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Thursday 11 December 2008

Jeudi 11 décembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 11 December 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 11 décembre 2008

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for personal reflection and thought.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Good morning. I'd like to introduce the Legislature to the hard-working members of my constituency office who are down here in Queen's Park, Nancy Turner and Michael McDonald. Welcome, guys.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'd like to introduce, in the west members' gallery, Richard Goldford from Thornhill, along with his son Zack. Zack is just 13; it's his first question period. He's got an abiding interest in politics.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm pleased to introduce Katie Neu from my riding and her father, Tom. Katie is from Listowel, and she and her colleagues have started bullyingcanada.ca. We're delighted that they're here today to raise this issue with us here at the Legislature.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I'm very proud to introduce the vice-president of the political science club from Laurentian University, Jason Kontak, and welcome him to the Legislature to watch question period.

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's a pleasure to introduce three guests in the west gallery: Ray and Monica Hickey from Pickering Village in Ajax; and Ray's sister Marie Maschke, who is also deputy mayor of Hastings Highlands. I must tell you that Ray and Monica are co-chairs of our annual golf tournament in Ajax, which feeds 10 food banks. Marie, of course, is a very close friend of Leona Dombrowsky.

The guests are here today for lunch, compliments of the Honourable Gerry Phillips, who is a regular patron; Margaret Best; and, of course, the affable Minister George Smitherman.

Mr. Mario Sergio: I'd like to acknowledge my staff, both from my constituency office and my Queen's Park office. They are not here, because they are working very hard on behalf the people of York West. But I would like to acknowledge them and wish them a very merry Christmas.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais présenter Marie-Lise Leduc, qui est ici de mon bureau d'Ottawa, and I'd like to know if you're going to introduce the student? Okay, thank you.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I would like to introduce, in the east members' gallery, Diane McCrohan, Joe Nowak, Joe Brothers and Heather Rush, all from the riding of Kitchener-Conestoga.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Introductions? On behalf of page Sarah Danchuk, we'd like to welcome her father, Nick, her grandmother, Helen, and her grandfather, Peter, to the members' gallery today.

On behalf of page Luis Vera, we would like to welcome his mother, Lucy, and his father, Antonio, who made the trek down today. Welcome.

We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery visiting interns from the Quebec National Assembly: Olivier Bégin-Caouette, Pierre-Olivier Tremblay, Marc-André Turcotte, Pierre-Luc Turgeon and Marie-Astrid Ospina. Please join me in welcoming our guests today.

For anyone who is feeling left out because they were not introduced, welcome to everyone else who is visiting the chamber today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: A merry Christmas to you and your family, Speaker. And let me say that after a little over a year in that chair, I think you have done an outstanding job as Speaker. Hopefully, that will get me another 20 seconds.

My question is to the Minister of Economic Development—we were advised that he would be here today.

Hon. George Smitherman: He's on call and will be forthcoming, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'll go to the Deputy Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Okay.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Minister, as we all know, since mid-September, when we returned to this House from the summer break, there has been a sea change in Ontario's economy. In the time we've been here this fall, almost 69,000 jobs have disappeared, driving the unemployment rate up to 7.1%. Housing starts have plummeted by 31%. Yesterday's Fraser Institute report on the Canadian investment climate was very troubling for the nation—Ontario's poor ranking. We ranked first or second, but in recent years the province has implemented policies that are not conducive to attracting investment.

Minister, when are you prepared, or why are you prepared, in any event, to leave this House without a meaningful jobs plan—a road map to get us through this difficult time?

Hon. George Smitherman: Thank you very much. Firstly, I do want to say in the spirit of the season that I want to wish the honourable member and some of his front-bench colleagues all of the possible successes, being part of the 18 senatorial appointments.

A serious question has been raised by the honourable member. Investments that our government has already initiated are designed to affect the employment circumstances for Ontarians, recognizing that the global economic crisis is very challenging. That's why just about \$10 billion in infrastructure spending this year is helping to sustain 100,000 jobs. That's not just about stimulus and jobs on the short term. It's about building an economy and an infrastructure which can support an economy to be more productive going forward. Alongside that, we've invested in Ontario's people, the single greatest source of future economic opportunity.

By way of supplementary, I will be happy to talk about more initiatives to the honourable member.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I should acknowledge the minister's lost Senate aspirations since his leadership candidate has dropped by the wayside.

In any event, as a supplementary, there was nothing in that response to give Ontarians any faith, any hope, any confidence in the government. In fact, over the last three months we've seen a complete lack of leadership from your side of the House. Instead, we've seen a government that has banned more activities than a preschool when it should have been working on getting Ontario's economy back on top where it traditionally has been.

Over the last three months, you've done nothing more than shrug your shoulders, blame somebody else, and now we're going on vacation, you're going on vacation, while hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are facing a very bleak Christmas and an even bleaker 2009.

Minister, when are we going to see a meaningful jobs plan for this province?

1040

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, if the honourable member wants to play out this ridiculous stereotype that when a Legislature is not in session, nobody's working, he can run down his own party, but he shouldn't be running down our government, because I'll be happy to take a meeting with that gentleman any time as we continue to work diligently on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario.

The honourable member said that for the last three months, there's been nothing done and there's been no investment. Why does the honourable member not stand up in this House and tell the people of the province of Ontario that he voted against budget measures which have resulted, just in the last little while, in a contribution of \$1.1 billion to every municipality in the province of Ontario for the purposes of making investments in infra-

structure, which is about jobs in the short term for people and about the infrastructure that can support the economic prospects and development in the province of Ontario? The member's characterizations are those of someone who has come late to the party, seeking to throw the mud around and offering—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We look at what's happening in the United States with respect to the auto sector issue and the fact that both parties at the federal level there have been involved, in terms of conserving what's appropriate for taxpayers in the United States. This government has shut out the opposition parties—both opposition parties. We're prepared to come back next week and sit, listen, participate and play a role in assisting and ensuring—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Honourable members know that the tradition within this place is that we don't make reference to people who are or are not here.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We all know the concerns. We know that 66,000 people in this province lost their jobs last month alone. We know many communities, families and individuals are suffering. If you're really sincere about working together to find solutions, make a commitment today. Come back next week—we'll be here.

Hon. George Smitherman: It's noteworthy. Today is Thursday. It wasn't convenient to be here, but if you come back next week, well, we'll see if we can drop by then. The work of government and the necessity of responding to the challenges, the very real and genuine challenges for people in the province of Ontario—is not met alone on whether the House is in session. It's met through the work that we do in our ridings and on a back-and-forth basis.

I would be very, very willing, as an example, in my areas of responsibility, to sit down with the honourable member any day next week or the week that follows to find what ideas he might have to bring forward and to support growth and economic development in the province of Ontario. But this member has stood against those efforts. He stood against the efforts to distribute \$1.1 billion to municipalities, including \$2.1 million to the city of Brockville alone.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My next question is to the Attorney General, and it's about the abysmal failings of our province's justice system.

Two weeks ago, Arber Krasniqi was convicted of second-degree murder for the unprovoked stabbing of Jordan Ormonde. According to the Toronto Star, since 2001, Krasniqi had five previous run-ins with the justice system, each of which involved either weapons or violence, and for those five occasions, the crown allowed

him to enter into a peace bond and withdrew the charges, even though some of them were violations of peace bonds as well.

Minister, these matters are no longer before the courts, so will you investigate these cases, including the crown's decision to repeatedly withdraw charges of violence against this killer, leaving him free to murder an innocent citizen?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: The first thing we say, of course, is that in any of these terrible cases, there's a terrible tragedy, and our heart goes out to those who are left behind and our heart goes out to the communities affected.

My friend raises some very important questions. How do we make sure that in all cases, the justice system deals exactly as it must, in the most serious fashion, with the most serious cases? The crowns prosecute all of these very seriously, the police investigate them very seriously, and they prosecute according to the limits of the law. At all times, that is what we do, but we are working hard through our initiatives, such as our exit point task force, to make sure that in every case, the full extent of the law is brought to bear on those who pose the greatest danger to society.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The John and Varughese murders two months ago are another glaring example of how the broken justice system is failing to keep Ontarians safe.

We've read the bail hearing transcripts—I hope you have—where Nathaniel O'Brien, Susan and Saramma's alleged killer, was released on house arrest. The transcript raises some very serious questions about the crown's conduct on the bail hearing and whether she was properly prepared to run a bail hearing for two violent sexual assaults.

Minister, will you look into the crown's conduct in this case? The fact that this matter is still before the courts doesn't prevent you from conducting an investigation right now. Will you do it?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I won't have the member of the opposite party running down the hard-working people of our public service and the crown attorney's office. It's just wrong.

A number of times this member has asked questions purportedly on the basis of what he says are facts, but it turns out that he is dealing with, at best, a tight glance at the facts.

Crowns prosecute cases very seriously. They do today and they did when the member was in government. They prosecute according to the law, as they do today, as they did when the member was in government. They prosecute to the limits of the law.

What we've announced with the exit point task force are ways to make sure that we can heighten that attention in every way that the law allows.

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's clear and regrettable: The Attorney General clearly hasn't read those tran-

scripts. It's disappointing that he's not prepared to give Susan and Saramma's family some answers when it's the very least he could do.

In the O'Brien case, the bail hearing took place several months after his arrest, giving the crown more than ample time to gather all the necessary information on the accused to present for the judge's consideration. We believe that didn't happen in this case, and if you read the transcript, you may share that view. Attorney General, we'll provide you with the transcript so you can see it for yourself and see why we're so concerned about what happened in this court.

Will you commit to immediately looking into the crown's conduct in this case? Will you do that for the family?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: What I have committed to the family in that terrible tragedy, and to the community and to all Ontarians, is that in every case where there are serious issues before the courts, we will make sure that the crowns, the police and the other justice partners have everything they need to bring to the attention of the judge or the justice of the peace so that wherever we are able, we stop the most dangerous from being released or we keep them in custody longer.

I would simply caution that the fleeting glance into cases, based on half information, doesn't assist the family, doesn't assist the community and doesn't assist the pursuit of justice in that or any other case.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the acting Premier. I want to quote Windsor Mayor Eddie Francis: "The reality is that without immediate action by the government of Canada and the province of Ontario, this country and this province will lose a city." He then goes on to say that that's how dire things are.

The auto industry needs a short-term credit financing plan within days, not weeks. Without it the industry will sink, taking hundreds of thousands of jobs and communities like Windsor down with it. My question is this: When will the McGuinty government finally put forward a plan to deal with the auto industry's short-term cash and credit crunch?

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

Hon. Michael Bryant: As the mayor of Windsor knows better than anybody else, this is a North American industry. It's a North American industry under, obviously, a severe credit crunch, and it requires a North American solution. That means the two major providers of vehicles in North America, Canada and the United States, need to be collaborating together so that we don't have competing lenders. We cannot have lenders in Canada competing against lenders in the United States because there is in essence one borrower: the auto makers and the auto suppliers.

Yes, he's absolutely right that if we do not have a package in place, there are going to be severe conse-

quences. But I've said before and I'll say again that that mayor can have full confidence that in fact the governments of the United States and Canada will have that in place for that industry.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government talks about competing lenders. The fact of the matter is, there aren't any lenders. That's why American legislators have been seized with this. That is why they've called for plans. That's why they've examined those plans. That's why they've put forward a strategy, and their strategy includes job and product guarantees. But, increasingly, people are wondering, where is the McGuinty government? Where is the Ontario government?

We've put forward a number of ideas that we think need to be part of this. The government keeps responding with strategies that you announced three or four years ago that haven't worked and don't answer the dire need for immediate credit assistance. Where is the McGuinty government's plan, other than referring to Washington and Ottawa?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The work that Ontario and Canada have been doing is work that has been going on—with respect to support for the auto industry, the member is absolutely right: The McGuinty government has been there for the auto industry for years and years and years. It is obviously partly as a result of that investment and the relationship with the CAW and with the companies themselves and, I should also add, with Detroit and Honda and with all the auto suppliers, that in fact we have been working with the industry—and every time we have been in discussions with American officials, we find that Canada is further along than the United States.

The simple fact is that you've got Congress putting a bill together that in essence is going to line up the mechanism by which the Detroit Three are going to be provided financing relief.

As the Prime Minister has said and the Premier has said, Canada will—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to quote Mayor Francis again.

"The combined loss, and impact on the community, will be staggering.

"At this stage, a refusal by the federal and provincial government to act immediately is nothing less than a decision to allow the death of a community."

That's what Mayor Francis says his community is looking at. Yet, when they ask this government what the plan is for immediate credit assistance—and we're not talking here about grants; we're not talking here about an investment strategy to kick in in two or three years; we're talking about immediate credit assistance, so that a plant is not closed within the next 30 days.

Again, I say, where is the McGuinty government's plan? Referring to Washington, referring to Ottawa, isn't doing it. The plant closures will happen here.

Hon. Michael Bryant: If in fact the mayor of Windsor had had the plan provided by the leader of the third party over the past six or seven years, all across Ontario we would not have seen the growth that we've seen, and we would have seen plant closures.

The fact is that this government has always been there for the auto industry. We've been there for the workers; we've been there for the management. We will be there to provide the emergency and urgent financial assistance. The mechanism in which it's provided is pretty important because it involves taxpayers' dollars.

The leader of the third party has spent most of his time in this House on the auto sector slagging it, slagging the CAW, and slagging every effort this government has made to provide assistance to the industry. So we don't need to take any advice from the leader of the third party.

The bottom line is, when it comes to auto—

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

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm sure all those laid-off auto workers are very aware of the ineffectiveness of the McGuinty government's strategy when it comes to the auto sector.

I want to ask the Acting Premier about the continuing crisis that is unfolding in the forest sector. We learned last night that AbitibiBowater is looking to sell its hydro dams in and near Kenora, in and near Fort Frances, and in and near Iroquois Falls. These hydro dams provide reasonably priced electricity to the pulp and paper mills that sustain literally over 2,000 jobs. The sale of these dams will mean higher hydro rates for those mills and will put more jobs in jeopardy. What is the McGuinty government prepared to do to avoid that?

Hon. George Smitherman: I thank the honourable member for his question. In the matters associated with the forest industry and the related matters of energy production that comes from facilities and the costs of industrial pricing, I can tell the honourable member that, working with the Minister of Natural Resources, the pre-disposition of our government will be to seek to lend support wherever it's possible to the companies and, by extension, to the people who depend upon them for economic opportunities.

The member brings to the floor of the Legislature an emerging issue. Perhaps we can all agree that it could be seen as an opportunity. In that spirit, I'll be working closely with the Minister of Natural Resources to see what's possible to sustain the efforts of that company, at economic development to sustain those communities and to make sure that people are employed. Energy pricing and related matters are certainly something that we'll work on as part of the mix at the suggestion of the honourable member.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: About the only thing this government has done is drive the industrial hydro rate for

these mills up to literally the highest in all of Canada. So a paper mill in Ontario is now paying an industrial hydro bill of about \$2.4 million a month, while one in British Columbia is paying about \$1.1 million a month, and a mill in Manitoba is paying about \$970,000 a month. For example, Domtar in Dryden, which just shut down two paper machines, saw its hydro bill increase by 40% over the last four years. AbitibiBowater's energy bills have risen from \$40 million to \$90 million.

Here's the issue: These companies are being pressed in terms of credit. If they sell off their hydro assets, they may get some quick money, but it's going to make the jobs that are there less sustainable. What's the McGuinty government going to do—

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

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, just like the earlier question, the honourable member transitions deftly to his position of the day, but it's important to remind him from his often-referenced and lowly read book, *Public Power*, "Industrial energy price subsidization can be attractive in theory, but tricky in practice...."

I think it is far better to work with industry to lower its energy costs through greater efficiency, not through a scheme of subsidized rates. The putative leader of the party, the member from Toronto–Danforth, is in fact on record as saying that he opposes any policy of industrial price subsidization. But we've taken advice from the honourable member in working directly through the Ministry of Natural Resources on efforts to stabilize prices in these sectors and, through prosperity investments, to work with those companies that transition to a lower energy price, at the very suggestion from page 251 of the honourable member's book.

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: And no one is talking about price subsidization here. What we're talking about is what every other province in Canada does, which is to sustain an industrial hydro rate which helps to maintain jobs. It is the McGuinty government that is out of step with literally every other province.

These mills, if they were located in Manitoba, in British Columbia, in Newfoundland and Labrador, in Quebec, in Saskatchewan or British Columbia, would all have much lower hydro rates. But the strategy that the McGuinty government has pushed them into, "Sell off your hydro assets which provide affordable electricity to the mills in order to obtain some short-term cash," means that the jobs that are in those mills now become less sustainable. Is this the McGuinty government's real policy? Force them to sell off the hydro assets to get some cash, making the jobs in the mills less sustainable? Is that your forest policy—I mean, your industrial—

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

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member's suggestion that government policy has forced the forestry sector to the challenges that they're experiencing

does not bear up to any scrutiny at all. The honourable member ran through a list of Canadian provinces that could have equally been the list of Canadian provinces that have seen shutdowns and job losses in their domestic forest industry. That's not of interest to the honourable member because that clouds his storyline for today.

Of the matter at hand, associated with the prospect of a transition from ownership of a hydroelectric property, I already said to the honourable member in our first answer, working with the Minister of Natural Resources, we'll do all that we can to sustain those companies, to sustain those factories, those plants, those mills and to sustain those jobs. This will be our focus going forward and we're very open to any input that the honourable member might have of a practical nature to see those transactions take place in a way that helps us sustain these jobs. On that point we agree with him—

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

1100

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, I'm very grateful for the support that you and all of the members of this House gave last week to my private member's resolution, which is resulting in the creation of a select committee to develop a provincial mental health strategy. But as you know, the Auditor General's report that was just released has revealed some glaring problems with our mental health system which are urgent in nature.

Minister, can you please tell us what's been done so far to constitute the committee and what the plan is going forward?

Hon. David Caplan: There are a number of things I'd like to mention to the member. We certainly do support, and thank her for bringing forward, the suggestion. I believe in the New Year the House leaders will get together to figure out the composition, the mandates and what the next steps for the committee will be. I quite eagerly anticipate being able to get the information and the direction that the committee is able to come up with. In the meantime, this month I will be meeting with the advisory panel of experts from across the province which I have put together. This will be another opportunity to develop a provincial mental health and addiction strategy.

I think it's also important to remember that the auditor, in his report, comments on a number of the very—truly, while there is much more work to do, there are many positive aspects. For example, funding has gone toward things like assertive community treatment teams, which are multidisciplinary teams that provide—

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Minister. I can only say that, because the need is urgent—and we do have members on this side of the House who are willing to sit during the winter session. Will you tell us whether

you're prepared to commit to us getting started with this committee right away in the winter session? The need is truly urgent, as the auditor has rightly pointed out.

Hon. David Caplan: I think I answered that question in the first response. I'm happy to reiterate for the member that House leaders will be gathering together, as they do when we have select committees, to work out timetables, to work out composition of the committee, to work out new resources that would need to be in place to support the work of the committee. I'm quite eager to work with the member and with all members of this Legislature to improve the quality and the availability of mental health and addiction services to Ontario's most vulnerable.

I truly believe that it is a measure of our collective humanity, the way that we treat those who are the most vulnerable, and that includes the mentally ill and those who suffer from mental health and addictions issues. I am quite proud of the work we have done so far, which has seen a \$200-million increase to mental health and addictions funding in the province of Ontario. I do acknowledge that there is—

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

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, in follow-up to the question from my leader in regard to Abitibi. Minister, we told you, the municipality told you, the union told you, the economic development people told you two years ago that if you allowed Abitibi to sever these dams off, eventually they'd fire-sale the dams for cash flow and it would put these mills at risk because the cost of operations would go up at least \$100 to \$120 per tonne. These communities are more than willing to buy these dams. If Abitibi is going to sell them, the communities are more than willing to buy them.

My question to you is simply this: Are you prepared to sit down with those communities and assist with the financing to purchase those dams so that they can keep them in their possession in order to sell electricity at cost to those mills and maintain those jobs?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: Yes, at the heart of it, we are, as I said earlier in my answer, prepared to work with all of those who have a stake in the ambition of helping to preserve jobs. If this is one piece of those mechanisms that is necessary, then I can tell the honourable member that we'd be very happy to sit down and have a meeting. The honourable member makes a very specific policy suggestion which gets well ahead of the situation into issues of ownership. But at the heart of the matter, yes, we recognize it will be necessary, through our various ministries and local honourable members, to work to bring people together and seek the resolution which we all share a desire to, which is to sustain jobs in local com-

munities. I'd be very happy to work with the honourable member.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We've heard this song before. Here's the problem. Two years ago, when we had the same situation, the then Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Ramsay, said "Don't worry; everything will be fine. This will never happen." The community and everybody rang the bell two years ago, and I'm putting the question to you straight, Minister: If Abitibi is going to go down this road, if they're going to fire-sale their mills—and we know why; they're having difficulty—are you going to guarantee that your government is going to stand up and say, "Yes, we will help to finance the purchase of those dams on the part of the municipalities so they can safeguard the jobs for the people of Kenora, Fort Frances and Iroquois Falls"?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member knows that the question has been answered. The honourable member has already decided on what the mechanism is.

At the heart of the matter is the desire to make sure that the advantage of this energy source can be brought to bear in the context of these plants. That is the goal. The matter of who will own them is a matter that can be addressed in the context of an accurate discussion. The honourable member will have the benefit of giving us his advice and presenting to us local communities and their views on this. I think the honourable member and I have a history of a capacity to work together on that with my other government colleagues.

We will do our utmost to seek all possible solutions to preserve the jobs in those communities, which we understand to be job one in this circumstance.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Minister, in this time of economic slowdown, it is crucial that we continue to invest in the programs and services that will help laid-off workers get the help they need to get back on their feet. We have heard a lot recently about training programs available through your ministry that provide financial assistance to those who wish to go back to school to upgrade their skills. I am aware that your ministry responds to layoffs immediately and in some cases provides support for services targeted directly to those who find themselves in this unfortunate situation.

You have spoken several times about Employment Ontario and how these programs are available to people who need assistance with finding a job. But, Minister, it is not always the case that people need to find an existing job. History has shown that Ontarians are very enterprising and full of great ideas that create marketable products and viable companies. Can you tell me what you are doing to help those who find themselves without a job but with a great business idea?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to thank the member for the question and for her advocacy on behalf of her community.

Through Employment Ontario, recently laid-off workers have access to a program, the Ontario self-employment benefit. Through this program, individuals are provided financial assistance and business planning advice to help them start their own business. The program has been a great success. I'd like to give one example to the House: In Ottawa, a gentleman by the name of Marc Appleby received a living allowance through this program over the course of 52 weeks while he developed his business plan and then implemented it. Through the National Capital Region YMCA-YWCA in Ottawa, Marc participated in workshops, one-on-one business consultation, business planning and networking. Marc went on to be a guest on the popular CBC show *Dragons' Den* and was offered an impressive \$500,000 for his product idea. His product, known as EcoTraction, is the world's safest and most effective—

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

Ms. Helena Jaczek: That's excellent news, Minister.

In these challenging times, communities are having difficulties adapting to changes. It is crucial for everyone in the community to work together to develop solutions on how to move forward. Local economic development officers are working hard with businesses and community organizations to ensure that jobs remain and people have the help that they need, but they cannot do it alone. At a time when our economy is changing and labour market demands are evolving, we need to be supporting communities in order to adjust. Human resource planning is essential at a time like this, and I'm glad to see that our government is helping some communities meet those needs.

In my area, newcomers make up a significant portion of the labour market. I was pleased to hear that COSTI Immigrant Services was provided \$149,000 to manage the open doors project that will help newcomers adjust and assist employers in fulfilling their hiring needs. Minister, could you please tell this House more about—

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

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to provide more details on this program. In partnership with several community organizations across York region, COSTI will manage a project that will develop an in-depth analysis of adjustment supports in York region and Bradford West Gwillimbury to help newcomers to Canada. The analysis will identify barriers to employment services that will assist newcomers find work and help employers realize their hiring needs.

The grant was provided through Employment Ontario's labour market partnership program. Labour market partnerships, or LMPs, support partnerships among employers, employer-employee associations and community organizations. The program is intended to help partners address identified labour market issues, develop and implement strategies to improve their ability to plan for their human resource needs and implement labour force adjustment measures to deal with changes in the labour market.

1110

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Tim Hudak: I have a question to the Minister of Health. Minister, I want to update you on the tragic story of Andrew Lanese, an 11-year-old boy in Fonthill who suffers from Hunter syndrome, and I do appreciate your personal attention to this matter in the past. His family has privately paid for Elaprase treatment since August, at the cost of \$6,000 per week. Minister, the results since August are remarkable: For the first time since he was stricken with Hunter syndrome, Andrew can hold a toy in his hands. He can now walk unassisted about 80 feet away from his wheelchair without taking a break, where he could barely manage 20 feet before. When their funds run out in a few weeks, the remarkable progress Andrew has made over the past five months will be lost. Minister, will you fund Elaprase treatment for Andrew Lanese?

Hon. David Caplan: First of all, I want to thank the member for the question. He has advocated with me before on behalf of Andrew and his family. I know we are working to resolve Andrew's situation, so I certainly do want to acknowledge that. I also want to say, if I could, through you, Speaker, directly to Andrew and his family—I certainly do understand the circumstances and the difficulty that this does have for families, and I want to take this opportunity to express my very deepest sympathies and thoughts with them.

I'd like to share with you that all of our drug funding decisions must be made through an informed decision-making based on the analysis of scientific evidence and cost-effectiveness. Recently, the ministry has publicly communicated that we are working on a new approach for drugs for rare diseases and we do intend to share it. In fact, Canada is one of the few countries in the world which does not have such a program on—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I appreciate the minister's response and the tone of it. I think as the minister knows, the Ministry of Health is currently funding treatment for two Ontario residents afflicted with Hunter syndrome, yet Andrew was recently denied again. The only difference between those who are funded and young Andrew is that he has, sadly, suffered neurological trauma. In short, he has brain damage.

But it doesn't make him any less human. His suffering is no less painful or tragic; in fact, more so. If you witness the progress Andrew has made, you could not deny that he is making significant progress from this treatment. His parents are seeing laughing and giggling again for the first time in years. Minister, you can't draw the line at Andrew Lanese. Will you make every effort to ensure he gets that funding?

Hon. David Caplan: While I do acknowledge that not every case will be funded, there will be instances when, after reviewing the relevant documentation, the executive officer and the committee which has been struck will have to, regrettably, deny funding.

However, funding for rare diseases must continue to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. We must ensure that patients will be likely to benefit from a slowing in the progression of the disease, if not a reversal of the disease. That's why we have taken the steps to institute this kind of review and this kind of process, so that individual Ontario patients and the individual circumstances they face can be reviewed by the executive officer and by experts. I have, as I said earlier, worked with the member and will continue to work to see what can be done. I cannot give the undertaking that it will be funded, but the process that it was reviewed—

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

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Sudbury Regional Hospital is in crisis due to its high number of alternate level-of-care clients. St. Joseph's Health Centre in Sudbury has asked the minister for an advance of \$4 million in capital funding so it can begin construction of their 128 long-term-care-bed home in Chelmsford, which would ease the ALC crisis. Will the minister commit to providing this funding today?

Hon. David Caplan: I just want to note that I am encouraged that the hospital is working collaboratively with the LHIN and the neighbouring hospitals in the region. The LHIN will continue to support the efforts to reduce the ALC pressure. I have been to Sudbury and I do acknowledge that this is a real challenge in Sudbury and the northeast, but we must manage our funds responsibly for the short- and for the long-term benefit.

In direct answer to the member, no, I will not commit and I will not be funding Sudbury and providing them a separate capital advance. We will continue to work with St. Joe's to deliver on the commitment toward expanded long-term-care beds. I know that we have spoken about this privately, but I do say publicly the same answer that I provided for you, that we will not be looking to a different kind of capital model. We will be looking to support them in the same way we do all long-term-care homes across the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sudbury is experiencing a hospital crisis like no other in Ontario. Two weeks ago, more than 250 physicians at Sudbury Regional spoke out in anger and frustration about this ALC crisis which has forced the cancellations of hundreds of surgeries, jammed up our emergency rooms, and compromised the daily operation of Sudbury Regional Hospital. Everyone—residents, physicians, the mayor and even, I hope, the MPP from Sudbury—wants St. Joseph's Health Centre to move forward with the long-term-care homes which will help ease the ALC crisis in Sudbury hospitals. I ask again: Why won't the ministry agree to a funding advance?

Hon. David Caplan: We are committed to moving ahead with the construction of more long-term-care

capacity in Sudbury and Chelmsford, as the member is well aware. But the member would be aware that, in fact, just yesterday, the former mayor of Sudbury, Jim Gordon, who was tasked by Mayor Rodriguez to provide some insight and strategy for Sudbury, said, "I want to praise the provincial government as a willing partner in finding solutions. The province has not turned their backs on us, I can tell you that. While the province will be called upon to do more, local officials will work to develop innovative proposals that are efficient and cost-effective."

It is by this working together, this coming together of the local hospital, the LHIN, long-term-care providers, the local members and many, many others that we are going to break the back of ALC in Sudbury. I would welcome the member—

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

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, you know that food safety is important for all of us. Also, it's a top priority for our government. Last week, the Auditor General released his report and commends the government for taking very important steps toward making sure the food we eat on a daily basis is safe, and also by establishing many different measurements in order to make sure all the milk, especially goat's milk, we drink on a daily basis—or some people do—is safe. As you know, in his report in 2001, he raised a couple of recommendations toward this issue. Regardless of our progress, the Auditor General raised a couple of issues about food safety. Can you tell us what you are doing in order to make sure the food we eat on a daily basis is safe?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The honourable member has raised a very important question, and I do want to say that our government appreciates the report from the Provincial Auditor. We do appreciate that it has been recognized that Ontario has one of the strongest food safety systems in Canada. It has been the McGuinty government that commissioned the Haines Report. As a result of that, we have committed to implementing those recommendations with respect to food safety in the province have been implemented. That is why our government has doubled the food safety budget at OMAFRA from \$27 million in 2005-06 to \$46 million in 2008-09—almost double. We've increased the number of meat inspectors. When we came to government there were 10 meat inspectors in the province of Ontario.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Is that all?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Only 10. We now have 170 meat inspectors in the province of Ontario—

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Minister, for this information. I think it's very important to all people

across the province to know that our government is taking very important steps to make sure that the food we eat on a daily basis is safe. But as you know, Minister, we cannot control the whole spectrum of food safety. The federal government also plays a pivotal role. Can you tell us what you are doing in conjunction with the federal government to make sure the food that comes to this province is safe?

1120

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We work very closely with the federal government on food safety initiatives. It is a shared jurisdiction, so there are some processing plants that are the federal government's responsibility and some that are the provincial government's responsibility.

I would like to say that the auditor did note that we've already made some of our systems even more safe. The audit was done in the spring; we have, over the course of the summer and fall months, been acting. We have implemented microbial testing on ready-to-eat meats; that will be fully implemented in January 2009. We continue to work with food processors to enable them to be HACCP-qualified; that is, the hazard analysis critical control points program. This is a quality control program. We continue to work with industry to put in place a traceability system, and we will continue to pay \$200 of the \$300 registration fee for mandatory food—

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

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, earlier this week, I brought to your attention an urgent plea from Greg Troy for the drug Myozyme to treat Pompe disease. Helen Stevenson, the executive officer, stated that she could see it approved in late March. To that, Mr. Troy's wife, Ana, says that she worries the approval won't come in time for her husband because they've seen his condition deteriorating daily. We have to move pretty soon or it will be too late.

I'm asking you today, Minister, would you consider, on a compassionate basis, providing funding for this drug for Mr. Troy?

Hon. David Caplan: Of course, I have nothing but compassion for Mr. Troy and for all Ontarians who suffer from rare diseases, where the normal clinical trials and approvals would never result in approval of these therapies; the numbers simply do not allow it. That's why Ontario has moved to implement a process and an arrangement based upon medical expertise and the advice of clinicians, practitioners and others to be a part of that decision-making process.

The member would know that we have approximately 200,000 of these types of requests per year. We are developing a fair and reasonable way to be able to address them, and we are moving as quickly as we possibly can. The member knows that this—

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

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: To the minister: The minister knows full well the drug was approved by Health Canada in 2006. There are at least 30 other countries in the world that fund it, as does, now, Alberta. Also, Ian MacPherson, an adult from Hamilton who has received the drug now for three years, has demonstrated that the progression of the disease can be halted. He is now able to get up, and it has improved his walking and breathing. Surely Greg Troy deserves the same improvement and shouldn't be struggling for each breath of air he takes each day.

Minister, I ask you, as we end this session, will you seriously consider responding to his request for this drug now?

Hon. David Caplan: I hope the member is fully aware, and I know she is, that Ontario really is at the forefront of moving as quickly as we possibly can to be able to determine—and it's done on a case-by-case basis—the efficacy and ability of these new therapies and treatments being available in the individual cases. Certainly I know that, as a former Minister of Health, she knows that we do rely upon the advice of medical experts and others to be able to provide that kind of advice and guidance. I know that these are some of the most challenging cases, and it's one of the reasons why I have been, along with my colleagues from across the country, calling upon our national government. Canada is one of the very few countries in the world which do not have a national program for drugs for rare diseases.

This has been part of the work that I, along with colleagues from across the country, have been engaged in, but I would certainly welcome this member's efforts in being able to—

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

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTES

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Today the teaching assistants, student instructors, lab demonstrators and monitors at the University of Toronto are prepared to strike. York University workers are already on strike, and other universities are set to follow. How many students will have to have their education disrupted before your ministry provides the funding required to adequately staff universities and fairly compensate those who teach them?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the member's question. In terms of the situation at the University of Toronto, I understand that both sides are working very hard to reach an agreement, and certainly we encourage them to come to an agreement as quickly as possible and not in any way disrupt classes.

At the same time, at York University we continue to encourage both sides to come to the table and come up with an agreement that's in the best interests of the students as quickly as possible.

The member raises the issue of operating funding. I would like to put on the record that at the University of Toronto, operating funding has increased by \$150 million

since 2003. That's an almost 40% increase. At York, operating funding has increased by \$100 million, or 52%, since 2003.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The only thing your lists add up to, Minister, is number 10 in per capita post-secondary funding. For students and their parents, the numbers you read in the House only add up to rising tuition, classes of 800 and 900 students, tutorials of 70 to 100 students, subsistence wages and disruption of studies.

When will your ministry end the turmoil and provide the funding so that Ontario can be a leader in post-secondary education again?

Hon. John Milloy: I would hope that the honourable member would be urging both sides in all these issues to sit at the table and come up with an agreement that's in the best interests of all students. But how can he stand in this House and dismiss a \$6.2-billion investment in terms of post-secondary education?

Operating funding for colleges and universities has increased by 58% since 2003. We have 100,000 additional students in colleges and universities. We've significantly increased per student funding. When the NDP were in power, they cut student aid by nearly 50%; they cut funding to PSE; they promised to eliminate tuition, and instead, they increased it by 50%.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Bob Delaney: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, in the three cities comprising Peel region in particular, and in the 905 belt in general, the need for social housing is higher than most anywhere in the province. Addressing the needs identified by housing providers in Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon would mean a greater life expectancy of affordable housing units, in addition to improving energy efficiency and the value of the property and community life.

Minister, in this year's budget, \$100 million was dedicated to social housing repairs. I'd like to make sure that the cities of Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon receive their fair per capita share of social housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: Well, allow me to thank the member and all members from Peel region for their advocacy for affordable housing. I would also like to thank the regional chair from Peel, Emil Kolb.

Peel region received \$5.5 million in affordable housing repair and retrofit money. The region of Peel has proposed to use its share to fund capital works projects at Fletcher's Creek Co-op in Mississauga, which the honourable member and I had the opportunity to visit, Northwood Park Co-op in Brampton and for other housing providers in Peel that have demonstrated need or have little or no capital reserve left.

Let me quote regional chair Emil Kolb when he said, "We are pleased that the province is committed to helping us improve our affordable housing situation in Peel region. The region looks forward to strengthening our partnerships with the federal and provincial governments

to help families continue to live in a home they can enjoy."

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary? The member from Mississauga South.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Minister, I can tell you that \$5.5 million is not enough to fix the backlog of repairs at Peel region. I've met with representatives from the region on a number of occasions, as well as constituents, who have experienced first-hand the shortage of affordable housing in Mississauga specifically. Peel is making their own investments, but they need more than just funding for housing repairs. Our community needs new units as well.

In light of our government's landmark commitment to reduce child poverty at 25% in five years, it is crucial that we get fundamentals like housing right. Our high-growth region has only 14,000 units of affordable housing, and as we continue to grow, the need for affordable housing increases. Peel region has one of the highest wait times for affordable housing in the province, and some of my constituents are on the waiting list. What will you, minister, do to work with the Peel region and build more affordable housing?

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the honourable member. That kind of passion is important when it comes to dealing with affordable housing because it's such an important part of our society and our life as a civilized society. There is more that we have to do. That's why the affordable housing program, which was signed by my predecessor and the previous federal government, contributed \$47 million for 1,401 units in Peel region.

I'd also like to congratulate Peel region because, when the Minister of Finance brought forward the Investing in Ontario Act, it provided \$1.1 billion in infrastructure money to municipalities. Peel region, I'm very pleased to report, is using the major part of its \$67 million from the act for affordable housing. They will build 400 units of affordable housing; \$60 million will go to 200 family units in Brampton and 200 units in Mississauga. We know that investing in infrastructure is investing in jobs.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, our caucus is becoming very concerned over your handling of the nuclear procurement issue. You don't seem to understand the importance of it.

December 31 this year was supposed to be the deadline for submissions. You delayed that. You've delayed the final decision at a cost of hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars. The number of bidders changes depending on whom you are talking to or the day of the week. Ontario is a leader in the nuclear industry, and the nuclear industry provides thousands of jobs. Minister, will you ensure this House that you will put a stop to last-second changes, back-of-the-napkin plans, and get on with the nuclear decision that is right for—

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

Hon. George Smitherman: This is the same honourable member who in a question not five weeks ago stood up and said, “Is it appropriate, in the challenging times of global economic crisis, that you should continue on matters of procurement for capital efforts which are substantially smaller than the procurement of two new nuclear reactors?” We’re committed to these reactors. We said that by the end of the spring we will have determined who the proponent is to build those two nuclear reactors at Darlington that will be operated by Ontario Power Generation. Any lack of clarity on these points is being driven by the honourable member’s own inability to keep up with the play.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That question was on an RFP for renewable energy, and you said there would be no delay. Minister, Ontario lost 66,000 jobs last month, many of those in the manufacturing industry, which are good, high-paying jobs. Considering that your government is considering billions of dollars of aid to preserve Ontario jobs in the auto sector, do you even realize how many jobs are dependent on the nuclear sector in this province? The nuclear sector, and AECL in particular, employs thousands and thousands of people in this province. I’m going to ask the minister: Have you even thought to consider, or do you even know, how many jobs are at risk or will be lost if AECL is not successful in the bidding process for these new reactors?

Hon. George Smitherman: It’s the honourable member’s point of view that on one of the biggest purchases any jurisdiction could make, we should set aside all proper consideration of productivity of the investment and decide, on an emotional basis, only to support a company which has a presence in the honourable member’s riding. When he raised this issue last time, I said, “Would you do me a favour? Would you talk to Cheryl Gallant? Will you talk to your federal member?” Because the government of Canada is the sole shareholder of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd.

We want a good bid from them. We’ve made sure that in the time of a new government coming to life, they have the appropriate opportunity to make a decision and to lend support to the company that they own 100%. In the tender documents themselves, we have given ample opportunity for a domestic company to make the point about the very economic foundations the honourable member references.

This process is designed well for them. We look forward to a good, competitive bid from Atomic Energy of Canada, backed up by the government of Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): New question. The member from Toronto–Danforth.

Interjections.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It’s nice to be popular. What can I say?

To the Minister of Natural Resources: As she may well be aware—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Calm your disappointment, colleagues.

Minister, as you may know, Canada has put the snapping turtle on its list of species at risk. You’re considering a regulation to allow hunting of the snapping turtle in Ontario’s newest park, Kawartha Highlands. Why are you doing that?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I thank the member for the question.

As the member knows, when a species is identified at the federal level, it actually goes through our committee, which is called COSSARO. COSSARO identifies whether or not that species is in Ontario, and then we put that species on the same list of species at risk, and then that species is removed from any opportunity for hunting and is in fact protected. That will automatically happen.

As a matter of fact, COSSARO has met. There are a number of new species, unfortunately, that are on the list, but we will be protecting all of them. The member needn’t worry.

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a report of the Integrity Commissioner responding to the request by the member for Guelph for the Integrity Commissioner’s opinion on whether the member for Halton had breached the Members’ Integrity Act and parliamentary convention.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I also want to take this opportunity to thank our tremendous group of pages and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Oh, I hear somebody from the government side asking to come back next week.

SEASON’S GREETINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to take this opportunity as well, on behalf of the table and all the staff at the Legislative Assembly, to wish all the members all the best. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, happy holidays. I truly just want to say thank you to all of you for the co-operation that you’ve provided over the past year. There have been a few instances, but for the most part—if every session could be like today, we could make a lot of good things happen. All the best to everyone over the holidays.

This House stands recessed until 1 this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I’m delighted to introduce to the members Mr. William Wen, whose father owned the

largest restaurant ever in Toronto, the Sai Woo. His father also received the Order of Canada and he has raised millions of dollars for charity.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I'd like to introduce to the House my co-op student, Tahiya Bakht. She's here with us today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ISRAELI APARTHEID WEEK

Mr. Peter Shurman: In this, my last statement before we break for the holidays, I want to address all the members of this Legislature and ask that they join me in condemning Israeli Apartheid Week, which will be held for the fifth consecutive year, this time at the beginning of March, perhaps before we return to deliberations.

As Canadians, we have a proud history of advocating for an end to apartheid in South Africa, and we fully condemn the human rights violations committed by that regime.

To describe Israel—a democratic state that, like Canada, respects the rule of law—as such a regime is not only unsubstantiated but is also a minimization of the struggles of those who suffered under true apartheid rule. There is indeed room for discussion on Israeli policies, but to equate this democratic country with an apartheid state reflects a lack of understanding of the true meaning of that word. The term “apartheid” belongs in the same category as such terrifying words as “genocide.” Neither should be used carelessly; otherwise, they will become meaningless and their true victims will be forgotten.

Debate on Israeli policies should be encouraged, but it should also be based on fact and forgo the use of terminology that serves only to demonize an opposing point of view and confuse history.

On behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, I deplore any equation of Israel with an apartheid regime and ask for all members of this Legislature to join us in condemning Israeli Apartheid Week.

WARDENS OF GLENGARRY, STORMONT AND DUNDAS PRÉFETS DE GLENGARRY, STORMONT ET DUNDAS

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: It is with appreciation and thanks that I rise to congratulate Estella Rose on her tenure as warden of the united counties of Glengarry, Stormont and Dundas. Last year, Mrs. Rose, a grandmother, a dairy farmer, and a no-nonsense politician, became the first female warden of the united counties in their 157-year history.

Mrs. Rose has had several firsts in her long political career. She served as the first female councillor in Mountain township, and later as its first female reeve. In 1957,

Mrs. Rose was crowned Dundas county's very first Dairy Princess.

J'aimerais féliciter M^{me} Rose pour tout son travail, son dévouement et son esprit d'avant-garde.

As Mrs. Rose moves on from her post, I am proud to announce that Chris McDonell has become the new warden of the united counties of Glengarry, Stormont and Dundas. Mr. McDonell was sworn in last Friday in Cornwall. He is following in the footsteps of his brother, Jim McDonell, who was the warden in 2005. The occasion marks the first time in the counties' history that brothers have held the office of warden.

Félicitations à M^{me} Rose ainsi qu'à M. McDonell. Au nom des citoyens et citoyennes de Stormont, Dundas et Glengarry, je vous remercie.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would like to make all members aware of an important issue for Ontario disability support program recipients and their families when they have to travel to obtain health care services and for medical services and appointments.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services has set a rate of 18 cents a kilometre for individuals residing in a group home setting who need to attend medical appointments. This rate was set over 10 years ago and hasn't been touched since.

For ODSP recipients to receive the reimbursement for their mileage, they must first go through an application process which includes presenting the mileage form to a physician for completion—for which, of course, there usually is a fee charged.

Everyone knows what has happened to gasoline prices in the last 10 years, yet the ministry has not adjusted the mileage rate for ODSP recipients. Eighteen cents per kilometre is not enough to cover the cost of travel in 2008. This is a serious issue, as it can impair a person's ability to visit their doctor and receive their needed medical attention.

As public sector employees, government employees and MPPs are currently reimbursed at a rate of 44 cents per kilometre. Compare that to a rate of 18 cents for ODSP recipients and you can clearly see that the ministry is once again failing to meet the needs of disabled people in Ontario.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: On September 14, 1992, a little girl named Holly Jones was born. She wanted to become a famous singer, a world-renowned superstar. She wanted to travel the world and see everything, to climb mountains and explore. She was courageous, brave, confident and an adventurer. On May 12, 2003, she was abducted in plain daylight and she was viciously murdered.

Yesterday, her parents came to Queen's Park. They had one request: that they leave a tribute in Holly's

memory so that other children don't experience abuse. In their honour and in Holly's honour, I tabled a motion—and I hope for all-party support on this—"That, in the opinion of this House, primary prevention programs such as the Boost Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention program be mandatory in all Ontario elementary schools as requested by" her family. It is now available in many schools, but it is not available in all schools and it is not mandatory for all children.

This is what her family has decided to do in honour and as a tribute to the memory of their little girl, to the memory of this wonderful child who was once part of my riding. I stand today in honour of Holly Jones.

PEOPLE OF THE WORLD INSCRIBE THE BIBLE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: On Tuesday, December 16, a special community project will be launched called People of the World Inscribe the Bible at Canada Christian College, overseen by Dr. Charles McVety. This Inscribe the Bible project is being sponsored by Christians United for Israel, B'nai Brith Canada, and overseen by the government of Israel's Consulate General in Toronto.

Bible lovers all over the world will be invited to make a personal contribution to a Bible manuscript in their own handwriting. The Shrine of the Bible will become a centre of biblical studies, as well as a hub for cultural and educational initiatives which seek to explore the relevance and impact of Bible values on historical and contemporary human affairs. The staff of this new centre will archive, manage and display the hundreds of manuscripts and Bible volumes written in many languages, illustrating the ubiquity of the Bible. The project encompasses both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Bible, the beginning of morality and civilization for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is the cultural and ethical gift of the Jewish people to the world. Millions around the world identify with the Bible and its reflection on the spiritual life. The faith, history and stories that took place in the Holy Land stir the imagination of hundreds of millions throughout the entire world.

We wish the three sponsoring organizations and their leaders, Dr. Charles McVety, Dr. Frank Dimant and Consul General Amir Gissin, Godspeed as they undertake this most significant project.

CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I rise today to talk about the importance of carbon monoxide detectors. Later today I will be introducing a private member's bill that will make all Ontarians safer by requiring a functioning carbon monoxide detector in all homes.

Carbon monoxide is a lethal gas. It is odourless and colourless, making it undetectable without a carbon monoxide detector. The tragic loss of the Hawkins family by carbon monoxide poisoning has reminded Ontarians how vulnerable we are to this powerful gas.

Richard and Laurie Hawkins and their two children were killed by carbon monoxide due to a blocked ventilation pipe. The bill will be called the Hawkins Gignac Act in honour of this young family. Since the Hawkins family tragedy, two other families, one in Toronto and one in Guelph, have suffered the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning. Luckily in these cases, they survived.

According to the Canada Safety Council, carbon monoxide is the leading cause of fatal poisonings in North America. Carbon monoxide detectors are simple, inexpensive and the only way to protect people in the place where they should feel the safest—in their own homes. I've already received numerous letters of support for this bill, including one from the Owen Sound fire prevention inspector.

In a recent poll on a London radio station, 78% of respondents said that they would be in favour of making carbon monoxide detectors mandatory. I hope that this bill will prevent tragedies, but please, don't wait for it to become law; install a carbon monoxide detector in your home and make sure that you, your friends and your family are safe—and do it today.

1310

GENERATION CHANGE LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

Mr. Mario Sergio: I am privileged today to have in the House Sergeant Steven Hicks from 31 Division in my riding of York West, accompanied by Sergeant Dan Ross. They are here with us today.

Sergeant Hicks is at the helm of the Generation Change leadership initiative. His team's tireless work with youth at risk helps change the image of Jane and Finch through positive student initiatives.

Youths' lives are being changed, directing many to attend colleges and universities, preparing through sports scholarships and Olympic teams in wrestling and soccer as well.

Youth and students are taught and encouraged to do voluntary work, to visit at Sick Kids hospital, and to hand out toys to unwed mothers with newborn babies. Some of these tough kids regularly visit the cancer ward and read books to children.

Thanks to Sergeant Hicks, teenaged girls, where once drugs and prostitution would be their only fate in life, have been saved from violence and living on the street.

Youth are becoming role models, picking up garbage, planting flowers and trees. Students from Emery Collegiate, C. W. Jefferys and Westview, motivated through the Generation Change leadership initiative, are inspiring other youth in spearheading toy drives, volunteering, and joining sporting events for special-needs kids.

I would like to thank and applaud Sergeant Hicks and team for all the efforts, positive change and successes in building a better community and promoting lasting positive relations.

I especially want to thank Sergeant Hicks for his perseverance, compassion, leadership and mostly for his

fathering spirit, which is the key to what our youth are most hungering for and so desperately need.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. David Zimmer: Usually when we rise to give a member's statement, we do so to honour a constituent, an organization or a cause. Sometimes we recognize contributions of fellow citizens who are working hard to make Ontario a better place.

Today I am honoured to stand and recognize Bill 66, An Act to proclaim Holocaust Memorial Day—Yom ha-Shoah in Ontario.

On this coming December 18, this landmark piece of legislation here in Ontario will see its 10th anniversary. The bill established Ontario as the very first jurisdiction in North America to have an official day on which to commemorate the Holocaust. The day takes place on Yom ha-Shoah, in accordance with the Jewish calendar.

I'm heartened at the spirit by which all Ontarians implemented Holocaust education programs to honour the survivors and to remember those who perished. The importance of these programs goes way beyond historical remembrance. These programs are committed to utilizing examples from the Holocaust to highlight the importance of combating intolerance, racism and, yes, anti-Semitism.

I'm looking forward to attending the fourth annual Dinner of Miracles this evening. This one-of-a-kind event, hosted by the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem and the Azrieli Foundation, brings together 300 Jewish and non-Jewish professionals, and other organizations, from across Ontario to commemorate this event.

On behalf of the close to 13,000 Holocaust survivors in Ontario, I am proud to acknowledge this historic piece of Ontario legislation.

HANUKKAH

Mr. Mike Colle: During this holiday season, in our very diverse province of Ontario, we celebrate a lot of incredibly important traditions. Certainly we all are aware of the Christmas tradition and the tradition of Eid, but there's also a very important tradition of celebrating and rededicating ourselves through the festival of Hanukkah.

Hanukkah's origins go back more than 2,000 years. In fact, it goes back to a time when the Jewish people were under the control of an empire based in Syria. They were ordered to worship Greek gods. Many Jewish people were put to death as a result of their beliefs.

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the holy temple in Jerusalem after the Jewish victory over the Hellenist Syrians in 165 BCE. With a small amount of oil, the menorah was miraculously lit for eight days in celebration.

Certainly, in my constituency of Eglinton—Lawrence and throughout all of Ontario—in fact, throughout all of the world—it is critically important for us at this time, given what has happened in Mumbai especially, to stop

and reflect that we must respect all traditions. This tradition of Hanukkah is certainly one that I respect and will be celebrating with my friends the Waxbergs, who host a family get-together every Hanukkah. I will be there this year again in remembering this remarkable people and this remarkable period in history—Hanukkah.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HAMILTON HEALTH SCIENCES ELECTIONS ACT, 2008 LOI DE 2008 SUR LES ÉLECTIONS AU SEIN DU HAMILTON HEALTH SCIENCES

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 142, An Act to provide for the election of members of the board of trustees of Hamilton Health Sciences / Projet de loi 142, Loi prévoyant l'élection des membres du conseil d'administration du Hamilton Health Sciences.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This bill is simply a democratization of the governance of the health sciences centre in Hamilton. It provides that at least 15 of the trustees on the Hamilton Health Sciences board of trustees are to be elected to represent the 15 wards of the city of Hamilton.

HAWKINS GIGNAC ACT (CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS), 2008 LOI HAWKINS GIGNAC DE 2008 (DÉTECTEURS DE MONOXYDE DE CARBONE)

Mr. Hardeman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 143, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 to require carbon monoxide detectors in all residential buildings / Projet de loi 143, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment pour exiger l'installation de détecteurs de monoxyde de carbone dans tous les bâtiments servant à l'habitation.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Recently, the tragic death of a young family in Oxford from carbon monoxide poisoning has reminded us all of the importance of having functioning carbon monoxide detectors in our homes. This legislation that I'm introducing will protect the lives of

Ontarians by requiring that carbon monoxide detectors be installed in all existing homes as well as being hard-wired in new homes.

The short title of the bill is the Hawkins Gignac Act in honour of the family that was lost. Thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity.

PROVINCIAL ADVOCATE
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'INTERVENANT PROVINCIAL
EN FAVEUR DES ENFANTS
ET DES JEUNES

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 144, An Act to amend the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007 / Projet de loi 144, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur l'intervenant provincial en faveur des enfants et des jeunes.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This bill comes in reaction to the troubles that the provincial advocate has had getting documents and information from the government. The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007, is amended to give the advocate power to require a person to provide any information, document or thing that the advocate considers necessary or advisable in exercising his or her duties.

1320

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

SCHOOL SAFETY
LA SÉCURITÉ DANS LES ÉCOLES

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I rise in the House today to restate our government's commitment to making schools safer.

Ce matin, j'ai reçu le rapport final de l'équipe d'action pour la sécurité dans les écoles. In February, I asked this team of experts to work together again to examine gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour between students in schools. They also looked at reporting requirements and the barriers to reporting these issues, and they participated in a review of local police and school board protocols. The report summarizes their findings, following months of research and consultations and 78 recommendations.

Even one incident of homophobia or sexual assault in our schools is too many. It's very disheartening to hear of

these. Our schools should be places where everyone—staff, students, parents and the community—feels welcome, safe and respected. We know that bullying and harassment can affect students' health, mental well-being and their success at school. Le rapport traite de sujets très sérieux. Nous avons la charge collective d'intervenir, and we will take action.

We will act on the recommendations in the report to help address these issues and make our schools even safer. We will introduce legislation that would, if passed, improve requirements for school staff to report serious incidents at school, including sexual assault, to the principal. The report also recommends other areas for action that will guide us, including: working with education partners to revise the curriculum to ensure gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour are discussed in the classroom; the development of a manual to help staff respond to incidents of sexual assault; and the expansion of the school climate surveys to help schools assess perceptions of safety.

We take these findings very seriously. The report's recommendations will help guide our further actions to help make our schools even safer and help put a stop to this type of behaviour in schools.

J'aimerais remercier les membres de l'équipe d'action pour la sécurité dans les écoles pour leur travail assidu et leur engagement continu envers l'amélioration de la sécurité dans nos écoles. My colleagues Liz Sandals, who chaired the team, and Leeanna Pendergast worked closely with fellow team members—

Applause.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes, yes that's right; wonderful parliamentary assistants, both.

Stu Auty was also on the team, Dr. Inez Elliston, Ray Hughes, Dr. Debra Pepler and Lynn Ziraldo, all people with great experience and knowledge. The team's previous reports have been evidence of their diligence and dedication, and this report is no exception. I'm confident that by building on our safe school strategy and taking action on these recommendations, we can make schools even safer.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I really appreciate the opportunity to respond to the minister. I'm encouraged by the kind of work that the safe schools committee has done, and I want to thank the member from Guelph for the encouragement and inspiration that you've given to those folks.

Just as in any report, it's necessary to read the details. I'm encouraged by the things I heard at the press conference this morning, but I do want to take the time to read the details before I make any firm statements.

One thing I do know is that our environment has changed so much in the last 20 years, and it's regrettable that we even need a report like this. But we do, and I'm glad that it's finally here.

My one concern is, what happens to the kids who have already been victimized, who are perpetrators and who have not been helped? Is there an ability through this process to go back and look at those kids? Because they are there, and they were lost in the system until this report came forward. It's my hope that with the recommendations in this report, those kids will now be captured or those kinds of situations will now be captured and those kids will be helped.

Kids are so vulnerable. They are either afraid to speak up or they're protecting a buddy. That's just the nature of the world a child lives in. I would hope that we, as adults, can give them the kind of leadership to show them that it's okay to speak out about things that have very deep meaning to them, that are troubling them, that are making them afraid. If they can't get a response that says, "It's okay, we understand, we're going to look into it and we will bring you help," then the message gets sent out to other children that there really is no point in talking about the things that trouble you, especially when it comes to bullying—and now, even sexual assault in public schools, never mind in high schools.

I hope that through the recommendations in the report, we can go a little bit further and look at the kids who have already reported incidents we have not taken up and not been able to help. I hope there is an opportunity for all parties to work together in progressing the goals in this report, because this report and the issue it discusses really cross all political boundaries. It has no boundaries; this is about all of our kids.

It is my hope that we can stay in touch, not only with schools and educators but also with parents. I think it's one of those issues we really need to work on together. Nobody has cornered the market on all the good ideas for something like this. So I'm just offering my willingness, from the Progressive Conservative Party, to work in co-operation to make sure we get this right, that we can protect as many kids as possible, right from the beginning, and that we can work together on something like this.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mr. Rosario Marchese: New Democrats welcome this report as well and thank the group for putting this together.

This report obviously deals with verbal harassment against girls and sexual abuse against young women in our high schools, and with homophobic slurs as well. This is a serious subject, and yes, it's true that it's not easy to deal with.

They talked about some highlights of this report, and I have to admit that, yes, you need curriculum changes. But there was no talk about timelines. No one on the committee, nor the minister, talked about how long these curriculum changes will take. They do take time. I personally would like to have a sense of what that might be. Is it one year, two years, three years or four?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's under review now.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Okay, it's under review. It would have been nice to have timelines connected to this, because when we're talking about a subject as serious as this, we should have had that in advance rather than saying, "We're looking at it."

They also talked about working in partnership with agencies. The agencies I know, which must be the same agencies my friends know as well, are overworked, understaffed and seriously underpaid—they've been underpaid for 15 long years—and many of these people are part-time doing full-time work. So good luck to you, Minister and parliamentary assistant, as you reach out to your partners in government agencies to help with this very serious subject.

The highlights also talked about doing more data collection. I have to admit that I get tired of more data collection. We have a sense of the seriousness of the problem; I'm not sure how much more data will reveal to us. But we are going to do more data collection. God bless. I'm not a big fan of that.

1330

Yes, they talked about reporting and closing the gap in reporting—at least making things clear, and there will be legislation in terms of reporting mechanisms. Okay. But it doesn't inspire me, I have to admit, in terms of things that we could be doing rather quickly. For me, the thing we should be doing is hiring youth workers. The minister in the press conference talked about how difficult it was for her to talk to her young children, now adults, on certain matters, matters that—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: All of us.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Of course. I was about to say, "It's not just you; it's many." So we have a difficult time. A lot of these young people are not going to talk to their teachers and they're not going to talk to their parents. Who are they going to talk to? They have spoken to the youth workers that the Toronto board used to have. These are the people that gays and lesbians used to go to on a regular basis. Young men and women in trouble would go to them because they were the figures who had their respect and with whom they could share their intimate problems. We should be hiring them immediately. Social workers are people they would go to to speak to. They might argue, "Oh, we've hired some" or "lots"; I'm not sure. We need them back in the system.

I would say: Look, we keep going to the teacher to solve all of the problems we have with young kids. I don't know if you've noticed, but every time there's a problem we say, "The teacher should know this. It's common sense." The poor teacher has to be a policeman or -woman, has to be a psychologist, has to be a social worker, has to be a mother or father, a disciplinarian. Good God. We want teachers to do everything, every time there's a problem. They can't do it all. So I say, we need to go to the principal—and make sure that there's serious training for the principals. Maybe it's in this report; I didn't read it yet because it was just given to us. But we need principals to be the principal teachers of this particular issue and make sure we work with the school as best we can.

Finally, I say to you, Minister: You've got a big job. It's a ministerial responsibility and a government responsibility to make sure that the ads get out there and the education gets out there in a public way. If this is a big, serious issue and we want parents and everyone to be involved, we need government education and government ads. You should be spending a couple of bucks to deal with this, and not hope that the teachers are going to do this on their own on a topic as serious as this.

PETITIONS

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital is fully utilized; and

"Whereas Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was sized to serve a town of Oakville population of 130,000, and the current population is now" over "170,000; and

"Whereas the population of Oakville continues to grow as mandated by 'Places to Grow,' an act of the Ontario Legislature, and is projected to be 187,500" people "in 2012, the completion date for a new facility in the original time frame; and

"Whereas residents of the town of Oakville are entitled to the same quality of health care as all Ontarians; and

"Whereas hospital facilities in the surrounding area do not have capacity to absorb Oakville's overflow needs;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure the new Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital be completed under its original timelines without further delay."

I agree with this petition, I sign my name and I pass it to my page, Amanda.

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

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

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

I agree with this petition. I will send it with page Bradyn.

REGISTERED DISABILITY SAVINGS PLANS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the 2007 federal budget introduced the registered disability savings plan ... to enable parents and grandparents with a disabled child to save for their future; and

"Whereas, in order for RDSPs to work for families, the Ontario government needs to introduce changes to ensure families who put money away in an RDSP are not penalized by having the savings considered an asset when calculating other provincial assistance programs like the Ontario disability support plan ... ; and

"Whereas annual RDSP contributions will attract Canada Disability Savings Grants, depending on a family's income and amount contributed, to a maximum of \$70,000;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately adopt Bill 94 and provide families with the tools to make necessary investments in their child's long-term financial security."

I obviously support this petition since it's my own and will be pleased to give it to my page from Dufferin-Caledon, Jacqueline.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I have a petition from hundreds and hundreds of people. It's a very thick pile, as you can see.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas back-to-work legislation would interfere with the collective bargaining process at York University between the employer and CUPE 3903; and

"Whereas such legislation would set a precedent for future collective bargaining in the university sector at a precarious time; and

"Whereas universities are autonomous institutions within the provincial framework;

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

"Reject back-to-work legislation and do not interfere with the collective bargaining process or force York University CUPE members back to work."

I support this petition.

LUPUS

Mr. Kuldip Kular: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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

“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 agree with the petitioners, so I put my signature on it as well.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: First of all, I want to praise the work of some folks in the Weston Community Coalition, who have collected more than a thousand signatures for the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“The government of Ontario promised that alternative routes would be studied for the air-rail link. That same government has now proposed that no alternatives need be studied. If the responsible authority (GO Transit, Metrolinx or other) chooses Weston as the route;

“We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens who urge our leaders to act now to ensure:

“That the air-rail link be public transit with fares in keeping with current public transit options;

“That the air-rail link be below grade throughout Weston, to avoid closing any streets, including John Street and Denison Avenue East;

“That the air-rail link include stops at appropriate places along the route, to serve the communities it passes, including Weston; and

“That the air-rail link be electric.”

I support this petition and I give it to page Amanda.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise on behalf of the Weston Community Coalition, whose dedicated members have managed, in just a couple of weeks, to collect the support of more than a thousand local residents and Toronto city councillors, including my own, Gord Perks, for the following petition.

“The government of Ontario promised that alternative routes would be studied for the air-rail link. That same

government has now proposed that no alternatives need be studied. If the responsible authority (GO Transit, Metrolinx or other) chooses Weston as the route;

“We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens who urge our leaders to act now to ensure:

“That the air-rail link be public transit with fares in keeping with current public transit options;

“That the air-rail link be below grade throughout Weston, to avoid closing any streets, including John Street and Denison Avenue East;

“That the air-rail link include stops at appropriate places along the route, to serve the communities it passes, including Weston; and

“That the air-rail link be electric.”

I agree with this petition, Mr. Speaker, and I’m going to give it to Bradyn to present to you. I’m going to also affix my signature.

1340

LUPUS

Mr. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish you a merry Christmas, and the Clerk and the table officers all the best of the season.

I have a petition today from the Lupus Foundation of Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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

“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 agree with this petition, will affix my signature to it, and give it to page Sarah.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have a petition from the Balsam Hill-Horton North Women’s Institute.

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

“Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

“Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren.”

I support this petition and will give it to page Bradyn.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition:

“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 as above to emphasize the importance of children’s relationships with their parents and grandparents.”

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

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly from the good people of Milton.

“Whereas Milton District Hospital was designed to serve a population of 30,000 and the town of Milton is now home to more than 69,000 people and is still growing rapidly; and

“Whereas the town of Milton is the fastest-growing town in Canada and was forced into that rate of growth

by an act of the Ontario Legislature called ‘Places to Grow’; and

“Whereas the town of Milton is projected to have a population of 101,600 people in 2014, which is the earliest date an expansion could be completed; and

“Whereas the current Milton facility is too small to accommodate Milton’s explosive growth and parts of the hospital prohibit the integration of new outpatient clinics and diagnostic technologies;

“Therefore, be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure take the necessary steps to ensure timely approval and construction of the expansion to Milton District Hospital.”

I’m pleased to put my signature on this petition and pass it to my page, Amanda.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario.

“Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

“Whereas Tom Longboat was voted as the number one Canadian athlete of the 20th century by Maclean’s magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world’s best;

“Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

“Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada’s aboriginal people;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario.”

I support this petition and I affix my name to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It is signed by people from all over Mississauga, Burlington, Oakville and Etobicoke. 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’m pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Samiha to carry it for me.

BEER RETAILING AND DISTRIBUTION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: “Whereas the current system, practice and arrangement of retailing and distributing beer in the province of Ontario—and more specifically, the ‘near monopoly’ of The Beer Store—severely restricts the accessibility, convenience and choice for retail consumers of beer in Ontario; and

“Whereas The Beer Store ‘near monopoly’ is controlled by ‘for-profit, foreign-owned companies’ and these companies are not accountable to the people of Ontario, and these companies do not act in the best interests of the people of Ontario;

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

“That legislation be introduced that will permit the retailing and distribution of beer through alternative and additional grocery and supermarket retail channels that will fairly compete with The Beer Store, thereby allowing an accessible, convenient, safe, well-regulated and environmentally responsible retailing environment for beer to become established in the province of Ontario.”

I pass this to our page Amanda.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT ACT (FRUIT WINE), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PERMIS D’ALCOOL (VIN DE FRUITS)

Mr. Runciman moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 132, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act /
Projet de loi 132, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis
d’alcool.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I appreciate this opportunity. This is an issue that affects a business in my riding, but it has broader implications across the province. Certainly when we’re looking at the challenges facing the agricultural sector and facing our economy

more generally, this is a relatively modest initiative but one that can have a positive impact on helping many in the farming community, and others as well in terms of farmers’ markets. We’ve seen in some areas where farmers’ markets have declined in terms of the number of individuals participating and their ability to attract not only local consumers but people from surrounding areas, and perhaps more importantly, tourists.

This is an initiative—and I’ve narrowed it down. I know there have been a variety of proposals over the years which are broader in scope in terms of dealing with cider and with Ontario VQA wines. I have tried to make this as attractive as possible in terms of hoping that I will gain support from all sides of the House. Certainly the early indications are that that will indeed be the case. I know the current Minister of Agriculture, Ms. Dombrowsky, on a number of occasions has indicated her personal support for this kind of initiative.

1350

In my own riding of Leeds–Grenville, the fruit wine producer—and I have only one at this point in time—is Countryman’s Estate Winery, which is near Maynard, just northeast of Brockville. It’s operated by Gene and Marsha Countryman, salt-of-the earth people who are very enthused about this new business. They actually entered into the business only two years ago, in 2006, but it continues to be a struggle because of the limited retail opportunities available for the company and other limitations as well.

I want to be complimentary to the LCBO. They have, in my view, been very co-operative and very helpful. The Countryman’s products are now in something like 20 LCBO outlets in eastern Ontario. So I think that they have been making the effort to assist and see this relatively new industry grow and prosper.

There are problems, obviously, in terms of the margins at the LCBO, the taxation rates and so on. My colleague Mr. Hillier will be speaking in more detail to that in a few moments. The margins and the volumes out of the LCBO outlets are modest, to say the least. I know that Countryman’s sells more in a week out of their retail operation on-site than the LCBO would sell in a month. But, again, that’s an issue of marketing, where perhaps the government could play an increased role. That’s not an issue today, but that’s an aspect in terms of making more and more people aware of the products and encouraging them to sample the product and give feedback to the producers.

My legislation is modelled on the Nova Scotia legislation, but in reality the sale of fruit wines is something that’s occurring in a whole range of jurisdictions, not just Nova Scotia—New Brunswick, Quebec, New York state, Ohio, Iowa, New Jersey, just to name a few. I had a note here from New York state. They have an annual wine-tasting permit, and you can do tastings and sales at farmers’ markets, as long as that farmers’ market is a not-for-profit market. The producers register with the Department of Agriculture, and the permit is \$61 a year. So that’s just one ingredient, if you will.

I want to mention the supporters again—and I'll go over some of their notes here.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture just recently came out very strongly with giving their support for this initiative. Obviously, Farmers' Markets Ontario believes strongly in this as well.

The farmers' markets organization, in a letter dated October 7 of this year, indicated: "One of our FMO goals is to have fruit wines produced by small Ontario producers sold at farmers' markets. Our farmers need all the help we can provide."

In an earlier letter sent to Premier McGuinty from the same association, talking about the potential for farmers' markets, they stated: "We believe that Ontario's farmers' markets should act as business incubators and direct outlets for the best our communities have to offer—local farmers and producers bringing their fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, fish, dairy products, preserves, baked goods, etc.... We hope to see Ontario fruit wine producers selling their wine at Ontario farmers' markets."

From the government ranks, the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Mrs. Van Bommel, has been very strongly supportive of this initiative, and is on the record doing so. I want to quote Mrs. Van Bommel, because this is certainly a view that I support. She's talking about this proposal, saying, "The idea falls into line with OMAFRA's commitment to encourage rural economic development and promote innovative and unique branding and marketing opportunities for producers in the province." That's an excellent observation with respect to this initiative.

I have another letter here from Carl Kimmett, who's the president of the Central Ontario Viniculture Association. Mr. Kimmett is focusing primarily on the central Ontario area and talking about this being a showcase opportunity for farm producers: "Each local farmers' market provides a point of sale for economic return to the producer and in addition is a valued tourism showcase for the region. We know that all businesses benefit from the tourist dollars spent within each ... Ontario community."

In referencing the economic benefit, I wanted to comment on a study that was done by KPMHG recently—do I have that right?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: KPMG.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Okay. Let's get it straight. KPMG—and took a look at the economic implications. I'll put some of this on the record as well:

"The return to the Ontario economy for one litre of wine from France, Italy, South Africa, Chile, Australia etc. is considered to be \$0.67. The return to the Ontario economy for a litre of Ontario VQA wine is considered to be \$11.50. That is over 17 times the return to the Ontario economy per litre. The return to the economy of fruit wines is even greater as the fruit is more expensive."

Obviously, there is a significant economic potential and positive economic spinoff for the province by allowing and encouraging greater sales of this product produced in the province of Ontario.

To get back to some of the other people who are on the record in support of this initiative—and I've quoted

Ms. Van Bommel on the farmers' markets—we also have the member from Oakville, Mr. Flynn, who has written to the minister indicating his pursuit of this issue and his encouragement that this initiative go forward: "I feel that this is an issue that needs to be given proper attention and I support their initiative as this is important to our community." That's the member from Oakville.

Another organization, the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association, and Cathy Bartolic, who is the executive administrator—this is a letter to Minister Phillips indicating their support for the proposal put forward to allow the sale of wine at farmers' markets. That's the Ontario Farm Fresh Marketing Association.

The Ontario Berry Growers Association—another letter of support. They are indicating—this is signed by Lee Etherington, who's the president of that particular association—their strong support.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Great guy.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Mr. Leal, the member from Peterborough, knows the gentleman, and perhaps he'll speak to that a little later on. He is strongly supporting "the initiative"—in his association—"to sell Ontario wines at farmers' markets."

"For those growers who have already invested in this value-added process, this is a great opportunity to enhance and improve this developing industry. Ontario berry growers are always looking at alternative ways of marketing locally produced fruit and this would help expand the fruit wine industry."

"This initiative will not only benefit those involved in the production of fruit and grape wines but will also enhance the farmers' markets where they are sold."

The final endorsement, if you will, that I'll put on the record is from the Minister of Agriculture herself. In a letter to Bert Andrews, who's from Andrews' Scenic Acres—

Interjection: He's here.

1400

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I gather he's here today in the gallery. Welcome, Mr. Andrews.

This is a letter to Mr. Andrews, of Andrews' Scenic Acres, indicating that the minister is very much supportive of the Fruit Wines of Ontario proposal. She says: "I will continue to voice my support for this idea with my cabinet colleagues and the potential it has to enhance business opportunities for small wineries, farmers' markets and rural companies."

I look forward to additional comments from other members.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: As the member from Leeds—Grenville said, his bill will allow manufacturers of fruit wine to sell fruit wine at farmers' markets. Frankly—and this is unusual for me—I applaud the member from Leeds—Grenville for his advocacy.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You always do.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: No, no. We disagree. But when he comes forward promoting Ontario products, reducing the

amount of goods that are transported from outside the province, putting people to work—all the good things that I think need to be recognized—then I have to say, “Member from Leeds–Grenville, I’m glad you’re advocating for Ontario’s fruit wines.”

As he has said, there are fruit wine growers across the province. In Winona, Puddicombe Estate Winery’s peach fruit wine—those of you who have enjoyed it will know it is a good product; this is not a commercial plug—in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Southbrook winery’s blueberry fruit wine, and Countryman’s Estate strawberry icewine, which Mr. Runciman was talking about. There are very high-quality products being made in this province; no question about it. And the more that is made in this province and the less that is imported, the better for the environment and for our economy.

I mentioned products by name because sometimes when you talk about products in a very general, abstract way, you don’t get a sense of the individual contribution to our economy as a whole. I agree with the member that we need to be encouraging not just Ontarians but anyone in North America who is interested, but certainly Ontarians, to buy VQA wines made with Ontario grapes or other fruits, especially as we get into the holiday season.

Having talked about the jobs, supporting communities and also this being a green choice, I have to also agree there is a concern that there should be a lot more exposure for Ontario wines and Ontario fruit wines in this province. The small wineries get on the LCBO shelves but often are not noticed in the way they should be. I was surprised by the quote from the member from Leeds–Grenville saying that Countryman’s Estate Winery sold more out of its own operation than is sold out of LCBO outlets. In fact, our products should be featured and marketed prominently.

The LCBO is one of the largest single purchasers of wine, spirits and alcohol, and it’s good at what it does. Frankly, it has become an awful lot more innovative in the last few years than it was in the past, and I think that people see it that way. When I talk to neighbours or friends, they see the LCBO as well run, providing a good service, a place they can depend on and, frankly, that is open extraordinarily long hours—very long hours.

When you look at customer satisfaction surveys, eight out of 10 customers support the LCBO and are satisfied with the service. Less than 1% say they’re not satisfied with the LCBO.

Having given all the positives, I have to say what my concerns are.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Ooh.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Now, now, member not sitting in your chair, restrain yourself.

Laughter.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I wanted to see what Rosario’s felt like.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, I’m glad you’re venturing around the chamber, seeing what it’s like from different vantages.

Interjection: It’s not as good as over here.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It’s not as good as over there? It’s a good seat.

I am concerned about initiatives that take responsibilities away from the LCBO, and certainly concerned that what has been brought forward as a very positive initiative to promote the sale of Ontario fruit wines could also be seen as an opening to further privatize the sale of spirits, wine and liquor in this province, and I have great concern with that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: There’s the bugaboo.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: That’s what I have great concern with, because I think privatization is a problem in terms of the revenue that comes in to this government. Certainly everyone in this House is well aware of the constraints we face in terms of revenue.

I have tremendous confidence that the LCBO will consistently and responsibly enforce the laws around the sale of liquor to minors. I cast no aspersions on those who would sell at farmers’ markets, but the bigger the private sector becomes, the more there’s a chance you will have operators who will not be as responsible, who may be pressed financially, who may decide, “Well, what the heck. I’ll just sell to these people one time, even though they’re clearly not of age.” I’m concerned that even though there are good features in what is being brought forward by the member from Leeds–Grenville—certainly the promotion of Ontario agricultural products is a worthy objective—I’m very concerned about going down the road of privatization.

There are now 200 agency or private stores selling liquor in Ontario, and the number doubled from 86 to 199 between 1996 and 2006. Again, I think we have done well in this province with the crown agency, the LCBO. It has brought in revenue, it has functioned well and it’s serving the public well. To move in this way undermines that agency, which I think we should be supporting and maintaining in public hands. When we have debates on this floor about the well-being of the Ontario government revenue picture, no one advocates reducing our revenue. We need the revenue, and frankly, we’re going to face some stormy waters in the next few years and we may well see much less revenue. So I can’t support efforts that would reduce the scope of the LCBO and reduce the revenue coming in to this jurisdiction.

We need to go to the LCBO and make sure they have a very clear mandate to put more emphasis on small Ontario wineries. We should be using their expertise, their leverage, their market reach to further promote the sale of Ontario products. That would be extraordinarily useful in Ontario, and would allow us not to get into this whole grey area of privatization but, clearly within public hands, promote products made in this province by people who deserve to be supported.

In the past we’ve suggested that the LCBO set up Ontario VQA wine booths: smaller retail outlets, especially in areas with significant tourism. That was a good proposal. It’s still a good proposal. Along the same lines, it might make sense for the LCBO to set up small booths to sell local fruit wines at farmers’ markets, so that Mr.

Runciman's goal would be achieved—the availability of those wines at farmers' markets—and the concerns of others around privatization and socially responsible sale of alcohol are met at the same time. I have no argument with the idea that we should be promoting Ontario products, and I would say that would be the perspective around this House.

Let's have the LCBO come in. Let's have the government sit down with them, point out to them the advantage of growing the domestic product, and quite clearly tell them, "We want you to put an emphasis here. You need to be educating people about the multitude of advantages to buying Ontario, to buying local products," and move from there. So let's have the LCBO take his idea forward.

We don't support privatization, so we won't be supporting the bill. But we would be very open to a discussion on leveraging the LCBO's business, its marketing approach and its knowledge to better develop an Ontario wine industry. It might make sense if there was an all-party review or committee that could take a closer look at it. I hope the member from Leeds–Grenville will continue moving forward with the idea, and I hope he will modify it so that he can get a consensus around this chamber that would support expanding our domestic industry.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Just to add to what was said by the member for Toronto–Danforth—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Sorry, you're not recognized by the Chair. We're going in rotation. The honourable member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

1410

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to have a few minutes to speak about Bill 132, the bill of the member for Leeds–Grenville, Mr. Runciman. I must say I'm also probably privileged because it might be the last time I refer to the member from Leeds–Grenville. If we look, it might be called by some other prefix. Anyway, it's a pleasure to be here today.

Let me just say up front that I personally will be supporting this bill because I think it's very important that, as we move forward in these challenging times, truly world-challenging times, the agricultural industry move at the same pace as other industries. It's probably no news to you or to any member of this House that the good farmers of Ontario have had sort of a repeating of what they've done best in the past: plant the seed, grow the seed and harvest the seed. But as we move forward, those things are not as stable anymore. I'm delighted to see that some of them are looking to the niche markets where we can make some inroads. Certainly what the member from Leeds–Grenville has brought forward makes a lot of sense to support.

I going to probably be repeating some of the things that the member has already mentioned, but they're worth repeating. Obviously, the fruit and wines of On-

tario—I've personally been lobbied both as the member of Northumberland–Quinte West but also in my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. We know the good folks of Farmers' Markets Ontario, and I must say my good friend Bob Chorney, the president or chair—I'm not sure what his title is—has been a very good neighbour of mine for a number of years. He has been, in my years, on a number of occasions, trying to tell us that this is the right direction to go. It's always good to hear about those things that are happening in the ground. I know the good work that Farmers' Markets Ontario has done by the way they have grown over a number of years. I'm going to be talking about farmers' markets a little bit as well later on. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has also endorsed the initiative to better market fruit wines to make them more available.

Just one little bit of caution: As I said, although I'm going to be supporting it, I look forward to going to committee to try to talk about some of the different issues, but I think at the end of the line we need to find a balance between renewed opportunities and social responsibilities. I know that the good people of Ontario take social responsibility very, very seriously. I am hopeful that the bill passes today, is able to be referred to committee, and that we have those discussions to fine-tune it. Whether it's in the pilot project—as you know, the minister has advocated a number of times that it's something she'd certainly like to see, so that we can move forward and basically see what happens. We don't want to pre-determine.

Although some folks haven't heard about this industry, and it's typically not a big industry, in 2007—we know roughly from the records we have that there have been about 20 of these particular industries across the province of Ontario. They have sold in excess of 200,000 litres of fruit wine and about \$3 million worth of business between 2007-08. So, although in the big scheme of things it's a small industry, big things start small, and if they're managed right, they will grow into bigger issues.

Here are just a couple of the reasons why I'm supportive of this in the general sense. It goes along the lines that we as a government, for the last four or five years, have been able to nurture this province of Ontario with the investments that we have made. I think this really fits into the mix. The fact that we'll be investing some \$56 million over the next four years to promote locally grown, locally produced—and how more appropriate is it that this will fit into that equation?

I can tell you, in my own riding, Northumberland–Quinte West, I do visit, maybe not often enough, those farmers' markets or those fruit stands. I can tell you that Buy Ontario, buy local, is really catching on.

I guess to me what's more interesting—I'll just relate a story to you—three years ago, a No Frills store in my riding, my hometown, was selling California fresh corn in season when there was a field less than a kilometre away. This year, that No Frills carried Ontario corn.

I wish the member success. I know I look forward to helping him drive this piece of legislation, with all those

things that may need to be adjusted to make sure that we keep the social fabric that we as Ontarians believe we should keep, but also to give a helping hand to that industry that really needs to be nurtured and needs the help.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to congratulate my colleague from Leeds–Grenville for introducing this bill. I also want to congratulate the members on the opposite side who are supportive of this bill. I think this is a significant and unique piece of legislation for rural Ontario and our economy in rural Ontario.

Just to follow up on some of the comments that I've heard about the small size of Ontario's fruit wine industry, it is small, but a number of years ago, Ontario's wine industry was very small as well. It would have remained small without Ontario removing some of those restrictions to its market. That's indeed what this bill starts doing as well for Ontario's fruit wines. It starts removing the obstacles and the obstructions, to allow this infant industry to grow and grow.

We all know that rural Ontario's economy is facing difficulties, facing hurdles and facing troubles. We in this House have an obligation to do what we can to improve that environment. I'm hoping that this bill does get approved, and when it goes to committee, we have to look at a few of the other things that are preventing Ontario's fruit wine industry from being significant and prosperous.

One of them is the cost of doing business with the LCBO. We've recognized this with VQA and have removed these hurdles. But right now, for Ontario fruit wineries, for direct sales, they have to pay 58% of the gross revenues to the LCBO. This is the same margin that they have to pay for fruit wines that are sold within the LCBO.

I think we can all recognize—just imagine, 58% of your gross revenue has to be turned over to an agency which is really doing very little in this regard. One might be able to justify a 58% margin for the LCBO on the retail shelves, but it cannot be justified on the direct sale. So I would really like to see in the committee that we look at ways to eliminate, or at least significantly reduce, that margin payment to the LCBO on direct sale.

Also, further to the comments of the member from Toronto–Danforth, who talked about the LCBO promoting Ontario fruit wines, there are significant delays. Right now, it's typically six months to a year for an Ontario fruit wine to make it through the hurdles to get onto the LCBO shelves, or to be recognized as a product that is legitimate and can be sold directly to restaurants and farmers' markets if this bill gets passed.

I'm really proud to support this bill. I'm very appreciative, and I know many others are appreciative of the member from Leeds–Grenville for bringing this bill forward. I also want to extend a thank you to Bert Andrews for being here today as well. I know there are many others who would like to be here from Ontario's fruit wine industry.

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Let's hope that we will take down these obstacles and allow these niche markets throughout rural Ontario—not just fruit wines, but increase these niche markets and add more value to rural Ontario and more value to Ontario.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Just to add to my esteemed colleague from Toronto–Danforth, a few points that he didn't have time to get to.

Number one, I want to point out that certainly the LCBO in Ontario is an incredibly popular institution. Not only is it a money-maker for the folk of Ontario, but eight out of 10 Ontarians appreciate the fact that we do, as a community, own the LCBO. Importantly, extremely importantly, it's a source of good jobs. When we've lost over 250,000 good jobs in the province of Ontario, it's nice to know that, at least in this one sector of the retail market, you can be paid a living wage to work in a retail store, and that's the LCBO.

In fact, just yesterday, on the international day for human rights, OPSEU started a campaign that is very much in keeping with my own campaign for employment standards, equal pay for equal work. So I want to give the nod to OPSEU and that incredible campaign that will be ongoing. As you go to the LCBO before the holiday season or during the holiday season and you see them, you will know that they are fighting for equal pay for equal work; that is, if you're doing the same job, whether part-time or temporary or contract, you should be paid the same amount of money, on an hourly basis, as those doing a full-time job. This is what the United Nations is calling for, after all, and we are in breach of that human right in Ontario—and in Canada, I might point out. Not only are they fighting for everybody's right to equal pay for equal work, but they are also doing their own campaign. So let them know how much you appreciate them in this busy season.

Unfortunately, we will not be able to support this, despite the fact that we in the New Democratic Party, I think to a person, all really enjoy and love fruit wine and will, I'm sure, be imbibing some of it over the holidays. We would like to see the LCBO have a hand in that so that these jobs continue to be good jobs wherever they are, whether they're by a country road or in the centre of an urban setting, and that the kiosks selling and promoting hopefully what is grown and made in Ontario, our wines, are handled by employees who have the dignity of organized labour, the dignity of a union job. We've seen far too many of those jobs taken away in the last five years under the McGuinty government and seen far too many of those jobs taken away over the last 10 years or so from the LCBO itself in the ongoing privatization by stealth.

So, unfortunately, to the member from Leeds–Grenville, we won't be supporting this, but we do appreciate the concern and we will continue to drink fruit wine.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: I want to say at the outset that I'll be supporting Bill 132, a bill whose time has clearly come. The member from Leeds–Grenville talked about a small community in his riding, and I want to say, just for the record, that about 14 months ago I had the opportunity to be in another small community in his riding, the community of Athens. I want to thank them for the very warm reception that I had that day in the local community hall. I really appreciated the sort of east-central Ontario, United Empire Loyalist work ethic and their contribution to our province.

This is a very important bill from a wide variety of perspectives. My colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West talked about his good friend Bob Chorney. I subscribe to the Eastern Ontario Farmers Forum, which I think is a very good bible to know what is going on in rural eastern Ontario, and it quotes Mr. Chorney in an article; he's from Brighton, Mr. Rinaldi's neighbour. "There are about 145 farmers' markets in the province of Ontario, he said. 'In Ontario, market sales are growing 5% a year. It's a growth industry,'" and he puts it in the perspective of some dollar figures. "Sales from Ontario farmers' markets now exceed \$700 million annually, with an economic impact of some \$2 billion.... 'We have over one million regular shoppers,'" who go to farmers' markets.

I know in my own case, I buy eggs every Saturday morning at the Peterborough farmers' market from my good friend Joyce Millar, who has an egg operation in beautiful Keene, Ontario.

Mr. Runciman also mentioned Lee Etherington. I know Lee very well. His neighbour is the McLean Berry Farm, which has developed what they call an everbearing strawberry, available at the end of August, in September and, indeed, October.

I do have a fruit winery in the riding of Peterborough—actually, I share it with the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock—Mr. John Rufa, who operates Kawartha winery in beautiful Buckhorn, Ontario. John is a very interesting individual. He had a very distinguished career as a teacher in the GTA. He wanted to retire to another community, and he chose our area of the province. One of the things that he established was the Kawartha winery, which is a very successful operation. He is looking for an opportunity to sell his product on a wider basis, and the bill that has been brought forward by my colleague from Leeds–Grenville this afternoon will certainly be very, very helpful in that area.

I'm also pleased that the vice-president of the Ontario Viniculture Association, Larry Paterson, happens to be from Peterborough. Mr. Paterson had a very distinguished career with the LCBO in the Peterborough area. He was a manager of several retail operations. Post-retirement, he has taken a real interest in promoting wines that are produced from other fruits in the province of Ontario. I had a chance to chat with him this morning. I indicated that I would be speaking this afternoon in support of the bill from my colleague from Leeds–Grenville, and he indicated to me that as of June 2008,

about 50 operators have joined the Ontario Viniculture Association. They've put together a very important industry umbrella group to further their objectives, in order to have the opportunity to showcase their products on a wider basis within the organizational structure of the LCBO and indeed through farmers' markets. In fact, the vice-president comes from Peterborough, and the treasurer, Dr. Liang Liu, also comes from Peterborough. So there's a real interest in this issue—and I should mention Carl Kimmett. He resides in Lindsay, Ontario. So this has been a very, very important topic in our area.

Mr. Paterson, as a former employee of the LCBO, was certainly a great promoter of VQA. He's looking for a way for us to put a special designation on fruit wines in the province of Ontario—product that would perhaps bear the Foodland Ontario label—so that the consumer will know exactly the kind of quality product they may be purchasing through the operation of farmers' markets in the province of Ontario. It may be that we will put another special designation on these products, such as "country wine." So, again, the consumer will know exactly the kind of high-quality product that they may be purchasing.

This is a wonderful way to extend sales in the province of Ontario and to generate revenue for our agricultural community, which has gone through a number of challenges over the last few years. I really applaud the member from Leeds–Grenville for bringing this bill forward.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased today to rise to speak in support of Bill 132. The sale of fruit wine in farmers' markets across Ontario would be a welcome addition to these markets and would proudly display one of the many homegrown goods Ontario has to offer. I frequent the farmers' markets in my riding of Dufferin–Caledon and consider this a worthwhile proposal.

Farmers' markets are known for selling locally grown, fresh produce. Farmers' markets are where communities come together to meet, mingle and exchange stories. People of all ages come to inspect the local goods and buy direct from the grower. For many families, my own included, visiting a farmers' market is a Saturday morning tradition.

Shopping at farmers' markets supports a centuries-old way of life, the family farm. They represent hard-working family operations across Ontario and preserve an important part of Ontario's heritage.

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Shopping at a farmers' market is great for the economy of the community as well. For every dollar spent at the market, another two dollars ripple through the provincial economy. In Ontario alone, sales at farmers' markets total almost \$600 million, leading to an economic impact of \$1.8 billion. Allowing fruit wines to be sold in Ontario farmers' markets would be a new business opportunity for small wineries in communities across the province. Not only would this stimulate the sustainability and growth of small businesses in Ontario, but the

attraction of wine sales would increase traffic at farmers' markets.

One hundred per cent of the fruit used to produce fruit wines must be grown in Ontario. Being able to sell their Ontario wines at the farmers' market will give these producers another opportunity to market their goods. Selling wines in farmers' markets across Ontario would give small business owners the advantage they need in these challenging economic times.

While selling their wine through the LCBO is great publicity and access to Ontario fruit wines, by the time you add taxes, delivery costs and the LCBO's cut, there isn't much profit for small wineries. By allowing fruit wines to be sold directly in farmers' markets, we would be assisting these small businesses.

In my own riding of Dufferin-Caledon, Downey's Estate Winery has been owned and operated by the Downey family since 1920. Their winery was established in 2001 and within one year began to enjoy remarkable acclaim from their wide variety of delicious fruit wines. In their first year alone, they captured 11 top awards at the Canadian International Wine Challenge at the Toronto Wine and Cheese Show. John Downey teamed up with his three sons, pooled their talents and created a world-class production and retail facility for their winery. The whole family works on the farm and they have also hired an experienced winemaker with an expertise in fruit wines. They wanted to get it right the first time and, obviously, after winning top honours after just one year, they certainly did it right.

We have a lot to be proud of in the fruit wine industry. Last year, Downey's Estate Winery won the coveted fruit wine of the year prize at the annual Canadian Wine Awards. This marks the second time Downey's from Caledon won this award. The winning wine was the raspberry dessert wine. It received the only gold medal in the fruit wine category. John Downey, president of Downey's Estate Winery, says, "We grow the raspberries here on the farm, hand-harvest only the best variety for the wine, and we ferment and bottle everything on-site." We can't find a much purer Ontario product than that.

For two years, Farmers' Markets Ontario has been making representations to Ontario government officials in an attempt to set up a pilot project where fruit wine could be sold at a few farmers' markets. Although several cabinet ministers and MPPs have shown support for the sales of fruit wines in farmers' markets, it wasn't until the honourable member from Leeds-Grenville brought forward Bill 132 that we've had an opportunity to debate it.

I'm pleased to support the passage of Bill 132. I know it would open up markets for small wineries to sell their products outside of their own wineries, and I support the great work in this excellent proposal from the wise and generous member from Leeds-Grenville.

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to begin my remarks by thanking the member from Leeds-Grenville for introducing Bill 132, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act.

This bill is intended to permit the sale of fruit wines at farmers' markets, as we know. I believe this is an idea worthy of support.

It's an issue of fairness. According to an October 21, 2007, Toronto Star article written by Catherine Porter, grape wineries receive a 30% rebate for selling VQA wines to the LCBO; fruit wineries, according to the article, don't. VQA producers can sell directly to restaurants without facing fees from the LCBO. Fruit wineries cannot, however, even though they pay the same licensing fees.

In the same article, Jim Warren, the executive director of Fruit Wines of Ontario, is quoted as saying, "Fruit wineries are working at a competitive disadvantage.... Since 1993, we've had many wineries open with talented, educated people making world-class fruit wines, and we can't seem to get the government to understand that."

Because of this uncompetitive playing field, I would suggest that fruit wineries need other marketing venues, including Ontario's seasonal farmers' markets.

This week, I received a letter of support for this bill from Rick Bonnette, the mayor of the town of Halton Hills. In fact, Halton Hills council more than two years ago, passed a resolution in favour of allowing fruit wines to be sold at farmers' markets. I hope that government members will add their voices and their votes in support of Bill 132.

In a letter of July 16, 2008, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs wrote the following: "I understand the need for the government to consider equal treatment for all of Ontario's artisanal winemakers when new policies and programs are developed. I can also assure you that the Ontario government supports all artisanal winemakers in the province. I will continue to advocate on behalf of the Ontario fruit wine industry in discussions with my cabinet colleagues." So said Leona Dombrowsky.

And in a letter dated August 30, 2007, just before the provincial election, the minister was even more definitive in her support. "I can assure you," she wrote, "that I am still supportive of the Fruit Wines of Ontario proposal, starting with pilot projects for the sale of Ontario fruit wines at farmers' markets." She went on to say, "I will ... voice my support for this idea to my cabinet colleagues."

Based on these past commitments by the minister, it would appear that fruit wine producers have reason to hope this bill will have her support.

In my own riding of Wellington-Halton Hills, the Georgetown farmers' market operates on Saturday mornings in the summer on the main street in Georgetown. It operates from June through to October, and I have enjoyed going to this fabulous farmers' market many, many times. I know that similar farmers' markets exist in many other communities across this province.

I'm pleased to recognize Bert Andrews, who is here today in the members' gallery, for his tremendous and persistent advocacy for the sale and fair treatment of Ontario fruit wines. It has been a pleasure to work with him. Mr. Andrews is a farm leader in Halton county. He is active within the federation of agriculture, and he and

his wife, Lorraine, operate Andrews' Scenic Acres, a very successful farm business in Halton Hills, along with the Scotch Block Winery.

I've also known another fruit winery owner in my riding for many years, Mrs. Gerry Trochta, and she owns Cox Creek Cellars Inc. Estate Winery, again located in Halton Hills, just north of Guelph on Highway 6. They're celebrating their 10th anniversary this week, and they have much to be proud of.

I would encourage, in closing, all members to support Bill 132, and thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Leeds–Grenville has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I want to thank all of my legislative colleagues who participated in the debate. They're very much appreciated. I'm somewhat disappointed in the member for Toronto–Danforth from the NDP, though. He kind of led us down the garden path by initially indicating he was very supportive and then, regrettably, the Christmas spirit was set aside and rigid ideology took over. Bah, humbug.

In any event, this is a modest proposal. I certainly appreciate the input from government members and my own colleagues. The parliamentary assistant, Mr. Rinaldi, talked about a pilot project, and we know that has been talked about for some time. If that is a compromise going forward, I would hope that government members would look at doing pilots on a regional basis. We have a relatively small number of producers in the province, and they all should have the opportunity to participate in pilot programs that are reachable in terms of getting their products to market.

There's no question there are more things to do. This is not a panacea. We talked about the need for marketing, the taxation issues, the direct delivery costs that they're faced with, but this is a modest, small step forward.

I know there are many challenges facing producers. I know for the individual family in my riding, it's a tough go. This is a tough economy that anyone in business is operating in today, so any improvement we can make through legislative initiatives in this House, on a fast-track basis, will be helpful to this one segment of the rural economy.

I want to thank all members for participating, and I certainly very strongly encourage your support in the vote to occur later today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): For those people watching in the galleries and those at home, we will vote on this item in approximately 100 minutes.

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA COMMISSION DE L'ÉNERGIE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Ramsay moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 131, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 with respect to retailers of electricity and gas marketers / Projet de loi 131, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario à l'égard des détaillants d'électricité et des agents de commercialisation de gaz.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Ramsay, pursuant to standing order 98, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

1440

Mr. David Ramsay: I'm very pleased to stand in my place today to enter second reading debate of my private member's bill, Bill 131. It's a bill like this and an issue like this that remind me, after all these years, why I got elected to this place in the first place, and that was to help people. Working with my staff in the constituency office in August and September, I began to realize how big a problem energy retailers are causing in towns in my riding; specifically, Kirkland Lake and Temiskaming Shores. I have been aware of the issue in the past and have staff working on it, but the caseload seems to have grown over the years.

This is also reflected on the Ontario Energy Board website, which shows the number of complaints up exponentially over the years. In 2005, there were approximately 1,000 complaints lodged through the Ontario Energy Board, and it's almost at 5,000 for the first three quarters of this year. So we think we're going to get to about 5,000 complaints this year. It's really growing.

What is happening here is that very high pressure salespeople are coming to people's doors, preying on vulnerable people, coercing them into signing contracts for energy, and sometimes multiple contracts over weeks of time, causing penalty fees, resulting in people getting into financial hardship and sometimes having their power lost.

In one case in my riding, the person was so stressed because the bill collectors and collection agencies were after her because of the debts that were accruing that she was hospitalized and lost her children. The children's aid society had to take her children away from her, because she was no longer in a position to take care of them.

I'm here today to present a bill and talk about some of the ideas I brought forward in this bill, but also to talk about some of the ideas I have learned from some of my colleagues in the House and from some energy associations since then. I hope that through today's debate, we accept the bill as it is written, but with the notion that we can also work together to make it better. Hopefully, it will get passed and referred to committee, and in the new year we can contemplate some additional ideas that I'd like to also talk about today.

First off, what I would like to do is thank my staff, who have worked very hard, not only on these issues, but they have helped me form this legislation. Lyn and Tanya, from Kirkland Lake, are in the gallery today, as is Caroline from my New Liskeard office. Shelly and Nicky from my New Liskeard office also helped me with this. Michael, from my office, and Meghan, my Leg intern,

who is in the gallery today, have also helped me with this. Also, Tara, our legislative counsel here at the Legislative Assembly, has helped me with all the legal nuances to make this bill a reality. I thank them very much for their assistance in developing this bill.

What I found, as I mentioned before, is that many vulnerable people have been really impacted by this. What happens is that many people on disability pension or Ontario Works are basically led to believe they can get cheaper electricity or natural gas prices if they sign these contracts. Invariably, what happens is that they already have a contract with somebody else, and this generates a penalty fee. It's not until two or three months down the road that they get their utility bill and see they are now paying much more for the energy supply they've purchased, but they've also got a bill for maybe \$830 coming at them for a penalty fee for cancelling the contract they were in.

I had one 92-year-old gentleman in Kirkland Lake who signed three different contracts in a six-week period last summer. What happens is that people get fooled and get coerced. In some cases, folks who come to the door misrepresent who they are. They will say they're from the utility company, and say, "I have to check your meter. I have to check your bill. I'm here to make sure we can save you money." Invariably, except maybe for somebody who was very lucky and signed a natural gas contract a couple years ago, before prices really escalated—maybe they did save money, but I've never seen anybody save money on electricity. Invariably, all they're talking about is the raw cost of the power and not about the total bill. So people think that maybe they're going to get electricity for 8.3 cents or 9.8 cents, but that's just for the raw power and not the distribution cost they would pay to the utility. So people get fooled and get coerced.

Sometimes people come to a door where maybe a trustee is helping that person manage their bills and their finances. They get that widower, who maybe isn't really capable of managing her financial situation, to sign and then the trustee gets this bill and wonders, "What happened here? Why is my client paying double for her electricity?" She got fooled at the door, thinking she was doing a good thing by signing on to this contract. A lot of people are being hurt, not only socially but financially.

Also, it comes back onto the government from time to time, because many of these people on ODSP or Ontario Works come back to our district social service board and say, "I can't pay these bills. I'm falling further and further behind," or, "You've got to give me money now for a deposit for Ontario Hydro"—or Toronto Hydro—"because I need to get my power back. Now they ask me for a deposit and I've got to come up with that." It's very disconcerting, it's stressful on people, and it puts them in danger if they lose their heat or their power. So we need to tighten up what happens at the door.

I've made some proposals in my bill that I think would be a start, and as I said, I'd like to talk about some additional ideas that I've picked up from different people since I've introduced this bill.

Of the five things that I'm looking at in this bill, number one is to stop the use of cheque cashing through mail solicitation that would automatically generate a new contract. Vulnerable people see a cheque in their name, and they're obviously very tempted to cash that cheque. And you'd have to look very carefully at the fine print to see that upon cashing of this cheque, you have re-entered into or entered into an energy contract. To me, that's just too generous baiting to people who might not understand what they're getting into by having that inducement, that enticement, waved in front of their face like that. I think that needs to be banned outright.

As I talked about, we need to make sure that the salespeople who deal with the folks in the home deal with the person whose name is on the utility bill. I've given one example where a trustee is taking care of the financial matters for the person. But also, in the way life goes, in partnerships and in marriages, people make social arrangements between themselves about who will take care of the bills. There might be very good reasons for that, and so it might be the case that the wife takes care of the bill for whatever reason.

But the retailer comes in here and the husband signs up, and because he hasn't been dealing with these bills, he doesn't understand what the costs are and has now entered into a contract that may be charging that family twice as much as what they used to pay. For many reasons, households determine who the designated person is to handle finances. I think we should respect that family decision, and so only talk to that person who is in charge of those financial arrangements.

One of the main pieces of this bill, an idea that I'd come up with and an idea that I'm certainly willing to debate down the road, is what I call a reaffirmation letter. Today, what happens is that there is a reaffirmation phone call from the energy company back to the customer, and that is taped. It's to confirm that the customer understood what he or she was doing upon entering into the contract.

I thought that wasn't really good enough, especially the way the contracts were written up, that they weren't clear and they weren't transparent. So an idea that I came up with is that a reaffirmation letter had to go back to the potential customer after the 10-day cooling-off period. That reaffirmation letter had to speak clearly as to what the cost of the energy would be in the proper units upon entering the new contract; what you're paying today; what the penalty fee would be, if any, if you're into an existing contract; and what would be the cost of the energy if you were just to buy it directly from the distributor or, as we used to call it, the utility, such as Toronto Hydro, Ontario Hydro or one of the gas companies. That's how that would work.

The other thing that I've talked about is that when you see your bill that you would get from the distributor, if you purchased from one of these retailers, you don't see the amount in kilowatt hours; you just see a cash amount. What we've purposely done here as a government, to drive conservation, is to have a two-price system so that

people can get their electricity at five cents a kilowatt hour for a base amount and then pay 5.9 cents for an amount over about 400 kilowatt hours a month. This needs to be spelled out in the contract so that people can see what they're paying versus the amount they're using, so that we can still continue to drive conservation.

The other thing is that we've got to, I think, stop the use of cancellation fees when people move. We've had many cases when people, for family reasons, either a death in the family or a family separation, are now having to move out of that household—if you have an account with Ontario Hydro, or Hydro One, you finish up your bill and that's it. The bill doesn't follow you when you sign up with somebody else wherever you relocate. We've even had instances where a person has moved to a rental premises and they now get their utilities supplied through their rent. They're not directly purchasing their energy needs, and yet they are being followed with a penalty fee by that company because they're no longer buying the natural gas or the electricity from this supplier. That has to be stopped too. Sometimes we get people out of this, but it takes three or four months, and they've been paying all these bills and penalty fees, and we think this has to stop.

1450

In the remaining time that I have, I'd like to go over some of the new suggestions that have been brought forward. I did meet with the Ontario Energy Association and, as an association, they're very concerned about the reputation of this industry. There are still a lot of rogue companies out there causing these complaints. As an association, with the good players there, they want to fix up this industry, and rightfully so. I've seen some of the new contracts that some of the companies are bringing forward, and they're very transparent and they state right upfront that I am entering into this contract because of price stability and not necessarily savings. That's something that does need to be spelled out and, like a fixed-rate mortgage, some people might choose to have a stable energy bill, though we have to point out that the so-called Ontario benefit, or global adjustment, as we call it in government, is always going to be passed on to people and that's not being spelled out at the door either by the salespeople, so that has to happen. We have to stop what we call the overwriting of these contracts, so that if a salesperson comes to the door and sees you're with one company, they leave, and so we stop all this cancellation of contracts.

I'm going to conclude now. I look forward to debate in this House and hearing new ideas that we might have to make this legislation better.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to stand here on Bill 131 today. I want to begin by thanking the member for—is it Timiskaming—Cochrane?

Mr. David Ramsay: Yes, sir.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —bringing this bill forward. This is clearly an issue that I would suggest most mem-

bers, if not all members of this House, have had some experience in dealing with from constituents who have felt that they were not properly informed of their rights and/or delivered what they were expected they were getting from energy retailers working within the neighbourhoods they serve.

I also want to commend the member and we're very appreciative of the fact that he has reached out, not only to us, but to members of the third party, and also to industry representatives like the Ontario Energy Association, on ways that we can improve upon the bill as it is now tabled. It is our intention to support the bill as tabled. We've certainly had discussions, and I know the member began getting into some of those. He has clearly indicated to us that there are ways and there are suggestions that, if implemented, would actually improve the bill as written today and actually offer more protection for consumers. We do appreciate the member's willingness to work together. I don't know if it's just that the bill has been tabled at a time that's so close to Christmas and he's feeling charitable, but I actually do suspect that it's part of his nature. He wants to make sure that at the end of the day what consumers are receiving is the best possible protection; also respecting the needs of the industry in order to allow them to operate, but respectfully demanding that the industry operate differently than it has operated in the past, and certainly we all have examples to indicate where those things have gone awry.

The member talked about some of those changes, but he didn't quite get—we don't get enough time in here sometimes, Mr. Speaker. I know you would probably disagree when I'm talking; that probably we should get less. There are a couple of changes that I think are very, very important that the member has certainly agreed to deal with as this goes to committee. The Ontario Energy Board, in 2007, brought in the provision allowing one company to overwrite the contract of another. Essentially what that did, it put consumers in a bind because some of them believed—and why wouldn't they?—that if they signed a contract with company B, the contract that existed with company A no longer would be valid. The fact is that it is valid, and what was happening was that they were getting hit with significant cancellation charges in addition to having to pay for the new energy supply that was coming from company B.

The provision—this is recommended by the OEA, industry has agreed to it and I know the member supports it as well: This would be an amendment to his bill to eliminate that ability of one company to overwrite the contract of another. There would be a register kept so that if a person was under contract, it would be immediately apparent to company B that that person was under contract and therefore they could not enter into a contract with that consumer. That's good protection. That's an improvement to the bill, but it had to start somewhere, and I cannot commend the member enough for bringing this forward.

Another provision they have, and the member has clearly indicated that he's more than happy to work with

that: He wanted to bring in an affirmation letter, and in the discussions that we've had, and I've had the opportunity to discuss this bill directly with the member as well, we all agreed that an affirmation letter on the spot actually gives rise to the possibility of allowing circumstances that would make it less than kosher for the protection of the consumer. So the provision is going to be made in amendments, possibly, that it's still an affirmation call, but there will be significant expectations in that call.

One of the things—the member talked about it and I know I can't show this because it would be a prop, wouldn't it? It's the new contract, the standardized contract that we suggest and the OEA agrees. If I could just read a couple of the provisions that are in this contract—I think this would give much more protection to the consumer than the current situation. The first part of it—I won't say whose contract it is because that would be unfair: “I have received a completed and signed a copy of this agreement and I understand and accept:

“a) This agreement offers price stability and does not guarantee savings.” Good language.

“b) This agreement is with” the retailer, blah, blah, blah, can't give the name, “and not with my local natural gas or electricity distributor ('utility').”

We don't want to talk about the contract of a particular company. They're making it clear that they are not the energy utility, and this is something that has led to a great deal of confusion. People have been beset by a rogue agent who says, “I'm with Hydro. I'm with the utility.” So this protects them from that point.

The two most clear concerns—and another one:

“c) “This agreement only covers the cost of” the “commodity itself,” and you will be “responsible for regulated delivery, transmission, transportation, debt retirement, and other costs” from the utility.

It also has in there that you will have to reconfirm this by a recorded phone call between 11 and 60 days from signing. I think those are some of the provisions and concerns. We'll address some of the concerns that the member had with respect to the reality that there were some agents there who were not following the rules. This will protect the agent—I have 12 minutes, Mr. Speaker. I'm using all the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Chudleigh): Okay.

Mr. John Yakabuski: This will give much more protection to the consumer than was present in the past. In my discussions with the OEA, they didn't have problems—and I guess Shane Pospisil will be president of the OEA. I give him a lot of credit for taking on this issue as well, as an association, and recognizing that there is a problem out there and we have to work collectively to try to improve it. I can tell you that, other than some of those things, they were quite impressed with the quality of Mr. Ramsay's bill. Of course, when we get to committee and we get to the possibilities of amendments, other issues will come up, because now, if this bill goes forward—and I expect that it will—we're going to get more publicity out there and some people will make some of their own comments.

1500

One of my own caucus members received a letter, and these are some of the concerns:

“Consumers believe the energy retailer is affiliated with the local utility.” We know that this new contract is going to put an end to that belief because it's there, in clear language, what the member expects;

“Consumers believe the product will guarantee savings over the utility price.” Well, the very first line is that it offers stability but does not guarantee savings;

“The consumer is not aware of the existence of early termination fees and cannot easily ascertain the amount of the fee.” It's very clear in the contracts today what, if any, early termination fees there are.

I think what we've got here is a winning situation begun, quite frankly, through the efforts of the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane—but also working as a group with the Ontario Energy Association and the electricity retailers to bring what we believe will be a better bill offering better consumer protection. Of course, when this goes to committee, we'll all have a chance to look at all of the suggestions again.

I do appreciate the work of the member. We're thankful that he was willing to work with us and bring us into the discussions. I think that is a good indication of how things can happen in this chamber.

In my remaining time, I want to take this opportunity, because it is the last sitting of this House, to wish every member of this Legislature—and I know that everybody here works very hard. We have our debates and disagreements on many issues, but I think we're all here because we believe our mission here is to work for the betterment of people of this province, and I believe everyone does do that. I want to thank everybody for the efforts they make and wish them a merry Christmas, happy holidays, a happy Hanukkah, and whatever other season you may be celebrating at this time. I look forward to seeing all of you in the new year.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: In general, the NDP supports the kinds of changes that have been detailed in the bill by the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane.

As everyone in this House will be aware from talking to their constituency staff or talking to their constituents, there have been some very nasty abuses perpetrated by these energy marketing companies.

One of my colleagues told me a story about a company that sent cheques to people at their homes, not being very clear that if you took that cheque—I think it was \$30—signed it and deposited it, you were signed on to an energy marketing contract with that company. When you do that in a community where people are hard-pressed, where there has been a lot of job loss or maybe people are just trying to get by on minimum wage, they are vulnerable to that kind of come-on. People got signed on to contracts and had themselves welded to agreements that required them to pay far more for electricity than they should have paid.

My constituency office is in East York, in Toronto, and beside my office there's a very good, well-run small business—a capable man and a person who has a lot on his plate. He doesn't spend a lot of time going through all his bills. About a year and a half ago, he came to me to say that his accountant had seen the renewal notice from an energy marketing company and had not realized that if he didn't send the renewal notice back, he would automatically be renewed. He missed that and was renewed, and he was paying far more for natural gas than I was paying on my natural gas bill. That sort of approach poisons the waters, angers people, makes them distrustful.

My mother, who may well be watching right now—

Interjection: I hope she is.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: She may well be watching right now—goes for coffee with a group of seniors at the Lime Ridge Mall in Hamilton on a regular basis. They are in their 70s, some in their 80s.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the kind comments from my colleagues in the House. In any event—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate your kind comments, colleagues.

She has told me stories of her friends who get these calls from companies, find that they have signed on to these contracts and don't have the ability to find their way through the web or network of agreements, contracts, stories they've been told, to get out of them. In fact, their sense, and a sense I've had from people who have done some work with these companies, is that seniors are targeted.

I say to the member who brought forward this bill, but also to those companies: If anyone has ever made an extraordinarily strong argument for regulation of the energy sector, you—energy marketers—have made it. You have made it very clear that simply letting you run amok is bad news for the population of this province. Bad news.

Going back to the bill itself, my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke talked about the affirmation letter and concerns about the potential for people at the door to perhaps be subjected to pressure to send in an affirmation letter. I assume that in the course of this bill going to committee, we'll have an opportunity to discuss it, talk about exactly how we deal with making sure that there is an un-pressurized, an un-intimidated, an un—what can I say?—a voluntary decision on the part of a customer, and not a situation where someone is bullied into, harassed into, pushed into signing a contract.

Obviously, people have to know that they're not necessarily going to save money. In fact, with most of the contracts I've seen, most of the prices I've seen, people don't save money. It is generous to say that it will stabilize price. That's right: If you buy at a price higher than anyone else is going to charge for a long time, you may well have a stabilized price. It may not be to your advantage.

People have to know about cancellation fees. I've had constituents come to my office, sometimes people whose first language was not English, who had no idea that they were going to be charged for cancelling this contract. They are used to dealing with utilities like Toronto Hydro or public utility companies where cancelling contracts didn't put them in the target hairs, the crosshairs, of a company that's going to try to make a lot of money out of them. Those things have to be clear.

It also has to be clear that the price they're paying for energy doesn't include all the costs: the debt service charge to pay for dead nuclear power plants, the transmission costs, a variety of other costs that will be loaded on top of the bill that ultimately comes through the door—it makes sense.

All of those disclosures and all of those safeguards are needed and should be brought forward. But I think we all have to recognize that there is a larger issue here, and that's the privatization of the energy system, particularly the electricity system.

I think it is a mistake to give too much legitimacy to those who essentially are people who game on top of the utility system that we as a province have set up. To talk about competition in this context is really to be playing games, verbal games. The competition really is a race to find people who are vulnerable, people who can be confused, people who can be pushed into signing a contract.

It was interesting to me that in a lot of cases, people have been given the very strong impression that the salespeople at their doors are actually from the utility companies. Because the utility companies are seen as acting in the public interest, they have a lot of credibility. The reality is you're dealing with a salesperson who is trying to maximize, possibly on commission, and that person has no interest in the person they're dealing with other than to maximize the amount of commission they're getting and the money they're getting out of them.

1510

To talk about this bill today, you need to go back and think about energy in Ontario and our history in the last decade or so. We've had a long history of public electrical utilities in Ontario. We had a central company, Ontario Hydro; we had local distribution companies; and we had a situation in which, although there were substantial differences on policy direction, people knew that ultimately utility companies were answerable to the population as a whole and that the money they put into that system was there to provide that service.

When the argument was made for deregulation, the argument was made that competition would reduce rates. Apparently not. With these new contracts, companies are put in a situation where they have to say, "No, not necessarily reduction of rates but stabilization of rates." People were told that there would be customer choice. Customer choice between one marketing company and another trying to bump up your bill is not choice; it is bad news.

We were very much influenced by what was going on south of the border, in the United States. There was a whole era of deregulation of the electricity system in the United States that many paid dearly for. Look at California, where the deregulation went far beyond the marketers going door to door but to a whole system in which companies like Enron gamed—that's a very nice word—profoundly manipulated the provision of and distribution of electricity to that society, causing huge spikes in electricity prices, disruption to that community, huge debts to electricity companies and, ultimately, the need for the government of California to step in in a substantial way.

We, here, had a somewhat gentler version, although a version that, when it came out, led to price volatility, led to situations where companies had to cut back on operations, led to situations where companies had to start operating through the middle of the night—which, having been a night-shift worker myself, I have to say is never a pleasant thing—and companies looked at shutting down through the summer when prices were peaking.

This government here in Ontario that brought on deregulation found itself facing a crisis; they pulled back. Now we are dealing with the detritus of that particular initiative. We are trying, through this bill today, to clean up some of the worst excesses, but I have to say, dealing with the worst excesses is not going to fully clean up the market. It's not going to fully protect the people of this province. Right now, people who have signed on to these energy marketing companies are paying a premium. They are supporting a whole layer of salespeople, a whole layer of accounting departments, a whole layer of functionaries who are not in fact providing a service; they are just simply acting as intermediaries between generators and buyers of power. For us in this province, these companies are not providing a useful service.

So I want to say about this bill: It's a good thing it's here. I look forward to it being improved in committee, look forward to some greater protection for consumers, but have to say overall that the fundamental problem is the remainder of the deregulation that came with a number of years of mistakes around the electricity system. My hope is that, in the long run, we will get back to a system in which the producers of energy in this province, publicly owned, will deal directly with people and we will not have those who will be making extra dollars off the backs of those whom they can confuse or intimidate into signing a contract.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: If there is one thing that Bill 131 certainly is, it is a law whose time has come and whose need has very properly galvanized all-party support in this vigorous and very demanding Legislature.

More than that, and I'm going to speak especially to the people in northwest Mississauga who have called me on this particular issue, this bill addresses some of the disgraceful and shoddy marketing practices by unethical and unscrupulous retailers that bring shame and disrepute

to the otherwise stellar efforts by our two particular utilities: Enbridge, which supplies our natural gas in northwest Mississauga, and Enersource Hydro Mississauga, which supplies electricity.

It's a simple bill, a focused bill. It seeks and delivers clarity in how electricity and gas are marketed to consumers. The complaints that all MPPs' offices have heard over the past several years, I think, are reflected in this bill with some measures with teeth and measures that fundamentally address the slanted marketing tactics by retailers in this particular sector. It brings clarity and consistency to this particular sector of remarketing natural gas or electricity.

I have warned people not to turn over their bill. I have put some material on my website about the practices followed by these door-to-door salespeople. I have even had them at my own door and had them claim some of the most outrageous things: that it's the government that's driving up the cost of their electricity, and if they want to protect themselves from more government action, then they've got to turn over their electricity or natural gas bill and sign on the spot. I've sat there and said, "Surely you've got a business card. Give me your business card. Show me your authorization." At the end I'll say, "I happen to be the government. Now get out of my house; get off my property." I have made a complaint to the Ontario Energy Board, and I have encouraged my constituents to bring their complaints to the Ontario Energy Board.

So if people come to your home and ask you to turn over your bill, and they won't tell you who they are—they sort of intimate they might be from your local utility, but really they aren't, and they're trying to get you to sign one of these things—get their name, get their card and make your complaint to the Ontario Energy Board. That too has teeth, along with the measures in the bill proposed by the very hard-working member from Timiskaming-Cochrane.

People have asked us, as MPPs, "What can you do? How can you help us stop this particular disgraceful practice?" The MPP for Timiskaming-Cochrane has heard our complaints from all parties and has said, "This is one measure we can use to stop it. This is one way the Legislature can address some of the problems people are facing."

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: Quickly, in my three minutes, I'm going to begin by introducing my son Dustin, who is visiting today, sitting in the east members' gallery. He's taking his father out for dinner this evening, and I'm very much looking forward to that.

I also want to very quickly thank the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane for bringing forward private member's Bill 131, which at its core is a consumer protection piece that I think, once we've had a chance to see this piece walk its way through the process of this place, will probably end up with very broadly based support; at least that's what I think we all hope. I'm sure,

from my experience in my constituency office, that most, if not all, of you here today, who do your work in your constituencies, have had similar experiences as I and certainly the staff in my constituency office have had with this very unfortunate way of getting people to enlist in electricity and gas contracts.

As I've said, I want to thank the member for bringing this forward. I think the reaffirmation letter he has in here is obviously the key piece of the legislation. This is going to provide an opportunity for sober second thought for people who find themselves encumbered with something they probably wish they had not done. As we understand it, many of these retailers, although not all, are engaged in what are, quite frankly, predatory and insidious practices when it comes to marketing their product at the doorstep, and preying on some of the most vulnerable citizens we have in the province. I think that, at its core, this is going to be a very wonderful piece of consumer protection, and we all have to thank the member for bringing it forward.

As I understand it, it will be require that the contractor mail the reaffirmation letter to the consumer, and the consumer will have to then send it back, signed. This will obviously provide an opportunity for them to rethink anything they may have done or entered into. Contained in that letter, which is key to letting people know, will have to be the price they will be paying; the penalties for cancellation of a contract, should they go forward and enter into it; and the current price that the consumer is paying. So very clearly laid out for them in that reaffirmation letter will be an ability for the potential consumer, on a new contract, to compare what it is they're about to enter into—or may have already entered into in a preliminary way—to what they are already paying. I think this is the central piece of it.

1520

As well, I have to mention and thank the member for this cheque-cashing part. It's hard to believe this almost negative billing thing. I'm trying to make an analogy to what some of the cable companies were doing in the past, where somebody would receive a cheque and sign it and, by default, have entered into a contract. Thank you very much for eliminating that as well.

This has my complete support. I have to tell the member he's made my constituency office staff very happy, and I'm happy for the people in Thunder Bay–Atikokan and I—

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

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Let me be dramatic this afternoon, on this last day of the Legislature. Let me simply say first, of course, thank you to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

This is a clear case of capitalism gone awry, capitalism without restraint. That's what we have here right now, when we look at this electric energy retail business. The significance that the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane indicates is—here are the number of complaints from 2005. In 2005, 1,099 complaints; in 2006,

1,913 complaints; in 2007, 4,475 complaints; in 2008—I think he mentioned it earlier—from January to September, 4,560 complaints about one item.

I have a letter here from Primrose Housing Co-operative. The lady who mistakenly signed the contract says in a letter, “I am writing” to you, Mr. Ruprecht, “to ask for your help in dealing with Ontario Energy Savings LP”—that's a company—because what she's discovered is that once she signed up and the new energy bill came, her bill, and I have a copy of it here, was over \$6,000 more than under the old system. It is clear to see that there is a major problem here, and I want to thank the member for introducing one of the best private members' bills there is today.

Applause.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: That's right, no doubt about it.

Now, from Primrose Housing Co-op, she further says that she called the Ontario Energy Savings company up and they told her bluntly, “If you want to cancel, guess how much we're going to charge you?”

Interjections: How much?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: They want to charge her over \$8,000 to cancel this contract. This is not just outrageous; this is terrible. So what I'm going to say is that it is obvious that the member has hit a nerve here.

People come to your house and they say one thing to you, “You will save on electricity,” and that's what the person in the house wants to know. Whether he is an elderly person, whether he is a person who doesn't speak English well, one question always comes up, “If I sign, will I save?” And the answer inevitably is, “Of course you will save. Not only will you save a few bucks, but you will save a lot.” Consequently—and my time is up—I want to simply indicate this is wonderful bill. We have complained about it for a long time, and finally and succinctly, here Mr. Ramsay has done something very special. He's giving all of us a Christmas gift, and the people of Ontario should be happy with Bill 131.

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

Mr. Mario Sergio: I would like to add my comments and support on Bill 131. I have to congratulate, as well, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

This is a problem that's affecting every member. There's no question that it's a problem that must be addressed, and this is a good start. I do hope that indeed the bill will travel. Listening to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane there, he'd like to see some improvements. I think that's a good step, because it needs to be addressed.

In my area, I have too many seniors who come to my office on a regular basis with either complaints or bills in their hands. It's not what these companies are doing; it's how they are doing it. A few years ago we dealt with making the bill, if you will, more transparent. But what happened to that? I think we complicated it more for the consumers out there.

The problem that we continue to get in my constituency office is that, yes, what they charge per kilowatt

hour is what they said they would charge, but there is one area where we have no control, where our taxpayers have no control, and that is delivery charges, debt taxes, administration and whatever. So they say, "How come I'm paying per kilowatt hour what they said I would be paying, but the bill is more and the consumption is less?" I think there is more to be done. I am pleased to see that the bill is here, and I hope that it will be travelling to address all of those issues. It is not only the per-kilowatt-hour charge but it's all the other charges.

I had two ladies walk into my office. One said, "Can I cash this cheque?" I looked on the back and I said, "Well, if you cash it, it means you accept the conditions." The other lady said, "What contract? I don't have any contract with this company. This cheque is made to my husband's name, and my husband passed away 10 years ago. So who are these people? Why are they sending me this cheque?" It is how they do it that is very underhanded, and something must be done.

I commend the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane for bringing this forward. I hope the bill will travel, will come back and will address some of the issues and make a better bill.

I thank you, Speaker, for the three minutes that you have allotted me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, Mr. Ramsey, has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. David Ramsay: I must thank all of my colleagues from all sides of the House for not only their support for this bill, as they've indicated in their speeches, but also their very generous comments about the bill.

I know why it's resonating with them, because I know all of you are here for the same reason that I am here: to help our constituents. Especially when we see something happening in society that particularly seems to prey on vulnerable people, it tends to really get to us. Those of us who are quite capable in managing our own affairs cringe when we see how many people are taken advantage of like this. Thank you for bringing all those various examples to us in the House. I'd like to thank you for that, and thank you for your commitment to continue to work with me, if we do pass this in a few minutes, to make it better. I certainly admit that this was a good start, and there are some other good ideas that have been brought forward and I acknowledge that. Working together in a democratic process like this, we can make it better by listening to people and different organizations, and that's much appreciated.

I'd also like to thank Minister George Smitherman and his staff for working with me. I know the minister appreciates that there's an issue here too and it has to be addressed, and we continue to agree to work together.

So again, I thank everybody for this and hope that you would support the bill. I would look forward to working with you on this in the new year. And I wish everybody the best for the season. Take care.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will vote on this item in about 50 minutes.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT (REGISTERED
DISABILITY SAVINGS PLANS), 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI A TRAIT À L'AIDE SOCIALE
(RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS
D'ÉPARGNE-INVALIDITÉ)

Ms. Jones moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 94, An Act to amend the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997 and the Ontario Works Act, 1997 to take into account funds held in or withdrawn from registered disability savings plans / Projet de loi 94, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur le Programme ontarien de soutien aux personnes handicapées et la Loi de 1997 sur le programme Ontario au travail pour tenir compte des fonds détenus dans des régimes enregistrés d'épargne-invalidité ou retirés de ceux-ci.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order number 98, Ms. Jones, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'd like to start my remarks this afternoon by thanking all the individuals and organizations who wrote, e-mailed and called me since I tabled this legislation last June. I'm humbled by all the support and encouragement that I've received.

In e-mail after e-mail I have been told that registered disability savings plans will make a real difference in the lives of disabled persons across Ontario. The RDSP is a major development for disabled persons and their families who want to save for their future.

1530

Caring for children with disabilities is a daily concern for many Canadians, especially as parents age and begin to worry about their children's future. To address this need, the federal government, in their 2007 budget, established the registered disability savings plan, a plan that would allow parents, grandparents and other family members to save for the long-term financial security of their children. The RDSP is a taxation measure that allows families of children with physical, mental or developmental disabilities to invest up to \$200,000 in a tax-free shelter, much like a registered education savings plan.

Because not every family will have the financial ability to invest, the RDSP program is supplemented with the federal disability savings grant and the federal disability savings bond, which will provide cash contributions to the plans. It is important for all members of this House to understand that a low-income Ontarian can simply open a plan, and without making a single financial contribution, they will begin to receive the disability savings grant from the federal government, up to \$20,000.

Over time, RDSPs will provide billions of dollars to supplement the incomes of thousands of Ontarians with disabilities. It will enhance the quality of life for Ontarians with disabilities, many of whom currently rely on social assistance and live in poverty.

As Joanne Purdon, chair of the Ontario Consumer and Family Advisory Council for the Ontario division of the Canadian Mental Health Association, stated in a November news release, "It seems unfair that a disabled person has to choose between having money for their daily needs now, including rent and food, or saving for their future. If" Bill 94 "passes, RDSP would allow a supplementary monthly income to be drawn upon allowing individuals some basic amenities that we often take for granted, such as a telephone, cable, groceries, clothing and supplementing their rent which is often 40% or more of their monthly ODSP income."

In order for the RDSP to work for families, however, each provincial and territorial government needs to introduce changes to ensure that families who put money away in an RDSP are not penalized for proactively saving for their children's future. My private member's bill proposes to make the change in Ontario. After speaking with families who are trying to plan for the financial future of their disabled child, I drafted the Social Assistance Statute Law Amendment Act. The purpose of my private member's bill is to allow Ontario families to save by removing the RDSP as an asset when calculating monthly disability benefits.

When I speak to parents, their number one concern is what is going to happen to their children when they are no longer able to look after them themselves. Parents are anxious to invest in an RDSP. They already have a tremendous burden of care, often giving up a second income so one parent can stay at home, yet they are committed to setting aside additional resources for the future. In the last six months, I've heard from parents across the province who are urging me to move forward so they can make a contribution for the 2009 tax year.

So, each province needs to act. Of course, Ontario has, at the eleventh hour, in a highly unusual Sunday morning news release, announced its intention to make this change, but has not provided anyone with a copy of the regulations for our review. I asked the minister to release the regulation so stakeholders and families could review it and was quite surprised when she flatly said no. For that reason and the fact that regulations can be made and changed in the future by cabinet without any public input or notification, I have decided to proceed with second reading of Bill 94. I believe that the change should be made by amending the statutes.

Families want to make long-term investments for the financial security of their children. We, as legislators, should make a similar long-term commitment by placing the RDSP guarantee in law—a guarantee that all RDSP investments and withdrawals will not impact on eligibility for any other disability entitlement, now or in the future.

The vice-president of OASIS, Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs, pointed out why legislative change is needed:

"This type of amendment to the Ontario Disability Support Program Act and Ontario Works Act is needed and long overdue. For many years, individuals have been

penalized by these acts when the federal government has given increases to funding to individuals on disability pensions, only to have it clawed back by the provincial government."

Amending the acts provides a long-term commitment and truly lives up to the spirit of the federal government's desire to enhance the quality of life for persons with a disability by creating the RDSP.

I ask the Liberal members to support this change. There's no reason not to support Bill 94, as it supports your own recommendation in the transformation agenda. When Ernie Parsons was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services, he prepared a report entitled Consultations Regarding the Transformation of Developmental Services. Recommendation 11 deals specifically with the need to improve families' ability to plan for the future needs of individuals with developmental disabilities. I'm going to touch on two of the recommendations that Mr. Parsons made:

- allow ODSP recipients to allocate their spending for current and future needs; for example, it allows contributions to an RRSP;

- hold consultation with the federal government with the purpose of establishing a future disability trust fund to permit parents to set aside funding for their children's future needs.

Ernie Parsons had it right with his recommendations. The RDSP is that savings instrument because the federal government has committed to supplement plans established by families with disability savings grants and disability savings bonds.

Although the Liberals have been dragging their feet on this important change, I think they might also want to take note of the many organizations that have come out in support of Bill 94.

"Community Living Ontario wishes to thank you for your advocacy on the registered disability savings program." That was written to me recently. "Your Bill 94, the Social Assistance Statute Law Amendment Act, would introduce changes that would be a tremendous support to people who have an intellectual disability and their families."

"I would like to thank you for introducing Bill 94, which would exempt RDSP assets and income from ODSP calculations. The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario is in full support of this bill, and we intend to do whatever we can to make sure it is passed." And they certainly did.

"The Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, applauds the creation of the registered disability savings plan ... recently announced in budget 2007, and fully supports the passing of Bill 94 because the bill recognizes the value of providing financial security to Ontario's most vulnerable."

Families For a Secure Future: "We would like to congratulate Ms. Jones for proposing this legislation for Ontario. As parents, we want to be able to invest funds for the future care of our child, but the current situation penalizes us from making an RDSP investment."

Another one: "I am a board member of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Grey-Bruce branch, and recognize all too well the need for such a bill. The passage of Bill 94 will be one more small step in allowing people with disabilities, and specifically people with a serious mental illness, to lead a life free from financial worry."

Again: "We at DeafBlind Ontario Services have been following Bill 94 with great interest. Thank you for your help! And congratulations on the bill!"

Even the media are urging you to move forward. Mike Burke-Gaffney of the Toronto Sun wrote: "Will Dalton Do the Right Thing? Federal plan to help families with disabled children hinges on Ontario's co-operation."

André Picard wrote: "RDSP plans go on sale in December. There is no excuse for every province and territory to not have committed to amend its rules by that time."

Perhaps the ones you should really be listening to are your own constituents—the families whose children will receive the benefits from the RDSP. I know that each and every one of the members of government has received heartfelt letters urging them to support Bill 94.

The Premier received the following letter:

"We are writing you this letter as our MPP, as well as the Premier of Ontario.... We are writing to ask that you take immediate steps to ensure that people with disabilities living in Ontario are able to take advantage of the new registered disability savings plan ... without having investments in this plan negatively affect other benefits provided by the government such as the ... ODSP

"Bill 94 introduced on June 12 by Sylvia Jones in the Ontario Legislature would amend the Ontario disability support program ... and the Ontario Works Act to exclude funds held in a registered disability savings plan ... from determination of assets. It would also amend the act to exclude funds withdrawn from a registered disability savings plan from the determination of income

"As this program comes into effect in 2009, you will understand that we are anxious for the Ontario government to clarify its position on RDSP investments before we proceed much further towards the end of the year. Your immediate action to ensure that people in Ontario are able to take advantage of this important program will be greatly appreciated."

Another one to the member for Scarborough–Agincourt: "I would like to encourage the passage of Bill 94.... My daughter has Down's syndrome and would benefit from the passing of this bill."

1540

To the member from St. Catharines: "We, the undersigned parents, grandparent, aunts, uncles ... urge you to support private member's Bill 94 ... allowing Ontario families to save by removing the RDSP as an asset when calculating monthly disability benefits.

"Private member's Bill 94, introduced by Sylvia Jones, MPP Dufferin–Caledon and Conservative critic for the Ministry of Community and Social Services,

addresses the inequity in Ontario, to exempt the RDSP as an asset and/or income. Clearly it would be wrong for the government of Ontario or any other government to claw back funds set aside for people with disabilities by their families. We urge you to pass Bill 94."

The member for Chatham–Kent received a letter from the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario, Chatham Kent, urging him to pass the bill, and on and on it goes.

A parent with a son who has Down's syndrome is trying to plan for his son's future. I could go on and on talking about the hundreds of letters that I've received. It has been very moving to read how Ontario parents are paying attention and covering this.

I tabled Bill 94 to bring positive change for all Ontarians with a disability. I ask you to support my bill because it would entrench in legislation the guarantee that RDSP assets will not impact disability benefits in 2009 and beyond. I ask you, in this last debate on the last day of the legislative session, to be non-partisan and put the lives of others first.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to greatly commend the member from Dufferin–Caledon. Certainly, this is a bill whose time has come; in fact, in some ways it has come. But the question is, how did it get here? She has every right in the world to stand up and ask for the accolades to be given to her, because she was the originator of this bill.

This place can be intensely partisan, and I think people in Ontario have very little patience for how partisan it can be some days. As an opposition member presenting a private member's bill, we all know the way that occurs and the fact that one has absolutely no chance—and I say it again—absolutely no chance of seeing your private member's bill pass. That's quite a shock to those in the communities we serve. The only thing we can hope, the best we can hope is that the government hears it and introduces it as their own. In schools, it's called plagiarism, but here it's called the way things are done.

In a system like that, the very least the government could do is give credit where credit is due, to the opposition members who actually come up with these bills, present them, go to all the work with their stakeholders to make sure the bill is well rounded and well represented and push it forward. Sometimes this involves campaigning across the province. I know it certainly did with the \$10 minimum wage campaign. Surely the least that could happen around private members' bills brought in by opposition members is that they are acknowledged and that their bills are passed.

Again, I don't see that anybody in the province of Ontario would really be upset with the government for doing so. In fact, I think, if anything, the government ranks would grow in terms of estimation with their own constituents if they saw that they were being non-partisan for a change. This is the very least that one could ask. After all, we've all been elected to represent our constituents in the best way possible. Again, it would show a spirit of co-operation, particularly at this time of year.

Interjections.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Although I hear the catcalls from the government side, in particular from the Minister of Education, about the redundancy of the member from Dufferin–Caledon presenting a bill that, in part, has been passed by the government, I don't think it's redundant at all. In fact, it's really the only way to claim some victory in this place.

I remember one of the saddest days I've ever witnessed in this House was when our own member from Hamilton Centre witnessed the government bringing in a bill that was clearly hers to protect firefighters, presumptive diagnosis around certain sorts of cancer. Not once did the minister who stood up and presented that bill credit the member from Hamilton Centre for actually organizing with the stakeholders, actually drafting and working on the bill, actually presenting the bill. So in one heartfelt moment—I remember the member was in tears—she sees her bill, which she has worked so hard on, being passed. That's good; that's wonderful; we're all pleased about it. On the another hand, it's almost, again, like watching another student produce your master's thesis and get their master's for it without even crediting the original author. Again, one can only ask for credit where credit is due, which is what this member from Dufferin–Caledon is doing. She doesn't deserve anything but accolades. She doesn't deserve anything but credit for what she has done, and what she has done in particular for those who are poorest in our communities.

I know in my own constituency I had a mother who had a son with schizophrenia, and she was diagnosed with cancer. She was a single parent. She said, "What is going to happen to my child when I pass on?" She was being very realistic. Again, she was dealing with a situation where the savings that she had been putting aside would be clawed back from the already meagre ODSP. By the way, for those who perhaps don't know—it's that time of year—what people on Ontario disability make, let me tell you that it's around \$1,000 a month. Remember, these are people who cannot work. They have disabilities; they are unable to work. Imagine trying to live in the city of Toronto on \$1,000 a month and with disabilities. Think about that. With the extra expenses that disabilities bring upon one and with having to pay your rent, feed yourself and sometimes your children when you cannot work, it's absolutely abominable. It's egregious that this government insists that those people be kept in poverty.

We just were privy to the National Council of Welfare report that indicates that social assistance incomes in Ontario have fallen by almost 30% in real-dollar terms since 1992, the greatest drop in any province in Canada. According to the report, between 1992 and 2007 a lone parent's welfare declined by almost \$5,500, or 25%. A couple with two children saw a loss of almost 28%. That's ODSP.

Welfare—OW—is even worse. You'll know why we have homeless on our streets when you know that somebody—a single male, for example—who is living

with welfare payments of around \$500 a month could clearly not afford to pay the rent and feed himself. They have to use shelters and they have to use food banks. Again, this is in a province which despite the current recession is one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in the world. Especially at this time, we should be absolutely ashamed of that record.

Even with the much-ballyhooed child benefit rates that the McGuinty government talks about that will give \$1,300 per child, not by tomorrow, not by Christmas, but by 2012, a single mother with two children will still be stuck deep in poverty, \$6,000 below the low-income cut-off. And, you know, this isn't partisan. Quebec does better: Quebec's welfare and ODSP rates are above the low-income cut-off; ie, above the poverty line. So does Newfoundland. So we've got a Conservative government and we've got a Liberal government who do way better than this government. The question is, why doesn't this government do better? Again, we're talking about, particularly in the case of Ontarians with disabilities, those who cannot work. I don't know in what jurisdiction it's okay to keep those with disabilities, just by definition, below the poverty line.

The member from Dufferin–Caledon has brought in a bill. It doesn't ask a great deal. It gives a little bit extra—a little bit extra; that's all we're talking about here, just a little bit, a soupçon—for those families who need it most. It certainly has had its impact on the government. Clearly, all the letters, all the work that she's done to get in touch with all of these organizations, has paid off; the government has responded. In presenting this bill today, she has simply taken credit, and as a feminist I applaud her. I think women's work is very rarely, first of all, given the money it's due or the credit it's due. We know that in the province of Ontario women make 71 cents on the dollar. Well, here we have a woman in the opposition who has brought in a private member's bill who has the gumption, who has the courage to stand up and say, "Guess what? It's my bill. It's not your bill; it's my bill. Thank you for recognizing it, thank you for enacting it, but guess what? You did not originate it; I did."

1550

I say, hats off to her. Good for her. Good that she represents her constituents. Good that she does what she's elected to do. Good that she did the spadework that was necessary. Good that she did all the work that was necessary in drafting it. Good that for the last many months she has been in contact with all the stakeholders that go into a bill like that. Good that she and she alone, quite frankly, thought this one up and, in turn, benefited the most needy of her own constituents—not only her own now but right across the province of Ontario, people who now will not get their RDSPs clawed back can thank Sylvia Jones. She's not a member of my party—we have political differences—but certainly I hope that in the halcyon day that we will be sitting across the aisle, we could at least give credit where credit is due and acknowledge that when a private member of an opposition party does the work responsible for a bill, that person gets the credit for the work that she's done.

So just to conclude, since it's the last time we're all together before school lets out, I want to say, as well, merry Christmas to everyone here. I know we all work very, very hard. I know that to be a member of provincial Parliament in this province, we're putting in 12-hour days, sometimes 14 or more. I know that it's not a vacation over Christmas—would that it were—but we will go back to our ridings and run from one event to another, from one appointment to another. I know we all work very hard.

I, along with all Ontarians, would like to see this be less acrimonious a place, less partisan a place and, in the spirit of the season, whether it be Christmas, whether it be Hanukkah or Kwanza, whatever vacation or holiday we celebrate, I certainly hope that when we come back in the new year and someone has the gumption to come forward to work hard on behalf of their constituents, all sides recognize it; all sides give accolades where they're due; all sides move forward, take the best of ideas—by all means, do. But don't just plagiarize them. Take them. Pass private members' bills. Why not? Who would it hurt? There's no question who has the most members here. Why don't we pass Bill 94 as Bill 94, as Sylvia Jones, member for Dufferin–Caledon, and benefit everyone in the province of Ontario, in particular those young girls and young boys who might think one day of running for office, perhaps not in the governing party but know that still their fingerprints, their touch, is on laws that change lives?

So again, best of the season. We're all looking forward to getting out of here. We're all looking forward to voting. Hey, be generous.

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: First, I think this would be the last time for me, in this year, to stand up in my place and speak. I want to take the opportunity to wish all of my constituents of London–Fanshawe and all the people across the province of Ontario and all my colleagues from both sides of the House happy holidays. Hopefully when we come back next year, the whole economic circumstances will be a lot better and people will be a lot happier.

Now I want to go back to Bill 94. I listened to the member from Parkdale–High Park speaking about a feminist issue versus a man's issue. I don't know what she was talking about, but regardless, I'm not going to go that way; I want to focus on Bill 94.

No doubt about it, the member from Dufferin–Caledon showed passion about the disabled people since we had the chance to travel the province together to deal with the disability issue. We listened to many different constituents, we listened to many different stakeholders from across the province of Ontario on this very issue.

I believe that our government has been in the process for many, many years, since we got elected in 2003, to make sure all the people with disabilities have a right and access to many different jobs, have a right to break all barriers, because it's important to all of us to change and

break those barriers, whether attitudinal, physical or financial barriers, to allow all the people with a disability to enter the market and be able to address themselves to be able to work and support themselves and their families.

I got the chance many different times to go to different communities and talk to the disabled community. When we talk about the disabled community, we don't focus on the disability part; we focus on the ability part, because I believe strongly that every one of us, despite the circumstances, has some kind of ability, and then we focus on that ability.

I want to congratulate the member from Dufferin–Caledon. Despite what the member from High Park says, we commend everyone in this House when they bring in ideas and bring up private members' bills to enlighten this House, to discuss them with all of us and to exchange ideas. This is a place for exchanging ideas, for creating a wave of ideas to benefit the people of Ontario. That's what this place is for. When we come and discuss, we credit the opposition sometimes when they put the government on the spot and make them accountable, and that's why we are here: to serve the people of Ontario.

I'm proud to be a part of government and proud to be the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services, who has been working very hard to address this issue in a very detailed way, because it's important for all of us to support people with disabilities and the vulnerable people among us. I believe strongly that it's our job to give people a push and a kind of support, because we are only strong if all of us walk together. Sometimes people with disabilities need some kind of support—a small support. Then, when they get that support, they'll be able to walk with the rest of us in order to strengthen our economy, our society and our province.

Not a long time ago our government, the McGuinty government, introduced some kind of amendment to regulations of the disability act of Ontario that addresses the RDSP issue, because it's very important. I know the federal government implemented it in the last budget and we are trying to address it in such a fashion to support the people with disabilities—to have some kind of financial support when they need it.

I applaud the member from Dufferin–Caledon, but our amendment also went beyond Bill 94. We went to talk about volunteer payment, so it wouldn't be accounted if somebody works and makes some money on a volunteer basis and the money would be accounted—also, if somebody made a payment on behalf of the recipients with a disability, it also wouldn't be accounted. If you want to withdraw money, it won't count as income, so it also wouldn't be accounted. This is a plus to support the program, which is being put in place for a longer time. Also, if you are earning interest on those investments, it won't be accounted as income, therefore it wouldn't affect your eligibility for social assistance.

We did a lot of different initiatives in order to create such a mechanism to support people with disabilities in

Ontario. Bill 94: The member from Parkdale–High Park mentioned that we are against it. No. As a matter of fact, we went further than Bill 94, way further—five, six, 10 points ahead—because we believe in this issue. We have a minister who is passionate about this file. She got elected in 2003. Since she became the Minister of Community and Social Services, her passion and her goal to address this issue, her passion and her goal to make sure that all the people with a disability get a fair chance in our society, in our province—that’s why, I believe, we came and we amended the regulations. We introduced it in order to go beyond, not to challenge the member from Dufferin–Caledon; we also put in process a motion a long time ago. We’ve been working toward that goal since we got elected in 2003. It was the time for it to be addressed and implemented in favour of people with a disability, to make sure that every person in the province of Ontario has the right to live with dignity and respect, has the right to live with some kind of ability to protect himself or herself.

Again, I don’t see why not to support the member from Dufferin–Caledon. Her bill is a part of our agenda and part of our direction, so again I think I’m going to support the bill because it fits right into our agenda and into our direction.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 94, the Social Assistance Statute Law Amendment Act, which is An Act to amend the Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997 and the Ontario Works Act, 1997 to take into account funds held in or withdrawn from registered disability savings plans. It’s quite a mouthful, and it sounds extremely complicated; but, in fact, it’s quite simple yet extremely effective.

Before I discuss what Bill 94 aims to deal with and how it is so important, I would like to speak just briefly to some of the comments made by the member from Parkdale–High Park, because I certainly do appreciate her comments with respect to the effectiveness and the hard work that has been put into this by my colleague the member from Dufferin–Caledon, Sylvia Jones. There’s no question that in her short time here—she was first elected in the 2007 election—she has made a tremendous impact, both as a member for her constituents of Dufferin–Caledon and as an extremely passionate supporter of people with special needs in her capacity as the official opposition’s critic for the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Time and time again, I have seen her standing up for the people with special needs. I had the privilege of working with her this past summer on Bill 77, the developmental services bill, and I can tell you that she put a great deal of passion into that. She studied the file, and she knows her file extremely well. I think that the people of Dufferin–Caledon are extremely fortunate to have such a committed, passionate and gifted member.

Having said that, I would like to say that Bill 94 is no exception. She recognized there was something that needed to be done for people with special needs that this government was not addressing, and she took it upon herself to deal with it. I would submit that it is only because of her efforts that we have got the government to this point where they are accepting the premise of Bill 94 and what it intends to do, and I’m not really sure where we would be if she had not brought this bill forward at this time.

So I would like to speak just briefly about what this bill is all about and why Bill 94 is so important, and I would note that it was started with the federal Conservative government in the 2006 budget, where it was noted that parents and grandparents of a child with severe disabilities face important considerations. They need to find a way to secure their child’s long-term financial security when they are no longer able to provide support.

In order to examine that issue, they set up a panel of three experts: Mr. James Barton Love, Mr. Laurie Beachell and Mr. Rémy Girard. Among them, these particular individuals had significant expertise in disabilities issues, in law, in taxation issues and also, perhaps most importantly, one of the panel members was the parent of a child with a significant disability. So they started with the premise that each family of a child with special needs faces important hurdles and hardships as they raise their child, as the child becomes an adult, and as they face the future together.

I would just like to comment that one of the other considerations is the family consideration, the fact that these families do stick together, that they want to do their best for their loved one with special needs, and this was noted in a report which indicated that there are also stories of love and of hopes and dreams. Those dreams are for a better life for a family member with a disability, and one of those hopes is that when they are no longer there to provide financial assistance to their loved one with the disability, that loved one will have available to him or her the financial resources to live a rich and fulfilling life.

When they set about the task of dealing with this issue, they did look at some actual case studies, and I think that when you look at the personal circumstances of the actual individuals that you’re hoping to support with a bill like this, it really brings home to you the many difficulties that these families face and how terrifying it is for a parent to have to consider what their child’s life is going to be like when they’re no longer there to support them.

So I’d just like to read one case study that I think helps us all understand what this bill is all about. The story of Robert is a case in point:

“Robert is 29 years old and has Tourette’s syndrome. He cannot read or write and does not understand numbers. He can be relatively independent, but he cannot live alone, as he needs someone to make sure that he eats properly and gets up in the morning. Robert has a job which he goes to every day. He does not consider himself

to be a person with a disability but rather, as a capable person with some limitations. Robert's mother died in 2004, and he wonders how long his father will live. Robert most certainly does not need to live in an institution and could live on his own quite independently with friends who would look after his meals and get him up in the morning for work.

"With his reading and writing limitations, Robert's employment is tenuous and, at best, his earning potential is very limited. Financial security would go a long way toward making Robert's future a good one and allow him to continue to be a happy and productive member of his community."

That's what the panel looked at, and that's where the registered disability savings plan came along and allowed people to collect income to allow their family member to be, if not self-sufficient, at least able to live a life of dignity in the community after they're gone.

What this plan allows is a maximum contribution of \$200,000. This contribution can be made over one year or over a period of years. There are no maximum contribution limits for the registered disability savings plan as there are for RRSPs. It allows not only the parents or family members of the individual to contribute; contributions can be made by relatives, friends, neighbours or perhaps even strangers, although I doubt that would happen, but it is something that allows the maximum resources to be put into the plan. The idea is that it's not a tax vehicle for an individual; it is a vehicle where savings can be collected for that person's benefit, which will then allow them to supplement whatever income they receive to be able to afford to live the way that many of us want to live in the community.

As the member from Parkdale-High Park quite rightly pointed out, people who live on government support plans—for example, the Ontario disability support program pays less than \$1,000 a month, and it's very, very difficult for people to live on this income, particularly in the city of Toronto. I would suggest—and I've heard from many of my own constituents—that it's very difficult in my riding of Whitby-Oshawa as well.

This is a vehicle that would allow them to work. The fact is also that almost 50% of people with significant disabilities rely on government plans to be able to live their lives. We're talking about hundreds of thousands of people across Canada who find themselves in this position. But the big problem, of course, was always that provincial support plans have maximum amounts that a person can earn per year before their disability support payments are clawed back on a monthly basis. It limits the amount you are able to earn on a part-time basis. It also limits the amount your family can leave to you.

For example, if the parents passed away and left a disabled beneficiary several hundred thousand dollars in the will, they would be cut off their disability support plan payments until all of their inheritance had been exhausted. They really need to have no assets to be able to collect disability support payments, and they would be disentitled to receive those benefits until all their inheritance was lost for basic living expenses.

What is sometimes done by those parents—I had the opportunity to do it in my previous life as a lawyer drafting wills—is that they draft what is called a Henson trust into a will, which allows families to leave money to family members on the basis that it's a discretionary trust. It therefore does not become an asset of that person and doesn't get clawed back if you receive those benefits as an inheritance. But that's really small comfort to parents in a situation where, when they pass away, they don't know for certain whether those amounts are going to be safeguarded for their child, and they want to make sure their child has a decent standard of living after they're gone.

Bill 94 provides for that. It provides for the disability savings plan amount—the corpus of the amount that's being left—not to be included as either an asset of the person or as income for the person, so it doesn't disentitle them to those benefits.

I could say that some of the provinces signed on to this federal initiative right away. British Columbia was one of the first signatories. Notably, Ontario is not. I would submit that this is something the member from Dufferin-Caledon has been working on for some time, and it really wasn't until she put forward her private member's bill that it really forced the government to deal with this situation, and thankfully they have. But I think it was important, and to give credit where credit is due, that this was at the initiative of the member from Dufferin-Caledon, who has worked long and hard, and you can see from some of the letters that she read to us the hard work that she went to and the work that she did with the stakeholders, all of whom, from the schizophrenia society to Community Living to Families for a Secure Future—the many organizations that have come forward to support this.

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I think this is really going to be something extremely meaningful for those many families across Ontario and, for that matter, across Canada because of the provinces that have already signed onto it. It's going to be able to make a real impact in their lives and for the lives of people with special needs, to allow them to have the dignity and the life that many of us take for granted.

I commend the member from Dufferin-Caledon for bringing this forward. We're extremely proud of her, and I know she's going to continue to work on behalf of those families into the future. As more and more bills come forward, she'll be there to deal with them.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise in the House. First, let me congratulate the member from Dufferin-Caledon for bringing forward what I think is a wonderful bill and something that I think most, if not all, people in Ontario would support, because it does the right things.

It's pretty easy to get jaundiced around here. I guess people can get a little cynical, but what I like to think is that a member has done a lot of work here—a member of

a party that I don't belong to, but I think is doing a great job—and has brought forward a good idea to the House. Coincident to that, the government of the day, our party, has been working on a very similar bill, on a very similar amendment to our social service policy and legislation, and those two issues have been working concurrently in the best interests of the people of Ontario. I think that's a good thing. I think the work that the member did in Bill 94 is work, as I said, that would be supported by most reasonable people in the province of Ontario. I think what we have done as a government, and what we've recently passed as a government, adds to Bill 94—it goes much further than Bill 94 originally envisioned—and that, to me, is a good thing. I think that speaks volumes about the member that brought the bill forward, in that the intent of the bill that she brought forward was to help some people in our society who don't have the same advantages that many of us enjoy. At the same time, despite being a member of the opposition party, the government was working on initiatives to do much the same thing, and in fact, as I said, to exceed that.

I have a young gentleman who works in my office. His name is Stephen Muir. Stephen is a gentleman who has been dealing with an intellectual disability all his life, and Stephen has taught me a lot of lessons about inclusion. In the old days, we would have excluded somebody like Stephen. Stephen would not have been allowed to go to school, perhaps. He probably would not have eligible for employment opportunities. Even socially we used to exclude people like Stephen. I think we've got a better society today. I think we're starting to realize that sometimes the rules we passed, with the best of intentions, in the past, actually stand in the way of some of the things that we really should be able to do for people in our society who, as I said, don't have the same advantages as some of us.

I don't believe we need to take any lessons from the NDP in this regard. Compared to the NDP, when they had a chance to govern this great province, I think the record of this government is one which, when you look at the initiatives that we've been able to make and to put into place in the best interests of people in Ontario, since 2003, far, far exceeds anything that was ever done by the third party. Our party is quite proud of that and for good reason.

Interjection: Delivered results.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Yes, we've delivered results. It's easy to talk about something; it's something entirely different to go out there and deliver on that.

Stephen is a self-advocate. The young man that works in my office is a self-advocate. If you were to call my constituency office on a Wednesday or a Friday, more than likely Stephen would answer the phone. At the same time, Stephen plays a role in Community Living. What he does is, he goes out and he advocates for people who are in a similar situation to him and he advocates for people that he works with at Community Living. This is the type of bill that Stephen likes to see, because it gives him the freedom, it gives him the ability to move ahead on his own a little bit, to be a little bit more independent,

to have a little bit more cash to work with. Also, it gives his family the security of knowing that should something happen to his family, Stephen will be taken care of.

As I said at the start, it is not a time, especially at this season, to be cynical or jaundiced. In fact, I think it is a time to seek the best of each other, and I think we have seen the best from the member for Dufferin–Caledon in proposing a very good bill.

The advocates for people who are dealing with disabilities have come forward and they have advanced their own interests, both through the government and through the member as well.

The government's interests, the interests of the member from Dufferin–Caledon, the advocates' interests, and those of people who are dealing with a disability—all those interests have collided, and they have collided in a way that's working to the benefit of and to create opportunities for people in our province who are dealing with things that most of us around this room simply don't have to deal with.

Many of the advantages that are spoken to in Bill 94, as I said, are exceeded by the legislation that's been changed by the province, recently introduced by the province, so it goes as far as Bill 94 asks us to go and actually exceeds that.

I'd like to take this opportunity today to extend my thanks for the type of thinking that's been brought forward by the member from Dufferin–Caledon. My thanks to my own government for taking the sort of positive thinking that's been proposed by the private member's bill today, adding to that and doing it in a value-added way that's going to mean much more for the people who are going to be the recipients.

It's a time to work together. It's a time to congratulate each other for the work that's being done, I think, in a non-partisan way. Certainly, for the day's work, a lot of credit has to go to the member from Dufferin–Caledon for the bill that she's presented here today that is going to help a lot of people in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Dufferin–Caledon. Ms. Jones, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I appreciate the comments from my colleagues. I know that a number of the Liberal members have talked about the changes that are coming forward, but the reality is we haven't seen those changes—lots of promises, lots of words, a press release, but we haven't had the ability to review those regulations, to take them back to the stakeholders and ensure that is in fact what we are looking for.

Canada is the first country to address families' concerns for the financial well-being of their children's futures by implementing the registered disability savings plan. If the Ontario government agrees to let my bill pass, you will be showing, along with the federal government, leadership for disabled Ontarians. I urge each and every member to support Bill 94 so that RDSPs can truly improve the standard of living for thousands of residents.

I tabled Bill 94 to bring positive change for all Ontarians with a disability. I ask you to support my bill be-

cause it will entrench, through legislation, the guarantee that an RDSP asset will not impact disability benefits in 2009 and in the future. I ask you, on the last debate of the last day of the Ontario legislative session, to be non-partisan and to put the lives of others first.

On that note, I wish you and every member and families across Ontario a happy holiday season. I hope you have a wonderful Christmas with your family. I look forward to working again here for Dufferin–Caledon and all Ontarians in 2009. Thank you.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to, in the spirit of Christmas, stretch a point of privilege and ask members to join me in welcoming my constituency office staff, Humaira Hamayun and Magnolia Ma, who serve the constituents of Mississauga–Streetsville in seven languages.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It's not a point of order, but welcome to Queen's Park.

The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT ACT
(FRUIT WINE), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL
(VIN DE FRUITS)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will first deal with ballot item number 64, standing in the name of Mr. Runciman. Mr. Runciman has moved second reading of Bill 132, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act.

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

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: To the general government committee, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to the general government committee? So ordered.

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA COMMISSION DE L'ÉNERGIE
DE L'ONTARIO

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 65, standing in the name of Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Ramsay has moved second reading of Bill 131, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 with respect to retailers of electricity and gas marketers.

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

Second reading agreed to.

Mr. David Ramsay: I ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that the bill be referred to that committee? Agreed. So ordered.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT (REGISTERED
DISABILITY SAVINGS PLANS), 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI A TRAIT À L'AIDE SOCIALE
(RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS
D'ÉPARGNE-INVALIDITÉ)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll now deal with the final ballot item today, ballot item number 66, standing in the name of Ms. Jones.

Ms. Jones has moved second reading of Bill 94. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Because the RDSP begins on January 1, 2009, and we will not be sitting again before that RDSP begins, I ask for unanimous consent to have third reading vote today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I just remind the honourable member that during private members' public business we can't actually do third reading today. But we can give consent that the bill be ordered for third reading. Is that what you would like to ask?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Do we have agreement that the bill be ordered for third reading? I hear a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The options now, to the honourable member: The bill could be referred to the committee of the whole of House, unless you'd like it to go to committee.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would like it to be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed? Agreed. So ordered.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 9, 2008, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. on Tuesday, February 17, 2009.

The House adjourned at 1622.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

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

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

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Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Attorney General / Procureur général
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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 Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
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Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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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	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, 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
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Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (IND)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	

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

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

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

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

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

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jean-Marc Lalonde
Sophia 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

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