that is available to these young adults;

"—it will make it more difficult on families whose children participate in sports or whose children need a vehicle to get to post-secondary education;

"—there will then be more vehicles on the road....

"Thank you for taking the time to read the above and hopefully our politicians will take a hard look at the consequences of this law."

ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Beginning on November 21, the Royal Botanical Gardens hosted a three-day workshop aimed at connecting Ontario's children with nature. One of the largest botanical gardens in the world, this

living museum has been bringing nature to Hamiltonians and Ontarians for over 60 years.

This workshop was entitled Back to Nature and was conducted with the goal of ensuring that our children do not live a life removed from nature. In addition to being concerned with children today, this workshop was forward-thinking, as it recognized that connections established at a young age will last for a lifetime. In other words, bringing nature and children together will result in a green Ontario for generations to come.

The Royal Botanical Gardens's dedication to Hamilton's children falls directly in line with the city's vision to be the best place in Canada to raise a child.

I'd like to thank RBG for their wonderful work in organizing this workshop, as well as their vision and understanding that connecting children with nature will result in a greener, healthier and more prosperous Hamilton and Ontario.

NEUROMODULATION

Mr. Dave Levac: Today, the Neuromodulation Coalition is at Queen's Park to raise awareness about the benefits of neuromodulation therapies. With us are William Orłowski, Ian Pearson, Kit Pearson, Linda Gibson, Stephen Yeates and Maxine Bergman, who all have had this process. It refers to surgery to implant devices that provide electrical stimulation of peripheral nerves, the spinal cord or the brain to alter nerve impulses.

These specialized and effective therapies have the potential to provide significant improvements in the quality of life for people living with chronic pain, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, dystonia, other movement disorders and urinary incontinence. In some cases, it has enabled patients to regain the ability to walk after suffering debilitating injury to the brain or spinal cord or after the onset of multiple sclerosis. In the case of my brother, they stopped the tremors of Parkinson's and gave him a quality of life such that he can now dress himself, feed himself and walk.

Patients who seek treatment from neuromodulation come from all walks of life, including the young, the old, men, women, and people of all economic circumstances.

The coalition is here to talk to many members in the House, and I hope that we will pay attention to them. They'll tell us about the quality of life that they have now gained from receiving this beautiful piece of medical marvel.

ADVOCIS

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It's a privilege to welcome members of Advocis to Queen's Park today.

Advocis is the largest voluntary professional membership association of financial advisers in Canada. Its members are financial advisers licensed to distribute life and health insurance, mutual funds and other securities. They provide financial and product advice to millions of

Ontarians and Canadians across a variety of distinct areas, including comprehensive financial and retirement planning, finance and wealth management, estate and tax planning, risk management, and employee benefits planning. For more than a century now, Advocis members have provided professional advice to Ontarians, delivering security and peace of mind.

Professional financial advisers have lasting relationships with their clients, so in times of financial market turmoil, they act as a calming influence because they take a long-term planning perspective and can guide their clients through turbulent times.

I'd like to especially mention two people in the gallery today: Greg Pollock, president and CEO of Advocis; and Roger McMillan, chair of Advocis's provincial advocacy committee and past chair of the national board of directors.

On behalf of all members of the Legislature of Ontario, I'd like to welcome Advocis to Queen's Park today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

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

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 99, An Act to protect and restore the ecological health of the Lake Simcoe watershed and to amend the Ontario Water Resources Act in respect of water quality trading / Projet de loi 99, Loi visant à protéger et à rétablir la santé écologique du bassin hydrographique du lac Simcoe et à modifier la Loi sur les ressources en eau de l'Ontario en ce qui concerne un système d'échange axé sur la qualité de l'eau.

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

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 119, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 119, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

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

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 5, 2008, the bill is ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition 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 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 and will send it with page Zac to the table.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents in my riding.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with Bill 119, the workplace safety and insurance bill, and it reads:

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes 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 support this petition.

TUITION

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

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

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

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

1520

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

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

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

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to immediately drop tuition fees to 2004 levels and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce a new framework that:

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

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

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

I agree with this petition and I have signed it.

LOGGING ROUTE

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

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

"Whereas alternate routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

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

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

I support this petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I had promised one of my constituents, Mr. Sukhdev Singh, that I would read a petition that he has very kindly submitted to me today, and I pass along my greetings to him. It's addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly 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 very pleased to sign and support this petition and to thank the Singh family for having sent it in to me, and to send it down with page Sarah.

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Jim Wilson: “Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes 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 and I will sign it.

GARDE D’ENFANTS

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: J’ai une pétition que j’ai reçue de Suzanne Huppé de St. Albert.

« À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Nous, citoyens de la province de l’Ontario, méritons et avons le droit de demander des modifications à la Loi portant réforme du droit de l’enfance, de façon à faire valoir l’importance des relations qu’ont les enfants avec leurs père et mère, ainsi qu’avec leurs grands-parents, comme le prévoit le projet de loi 33, 2008, présenté par le député provincial Kim Craiton.

« Attendu que le paragraphe 20(2.1) de la Loi exige que les père et mère et autres personnes qui ont la garde d’enfants ne doivent pas faire déraisonnablement obstacle aux relations personnelles qui existent entre les enfants et leurs grands-parents;

« Attendu que l’article 24(2) de la Loi énumère les questions dont le tribunal doit tenir compte pour établir l’intérêt véritable d’un enfant. Le projet de loi modifie ce paragraphe de façon à inclure une mention expresse de l’importance du maintien des liens affectifs qui existent entre enfants et grands-parents;

« Attendu que le paragraphe 24(2.1) de la Loi exige qu’un tribunal qui décide de la garde ou des droits de visite d’un enfant applique le principe selon lequel un enfant doit avoir le plus de contact possible avec ses père et mère et avec ses grands-parents, compte tenu de l’intérêt véritable de l’enfant; et

« Attendu que le paragraphe 24(2.2) de la Loi exige qu’un tribunal qui décide de la garde d’un enfant prenne en compte la volonté de chaque personne qui demande, par requête, la garde de l’enfant de faciliter les contacts entre celui-ci et ses père et mère ainsi que ses grands-parents, compte tenu de l’intérêt véritable de l’enfant;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Que les députés de l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario adoptent le projet de loi 33, 2008, qui modifie la Loi portant réforme du droit de l’enfance, de façon à faire valoir l’importance des relations qu’ont les enfants avec leurs père et mère ainsi qu’avec leurs grands-parents. »

J’appuie cette pétition et j’y ajoute ma signature.

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with lab services and Muskoka funding of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the residents of the communities served by Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC) wish to maintain current community lab services; and

“Whereas maintaining community lab services promotes physician retention and benefits family health teams; and

“Whereas the funding for community lab services is currently a strain on the operating budget of MAHC; and

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

“Whereas the operating budget for MAHC needs to reflect the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

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

“That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health increase the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to permit continued operation of community lab services.”

I support this petition.

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 services in Muskoka and Parry Sound. It reads, “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I support this petition.

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: On behalf of my seatmate, the member from Niagara Falls, I'm pleased to read this petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

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

1530

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

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

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

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

I'd like to thank the many people who signed, especially a group here from Simcoe, Ontario. I'm pleased to add my signature and to support the petition and to ask page Swapnil to carry it for me.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 24, 2008, on the amendment to the motion by Ms. Smith to authorize the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to meet during the week of December 15, 2008.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: It is a pleasure to take part in debating the amendment put forward by my colleague the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook regarding adding a list of communities that the finance committee should visit during their pre-budget consultations.

This whole idea of rushing these pre-budget consultations seems very familiar to me. It was just two weeks ago that this government shut down debate on Bill 119, the WSIB bill, despite the fact that it is going to take them four years—four years, ladies and gentlemen—to implement this bill. This government is showing that it is not very fond of consulting. In the last election, they promised to consult everybody—the CFIB, on any changes to the WSIB. They promptly ignored that promise when they introduced the punishing new small business tax in the form of Bill 119.

What the government wants is to rush this pre-budget consultation through the week of December 15, to cloud it with Christmas. When most people are starting to get ready for their Christmas holidays, this government wants them to come to meetings to give them advice on what should be in the budget, when they're going to be out Christmas shopping.

This is a departure from tradition. In the last number of years, as the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook pointed out yesterday, what would normally happen is that we would adjourn the Legislature in December and in January and March the finance committee would travel this province doing pre-budget consultations. The budget normally comes in the spring, so the winter gives this committee lots of time to do a lot of travelling and to hear from many Ontarians on what should be in the budget. Why the rush this year? Does the government want to only hear from a select few Ontarians who will tell them to keep on keeping on? More than likely, though, is that the government wants to bury this committee in the pre-Christmas rush so that Ontarians don't get the real picture about what is going on in this economy.

I just have to look around my own local community and you can see the effects of the downturn on its economy. Lanxess laid off hundreds of people and moved their production to Europe. The government is bound and determined to throw hundreds more Lambtonians out of work when they close the Lambton generating station in 2014. Hundreds of men and women will be thrown out of work and we are already beginning to see the negative impact of this closure. The municipality of St. Clair

township stands to lose over \$1 million in property taxes—17% of their tax base this year alone, which is years before the generating station allegedly will close. This is property taxes that the generating station itself pays to the municipality.

I would like to know why this government doesn't want to hear from Brampton, Cambridge, Chatham, Cornwall, Guelph, Hamilton, Ingersoll, Kitchener-Waterloo, Lindsay, London, Oakville, Oshawa, Owen Sound, Smiths Falls, St. Catharines, St. Thomas, Welland and Windsor—sounds like that Hank Snow song, I've Been Everywhere. My colleague put a lot of time into determining what communities would be appropriate for the pre-budget consultations to take place in. These are all communities that have faced large job losses in recent months.

Just for some examples: Owen Sound, PPG closed, with 170 jobs lost; St. Thomas, the Sterling Truck plant, 720 jobs lost; Guelph, Linamar, 400 to 500 jobs lost; in the Cornwall area, Valspar, with 24 jobs. These are all communities that this committee should be visiting. I think it would be time well spent for the committee to spend a day in Welland. They could hear first-hand about the devastating impact of the John Deere closure. They could hear about what the closure of Henniges Automotive will do to Welland. They will be able to see first-hand the devastating impact of the collapse of that manufacturing sector. In Ingersoll, Cambridge, Oshawa and St. Catharines, this committee would be able to hear from the workers in the auto industry. They would be able to go to those communities and hear and see what the impact is of the slowdown in the auto industry.

I would also remind people who are watching and listening today that the pre-budget consultations actually started on November 20, but you wouldn't know it. The hearings were very poorly publicized and, as a result, there were many holes in the agenda throughout the day.

Why is this important? Why should we get outside of Toronto with the committee on finance and economic affairs? Well, I'll tell you why. Just today, the Conference Board of Canada released a report that showed that the Canadian auto sector will lose 15,000 jobs by the end of 2009. Combined, the auto companies will lose \$1.7 billion and see demand for vehicles drop by another 15.3%.

The Conference Board also said today that those 15,000 jobs lost just in vehicle assembly will translate into many thousands of jobs lost in the parts sector and downstream. The Conference Board is projecting five consecutive quarters of declining consumer confidence and demand, which could send US vehicle sales down to the same level as they were in 1992. These numbers alone are staggering. These numbers are from the Conference Board, not myself. Don't you think that we should go to the communities that are going to be the hardest hit by the decline in the auto sector? They would also be able to see first-hand if the money that the McGuinty government is spending to help our manufacturing sector is working or not. They would be able to hear from the

real people involved. That would probably be the most interesting part.

As my good friend the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook pointed out a couple of weeks ago, this government is very good at making big announcements in big dollar amounts, but when it comes to announcing projects, they are very slow. I could be wrong, but I don't believe there has been one project announced out of the Next Generation of Jobs Fund. That was a huge amount of money designed to help our manufacturing sector, and the government can't even announce one single project. The advanced manufacturing strategy was announced with great fanfare and hoopla, and yet, they have only announced a handful of projects.

The government is planning to do with the pre-budget consultations just what it did to Bills 114 and 119. With Bill 114, the process was just a sham. They actually had it designed so that any amendments to the bill had to be in before the public hearings started. By doing that, they admitted that they had no intention of listening to what anyone said at the committee; they were just going to go full steam ahead. I'm not sure why anyone would have wanted to present to a committee that had no intention of listening to them, and taking their valuable time to travel here to make those presentations.

They did something similar with Bill 119, the WSIB bill. I would remind everyone here that Bill 119 will levy an \$11,000-a-year tax on our small construction companies, just when we want them to start creating jobs—at the worst time. They cut off debate at second reading, allotted only two days for public hearings—all held in Toronto—and will only allow for one hour of debate at third reading. They want to rush Bill 119 through before everyone realizes what they are doing, and now they want to rush through the pre-budget consultations as well.

Maybe they don't want to hear what Kevin Gaudet from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said when he reminded us that when the McGuinty government took office they immediately introduced the largest tax hike in Ontario's history.

Government spending is absolutely out of control. Just to give you an idea, this government is spending \$20 billion-plus more than when it took office. That represents a 31% increase in program spending—unsustainable in these days. We never could sustain these levels of spending, and now we are going to pay the price for it. Our party has said that, and now we are hearing the same thing from others.

Of course, this government doesn't have much of a plan when it comes to fixing the economy. Just look at the very strange approach it takes to job creation. Just last month, we talked in this Legislature about a business in Guelph called Cash Rolls, which was forced to move its manufacturing division to the United States because the Ministry of Labour wouldn't give them time to come into compliance with new regulations. Closer to home for me is Mr. Chris Cooke, the owner of Huron Web Printing in Wyoming, Ontario, who had a businessman's worst

nightmare come true. I would remind members that Huron Web employs over 100 people and has annual sales of over \$20 million. They print over 14 million grocery inserts every week, making them the largest printer of grocery inserts in Ontario, and these are all shipped to the US for inserts into American papers.

1540

In October 2005, Huron Web was shut down for nine hours because a Ministry of Labour inspector thought the guards on the printing press were not adequate. Mr. Cooke immediately undertook to get the work presses back online so he could meet his deadlines. One of the presses that was found to be out of compliance he had bought three months earlier and was brand new. The manufacturer of the press, which was built here in Ontario, still believes his press was compliant with all those regulations.

After completing the work, the Ministry of Labour inspector wasn't available, because it was after hours, to come back and certify that the work had been done to compliance. In Mr. Cooke's business, lost time means deadlines and just-in-time delivery dates aren't met, and he loses money. The Ministry of Labour was quick to shut them down but was not so fast to let them get back up and running.

What is worse is, after the fact, Mr. Cooke found out that the interpretation of the safety rules was left up to an individual inspector, so that competitors of Mr. Cooke, with the same presses, were allowed to run and do their press runs. The regulations are not written down, and so it was an interpretation left up to a local inspector.

Another case I know of that impacts the economy—and they would like to speak to this—is a restaurant owner in Sarnia-Lambton who had a government inspector in his restaurant for five weeks, with the result that, at the end of the day, he owed an additional \$1,800 in PST. It took five weeks for a government auditor to find this, plus all his travel and expenses. That seems like a bit of overkill to me.

I would ask, does the government want to rush these hearings before more of these economic horror stories can come out and be told to the committee?

Since the government announced that they would be running a budget deficit this year, I have heard from municipal leaders that they are worried about the dollars promised to help replace their aging infrastructure. This is money that municipalities desperately need to be able to attract jobs that are right now being lost. This government has put themselves into such a financial situation that they cannot guarantee long-term stable funding for our municipalities to help them meet those infrastructure needs.

I would encourage the government to work with the federal government so that they can maximize those dollars in our communities. It seems like the federal government wants to do a massive infrastructure funding—and I would encourage the provincial government to work with them every day.

I don't believe that this government has any idea how to turn this economy in Ontario around. We have lost

over 200,000 manufacturing jobs to date, and the best that they can come up with is a five-point plan that will do nothing. It is like a five-pointed compass; it can take you north, south, east, west or nowhere. This government seems to be keen on going nowhere.

For over a year, and until just last month, this government has repeatedly said that everything is fine with this economy. During the last election, they told Ontarians that we had nothing to worry about. We knew differently. They were whistling past the graveyard.

Since the election, we have consistently called on the Premier to deal with the issues that are impacting our manufacturing sector, and they have done nothing. We have said that you need to deal with the high energy costs that our manufacturers have. We have told this government to reduce the burden of taxes on business and investment. We have asked for this government to immediately eliminate the capital tax.

My party had a plan to help our manufacturers months before the government woke up to the fact that we have a crisis in manufacturing. They should be asking for as much input as possible, not limiting debate and not just restricting it like they want to do with the finance committee.

The pre-budget consultations are a great opportunity to work with the opposition in a non-partisan way, to get out and meet the public and come up with suggestions for inclusion in the provincial budget that will be due sometime this spring. This would ensure it has buy-in, because it's done in a non-partisan way as they tour Ontario and meet with those residents that are going to be so drastically affected.

In order to have meaningful consultations, they need to have time to give time to people to prepare and to come together and offer solutions that we could all get behind and support.

Burying this committee before Christmas will do nothing. It will write a meaningless report, like so many others of this government, and it will sit on a shelf and be ignored.

I believe it is time for this government to use the resources they have to get meaningful consultations and listen to them. If the government gives us the chance, we will work together for the best of Ontario. Right now, this government seems more caught up on scoring partisan points.

I believe that we should open up these hearings to as many Ontarians as possible; open it up to as many people as we can. The whole world is trying to deal with the financial crisis that we find ourselves in, and this McGuinty government seems to be the only one that isn't actually dealing with it. Everyone else is consulting and talking, except for this government. It seems content to withdraw into the Whitney building until it gets better out here.

I would say, pass the amendment offered in the name of the member for Niagara West-Glanbrook, allow the committee to travel through the communities across this great province, hear from the people of Ontario about

their sour economic circumstances, and let's work together for a better Ontario. It's the right thing to do.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: Well, as far as debate, I certainly welcome the debate this afternoon, and when it comes to open and public hearings, the finance minister himself described it as an opportunity to deal with the economic challenges facing this province.

We're again faced with a government rush to hold hearings as quickly as possible—the week before Christmas—in an attempt to silence any dissenting opinions. This just-before-Christmas tour is only five towns; we in opposition submitted a list of 19 towns that should be considered for the tour of the finance and economic affairs committee. That would be a tour traditionally going into the months of January and February in 2009, the same year for which the finance committee would be considering pre-budget submissions.

I know what this government is trying to do in sprinting through the hearings as quickly as possible before the clock brings an end to this woeful fiscal record McGuinty and his crew have earned in 2008. They're trying to avoid even worse signs of economic collapse that surely await us around the corner in 2009.

All signs do point to the fact that you can't spend your way out of this problem. These government ministers really seem to have little clue what to do, and the longer they wait, the further down they'll be in this fiscal morass, this economic hole.

I call on this government to reconsider its slapdash approach to these hearings, follow our advice, follow the traditional approach, and have hearings throughout the new year: in January and February. I'm also urging residents across the province to take an opportunity to sign up for these pre-budget hearings and make your voice heard.

This week, I had an opportunity to address an area meeting of mutual insurance board directors. I'm a former board member, and I recognize the wisdom around the table, wisdom that this government would do well to listen to. We can never underestimate the wisdom of the boardroom and the wisdom of the kitchen table. I continue to ask those people who are footing the bill, whether they've got a diminishing pension plan or pay taxes, to share their wisdom, to get involved and provide their input as we teeter on what has now become one of the most significant economic declines in recent memory.

As a member of the finance committee, I've lost confidence in this government. Clearly, this government needs help. They need advice. They've been caught flat-footed, and it's time they had an opportunity to listen to people out there.

Without that kind of input, this government is doomed to repeat some past mistakes. If this regime gets its way, it will continue to tax and spend more and more, and faster and faster, than any Ontario government previously, leaving the rest of us obviously unprepared, ill-equipped and without the funding to meet some of the

very real fiscal challenges that are now knocking down our doors.

Instead of checks and balances, this government has gone on a spending spree, using taxpayers' cheques with wild abandon. Spending has gone, as we know, from \$69 billion a year to something just under \$100 billion a year; again, spending that has driven us into this dark hole that we now peer out from.

1550

This is a government that went from first to worst. A policy of tax and spend has put this great province not only into a recession but also into have-not status. We only need to look at the headlines to understand the true depth and the dire impact of what is at stake, impacts that could well be better dealt with had the majority of members taken off the McGuinty blinders and listened to the warnings from this side of the House.

Just to be a little more specific, of course really the economic elephant in this room and in this province is our auto industry and our auto parts suppliers. The current industry crisis looms large, has become the focal point in most of our daily media reports with respect to potential financial gloom and despair. There's little doubt that today's auto industry crisis is playing out and it's intimately connected in part to the difficulty of the consumer to access credit. It's linked to that meltdown on Wall Street with respect to the banks, which has shattered consumer confidence, let alone prevented them from accessing any credit in the first place. Although the panic in the credit markets does show signs of abating somewhat, economic news continues to get grimmer. Global demand is slumping. Rich economies plunge into what perhaps could be the deepest recession since the 1930s. There's another word we haven't heard much of in many, many years—"deflation." Although it's unlikely perhaps in a few countries—who's to know?—deflation is now no longer an idle risk. Indeed, deflation, again, characterized by annual falls in consumer prices, could well be increasingly likely.

Since the summer the commodity boom has gone bust, changing the inflation outlook at the time fairly dramatically. The price for crude oil, for example, we've seen go down at one point below \$50 a barrel. It didn't seem that long ago—last summer—when we were looking at \$147 a barrel. I think that was in July. So lower prices for oil, lower prices for houses—

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Standing order 23(b) states that the member is supposed to address the item or the motion before him. He's giving his pet theories on the meltdown in the economy. He's supposed to be speaking to the motion, but he's not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I thought he was speaking to the motion, and I return to the member for Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I remind the member—and the member was a former member of the finance committee—that this is the issue we're dealing with. These are issues that should be discussed not only a few days before Christmas but, as we normally do, throughout

January and February. I don't want to continue to beat that over your head because there are some other deep-seated reasons why it is so important to have this kind of consultation. One word alone—"deflation." That's something that comes up in finance committee hearings.

This Premier has acknowledged, and I quote, "'an element of merit' in the argument that the Detroit auto makers are the architects of their own misfortune and should be allowed to succumb to the discipline of the market."

I don't really agree with that. However, we also know that this is more than just a small problem for Ontario, where most of what is being produced at assembly plants, whether they be Windsor or Oshawa, is high-consumption vehicles. And it's more than just a small problem for this government, because this government did not overtly link the bulk of previous spending of close to half a billion dollars in the auto sector fund, did not seem to link it to green vehicle development, did not seem to link it to any kind of a return or a payback. People are asking, where did that money go and just what did this province get in return? Clearly, any further aid to the auto sector must be attached to job guarantees, must be attached to product guarantees.

Mr. Tory has pledged his support for aid on behalf of carmakers—in contrast to what I just finished saying about Premier McGuinty—with one condition: as long as there's a viable plan. What we've seen in the past, we've seen Ontario Liberals hand out millions of dollars to auto companies over the last four years without securing those assurances, without a viable plan. I am concerned that there would be a repeat of past mistakes. Again, our call for hearings, traditionally through the month of January, through the month of February 2009, for a 2009 budget to enable us to plan for the coming fiscal year—April 1 of 2009.

We do also know that, as the heartland of Canada's auto industry, Ontario would be the hardest hit if any of the Big Three automakers filed for bankruptcy. It would be a devastating blow to the province, which is already facing a \$500-million deficit—likely more in that department. We know that the government has already guided us into the status of have-not province, again, as we collect these equalization payments from Ottawa.

That said, Mr. McGuinty has admitted that if one or more of the three big automakers collapses, this province has no plan B. He would have no idea what to do. In fact, further to that, Premier McGuinty says, if I could quote the Premier, "not even going to think about that." How absurd is that? Why would someone say something like that? A province that is already crying poor, set to be the hardest hit by an auto collapse that we're teetering on as we speak, and we hear there's no plan B. It really might be time, perhaps, for the members opposite to start thinking one up.

You know, this is really part and parcel of the historic McGuinty "Don't worry, be happy" approach. We've seen him coast, spending taxpayers' dollars over the last five years, saving nothing, nothing for a rainy day, and I'm afraid that rain is coming down on the roof today.

Now, that being said, bailing out Detroit would be an open invitation to other companies everywhere—the federal government has referred to the aerospace industry, for example—to apply for aid, with the present recession. I can understand that banks qualify for help, because the entire economy depends upon their services. They're vulnerable to sudden collapses in confidence that can spread to other banks, banks that are probably perfectly solvent. Remember, much of the US bank regulation from the 1930s had been, in my view, foolishly overturned, and I think that was under the Bill Clinton era.

In the United States they have Chapter 11, obviously created precisely to help companies get that protection they need from their creditors while they restructure liabilities and winnow out the good business from the bad. If the North American businesses GM and Ford filed for Chapter 11, their activities elsewhere in the world, as I understand, would be largely unaffected. Even in North America their businesses could continue to make vehicles as they shed costs and renegotiate union contracts and other contracts with suppliers.

In many ways—and when I look at this government—something like Chapter 11 is probably more stable and predictable than depending on government. However, the effects of the auto crisis as the focal point of a possible deflating economy are widespread and long-reaching. Think of someone who just bought a new car. That is a bit of a gamble in these times if you bought one from the Detroit Three. Will your dealer still be there? Will you be able to get spare parts? Will you get an oil change from the same company you bought the car from? When you go to sell the car, where is the second-hand market? People do expect now to get that 60,000-mile warranty. They want that honoured, they want parts, they want to ensure that the dealers have not disappeared; and if the company that made the car has gone bust, it can be virtually impossible, in some cases, to sell that vehicle.

1600

South of the border, we've seen the bank bailout, followed closely by the carmakers pleading for help.

This government again seems to be dithering and seems to be caught flat-footed and looking for help. Obviously, we in opposition offer advice, and people across the province are there to offer advice, if we could have fulsome hearings throughout not only December, but also through January and February, as we lead up to an April 1 budget.

On November 7, General Motors in the US made the revelation that it is in danger of running out of cash before the end of this year. Ford is in a similar position, although it's a little better off, as I understand. As for Chrysler, some feel that its days as an independent entity may well be over. Again, think of the impact of the Big Three taking a nosedive and the consequences on this side of the border. Certainly, for our Canadian subsidiaries of GM, Ford and Chrysler, that alone directly represents 30,000 workers in Canada. For the broader auto sector—the parts sector, the dealers—you're looking at something like 400,000 people in this country alone,

much of them in dozens of Ontario communities. I think that explains why 22 mayors showed up at Queen's Park just the other day.

Some plans have been put forward. I understand that Chrysler has asked Ottawa and Ontario for \$1 billion. I think this is the only Canadian subsidiary that is being specific about just what they're looking for.

We do know that in the speech from the throne, the federal Conservative government said Ottawa would provide additional support for the crippled auto sector and, as I mentioned earlier, for the aerospace area.

In the US, Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid scrapped plans for a vote on a bill to subtract \$25 billion from the \$700 billion that had been announced earlier for the Wall Street bank rescue fund.

Another thing we have to consider, a little further down the food chain from those currently employed, is the ripple effect on retirees. There are something like 49,000 retired auto workers and thousands more retired salaried staff—and of course, thousands still presently working at Chrysler, Ford and GM in Canada—who stand to see a threat to their pensions if their company goes under. Here in Ontario, I understand that there's really no law that obliges the province to cover a shortfall in the guarantee fund. I know there were disbursements in the past: I think of Massey Ferguson; I think of Algoma up in Sault Ste. Marie.

Our House leader, Bob Runciman, pointed out that this government should be mindful that taxpayers may well be resentful about bailing out a pension plan, especially when so many people in the province of Ontario don't have a pension: "People who have saved for RRSPs over the years and seen the value decline precipitously over the past couple of months, they don't have that fixed (benefit)."

There is little doubt that this is a dangerous situation. We are in dark days, days that could have been better prepared for had this government not ignored the warnings, not only from members on this side of the House, but the general public. The car dealers are in trouble, the auto sector is in trouble, manufacturing is in trouble.

The fact is that under this government's watch, Ontario has the highest taxation on new business investment in Canada. This government's own Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress reported that Ontario has the second-highest taxes on new business investment in the developed world.

Just to add insult to injury, Ontario also has one of the highest personal income tax rates in the country, obviously creating a major disincentive for talented people to stay here or to work here or to raise a family or to buy a car or to buy a refrigerator.

We do know that since 2002, the government of Ontario has slid back into some of those bad old self-destructive habits. Massive increases in public spending and the return of high taxes are now dragging Ontario down and risking the economic future of our province. The recent declaration of our have-not status is the culmination of—

Mr. John O'Toole: A five-year—

Mr. Toby Barrett: —a five-year decline. You took the words right out of my mouth.

This announcement proves that Ontario isn't just on the edge of a fiscal and economic crisis. We've essentially crawled into the hole—or whatever expression you want to use. We've gone over the cliff, we've hit the wall, and we've hit that wall head-on. I won't think of the make of car that we were driving. But as we have hit that wall—or are about to hit that wall—take a look around, because your family is in the car with you.

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

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I guess nobody from the Liberal side wants to speak on this pre-budget debate, so I rise to speak in the House today in support of the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook's motion to establish a real democratic pre-budget consultation process.

It's no wonder that the McGuinty government wants to limit public input on the impact of their policies—or more to the point, the lack of their policies—on taxpayers across this province. It's obvious that this McGuinty government does not want to face the citizens whom they have displaced in the job market through their inability to properly manage our economy.

In his amendment, the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook has suggested several communities that should be heard from during the pre-budget consultation process. These communities have been exceptionally hard hit, and I believe it's time for this McGuinty government to face the music and sit across from these folks to hear first-hand their experiences and the hardships that they and their families are facing. These are hard-working Ontarians, and they have to endure this.

If the McGuinty government will not listen, perhaps they have to listen to the thousands of workers who are on the brink of financial ruin and are looking for this government to create that positive economic climate—not to sit cloistered in their offices, and bring in new regulation after new regulation.

I will go through the list of the cities that my colleague has suggested and remind this government, and put on record the reality that they are afraid to face. This is a quote from the Toronto Star regarding the Brampton community:

"Political leaders in Queen's Park say there's little they can do to help struggling Canadian automakers adjust to a changing North American market, despite the loss, announced yesterday, of more than 1,100 high-paying Chrysler production jobs at its Brampton plant.

"Many of these laid-off workers will receive buyout or early retirement packages, or receive enhanced unemployment insurance benefits while they" try to "look for other jobs."

Well, Premier, perhaps these laid-off workers are not as enamoured as you are with your skills retraining program, and you simply prefer not to deal with that point. Well, that's fine.

Let's move on to another community—a community like Brantford. According to the Brantford Expositor:

“The Family Counselling Centre of Brant has received requests from over 1,900 people this year, despite budgeting for only 600.

“They expect to serve more than 2,500 by the end of January 2009.

“The number of people seeking help through the agency has increased fourfold since last year, and much of the increase is directly related” to the job loss in the manufacturing industry and the cutbacks.

“The ‘suddenness of a layoff’ not only creates an immediate income crisis for individuals and families, but”—as you know—“also results in stresses and strains on the personal and family relationships.”

We are not just talking about dollars and cents here; we're talking about lives. We're talking about people's lives and the stress placed on families when the breadwinner isn't working. Premier, this government needs to be reminded continuously of the human face behind the economic downturn. Perhaps at some point these real stories will begin to chip at this government's armour.

1610

Let's talk about Cambridge. A once-prosperous community has witnessed 1,650 jobs disappear as three local plants shut their doors. In addition to that, over 570 workers have been laid off, with little hope of being called back. Their only hope rests with the McGuinty government focusing their efforts on creating a positive investment-friendly province by developing and acting on a realistic plan. As you can see by the regulatory bills running through this Legislature, they are not focused on that end goal.

Let's talk about Chatham. Chatham would also greatly appreciate a visit from representatives of the Ontario government so that their concerns can be addressed. A quote, “Southwestern Ontario was hit with more bad news ... when hundreds of employees at the Navistar truck plant in Chatham were handed layoff notices.... Some 525 workers are already on indefinite layoff after one shift was cut in April because of falling sales.” How much heads-up to you need? Where are these workers expected to go for support? What planning process does the McGuinty government have in place to give these workers a modicum of hope as we enter the holiday season?

Hold on to your seats, because the citizens of Cornwall also have a story to tell. Satisfied Brake Products laid off 180 people. Advantech Advanced Manufacturing Services laid off 27 people because Ontario is no longer a competitive place to do business. Domtar pulp and paper mill has closed, leaving 310 workers and their families with no hope of being called back. Morbern Inc., manufacturers of vinyl upholstery, has laid off more than 78 workers. Minister Papatello is globe-trotting. Are any of these workers looking forward to jobs right here in Ontario as a result of that globe-trotting?

In a moment I'm going to be moving an adjournment of the debate. I'm going to be doing so for the following

reasons. A motion was passed from the House by all parties on December 8, 2005, calling for a detailed government initiative to come forward immediately to deal with local economic crises affecting such communities as Cornwall, Oshawa, Collingwood, Thunder Bay, Windsor, St. Catharines and smaller rural communities. When the McGuinty government failed to act on this motion, another similar motion was brought forward by the official opposition on May 29, 2007, calling once again on the McGuinty Liberals to bring forward a comprehensive jobs plan to spur job creation throughout the province in general and in the manufacturing sector in particular. On October 21, 2008, the McGuinty Liberals voted down a motion from the official opposition calling for a select committee on the Ontario economy to consider and report on options to address the challenges faced by Ontario families and businesses in the province's current weakened economy.

The McGuinty Liberals have failed to give all members in this House the opportunity to speak in a debate they themselves initiated on the economy on October 7, 2008. The motion and the amendments from our party and the NDP that are the subject of this debate have yet to be called again for further debate and yet to be voted upon. Ontario's finance minister said in the House on October 21, 2008, that the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is “an opportunity” to deal with the economic challenges facing the province.

I therefore move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1615 to 1645.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mrs. Savoline has moved the adjournment of the debate. All those in favour of the motion will please rise together and be counted by the table.

You can take your seats.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing while you are counted by the table staff.

I think you may take your seats.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 7; the nays are 35.

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

I return to the member for Burlington, who continues to have the floor.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I cannot even begin to imagine the impact on the quiet and proud communities like Guelph, which has been exceptionally hard hit by the McGuinty government inaction. Linamar Corp. laid off 800 workers because of serious economic circumstances, none of which this government lifted a finger to assist with. The Collins and Aikman plant closed in Guelph, leaving 510 workers behind. The Better Beef food pro-

cessing plant laid off 360 workers from their operation. ABB, a manufacturer of small power transformers and repairer of large transformers, moved their operation to greener pastures and left 280 people wondering where their next paycheque would be coming from. Imperial Tobacco closed up shop and left 550 people wondering why they suddenly moved to Mexico. Sleeman has laid off 80 workers, a company with a solid foothold in the beer market. W.C. Wood closed one of its shops in Guelph, resulting in 200 taxpayers that are now out of work. Genesta Inc. and Dana Corp. shut their operations down, totalling more than 65 workers, while GeoScience Corp. laid off yet another 100 workers.

The job losses in the Guelph community are substantial. The loss of this revenue will not only hit the families of the workers themselves, but it also will hit the businesses that the families patronized.

What this government fails to remember is that the quality of life in our community is not based on our residential property taxes; it's based on our industrial and commercial property taxes. Once you succeed, Premier, in driving that core industry away, it will not be long before our quality of life begins to erode. There will be a ripple effect throughout entire communities. Once lost, it's extremely difficult to regain that.

In Hamilton, close to 2,000 jobs have been terminated as their employers went in search of greener pastures yet again. They have settled in the United States and Mexico, where labour is cheaper. But they have also moved out west; they've moved out east to the provinces that have lowered their taxes to attract investment—basically landing anywhere but here in Ontario.

I wonder if the Premier has a plan to bring these folks back. Not all of the plant closures can be blamed on the United States and the world economy. In tough times, if you want to keep people working, keep the economy moving, you need to offer companies a reason to stay. The McGuinty government wouldn't even have to bring in sweeping corporate tax cuts, although they should. No, all they really need to do is repeal the single largest tax increase in the province of Ontario, the precious health tax, to cut employers a break during these tough times. In fact, if the McGuinty government were really intent on saving jobs in the province of Ontario, they could make an order in council in cabinet tomorrow afternoon. It really is that easy.

Platitudes and hand-wringing will not get us out of this economic situation that we're in. Just wishing for a better economy for tomorrow and begging other levels of government for help will not make it so either.

The McGuinty government needs to face facts now. They need to face the people whose lives they have destroyed through their inaction. They need to hear from the very people who are experiencing what is happening to them. They have left these people to flounder, and they need to take action now to help these folks. Bringing the prebudget consultations to these communities will be a very good start, and hopefully after that the McGuinty government will create a meaningful plan to help communities get back to work.

I am moving adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be another 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1652 to 1722.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise together to be counted by the table.

You may take your seats.

All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing while being counted by the table.

Take your seats.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 9; the nays are 31.

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

The member for Burlington has the floor, and I recognize the member for Burlington.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise to once again support my colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook in his attempt to put forward the communities that need to be communicated with in this round of hearings. The economy has hit so many families in such a devastating way that I think the least this government can do is recognize the fact that these communities should have a chance to speak.

The reason I have put forward these motions this afternoon is that I am quite amazed that there aren't any members on the government side who wish to speak to the amendment. They have just shut down—the arrogance with which they are approaching this issue and snubbing Ontarians.

The reason I have put forward the motion to adjourn debate and the motion to adjourn the House is to let the people of Ontario know that this government is playing games with their lives, with the way in which their communities are suffering under the non-action of the McGuinty Liberals. Not only do they not act; they don't choose to stand up in the House and speak to important issues. So I wanted to get on the record that this game that the McGuinty government is playing does not wash on me and it does not wash on the residents in my community and certainly, certainly not on Ontarians. It will be obvious in the next few months how little this government is doing to help Ontarians out of this very, very tough economic time.

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I ask that the question be now put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 48, it is a decision of the Speaker to determine whether or not this motion should be allowed, based on a number of considerations, including whether

or not allowing such a motion would be an infringement upon the rights of the minority.

I believe that allowing this motion at this time, after six hours of debate, would in fact be an infringement on the rights of the majority.

Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to commend the Speaker for standing up for democracy. That is fundamentally what this debate is really about.

I would put to you that the debate yesterday, and I have a copy of that debate, trying to get the Liberal government to go to the people of Ontario during this time of economic crisis in the province—show some leadership.

Our leader, John Tory, suggested months ago that we have a sectoral discussion on the economy. They failed to listen, and they're really trying to skate through, to get to Christmas, have a few Christmas carols, a bit of eggnog and go to sleep. What they really want is for the people of Ontario to ignore the inevitable.

This is a time for the government and the opposition to work together for the betterment of Ontario and the economy. In difficult times, families pull together.

I would say that I am disappointed. The member from Pickering–Scarborough East should know, having served as the mayor of Pickering, and being a person I had some respect for when he was in the municipal level of government, but he's gone to the dark side now, unfortunately. In fact, I would say that he would know full well how important the auto and manufacturing sector is generally in the region of Durham. He knows full well how important it is not just to Pickering but to all the municipalities within the region of Durham.

1730

Arguably, when I listened to and looked at the debate yesterday—in Hansard, it's quite clear there on page 4168, for those who want to follow along. It's sort of like a songbook. This is actually Mr. Arthurs speaking yesterday to this original motion; I should say to you that we're continuing an amendment moved by Mr. Hudak. That's what this debate is about: that the government motion be amended by striking out “during the week of December 15, 2008,” and replacing it with the following—they wanted to have one week of discussions as a concession. Shame. They were just going to shut it down before Christmas, drink the eggnog and go to sleep.

What we want is this: During the months of January and February 2009, when the Legislature is not sitting and members are available—we're on full alert on this side—rather than rushing the prebudget hearings through under the cover of Christmas and the holiday season, we want to visit the following 19 vulnerable communities, among the hardest hit by the downturn in Ontario's economy. What we want to do is talk to the people in the communities. We've listed those communities. They are Brampton; Brantford; Cambridge: I think of the member from Cambridge, who has spoken here frequently.

Chatham: The member from Chatham knows the industry that has been affected and the auto-related business.

Cornwall: Cornwall has been on the radar screen here for months and is devastated.

Guelph: The member from Guelph should speak up; she should be on our side on this. Break from the force of the whip and join us in our reaching out to the people of Ontario, to hear the voices of the families who during Christmas are going to be saying, “Where is the next paycheque?” This is Dalton McGuinty's Christmas, and he's trying to pull the potato-in-the-stocking trick, I think it is.

Ingersoll; Kitchener–Waterloo. The Speaker would know about that. Lindsay; London, Ontario; Oakville.

Oshawa, the area that I am closely associated with.

Owen Sound; Smiths Falls; St. Catharines: The Minister of Transportation should be here, voting with us to extend these hearings.

We're not asking for something that's impossible. Members are elected to serve their constituents first, and in that, we're outlining the 19 hardest-hit communities that we want to visit and listen to. We're not asking to in any way restrict the force of Dalton McGuinty and Dwight Duncan, the Minister of Finance. The city of Windsor has the highest unemployment in Canada, and he wants to shut this down. He's not doing his job. He may be doing his job as Minister of Finance—the Premier is telling him what to do, clearly.

My point, though, is when I listened to the remarks yesterday—and I'll get back to this—the minister has had closed-door hearings, not just trying-to-get-the-lay-of-the-land kind of information, meeting with sectoral groups. This is Mr. Arthurs speaking yesterday: “We heard from the Colleges of Ontario.” What have they done?

When you think of the Colleges of Ontario, you'd have to ask the expert in our area, Peter Shurman, the member from Thornhill, who has been the only voice that I've heard for the students at York University who could be losing their academic year. Our job is to listen to our constituents. The young people of Ontario are being ignored. We see that in Bill 126, where they're targeting young people and the graduated licensing. These are people in rural Ontario who will no longer be able to even get to school or their after-school jobs.

Here's what Mr. Arthurs said—I'm just reading from Hansard here, because it's easier than preparing notes: “We had a presentation a week ago, Thursday, from the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada—AIAMC. This is a familiar group.” Well, this isn't a familiar group to me. AIAMC represents the Hondas and the Toyotas.

The Premier and, I think, the other member from Windsor, Ms. Papatello, are travelling the world—not in business class, I hope. If they're in business class, that's almost as bad as the president of GM showing up in front of the Senate in the United States, or Congress, with a Learjet. I would say that we've got to put these things in perspective. Travelling around the world—what exactly is she doing? I'd like a report. That would be a fine time for her to present to the committee. She can appear here

or in Windsor, wherever. We wouldn't want her to have to drive to Toronto in the winter. She might be in Windsor. She could be in Florida. Who knows? But the fact is, she could even be in Italy, calling it business, but in the meantime her community is suffering. She's the minister of economic development, and she's not to be found.

This organization is not the Big Three as we've referred to in Detroit. I should disclose here that, in reality, I worked for General Motors for 31 years and I have much to be thankful for. This is a company that I think, at the end of all of this, will emerge representing the North American auto market. I think there is a role for the government. I think there's a role for the federal government and certainly a role for the provincial government. But I don't know what Premier McGuinty's plan is. We could be hearing from those communities during the days of the hearings that I'm talking about, from the auto producers, the auto sector side, from Chatham. The member from Chatham is over there chatting, and I'm sort of thinking—the member from Essex, pardon me; it used to be Chatham–Kent. That's Mr. Hoy, actually. My point here is, though, what's wrong with just listening to those communities? Is it too much to ask?

We want to move that motion to add those 19 communities, to sit during January and February and allow the committee to put together a significant report in these difficult economic times. That report can be non-partisan. We could have a unanimous consent report. I've been on that committee for 10 years. They can do good work. I know they could do good work. I hope that Mr. Arthurs is going to be in the country, but if not, his other parliamentary assistant could certainly take the lead there. I would suspect that we would want all members to participate, not just the select members of that committee. All members of those 19 communities would be able to participate and represent their constituents as well as they could.

I can only say that, in conclusion, in my riding this is a very, very important issue. It would be irresponsible of me not to speak today and demand for them to be able to speak tomorrow. That's what this debate is about, listening to and allowing the voices of the people of Ontario in these tough economic times to be heard—if nothing else, a platform for them to make their points, whether it's business, labour, people who are currently unemployed or students themselves. This is the time for the people of Ontario to be heard. In these difficult economic times at this time of year, a better gesture or gift I couldn't think of.

So, with that in mind, I would move adjournment of the debate because I hear nothing, not even a snarl, from the government members who are here. So I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. O'Toole has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be another 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1739 to 1809.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise.

Take your seats.

All those opposed will please rise.

You may take your seats.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 2; the nays are 29.

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

It being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1810.

ERRATUM

No.	Page	Column	Line(s)	Should read:
92	4155	1	2	Two good friends in my riding in Ottawa Centre, Dilip

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

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

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

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

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Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of International Trade and Investment / Ministre du Commerce international et de l'Investissement
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre
		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
		Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Tim Hudak
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Garfield Dunlop
Gilles Bisson, Kim Craitor
Bob Delaney, Garfield Dunlop
Tim Hudak, Amrit Mangat
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jean-Marc Lalonde
Sophia Ageloniitis, Ted Arnott
Wayne Arthurs, Toby Barrett
Pat Hoy, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Leeanna Pendergast, Michael Prue
Charles Sousa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Linda Jeffrey
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: David Oraziatti
Robert Bailey, Jim Brownell
Linda Jeffrey, Kuldip Kular
Rosario Marchese, Bill Mauro
Carol Mitchell, David Oraziatti
Joyce Savoline
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Présidente: Julia Munro
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Michael A. Brown, Kevin Daniel Flynn
France Gélinas, Randy Hillier
Lisa MacLeod, Julia Munro
David Ramsay, Liz Sandals
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Christine Elliott
Peter Kormos, Jeff Leal
Reza Moridi, Yasir Naqvi
Lou Rinaldi, John Yakabuski
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
Kevin Daniel Flynn, Sylvia Jones
Norm Miller, Mario Sergio
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jerry J. Ouellette
Laura Albanese, Ernie Hardeman
Andrea Horwath, Phil McNeely
Jerry J. Ouellette, Liz Sandals
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craitor, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Laurel C. Broten, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Helena Jaczek
Dave Levac, Shafiq Qaadri
Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott
Peter Shurman
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Select Committee on Elections / Comité spécial des élections

Chair / Président: Greg Sorbara
Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Continued from back cover

**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS /
DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS**

Buy Local

Mr. John Yakabuski4217

Derek Hatfield

Mr. Charles Sousa4217

Growth planning

Ms. Sylvia Jones4218

Agricultural labour policy

Ms. Andrea Horwath4218

Oak Ridges–Markham museums

Ms. Helena Jaczek4218

Road safety

Mr. Norm Miller4219

Royal Botanical Gardens

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis4219

Neuromodulation

Mr. Dave Levac4219

Advocis

Mr. Wayne Arthurs4219

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DES COMITÉS**

Standing Committee on General Government

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey4220

Report adopted4220

Standing Committee on Social Policy

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri4220

Report adopted4220

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Hospices

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis4220

Child custody

Mr. Jim Brownell4220

Workplace insurance

Mr. Norm Miller4221

Tuition

Mr. Jim Wilson4221

Logging route

Mr. Norm Miller4221

Hospital funding

Mr. Bob Delaney4221

Workplace insurance

Mr. Jim Wilson4222

Garde d'enfants

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde4222

Laboratory services

Mr. Norm Miller4222

Emergency dispatch services

Mr. Norm Miller4222

Lupus

Mr. Bob Delaney4223

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Committee sittings

Mr. Robert Bailey4223

Mr. Toby Barrett4226

Mrs. Joyce Savoline4228

Mr. John O'Toole4231

Erratum4232

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Tuesday 25 November 2008 / Mardi 25 novembre 2008

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Countering Distracted Driving and Promoting Green Transportation Act, 2008, Bill 118, Mr. Bradley / Loi de 2008 visant à combattre la conduite inattentive et à promouvoir les transports écologiques, projet de loi 118, M. Bradley

Mr. Gilles Bisson	4197
Mr. Jeff Leal.....	4201
Mr. Norm Miller	4201
Mr. Tony Ruprecht.....	4201
Mr. John O'Toole.....	4202
Mr. Gilles Bisson	4202
Mr. John O'Toole.....	4203
Mr. Gilles Bisson	4205
Mr. Mike Colle.....	4206
Mr. Robert Bailey	4206
Mr. Peter Kormos.....	4206
Mr. John O'Toole.....	4207
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	4207

Wearing of ribbons and buttons

Hon. Deborah Matthews	4207
-----------------------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	4207
--------------------------------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Ontario economy

Mr. Robert W. Runciman.....	4207
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	4207

Health care funding

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer	4208
Hon. David Caplan.....	4208

Automotive industry

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	4209
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	4209

Ontario economy

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	4209
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	4210

Workplace safety

Mr. Frank Klees	4210
Hon. Peter Fonseca	4211

Child care

Mr. Paul Miller.....	4211
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur	4211

University labour dispute

Mr. Mario Sergio.....	4211
Hon. John Milloy	4211
Hon. Peter Fonseca.....	4212

Child protection

Mrs. Julia Munro	4212
Hon. Deborah Matthews	4212

Road safety

Mr. Gilles Bisson	4212
Hon. James J. Bradley	4213

Violence against women

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis	4213
Hon. Deborah Matthews	4213

Property taxation

Mr. Tim Hudak.....	4214
Hon. Dwight Duncan.....	4214

Nuclear energy

Ms. Cheri DiNovo.....	4214
Hon. Dalton McGuinty.....	4214

Carpooling

Mr. Lou Rinaldi.....	4215
Hon. James J. Bradley	4215

University labour dispute

Mr. Peter Shurman	4215
Hon. Peter Fonseca.....	4215

Property taxation

Mr. Michael Prue	4216
Hon. Dwight Duncan.....	4216

Municipal taxation

Mr. Mike Colle.....	4216
Hon. Jim Watson.....	4216

Workplace safety

Mr. Frank Klees	4217
Hon. Peter Fonseca.....	4217

Continued on inside back cover