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Wednesday 25 February 2009

Mercredi 25 février 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Wednesday 25 February 2009

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mercredi 25 février 2009

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAMILY STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LE DROIT DE LA FAMILLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 23, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 133, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to certain family law matters and to repeal the Domestic Violence Protection Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 133, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne des questions de droit de la famille et abrogeant la Loi de 2000 sur la protection contre la violence familiale.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to stand and speak for a few minutes on Bill 133, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to certain family law matters and to repeal the Domestic Violence Protection Act, 2000.

This bill was introduced in November 2008, and you know, of course, that our position is to make sure it goes for public hearings.

The reason I'm kind of interested in this is that I had the privilege of introducing a bill some time ago that dealt more specifically with domestic violence, and I would hope that this bill, in public hearings, would address some of the provisions that were brought to my attention through some tragic events in my riding.

I also want to pay some respect to our member from Whitby–Oshawa for her leadership on the issue.

Bill 133 is really an omnibus bill that amends eight existing statutes. It amends the Family Law Act, the Children's Law Reform Act, the Pension Benefits Act and the Domestic Violence Protection Act.

Family law includes divorce, separation, custody and access, child protection, adoption and the equitable division of family property. I'm sure that most members here, at least in their offices, are dealing with issues on a daily basis, which is a symptom or evidence of a system

that is in peril. The court process is perhaps not the best place to resolve some of these personal matters.

The difficulty with an omnibus bill is the number of details we have to get exactly right. When you're dealing with this number of bills in such a fragile environment, you want to make sure you're looking after what I consider to be the victims: in many cases, women and children, but indeed, families broadly, including grandparents. I would say, with the details here, that I would not want the size and complexity of the bill to detract from the immediate family and child protection measures, such as restraining orders and approving evidence in custody hearings. I would encourage full consultation with the legal community and also with individuals, families and all stakeholders.

Ontario's first child protection act was introduced in 1888, more than 120 years ago. The ongoing need to adapt child protection to meet the needs of today must guard against delays, because lives could be at risk. In fact, it's an important time to respect, or at least recognize, the work done by the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

This text was released to members yesterday by the child advocate, and he said in his report quite a few things that I feel were—in fact, it's in the media today. He talks about 90 Deaths, Ninety Voices Silenced. That's the kind of attention and sensitivity we need to focus on when dealing with this very sensitive issue. I would refer viewers and other members to look at this report from the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

In fact, there are many sad stories, which lead to my comments this morning, so that I can be on the record as standing up for protecting and criticizing any form of violence at any level by any individual. It just isn't acceptable, nor was it ever; it's just that we are more educated today about strategies to deal with it.

The need for urgency: Ontarians were shocked and saddened to learn early this week that 90 children known to child protection services died in 2007. That's the report I referred to. The child advocate says that a 2008 coroner's report suggests that most of these deaths were preventable. Equally shocking was the death of seven-year-old Katelynn Sampson in August 2008. As members will recall, her guardian was granted full and final custody of the young child earlier in the year, despite having a criminal conviction.

Current bills before the House: Bill 130, the Children's Safety and Protection Rights Act, 2008, was introduced by the member from Nepean–Carleton, expanding

Christopher's Law—the sex offender registry—to include child abuse, and expanding the role of the Ombudsman, the Children's Aid Society and school boards or hospitals. It's like anything. My wife has since retired as a teacher, but they're required to notify officials when they suspect abuse. That's the state we should be in: not to be intrusive, but when there's clear evidence, I think they should have a duty, whether it's a doctor or educator or whoever, to report that. Expanding the role of the Provincial Auditor and the advocate for children and youth is really what I'm advocating here, and amendments to allow the advocate to provide advocacy to students in schools and children in hospitals.

Children are the most vulnerable members of our society, and we collectively, without any partisan politics, should be standing up to protect them. Bill 128, the sex offender registry introduced by the member from Cambridge, is another example. The bill I introduced some time ago was Bill 10, An Act, in memory of Lori Dupont, to better protect victims of domestic violence. I introduced this bill December 5, 2007, and it went to second reading on May 5 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. It was based on provisions in Bill 117, passed in 2000, although they were never enacted. I want to repeat: That bill was unanimously passed here in the year 2000 and, under this government, was never enacted. Perhaps there are justifiable reasons. I don't know; I have inquired. That's why I reintroduced the Lori Dupont act, to bring the effects of the bill into law.

0910

On November 12, 2005, Lori Dupont, a nurse and mother, was killed by a man who had been her partner. This happened despite her efforts to obtain a peace bond to keep him away. In another case, Jennifer Copithorn was tragically killed in August 1998 by an estranged lover, partner, whatever. This one here was tragic because it really brought it home to me and, I'm sure, to our entire community in Bowmanville. This happened right across the road from my constituency office in Bowmanville. It was a very tragic, savage and unnecessary death. Jennifer was a young woman who worked at the bank across from my constituency office and she was stabbed repeatedly to death. Her former boyfriend was charged with first-degree murder.

Over a five-year period, an estimated 1.2 million Canadians are victims of domestic abuse. Domestic violence is not just a crime against the person abused. It deeply affects the children who witness the violence and the destabilization of families. That family extends across from in-laws to other relatives in the family and associates of the young children. It's just a tragic and unnecessary perpetration of anger and I just don't understand it. Domestic violence is a crime against the very foundation of an orderly and nurturing society. We all talk about families as being the basic unit of society. Now is the time to stand up, without partisan rhetoric, to implement the mechanisms for police and others to be able to act to protect people whose lives should not have been lost.

I do want to pay respect to people who helped in the drafting of Bill 10, the Lori Dupont Act. I looked at the history of the bill. Paul Hong is a young lawyer who was interested in this. Paul worked along with my son, Erin, who is also a lawyer. They did it on my behalf and on behalf of young men to show that they are very concerned as well.

I think education, even talking about this issue, is important, to say that we have responsibilities. It's not to paint all men as perpetrators of violence. I think that's false. It's a false argument. In fact, it's not the message. It's violence that we're trying to respond to here. It is not acceptable.

In some age groups or gender groups there are some predictors but I think, quite honestly, we've got to treat it fairly, because what I see under separation and the court order issue of support payments is huge. It is a huge deal, especially in this economy. Say someone was a stockbroker and the stockbroker was making a lot of money back then. A court order could be awarded for maybe \$5,000 a month in support or more, and now they're unemployed and going deeper into debt. All the debt is going to drive them crazy.

I'm not justifying it. It could be either partner. It's the way of resolving disputes and keeping in focus that we don't want people to go over the deep edge. I'm speaking in a broad sense. I respect Fern in my office, who does most of the work on the family law business. She's very good.

Bill 133 seeks to protect or prosecute breaches of restraining orders under the Criminal Code. What Bill 10, the Lori Dupont Act, did is it allowed access to a restraining order seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The courts determined that Lori Dupont was actually murdered while she was waiting for a restraining order to be issued. What we're saying is they should be accessible seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

I'm surprised that the court, whether it's the justices of the peace or the judges themselves in Family Court, wouldn't be supportive of the Lori Dupont Act. I would like to hear from them. Although we don't, and should not, have any direct intervention or interference with the courts, this august chamber here is responsible for setting the statutes and the laws. I think we can exercise our voice and we should.

This would allow for tougher enforcement and stricter bail conditions. Restraining order eligibility would be expanded to those living together in a relationship for fewer than three years. However, in Bill 133, I do not see the 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week access to emergency intervention orders that was part of the private member's bill and originated in Bill 117. I'm really trying to say this is a very small amendment that could be implemented in this omnibus bill, Bill 133, and would allow for these restraining orders to be issued 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

I urge members to consider the amendment and provide for emergency intervention orders. That's really all I'm calling for; it is not a huge deal. It's really going to

save lives. We're seeing that with the Advocate for Children and Youth, and we've seen it in evidence I've cited here—two cases specifically. If you follow the media, I'm sure you will find them in many, many locations.

In my view, adding round-the-clock access to protection that is legally binding would strengthen the bill. I would urge members to find ways to make this bill stronger where protection of our children and families is concerned. Please consider the ideas that have been put forward in private members' legislation I have briefly mentioned—and I take no single credit; this is an action of the whole House and a sentiment that is shared, I would say, by all members. Not one of us has a monopoly on insight or ideas: not the government and not the opposition or the third party.

I think that if we worked collegially and collectively on issues that affect families and society's civility, we ourselves would be respected in the Legislature. As it is, we tend to get into name-calling and other degenerated activities that maybe aren't very helpful. By working together, we can ensure that the most effective child and family protection legislation is enacted.

We also need a full public consultation. I think the direction I have been hearing from the ministry is that there will be public hearings. That is where the real stories can be told and be permanently on the record to improve the civility of society by all of us. This could apply to children who are learning things from adults who aren't acting properly themselves.

I would ask officially for full public hearings at this point, and in responses I expect the minister would take it upon them to have full hearings on this omnibus bill which affects all the acts I have mentioned—in the time I have, maybe I will mention a few of them. We can prevent family violence by setting the right tone and the right process.

Even further, I'd be happy to seek other ways of mediation outside the very expensive, litigation-bound process we have today. What I find, without being cruel to anyone—as I say, I have members of my family who are lawyers, litigators—is that when you have a combative separation or divorce, a lot of money is spent in legal fees and the children may not have winter clothes. It's tragic. They end up with nothing. It really is sad. If we don't go to public hearings and hear from people who practise family law—many of them are saddened themselves at applications to court, pretrial hearings, all these things that take money. We have an opportunity in Bill 133 to make the lives of children and families better, and I would urge you to do that.

In the interest of using all the time I have been allocated, I'm just going to go over a bit of Bill 133 for members here.

Hon. James J. Bradley: You're actually going to speak to the bill?

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, I have. I think I've done an extremely thorough job and prepared notes.

Quite frankly, the part I like here is: "The Act is sequentially amended to account for amendments made

by the Bill to the Children's Law Reform Act, permitting a court to change a child's surname where a declaration of maternity or paternity is made. Specifically, section 5 of the Change of Name Act is amended to add a requirement that, where the court has made such an order changing a child's surname, an application under the Act to further change the child's surname requires the consent of the person declared by the court to be the mother or father of the child. As with the other consents required to be obtained by the Act in the circumstances, the requirement may be waived by a court on application."

That's one of the kind of nitty-gritty parts when there is a divorce: One of the spouses wants to change the child's surname. Some of the things that are in the bill can be pretty acrimonious.

0920

The bill also makes amendments to the French version of the Child and Family Services Act.

"The bill makes consequential amendments to section 57.1 of the Child and Family Services Act to update the provisions permitting the court to, while making a custody order, make a restraining order without requiring a separate application, and deeming the restraining order to be a restraining order made under the Children's Law Reform Act."

So they do mention the restraining order. The only small provision I'm looking for is to have it accessible seven days a week, 24 hours a day. That's how you save lives. When these things break out, you can't just run over to the court at 11 o'clock at night when somebody's acting out and ask for a restraining order. It's just not available. You'd have to make application for it and then file.

"The Children's Law Reform Act is amended by adding section 6.1, which permits a court to change a child's surname"—I mentioned that.

"In addition, three new provisions are added to create new requirements in cases where a person who is not the parent of a child applies for custody of the child." This comes back to another bill which the government has disallowed: grandparents who have taken custody of children from a family dispute where they no longer get that supplemental pay of about \$124 a month. That's simply wrong. Grandparents today, with all the chaos in family breakdowns, are often ending up as the caregivers and the support for the child. I think that support should be there.

I'm a grandparent, we have five grandchildren, and I would hope and pray that our five children and their spouses—they're not all married; two of them aren't married, but three are married—stay together for many, many years—happily, I hope—and their children, our grandchildren, are protected and safe. That's where I'm coming from on this bill. I would ask other members to give due consideration, and I look forward to public hearings.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Il me fait plaisir de donner des commentaires suite au député de Durham face au projet

de loi 133, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne des questions de droit de la famille et abrogeant la Loi de 2000 sur la protection contre la violence familiale.

Nous sommes, bien entendu, en accord avec la création d'un projet de loi qui protège les femmes et qui protège les enfants—le parti néo-démocratique est là pour défendre les familles, ce qui inclut les femmes et les enfants—et un projet de loi qui essaie de diminuer les coûts et le stress associés avec les processus de la Cour de la famille.

Il faut se rappeler que ce projet de loi fait suite à la mort de Katelynn Sampson, une petite fillette de sept ans qui a été tuée par ceux que la cour avait désignés pour la protéger. On a par la suite appris que sa gardienne, qui avait été désignée par la cour, avait un dossier judiciaire.

Nous sommes en accord avec le membre de Durham que le projet de loi ne va pas assez loin. Le projet de loi en lui-même est un pas dans la bonne direction, mais il faut regarder aux causes qui ont mené à ce type de problème : dans un premier temps, le sous-financement, qu'on parle de sous-financement des juges, d'accès à la juridique ou même d'accès aux services sociaux qui font que les enfants et les femmes se retrouvent dans une position de vulnérabilité où ils ont besoin d'être protégés par la cour.

On parle également des recommandations qui ont été faites suite au meurtre de M^{me} Lori Dupont. Pourquoi est-ce que ce genre de recommandation-là, qui pourrait avoir un effet majeur pour protéger les femmes, reste sur les tablettes ? Les recommandations ne sont pas mises de l'avant.

Donc, nous appuyons certains des commentaires qui ont été faits par le membre de Durham et nous voulons voir ce projet de loi aller en comité.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to commend the member from Durham for bringing this forward. This is a very delicate situation in family law. The victims are the children and the parents if it's not a good breakup. But what I don't see in the bill and would like to see more of is counselling for the person—for whatever reason one person leaves and the children and the father may be distressed or the mother may be distressed over the breakup and they may not be acting in a normal situation because of their duress—that there be more counselling for these situations from social services so that they can get them right off the bat, so that the emotional stress does not come to a point where it becomes violent. They can talk to them and settle them down and maybe do some rebuilding that may even put these families back together, for whatever reason.

Especially in this time when there's economic strife in our communities, because of the job losses and that, these things escalate. So the ability for the court to immediately act in a restraining order is good because a lot of things happen within the first week of a breakup which wouldn't normally happen when somebody sits down and thinks about what they're doing or their actions. I think

this type of legislation will be beneficial to the protection of mothers, fathers, whatever the situation may be, and the children. I think it's long overdue.

Once again, I'd like to reiterate that I'd like to see more help for the one that's left behind, whether it be the father or the mother, to deal with the emotional breakdown of their life. I think that would be an important part of this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Member for Durham, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd also like to thank the member from Nickel Belt, who, along with the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, did mention the tragedy that I believe all the speakers when this was last debated—I'm checking the Hansard record here. I would think there were a number of speakers—I know Mr. Kormos spoke as well as the members from Nickel Belt and Hamilton East. They all sort of referred to the tragedy that we all talk about as being a point where we can identify why we're emotionally connected to this, a young child being murdered. A lot of it comes back to this restraining order, for all people who feel threatened by violence. That's really what we're trying to say.

First, we agree with the intent of the bill. We want public hearings across the province, especially in areas—probably remote areas. Can you think of someone living in a remote area who has no protection except that the courts can intervene? Maybe police can't be there quick enough. There needs to be some certainty around the strengthening of these intervention orders seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

When we're looking at this situation, I want to say on the record that Christine Elliott, the member from Whitby—Oshawa, is a lawyer. I believe she's practised in this area of law. She's very committed. I read her comments in the Hansard. I want to commend her for her advocacy for vulnerable people generally.

I look forward to this legislation going to committee, as has been suggested.

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

Mr. Bentley has moved second reading of Bill 133. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Interjection: No.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I didn't hear anybody say "no" from their seat.

Interjection: No.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): To which committee shall it be referred?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Agreed?

Mr. John O'Toole: I would suggest that the bill might be better sent to the justice committee, as it is a justice bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The minister has the right to designate the committee. So the bill shall be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): So referred.

0930

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS
AMENDMENT ACT
(TEMPORARY HELP AGENCIES), 2009
LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI
(AGENCES DE PLACEMENT
TEMPORAIRE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 24, 2009, on motion for second reading of Bill 139, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in relation to temporary help agencies and certain other matters / *Projet de loi 139, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne les agences de placement temporaire et certaines autres questions.*

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 139, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act 2000, in relation to temporary help agencies and certain other matters. In simpler terms, this legislation, this proposed Bill 139, deals with regulating temporary agencies that hire individuals and assign them to a client site, and I will talk a little bit more about that further in my comments.

Before I do that, I want to make a couple of observations. I have often in this House spoken about the need to create sensible legislation, legislation that strikes the right balance: balance between the rights of the workers or employees and balance ensuring that we don't stifle entrepreneurship, that we give our businesses, our employers, the tools necessary to ensure that they run profitable, good, healthy businesses and employ more people in our community and in our economy. I believe that this particular legislation, Bill 139, strikes that right balance. It really, on one hand, upholds and further protects the rights of the workers, those temporary workers who use temporary agencies to get employment, and also the rights of the employers to make sure that they can rely on that type of temporary employee to conduct their business in a proper manner and be able to further contribute to our economy.

That type of balance is extremely necessary, especially for us as legislators, as policy-makers, when we are debating this type of legislation, to ensure that we have that right element in the legislation. In that regard, I want to

congratulate the Minister of Labour, Peter Fonseca, for proposing Bill 139, and I also want to congratulate his parliamentary assistant, Vic Dhillon, for the work he has done to ensure that we have this bill in front of us for debate.

I have heard about this issue quite a few times in my riding of Ottawa Centre. Since I was elected a year and a half or so ago, this issue has been brought up to me: For employees who go through temp agencies, what are their rights? What kind of benefits do they receive? There are a few groups who have brought that issue to me, but I'm going to focus on one group who has often spoken to me about this particular issue. Those are immigrants in our community, or new Canadians, as we may refer to them, those who recently arrived in Canada, in Ontario, to build a new life. They have often spoken to me about the need to have more safeguards in place to ensure that those individuals in our society who get jobs through temp agencies have their rights protected.

We are a country of immigrants, as you know, Mr. Speaker. We've built this country along with First Nations, the aboriginal communities, over many, many years to be a very prosperous society. We welcome people almost every day who come to Canada, who come to Ontario—my family included, almost 20 years ago. The majority of the people who come to Ontario are here in search of a better life. They are here to make sure that they are more prosperous than where they lived before, that their children receive good education and have those opportunities to succeed, so that they have equal rights, which is something extremely important to cherish—to prosper right here in Ontario, right here in Canada. So they, in essence, are economic immigrants. They are not really here for political reasons. Some are, but most of the people who come to Ontario are economic immigrants. They're here to build a better life. It is important for us to ensure that, as newcomers to our society, their rights are well known to them and are protected.

A lot of the new immigrants who come in are building a new life. They're starting out. It's akin to learning how to walk again. You're living in a new country, a new culture, a new society, a new climate, and you need to deal with that. You also need to build your economic life: to find a job; to fit into the profession, if you're a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, and go through the whole accreditation process to make sure that you can practise in your respective profession.

Most of the immigrants, when they come in initially, so they can start sustaining themselves, so they can start paying their bills, so they can start making sure that their kids are going to school, engage in temporary employment because they've got to start living right away. They have to make sure. Those realities are very important. Not many people come to Canada with a lot of savings, so they have to integrate into the workforce right away. One recourse they have is temporary agencies, so they can find temporary employment. As they are adjusting well into their new community, as they are going back to university or college to get their new diplomas or

degrees, as they are going through the process of getting their professional credentials recognized, they need to make sure that they are paying their bills.

Today, we don't have many rights for those employees who work through temp agencies, which this bill, Bill 139, is trying to rectify. Those individuals who are working through these temp agencies are finding that they are really not taking that much of their salary home, that they are paying most of their salary through various fees, that there are barriers to them getting into permanent jobs while they are in these temporary positions etc.—and in a moment, we'll go through some of the elements of this legislation. It really creates a significant impediment for new Canadians as they are working very hard to integrate in the economic fabric of Ontario, and this legislation really goes to the heart of that.

I do want to acknowledge a lot of good work that is already being done in our cities, in our towns, in our villages, to help new Canadians better integrate, both socially and economically, in our communities. I know in Ottawa Centre, in my riding, there are a lot of great organizations that are working with newcomers to ensure that they have all the tools necessary. I want to take the opportunity to mention Carl Nicholson at the Catholic Immigration Centre, Lucya Spencer at the Ottawa immigrant women's organization, Hamdi Mohamed at the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization, and Mengistab Tsegaye at LASI World Skills—great individuals, fantastic organizations, and they're working hard. I want to congratulate their staff, their boards and their volunteers for the tremendous work that they are doing in Ottawa alone and in my riding so that those who are making Ottawa their home are getting the right supports, are given the necessary tools, to build a better and more prosperous life in the city of Ottawa.

0940

This government has taken many other steps to ensure that immigrants have the right tools to integrate in their communities. The Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, is another important example by which we are collectively working to ensure that we make it easier, more fair and equitable, so those individuals who have foreign credentials are recognized in a manner that is more effective right here in Ontario. There is a lot of work, no doubt, that needs to be done on that front, but I'm very happy that this government, in 2006, brought in the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act and passed it. Through this legislation, the Honourable Jean Augustine is the first Fairness Commissioner, who is overseeing the work that is being undertaken. But we need to continue working on that front, because all these pieces together will ensure that immigrants who come to Ontario have the right tools necessary to succeed. When they succeed, we all collectively prosper: as a community, as a society. So it is in our best interests to make sure that those who are coming and making Ontario their home every single day have the right, necessary tools.

Let me talk about this legislation, Bill 139, and what it's trying to accomplish. What does it do? Again, I

repeat that it's very important to remember that it really strikes the right balance between the rights of the employees and ensures that our businesses are running successfully.

First of all, I think at the most fundamental level what this legislation is trying to do is bring the whole mechanism that works through temp agencies—that is, the employment opportunities that are provided through temp agencies—under the fold and scope of the Employment Standards Act, 2000. For those who are watching these proceedings who don't know what the Employment Standards Act does, essentially the Employment Standards Act enshrines the rights of the employees and the obligations of the employers. In our daily lives, as we have various jobs in our communities, we are protected pretty much through the Employment Standards Act. So the number of hours you work, how much time you should get in terms of lunch break, statutory holidays or public holidays, how many and what days—all these things are within the scope and ambit of the Employment Standards Act. So essentially what we are doing through Bill 139 is that if you are hired through a temp agency and you've been assigned to a client, as they refer to a third party, to provide your services, you are also protected through the Employment Standards Act. That is what Bill 139 is trying to do and that's a big step, to ensure that the rights of those employees who are hired through temp agencies are protected through the Employment Standards Act.

There are four, I believe—in my reading through the act—factors which are extremely important or rights which are enshrined in this legislation which are worth discussing. The very first aspect is fees that are charged by temp agencies of the temporary employees. At the moment, in some circumstances and through some temp agencies, there are enormous amounts of fees which are being charged. So when an employee goes through this agency, not only is the temp agency charging the client, where they are placing the individual, but they are also charging the employee, I've heard, up to 30% or 35% of their salary. Of course that creates a huge, tremendous, onerous limitation on the individual, who is working very hard and then forgoing that much of their salary to the temp agency. Bill 139 would prohibit agencies from charging a fee to a person for becoming an assignment employee or a temporary employee, charging a fee for assistance in finding or attempting to find work with a client and charging assignment employees or prospective employees a fee for assistance in preparing a resume or for job interviews. This is a great direction.

However, agencies, of course, will be free to receive fees from clients because it's a business and they have to earn a profit as well. If a client comes to a temp agency, "I'm looking to hire a person to do some computer programming" and this temp agency finds an individual who meets the qualifications, then that client who requested them to find somebody is the one who will be paying a fee, not the employee who has been assigned to do the work. That employee, then, can take all the money

they make, everything they're earning from that particular position, to their home, to their families and, as a consumer, spend it back into our economy—an important aspect.

The second element that's very important is the issue of reprisals. In many instances, we know that if the relationship goes sour or if the person leaves—a person is looking for a permanent job at the same location—that there are circumstances where there are reprisals. There are some significant prohibitions and enforcement measures in Bill 139 to ensure that reprisals don't take place.

Just to give you an example, Bill 139 would prohibit the clients of agencies from engaging in reprisals against assignment employees for asserting their rights. Currently, if a temp agency employee is on an assignment and finds his or her rights are being abused—for example, being forced to work excess hours—and if that employee complains to the client, he or she could be labelled a troublemaker and told not to come back. Even though the client company has reprised against the employee, that individual has no remedy currently against the client company under the current Employment Standards Act rules. Bill 139 would prohibit this kind of reprisal, a very important element in order to ensure that the rights of those employees who work in temp agencies are fully protected.

There are very important information provisions as well in this bill. Agencies will be required to provide certain information to the assignment employees in writing, such as the client's name and contact information when offering a work assignment, wages, benefits, hours of work, the pay schedule associated with the assignment and a general description of the work to be performed for the client.

On the surface, this sounds very basic, as to, "Oh, why would you need this?" or "Of course that should be done." We have seen and heard of circumstances in our communities where people have been given an impression that they would be working at a certain location for certain hours, but in reality the job is totally different, the work hours are far in excess of what the person is getting paid, and there's no accountability. There is no legal enforcement against that.

What this particular provision around information is trying to do is to rectify the situation where there is an obligation on behalf of temp agencies to provide certain information to the potential employee so that the person can make a decision on whether to take the job or not based on proper information; there is full transparency associated with it.

Lastly, there are provisions dealing with undermining and eliminating barriers to permanent employment, because one of the things we want to see is that if a person gets a temporary position and if it can become permanent, that it takes place. So Bill 139 will prohibit preventing a client from hiring an agency's assignment employee, charging the client a temporary-to-permanent fee after six months or more have passed since the employee was first assigned to the client, restricting clients from pro-

viding references to an assignment employee, preventing an assignment employee from taking permanent employment with a client of the agency and charging the employee a fee if the employee should find permanent employment with that client. These are very important provisions to ensure that the rights of the employees who get a position through temp agencies are fully met.

I see that my time is running out. I think what I would like to say in conclusion is that this legislation very much works hand in hand with this government's poverty reduction strategy to ensure that members in our community, our families, working families, have the right opportunities to succeed. Making sure that we enshrine the rights of those employees who get jobs through temp agencies is extremely important.

Yesterday, I mentioned the Payday Loans Act, which was passed last year through this Legislature. It's another important step to make sure that the rights of those individuals and working families in our communities are protected, that they have the safeguards on their side to ensure that they're not being taken advantage of and they have the means to take their hard-earned incomes home so they can spend it on themselves and their families and put themselves first.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 139.

0950

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened carefully to the comments made by the member from Ottawa Centre. For the most part, I would say, having worked in personnel and labour relations for a number of years with General Motors—in better days of General Motors, I might say. My point is this: I think almost everyone here would agree that on compliance with the existing Employment Standards Act, we're onside. I think, more importantly, it's important to put on the record that the main debate today is about the status of the temporary worker. This is someone—it may be a young person, a person re-entering the workforce, a person wanting to work part-time, different kinds of things to maybe augment the family income; but most important here, we should keep the focus on this: It's about a job. First, it's about a job.

What do we have in Ontario? We have a slightly contracted labour force—about 300,000 people without a job. Don't lose sight of the state of the economy and talk about these small fragments of important economic issues. That being said, if you read the sections carefully, there are a few sections that should cause you some concern. I'm referring to section 74.2 of the act that it's amending. It says: "... the part" of the act "does not apply to certain kinds of work assignments made under certain contracts with community care access corporations." Wait a minute here. What are the exclusions, if it's good for all and you are making great trumpeting sounds about the fairness of it all? It is not consistent.

It's my understanding as well that certain agencies—let's look at the health care debate. When they know that

there's an outbreak of SARS or whatever, they need to man up quickly for a period of time until they deal with this emergency issue, and then they go back to their normal employment levels. I'm not certain that this bill is clear enough on what it's trying to achieve, so I'm looking forward to public hearings on this bill, because it's poorly drafted.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to talk about some of the comments that were made, basically about the issues facing temporary agency workers. One would tend to believe that they can all be put into the same basket and treated the same way, when this is not the case at all. The issues addressed in this bill represent only some of the issues facing temporary agency workers and peripheral workers more generally, but it certainly doesn't cover it all. In reality, we need to get at the fundamental changes in peripheral workers in today's market. There are broader issues that have to do with fundamental rethinking of the Employment Standards Act.

In Sudbury, up to a few months ago, mining was booming. They couldn't hire people fast enough and they certainly relied on temporary agency workers to come and fill the need, the intention being that they were not able to recruit and give full-time employment, so they used agencies to help in the short term. But here again, even in those circumstances, the Employment Standards Act failed those people. It failed them in terms of WSIB coverage. Might I remind you that mining is still a very high-risk occupation in this province. Once you deal with a temporary agency and you're considered an independent contractor, you are not covered.

So there are all kinds of issues that need to be added on to this bill if we want it to achieve the goal that it set out to do. We, too, are looking forward to seeing this bill in committee so that it can be modified to do what it set out to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I want to thank my colleague the member from Ottawa Centre for his eloquent speech detailing the important elements of this bill. I think he said it right. This bill is an important step toward reforming temporary agencies in the province of Ontario, which play a pivotal role in our community, but sadly, there was no regulation in this element of our economic structure. I think it's important to regulate them and make sure all the people who are working through those temporary agencies are well protected, especially, as you mentioned, the newcomers who do not understand the rules and regulations of this province, who are looking badly for jobs and do whatever is possible to feed their families. I think that it's our obligation, our duty, to protect everyone, especially the vulnerable among us who are looking for jobs.

So I want to congratulate my colleague for telling this House and the people of Ontario about the important elements of every step and why we introduced this bill

and why it's important for all of the people of Ontario that this bill pass and become law in the province of Ontario to govern those temporary agencies.

Also, and I heard many different people speaking before us today and the other day, it's not against the temporary agencies. It's not against anyone. I know some of them do a good job trying to find jobs for many people across the province of Ontario. But it's important to make some rules and regulations to make sure all those temporary agencies are working according to the rules and laws. Many people, especially the workers, sometimes pay the price because some of those temporary agencies are fly-by-night agencies and they don't pay the workers. That's why it's important to regulate this industry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Member for Ottawa Centre, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank my colleagues from Durham, Nickel Belt and London-Fanshawe for their insightful comments in response to my comments on Bill 139.

I want to reiterate that this legislation is important to ensure that, for those individuals who are working through temp agencies, those individuals who are working very hard—and as I was alluding earlier, a lot of them happen to be newcomers to Canada—to build their lives, to integrate into this new society, into this new province, this country which they are calling their home now, those workers' rights are protected under the Employment Standards Act. Bill 139 is doing exactly that. It's making sure that temp workers, or assignment workers, as they are referred to in Bill 139, are recognized in the legislation, that they are protected by the obligations and the rights that are outlined in the Employment Standards Act so that they are full participants in our economy.

I think it's even more important today, given that we're going through some tough economic challenges not just in Ontario, not just in Canada, but across the globe, if you look at some of the Asian countries which are suffering far more than we are in Canada—and we are fortunate for that—that we create measures and we have safeguards like that so we encourage employees to be full participants in the workforce so that their rights are protected. We need all of us at our best to ensure that we contribute to the economy.

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

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 139, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, in relation to temporary help agencies and certain other matters.

I'm disappointed that we're here in this Legislature once again debating another regulatory bill when hard-working Ontarians are losing jobs by the thousands. As a result of this bill, if it passes the way it has been written, there will be more unemployment. Ontarians are looking

to their government for some help. You can't call a late budget help, or the fact that we were fiscally in a full-blown recession—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Burlington, you may be disappointed, but we are discussing Bill 139 and I would appreciate if all members would keep that in mind in their debate.

1000

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like the minister to tell me why he is creating make-work projects when we have much more urgent business to attend to. Deflecting from that business with this bill does not serve us well in this Legislature.

Taking up valuable debating time when we are struggling is not appropriate. This is yet another bill and another example of a good idea not being followed through appropriately. It does not identify the hardships that will ensue for firms that are scrupulous and for their employees. I understand that there are some firms that take advantage of employees, but the legislation should target those companies and those companies only.

Did Minister Fonseca say, “Mr. McGuinty, I know that the economy is weak and that we don't have a plan to make it better, but what I'd like to do is make it harder for the businesses who are out there finding employment for transitional and temporary labourers to operate”? What planet are we on here?

This is yet another bill that is taking time in this House when we need to focus on other business. The private sector is the only sector that will suffer from this bill, because those contracted by government agencies will not be affected by this bill. Why is that? That creates a very unlevel playing field. I've amassed a great deal of experience in how some of these regulations are rammed through without much public consultation. The honest truth is, we are hurting the very businesses who are picking up the slack for this government's inaction.

A constituent of mine who provides non-medical in-home care to seniors and others in need of daily assistance shared their concerns with me over the impact that Bill 139 would have on their clients and their business. Their business is thinly margined. The proposed changes will add costs and ultimately drive up the cost of their services for their seniors who can ill afford that increase right now. Many of their home care workers want the flexibility of casual labour. As employers, they need to tailor work schedules based on clients' needs. This should not trigger termination. There are parts of the bill that are clearly aimed at preventing abuse from unscrupulous employers and they wholeheartedly support those, as I do, as it works to improve those situations.

My colleague from Thornhill's stakeholders have shared these objections to Bill 139:

“Our primary concern is the removal of the ‘elect to work status’ and how it will effect notice of termination.

“This cost burden will make it impossible for clients to continue to use agencies which they have come to depend on to remain competitive in a global economy. The

use of temporary workers helps them manage peak periods and fluctuations.” This bill wipes all that out.

“This will remove the flexibility that many organizations have come to require in this global economy with goods arriving from various ports.

“Many of these organizations will leave this province if that flexibility is lost and move to a more business-friendly environment. With what is occurring in the US, they will continue to receive an even greater incentive to do so.

“Numerous large organizations have temporary workers as part of their business plan, including many with unionized environments.

“Those organizations that do not move will ultimately be forced to consistently turn over its workforce in an effort to minimize such impact.

“This will force all parties to immediately turn over the staff prior to three months of employment to avoid the issue altogether.

“How can such a policy truly benefit a worker that is trying to develop the skills to gain better full-time employment, when they are displaced every 10 weeks?

“Please remember that many of these workers are new Canadians with good work ethic and skills, but lacking the communication skills clients would require for them.” They try to take temporary employment while they gain the communication skills in order to obtain full-time employment.

“Working temporary assignments as a starting point provides them with an opportunity to contribute, pay taxes and feel proud of themselves.

“Statutory holiday pay” is “becoming mandatory effective January 2, 2009. Our agency has paid statutory holiday pay to a percentage of our workforce based on attendance, longevity etc. so we will be able to digest such a notion,” says this company.

“However, the cumulative effect of this with the other proposed changes will be economically devastating to our industry and our clients.

“Overall it is the timing of such a mandate that is disturbing. Our province is facing a financial crisis”—just as it is in the US and globally.

“Many areas are constructively working with business to increase cash flow and employment opportunities. Ultimately such a mandate increases the cost of our client organizations at a time when even the largest, most stable organizations are struggling to survive.

“Such policies will have a negative impact on our clients, ourselves and ironically the workers that such a bill was trying to protect.

“These workers will be easily replaced in such a market, and given no chance for longer assignments unless they are truly extraordinary yet will have a negative impact on morale and overall efficiencies.”

Sad tale to tell.

The Association of Canadian Search, Employment and Staffing Services, more commonly known as ACSESS, says:

“There are three technical shortcomings within the bill which require improvement, otherwise these areas will cause an overall failure to achieve the stated objectives.

“These shortcomings unintentionally create an overly complex set of rules that are administratively unmanageable for any employer and may be impossible to monitor and enforce.

“These shortcomings will also unintentionally cost thousands of jobs and cause significant hardship for the people the bill was specifically designed to protect.”

In the continuance of employment while not working category, ACSESS is very concerned with subsection 74.4(2) because it creates an implied continuance of employment while not on assignment, which in turn constructs an inconsistency between the employer’s obligations and the reality of the employment context. This is inconsistent with every other jurisdiction within not only Canada, but North America. The legislation fails to appreciate the nature of temporary employment and the staffing services industry. It creates a different and higher standard for staffing company employers and creates a higher cost of burdens and liabilities for temporary staffing companies compared to all other employers within every other industry. ACSESS is very concerned that this proposed amendment will result in a significant reduction in the number of short-term employees being hired and will result in higher unemployment in the province of Ontario. This provision will cause the greatest harm to the thousands of employees who choose—because there are people who choose—temporary employment and benefit significantly from the flexibility and training that is provided. Moreover, it imposes a higher legislative standard on staffing industry employers and contrasts existing provisions of the Ontario ESA.

There are recommendations for the continuance of employment while not working. They suggest that we don’t codify a continuance of employment and recognize and respect periods of active versus inactive employment. There is no employment when the assignment employee is inactive—that means not on assignment. So they’re suggesting we delete clause (b). Do not impose a different and higher legislative standard on staffing firm employers.

ACSESS is also very concerned with the proposed amendments in the area of notice of termination and severance. The amendments set up a general rule that an assignment employee will be deemed to be terminated and severed if he or she is not assigned work for a period of 35 consecutive weeks, subject to some exceptions. The amendments also set out detailed rules respecting how to calculate termination and severance pay for assignment employees. As is the case with the issue of continuance of employment, the amendments proposed within Bill 139 construct an inconsistency between the employer obligation and the reality in the employment context. This is inconsistent with every other jurisdiction within Canada and within North America, and the legislation fails to appreciate the nature of temporary employment term contracts and the staffing services industry.

1010

Section 74.11 amendments establish a new obligation for staffing services employers in the areas of notice and termination. This section creates a separate and higher standard for staffing company employers and creates a higher cost of burdens and liabilities for staffing companies compared to all other employers within every other industry. This is not fair. These amendments also stand in direct contrast to the government’s stated intent, which is to ensure that Ontario’s employment legislation recognizes the needs of temporary employees and employers in a fair and balanced way. The proposed amendments will, however, create confusion and ambiguity for workers and employers, while also creating an impossible standard for record-keeping and administration associated with inactive workers. The amendments are prohibitive from an administrative standpoint. What are we doing? Increased costs disable staffing companies’ ability to provide services to clients and to job seekers. This isn’t right.

Short-term workers who are unemployed and underemployed and who are in most need of work will either not be offered employment because of the increased costs associated with not remaining consistently employed, or they will be permanently terminated prior to achieving the three months of tenure. This will not have a positive impact on the removal of barriers and will serve to limit employment opportunities for Ontario workers.

There are recommendations for termination and severance. That is to delete subsection 74.4(2):

“An assignment employee of a temporary help agency does not cease to be the agency’s assignment employee because, ...

“(b) he or she is not assigned by the agency to perform work for a client on a temporary basis.”

Do not impose a different and higher legislative standard on staffing firm employers. Respect well-established and recognized employment principles and provisions contained in the act.

Ontario Employment Standards Act regulation 288/01 identifies employees who are not entitled to notice of termination or termination pay under part XV of the act, subsection 2(1). It states that the notice of termination and termination pay requirements of the ESA do not apply to an employee who was hired for a specific length of time or to do a specific task. Now we’re contradicting.

Regulating business terms and client fees within service agreements: Paragraph 8 of subsection 74.8(1) and “Exception” subsection (2) limit a temporary help agency from charging a fee to a client in connection with the services provided. The client is always a company or organization and is never the worker or candidate. Controlling financial business terms between a staffing service and client represents a misapplication of employment standards legislation in the area of consumer and commercial transactions.

The ESA governs the relationship between employers and employees in Ontario. The act should not be misused to interfere with established contractual business agree-

ments between staffing firms and their clients. Temporary help services incur significant advertising, recruitment, background, screening, risk and other overhead costs and should be permitted to offer their services to clients without the government's arbitrary interventions, limitations and restrictions upon legitimate business terms.

This provision fails to provide any meaningful benefit to low-wage workers and will significantly damage the largest percentage of the industry providing this important service in the areas of information technology, accounting, engineering, medical services and other professional services. These amendments will cause significant hardship and irreparable harm to staffing service companies, and by extension to their clients and the candidates for employment.

There is a recommendation for regulating business terms and client fees within service agreements. The suggestion is to remove paragraph 8 of subsection 74.8(1) and "Exception" subsection (2), which interfere with business terms, and refocus attention on employment-related issues such as employment agreements and employment terms so that a worker is never unfairly restricted from seeking employment with prospective employers.

The timing of this legislation is concerning, both in terms of meddling with employers—good employers—in a challenging economy, and how swiftly Mr. McGuinty wants to implement this bill. The implementation is to be a mere six months after the bill receives royal assent. That seems a little quick to me. I would say that the stakeholders have given this bill more thought than the government has and the quality of their argument proves that. It's a true shame—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Excuse me, member for Burlington. I'm sorry, but we've reached 10:15.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): According to the standing orders, this House is recessed until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1016 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jeff Leal: It is a great pleasure for me today to introduce some elected representatives from the riding of Peterborough. First of all, we have the warden of Peterborough county, Ron Gerow; the deputy reeve of Havelock-Belmont-Methuen, Mr. Andy Sharpe; J. Murray Jones, the reeve of Douro-Dummer; Karl Moher, the deputy reeve of Douro-Dummer; Jim Whelan, the reeve of North Kawartha; and Barry Rand, the deputy reeve of North Kawartha. They're here today to celebrate Peterborough-Northumberland-Quinte West Day here at Queen's Park. Let's give them a warm welcome.

Mr. Norm Miller: I have two introductions today. First of all I have Carolyn Tripp, director of planning

from the township of Georgian Bay, who's here visiting. Also, we have Jeff Johnston, who is the mayor of Kearney, here at Queen's Park today.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to welcome 90 grade 5 students from McKinnon Public School. They are here at the Legislature today and they will be in the Legislature later on. I also want to extend a very warm welcome to their teachers and the volunteers who are with them.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I'd like to introduce my new intern, who is visiting from the University of Akron, Ohio, the Bliss Institute of Applied Politics. His name is Richard Carnifax. I'd like to welcome him. He's here until May 2.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I take this opportunity, on behalf of the Minister of the Environment and page Rachel Goldstein, to welcome her mother, Liz VanDenKerkhof, sitting in the east members' gallery today; and on behalf of the member from Wellington-Halton Hills and page Emily Wilson, her mother, Susan Wilson; her father, Don Wilson; her sister, Elizabeth Wilson; her grandmother, Ellen Dolon; and her godfather, Dino Vavala, sitting in the west gallery this morning. Welcome to all of you to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: This is for the Premier. The editorial in today's National Post says it all: "An Energy Plan that Won't Help." They say that the energy minister's boast of only a 1% increase in energy costs cannot be believed.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please continue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: They go on to say the following: "Just because someone slaps the word 'green' on a piece of legislation doesn't make it intelligent or forward-thinking. This is not the energy policy that Ontario needs...."

Premier, what do you have to say to the National Post? They condemn your policy. Have they got it right and you've got it wrong?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Nepean-Carleton may want to be in her seat.

Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm always interested in getting the views of the good people at the National Post, but they are not really my intended audience when it comes to the Green Energy Act. We're focused on Ontario families and Ontario businesses. We are very eager to move forward with our Green Energy Act. It's fundamentally about new jobs, it's about clean, green electricity and it's about fighting climate change. We have

found a way through public policy to make sure we can do all of those things. Fifty thousand jobs I think is the single most important achievement that we will make through this Green Energy Act.

I thought at one point in time that my colleague opposite was supportive of these kinds of measures. I find it passing strange that he's no longer interested in pursuing this kind of progressive policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: They talked about the price of energy under this act, Premier, and you and the minister like to use your mothers as examples. I want to talk about Germany and Denmark, where energy costs are four times what they are here in Ontario. Even if energy rates only rise to half of what they are in Germany and Denmark, your mothers will have to reduce their consumption. Even if they reduce it by 20%, their energy bills will still be 70% higher than they are today. How are your mothers going to feel about that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just to stick to the big picture for a moment, there are a few things that we know with absolute certainty. The price of oil and gas is going up. We know something else for sure: Over time, the price for solar power will come down, the price for wind power will come down, the price for biomass and biogas will come down. We know for sure that when we buy our oil and gas, we're not creating a single job. We know for sure that if we invest in solar, in biogas and biomass and wind power, we're creating thousands and thousands of jobs in the province of Ontario. We're putting our money on the future, not on a past that's gone.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: We'll talk about those jobs in a few minutes, Premier, but maybe you're going to wish at the end of the day that you were still being scolded on the Lord's Prayer.

If the Premier doesn't like what the National Post has to say, maybe he's a little closer to the Toronto Star. An article by Tyler Hamilton questions whether our colleges and universities are even equipped to train the workers to work on these energy projects. He speaks to Frank Macedo, an electrical engineering consultant who used to oversee the transmission planning for the province. He said that the jobs you're promising aren't going to happen in the next three years; more likely five to 10 years.

Premier, the experts in the field don't agree with your figures. Either you didn't consult with them before you put together this bill or you've ignored their advice. We need jobs today, not five or 10 years from now.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I love this challenge. They're telling us that we're going to have to take heroic measures in order to ensure that we can train enough people; I love that challenge. They're telling us we're not going to be able to keep up with the demand for these kinds of new initiatives and these kinds of jobs; I love

that challenge. That's why we're going to continue to move ahead.

You know, again, I'm wondering what happened between the election and now when it comes to the Conservative Party. One of their specific commitments, and I'll quote it for you, says, "We will require home energy audits before every sale of a house." That was good policy then; it's good policy now. What happened to them in the face of a little bit of opposition?

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Back to the same—

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I can't even hear—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I can hear you. Member?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Premier touted this bill as part of his stimulus package. Again, the National Post points out: "It's intriguing that the Ontario government should be pursuing such a scheme at a time when the best minds, in all the governments of sufficiently advanced democracies, are frantically trying to figure out 'stimulus' measures for putting fast cash in the pockets of those who need spending money"—rather than saddling Ontarians with a new \$300 tax on their homes.

Premier, why don't you talk about how you're going to put \$300 into their pockets instead of taking it out of their pockets to pay for an audit?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my colleague is making reference to our new home energy audit requirement, but again, I'm going to quote from the platform: "We will require home energy audits before every sale of a house so that the market will reward homes which are energy efficient. This will be a signal to homeowners that they will get a return on energy investments in their homes."

1040

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Who said that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: They said that. They were right then and they're wrong now. Nobody ever said putting in place good public policy was going to be easy. Why are they running from a little bit of opposition?

I'm convinced that at the end of the day, when Ontarians come to fully understand what this is all about—50,000 jobs, clean energy and fighting climate change—they will want to know how quickly they can get on board.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, there's nothing green about an act that is going to put consumers, families and businesses in the red. If you want \$300 audits, then pay for them. Don't take more money out of taxpayers' pockets, ratepayers' pockets. Because it's not just their energy bills that are going to skyrocket; the cost of everything they buy or produce is going to go up under this legislation. We see that every time the price of oil spikes. The

difference is that with this bill there will be no hope of price relief for consumers in the future. Talk about kicking people when they're down.

Premier, why would you force Ontarians to pay more for everything they need at a time when they can afford it the least?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, it's interesting to observe the twisting about on the other side there. Here's a quote from the MPP for Durham during the course of a debate when one of my colleagues, Phil McNeely, introduced this very concept as part of a private member's bill. He said in response:

"I want to commend the member for doing the right thing...."

"The point I want to make is this: First of all, this was one of the planks in our platform in the election.... Okay? It was in our platform. Therefore, it must be a good decision. It's efficient use of our resources, in the general sense."

What happened to this party, which was so wed to this progressive concept before the election? Now, in the face of a little bit of opposition, they're wilting, they're melting, they're putting as much distance between them and this as they possibly can.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: You know, Premier, we have to wonder about your and the minister's mindset in designing this bill. Look at the draconian measures in the bill: warrantless searches into businesses—

Interjections.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Speaker, this is too much fun.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): You want to sit in this chair and experience it? I want to be able to hear the question, though. Please continue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You have to wonder where the Premier and the minister's mindset is on the design of this bill. Let's look at the draconian measures in the bill: warrantless searches into businesses, that the minister didn't even know about when asked about it by the media yesterday; search warrants to get into people's homes to check on compliance with the act; and finally, telling municipally elected officials that the Premier and the minister are going to override their rights, as the elected representatives of their people, to write laws and bylaws within their municipalities.

Once this bill is passed, the precedent will be set. Premier, is this how municipalities can expect to be treated in the future? What other municipal powers do you intend to strip away from those duly elected representatives?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I had the opportunity just a couple of days ago to speak at the combined convention of the Good Roads people and the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, and spoke to this very issue. It was very well received. There is a—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I was there. You didn't even talk about it. The bill wasn't even tabled yet.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The issue of trying to keep the tone down goes both ways within this House. The honourable member just asked the question, and I would hope that he would at least listen to the response.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There was great receptivity to the idea that we can do something together as Ontarians to create jobs, to fight climate change, and get clean and green electricity. There was also an understanding that it's very important that we ensure that we have an economic environment that welcomes those kinds of investments.

We're going to work with our municipal partners to make sure that we get a provincial standard right. What I am saying is, you can't say no to a wind turbine because you don't like the look of the darned things. We're going to find a way—

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

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. I wonder, does the Premier recognize this quote? "It doesn't make any sense that a worker in Thunder Bay has to work more hours to qualify and get fewer weeks of EI support than a worker in Fort McMurray. Surely, a worker in Thunder Bay or Windsor or Hamilton deserves the same support as a Canadian living in Alberta."

This morning, we learned that the number of Ontario EI recipients has increased by 30%. What has the Premier done since he made the quote in August 2008 to ensure that Ontario EI recipients are treated fairly?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. My colleague will know that as a result of efforts made, both by our government and collectively through a few resolutions in this House, we have together secured some real gains for the people of Ontario on a number of fronts. I want to thank my colleague and his party for their support when it comes to achieving those gains. But there is more work to be done and my honourable colleague puts his finger on it. The fact of the matter is that workers in Ontario are the subject of discrimination when it comes to employment insurance benefits. They are receiving fewer resources on a per capita basis than Canadians living in other parts of the country. That is not justifiable, it is not tenable and we need to continue to work together to put pressure on the federal government. I ask him to speak to his federal leader to ensure that he understands how important this is to Ontario workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: The federal budget came and went. Unemployed Ontario workers are still being short-changed. They receive far less in benefits than they should and those benefits aren't being paid out nearly as long as they should. How does the Premier explain the total failure of the so-called EI fairness campaign?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It sounds like my friend is ready to give up on this. We're not.

We sometimes have to play the longer game. Not willingly, but that's just the nature of the animal when it comes to working with various federal governments. We are going to have to continue to collectively—and again, I urge my honourable colleague to speak to his federal leader and ask him to raise these kinds of issues in the House of Commons during question period. He has the possibility there to introduce a resolution, a private member's bill or other kinds of initiatives to ensure that that decision, which has to be made in the House of Commons in Ottawa, stands to the benefit of Ontario workers. I ask my colleague to keep working in that regard.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you for the kind words, Premier. However this failure, whether it be federal or provincial, is being felt across our province. In London, EI claims have jumped 75.5%; Windsor posted a 61% increase in EI claims; Kitchener, a 51% increase; and Hamilton, my city, a 42% increase. At the root of the problem are the hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs that have been lost in Ontario in recent months due to the absence of any sort of jobs strategy from the government. Will the Premier now admit that not only is the EI fairness campaign a failure, but that he has made it worse by having no jobs plan to put Ontario back to work?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, now we part company. What my honourable colleague is saying is that he doesn't support our five-point plan. What he's saying is that he doesn't support those billions of dollars we've invested in new schools, new hospitals, new roads, new bridges, new public transit and new border infrastructure, and the thousands and thousands of jobs that is creating and putting people to work right now. The investment we continue to make in strengthening our workforce, the 11,000 more kids who are graduating from high school every year; he doesn't support that. Fifty thousand more apprentice trainees; he doesn't support those. A hundred thousand more young people in colleges and universities; he doesn't support those. That's all part of our five-point plan. We continue to move on that and we look forward to building on it through our budget.

1050

GREEN POWER GENERATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: To the Premier: The Green Energy Act sets no timelines or targets for increasing renewable energy in Ontario. Despite the rhetoric of transformation, the government is continuing its go-slow approach to green energy. Under this government's plan, come 2027, Ontario will still have less wind power than Texas has today and less than one fifth the solar panels Germany puts in in one year.

Greenpeace, the Ontario Clean Air Alliance, the David Suzuki Foundation and the World Wildlife Fund all say that unless the government increases its targets for

renewable energy, the Green Energy Act will be a green-wash. When will the government set serious targets for renewable energy to match your green rhetoric?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for his question, and I want to ask him one in return, as we'd like to hear from that party about their intentions with respect to the bill.

On the matter that the member has raised, I would say that he's quite off base on two points. Firstly, he references 2027. He's manufacturing something there. I don't know what it's a reference to, but it's certainly made up.

A characteristic of a feed-in tariff is not to associate it with targets or caps. Targets say what you're limiting. They don't say, "We encourage all investors to come forward with their projects in a variety of forms so we can take advantage of them." It says that we have a mindset, a limit, in terms of how much investment we're prepared to accept. The feed-in tariff model that we have adopted is inspired by Europe, where they did not suffer through the targets that the honourable member is referencing in this question.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The main reason the government is stuck in neutral on renewable energy is that it has stubbornly committed to powering 50% of the grid through waste-producing, expensive, unsafe, new nuclear energy. With all that nuclear, there is simply no room on the grid for significant new renewable energy.

A study by professors at the Ivey School of Business says that the McGuinty government has failed to stimulate investment in green energy because of investor uncertainty about the government's long-term commitment to green energy. Why won't this government put green energy first in this province by enshrining in the act strong and long-term public targets for renewable energy?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do encourage the honourable member to absorb this point, because it's a matter of culture. If the honourable member wants to work in an environment that is about targets, those are about limits.

A feed-in tariff model, combined with the right to access to the grid and with certainty about regulation, is not about targets or limits; it's about creating certainty around the investor climate, that, "If you're willing to make the investment, we will buy it, we will connect it, and we will do so in a faster fashion than has ever been done before."

Where I do agree with the honourable member is that it's necessary to move forward promptly with a new model that sees substantial new investment in transmission and especially in creating the capacity for our local distribution companies, like Toronto Hydro, as an example, to have the capital resources and the encouragement to invest today in building a model of distributed generation which allows thousands of rooftops in the city of Toronto to come to life as electricity generators. This

is what the honourable member will see in the next month.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's not only environmental groups and professors who are criticizing the bill. Today in the Toronto Star, industry observers cast doubt on the government's claim that 50,000 new jobs will be created over three years. A former Ontario Hydro director called the jobs claim "a tall order." The government says that 20,000 jobs will be created in three years in transmission and distribution projects, but such projects can take up to 10 years to get going. Meanwhile, the government refuses to promise a minimum 60%-domestic-content measure as is used in Quebec.

I know the Premier loves the challenge; maybe you do, too. When will you show Ontarians how you came up with the figure of 50,000 jobs?

Hon. George Smitherman: A couple of points there. Firstly, yesterday in this House, the leader of that member's party talked about Quebec's domestic content and said that it was enshrined in legislation in Quebec, which is a fallacy. It has been done only through Quebec's procurement model. We have enshrined in the legislation and given ministerial directive capability for moving forward domestic content, which is related to legislation, a much stronger approach than Quebec has offered.

The honourable member obviously has not digested the bill from the standpoint of transmission. Embedded in the bill are efforts related to the Environmental Assessment Act to substantially expedite the capacity to build new transmission in this province, instead of the snail's pace which has been the norm.

With respect to building new transmission, this bill takes special steps to be able to move those projects forward, and I will move forward with a ministerial directive on distribution and transmission within one month.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: My question is to the education Premier. Premier, I have asked you and your Minister of Education repeatedly in this House to implement mandatory reporting and protect the young victims who are bullied and abused in your schools. Your solution is to throw money at this issue. It isn't just about money, Mr. Premier; it's about follow-through and protecting the victims who continue to feel threatened and unsafe in your schools as the bullying and abuse continues unchecked.

Premier, can you tell the growing number of victims of student-on-student violence in Ontario schools why they continue to be ignored by the system and left to fend for themselves in fear in the midst of your inaction and rhetoric on this issue?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure I agree with all the language used by my honourable colleague, but she's on to something. There is a real issue here and I think

that all of our kids have the right to go to school and to feel safe and to be safe. And all parents have the right to drop their kids off at school or send them through the buses, whether it's elementary or high school, in particular, and to enjoy that sense of comfort and security from knowing that the kids are okay at school. I understand and I believe my honourable colleague supports that.

The fact is that we have been moving in this regard. We have, through our improved Safe Schools Act, by legislation we introduced, included the first-ever penalties for bullying. We have new programs in place for expelled students who might be caught up in that. I can also tell my honourable colleague that we intend to move this spring with more legislation, and I think it will speak specifically to the issue that she's raising here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm talking specifically about administrative follow-through. Premier, when I last raised this question, there were five people in the gallery; now, there are many more than five, because the number of students who feel unsafe in your schools is growing unchecked on your watch. Your schools are not doing everything they should be to keep these young victims safe. In fact, they make it adversarial and confrontational when parents try to protect their children from student-on-student violence and abuse, and unfortunately, they are failing to prevent continued bullying and abuse.

Premier, it's time to open your eyes and see the hurt and the fear in these children. They're experiencing this and their families feel powerless to stop it. How many more children and families must suffer before you finally address this issue of mandatory reporting in a substantive way?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I say to my colleague that we do intend to move forward with that particular aspect of improvement to the Safe Schools Act this spring. We will be introducing a bill in that regard.

I must say as well that we have been moving forward in other areas. In addition to that change that we made to the legislation, to the Safe Schools Act, to include the first-ever penalties for bullying, we have also trained some 25,000 teachers and 7,500 principals on the matter of bullying, how to recognize it and how to address it.

I want to take the opportunity as well to say something beyond this, which is that we will do everything we can as a government, collectively, to find a way to better address this issue in our schools, but it's also incumbent upon parents to take an interest in the activities of their children. Whether they either are being victimized or they are maybe caught up in something which is a negative activity, I'm saying we all have a role to play in this. We have done something and we will do more in this House.

POVERTY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Minister of Children and Youth Services, your 25 in 5 bill is more like a five in 25 plan.

It will be framework legislation with no specific targets, no specific actions, no specific commitments. The government's own 25 in 5 plan won't even be in the legislation. When will this government finally stop grandstanding on poverty and start raising the minimum wage above the poverty line, reducing the wait-lists for affordable housing and child care, and rolling out the full Ontario child benefit today, rather than in 2011?

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm really delighted that I will be introducing legislation this afternoon that will enshrine an ongoing commitment to poverty reduction.

We did release our 25 in 5 plan in December. I'm very proud of the work that we have done and that we are committed to doing in the future. We are committed to reducing poverty, to reducing the number of kids living in poverty by 25% over the next five years. But we know that's just the first step. We know that we need an ongoing commitment to poverty reduction. The legislation that we'll be introducing this afternoon, and that I hope you will support, will commit future governments to continue to work on reducing poverty in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Ontarians can only conclude one thing: that the McGuinty Liberals would rather pay lip service to the poor than to actually help them. At a time when more people are falling into poverty every day, there will be nothing in the government's legislation to lessen the burden for these people—no plan, no strategy, absolutely nothing. What use is a poverty plan that has no plan? Indeed, the only thing you can say about it is, it's really poor. What use is it?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I simply don't share the member's pessimism. I actually am very encouraged by the steps that we have taken and that we are committed to taking. I'm especially proud that future governments will continue the work that we have started.

Just as an example, let me tell you what we have already accomplished with the work to date. When we were elected in 2003, a single mom with two kids working a full year at a full-time job had an income of under \$20,000. When our strategy is fully implemented, even without any new federal investments, her income will have gone up by 54%. That's over \$10,000 in the pockets of that family.

ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is for the Minister of Culture. My riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore has the benefit of having important economic clusters in many sectors, including small manufacturing, printing, small business retail, and film and television production. In particular, film and television production is an important economic driver in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, yet this industry has suffered and declined in recent years. As a result, it is imperative that the government play an important role in promoting Ontario as a premier location

for film production through financial incentives and programs. Minister, what is our government doing to help Ontario's film and television industry remain competitive with other jurisdictions during these challenging economic times?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: The McGuinty government understands, indeed, that this is a challenging time for Ontario's film and television industry. So in order to help that industry and help them remain competitive in this tough economic climate, our government is proposing to make our increased production tax credits permanent. This will give businesses the certainty that they need for investment and for planning. If passed, domestic film productions will continue to be eligible for the 35% tax credit and foreign for the 25%. These are very competitive rates vis-à-vis other jurisdictions. Indeed, such financial incentives will combine with our world-renowned creative talent, our technical expertise and all of our wonderful first-class facilities to ensure that Ontario remains a key film production centre here in Canada and abroad.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm certainly encouraged to hear that the government is taking such a strong and proactive position on this important matter. With three new productions underway or set to start in Etobicoke–Lakeshore as we speak, the film and television industry is key to the economic health of my community, and of course to that of many regions in Toronto and across the province.

Another current challenge that film productions face is securing funding for early-stage development activities, including scriptwriting, concept and story development. In these tough economic times it's even more crucial for our film industry to secure early funding so they can develop marketable products. Minister, can you tell this House what the government is doing to better support Ontario companies seeking to attract financing and attempting to bring their projects closer to production?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I thank the honourable member for her insight and understanding of what this industry does for the province and how it impacts on her riding.

This industry contributes \$671 million to our economy, or did so last year, and we understand the real competitive advantage that film production and screen-based industries give to our economy. Consequently, the government just recently provided \$2 million to those important industries through the screen-based content initiative, administered by the Ontario Media Development Corp. This funding is supporting the work of 49 Ontario companies as they create marketable entertainment for this country and the world, just exactly the kind of smart investment a smart government should be making.

The government understands that to lead the way by investing in these industries, that this is vital to the ongoing transition of our—

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

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, and it concerns the Second Career program. Ernest Kiss is a constituent of mine from Collingwood who is looking to be retrained in business. He registered and qualified for retraining under the Second Career program, but the day before classes began, Mr. Kiss received a phone call from your ministry indicating that he no longer qualified for the program because, apparently, the course level he chose was too high for the level of job he was seeking, even though he knows of others who have received funding for the very same course. We talked to him yesterday and he told us, "It's like they're trying to do everything but help you get a job." Mr. Kiss wants to take the course and get back into the workforce. Minister, why won't you let him do that?

Hon. John Milloy: I appreciate the concern the honourable member has for his constituent. As is always the case, if any member brings forward a case, I'd be very happy to look into it and get back to him with the details on it.

The fact is, through Employment Ontario, we have a variety of services which are available to those who are looking for a job, such as my friend's constituent. Through Employment Ontario, we serve about 900,000 people a year for a variety of training programs, both short term and long term. There are certain eligibility requirements for both of them. But I'm pleased to report to the House that we've seen 6,300 people come forward for Second Career. We've seen about 9,000 people come forward for short-term training since June. At the same time, we're working with literally tens of thousands of other Ontarians who need support in finding employment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Minister, I'll send Mr. Kiss's letter over to you so you can look into it.

In the meantime, let me tell you about another case. Ben Gaston of Alliston, also in my riding, has applied to the Second Career program for a six-month gasfitter's training course at Hi-Mark Occupational Skills Training Centre in Barrie, which is an accredited training provider for the Technical Standards and Safety Authority.

Ben is already qualified as a sheet metal worker and with his gasfitter's certificate he'll be able to get a job in six months, but your ministry has said no. They won't let him go to Hi-Mark, even though it's accredited by an agency of the government of Ontario. Instead, your officials are telling him he has to spend the next two years at Humber College, when all he needs is a six-month certificate to get a job and get back into the workforce.

These are two examples of what thousands of Ontarians are going through when they try to get into your Second Career program. Why won't you cut the red tape, recognize the Hi-Mark training centre and help Mr. Gaston get a job?

Hon. John Milloy: I think the member appreciates the fact that I can't stand here and, on the basis of a 30-

second question, give an analysis of the situation he's raising. I'd be happy to look into it.

I reject the premise of his question. He says thousands of Ontarians are finding obstacles in moving forward with Second Career. The fact of the matter is, we've seen 6,300 people come forward, and let me share stories with the Legislature. Violet, a young, single parent, was laid off as a packer at a local plant. Second Career is helping her attend the construction techniques program at Conestoga College. This course will give Violet the credit she needs to complete her general education diploma and enable her to complete the math course that's a pre-requisite to apprenticeship.

Let me tell the House about Zoltan, a young man I met, who was laid off after working 16 years at a plant in Oakville. Zoltan's previous studies, combined with some work experience in the electronics field, made him an ideal candidate for Mohawk College—

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

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

Mr. Peter Kormos: The question is to the Attorney General. We recently learned that the government of Ontario blew 23.4 million bucks to get a judgment for \$3.5 million. How many millions of dollars is this government going to spend fighting SARS victims, including 53 health care workers?

1110

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Of course SARS was a terrible tragedy in so many areas, and we will never forget those who suffered and never forget the lessons that we have learned as a result of it. There has been ongoing litigation. All those matters are before the courts. In fact, there is an appeal of a procedural step that both parties are appealing.

But there have been a lot of lessons learned out of the terrible SARS tragedy, and I know in the subsequent questions, my colleague the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care will want to speak to some of the steps that have been taken to make sure that when infection tragedies strike, we are so much better positioned to deal with them than we were in the past.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Kormos: You see, we're talking about the people who were victims of SARS, including 53 health care workers, who look for nothing more than fair compensation for their losses. Rather than lining the pockets of lawyers, why doesn't this Attorney General take his own counsel, apologize, sit down, and negotiate a fair settlement instead of creating huge legal fees for all the parties?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. David Caplan: In June 2004, our government released Operation Health Protection, a three-year action plan to revitalize our public health system. The third and final year of the plan has ended, and significant work has

been accomplished under each of the plan's six strategic priorities. For the information of the House, we have created the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. We have renewed public health in numerous ways and, I would submit to you, implemented the recommendations of the Campbell report and increased the share of funding for mandatory programs from the previous low levels to 75%. We've enhanced health emergency management by creating the emergency management unit, a dedicated branch of the public health division. We've enhanced community and infection control of communicable disease by establishing the PIDAC, the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee, and 14 infectious control networks. We have implemented—

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

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, this week over 1,000 municipal representatives from across Ontario representing rural and urban communities gathered in Toronto for the Ontario Good Roads Association and Rural Ontario Municipal Association joint conference. I know that local representatives of my home city and the minister's, Ottawa, were in attendance throughout the conference. There have been a number of speeches, delegation meetings with ministers and ministers' forums Tuesday afternoon. The representatives at the conference are looking for ways that they can assist their communities through these troubled economic times. They are sharing with each other best practices and looking to the province for guidance to ensure their cities and towns come out stronger than ever.

Could the minister please report to the House the details of the how the OGRA/ROMA conference went?

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the honourable member from Ottawa-Orléans. It was a very constructive conference the last three days, as over 1,300 delegates from rural Ontario joined with close to 15 cabinet colleagues and parliamentary assistants. The Premier really set the tone and was very well received by the delegates, receiving, by the way, a standing ovation as a result of his commitment to infrastructure for rural Ontario, his commitment to ensure that red tape would be cut and that we would fast-track initiatives like environmental assessment for public transit and fast track green energy projects.

We were also particularly pleased to meet with the eastern and western wardens; we had some very good discussions and dialogues with those individuals. We're particularly pleased to highlight some of the significant historic record investment in infrastructure in rural Ontario. We're there for—

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

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister, for that. I know that in your speech you gave examples of the

innovative solutions being used by Ontario municipalities to not only meet today's economic realities but respond to the environmental challenges that we are all facing. In order for innovations like these and others to continue, we need to assist municipalities as best we can to provide all communities, small and large, with the support they need.

On a number of occasions, I have heard from municipal leaders about the costs they incur because of court security that they are providing not only to their own residents but for surrounding municipalities in their regions. Could the minister please tell the House how our government, and his ministry in particular, is reducing the financial burden on municipalities, especially rural municipalities?

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm very pleased to answer the honourable member's question. When we sat down with AMO and the city of Toronto, the Minister of Finance and I talked about a long-term, principled approach to uploading.

After years of disastrous downloading by the previous Tory government, this government is in the business of partnering and treating our municipal partners with respect. That's why we have already uploaded the Ontario drug plan. We are uploading ODSF. We've brought funding up to the public—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please continue.

Hon. Jim Watson: I know the Tories are upset because their leader, for the first time in a decade, didn't get a standing ovation from ROMA when he spoke to the delegates, including members of his own caucus.

Let me continue: Kawartha Lakes, \$11.2 million; the good people of Northumberland—Investing in Ontario—\$1 million; Quinte West, \$4 million; Peterborough, \$7.1 million—

Mr. John O'Toole: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I'm not going to accept the point of order. It's understood we don't raise points of order during question period.

Mr. John O'Toole: I was trying to make the point that the minister should—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No. Do you remember former Deputy Speaker Mr. Johnson talking about two people standing at once?

New question.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I know this week he was as concerned as me and every other member from Ottawa when we learned that 90% of the patients at the Ottawa Hospital were waiting at least 360 days for an MRI. That's 12 times the provincial target, which was set by your government at 28. I need to know, how could you have let this happen?

The Champlain LHIN CEO has indicated we can get out of this mess if we streamline all of the MRI wait-lists

in the city of Ottawa. He also indicated that we need anywhere between one to three new MRIs.

So my question to you, Minister: Have you contacted the CEO of our LHIN and our local hospitals to work on streamlining those lists, and more importantly, when will one, two or even three new MRIs hit the city of Ottawa so we can make sure that those people waiting for an MRI get it in a timely manner?

Thank you for your—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. David Caplan: I do want to thank the member for the question, because this is a serious matter—having people in Ottawa and eastern Ontario have access to important diagnostic services.

In fact, I was in Ottawa. I had a chance to be hosted by Dr. Cushman at the LHIN office to meet in a round-table format with hospital and CCAC officials and others interested in this issue in particular. I can report to the member that three MRI machines have been placed into Ottawa: one at the Queensway Carleton Hospital, one at the Ottawa Hospital, and one at the Montfort Hospital. In fact, they have recently come into service. The data is older data, and you will see, as we move forward, that those wait-lists are coming down. In fact, across the province, wait times for MRIs, while there is still much more work to do, have come down 22%.

I do thank the—

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

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Last summer, Dr. Alan Hudson, leader of Ontario's wait times strategy, said that our Champlain LHIN, which includes Ottawa, had the longest waiting lists in the province in a whole number of areas, including MRIs. The Premier, in response to this disastrous report for Ottawa, said that wait times for MRIs had gone down 37%. Does that mean that wait times last summer were 500 days? Does it mean that wait times were much less last summer and much higher now?

We have three cabinet ministers in this Legislature from the Ottawa area, including the Premier. When are you going to do your job, as ministers, and get this problem fixed for Ottawa and eastern Ontario? Health services wait times are longer in the Premier's city—

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

Hon. David Caplan: This is a member who presided over the closure of the Riverside Hospital and the Grace hospital and attempted to close the Montfort Hospital. I think it's rather surprising that he would come into this House—in fact, since 2003 we've almost doubled the number of MRI exams per year in the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please continue.

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Hon. David Caplan: As I was saying, since 2003, when the member was on this side of the House, we have almost doubled the number of MRI exams per year in the province of Ontario, from more than 276,000 to over 560,000 procedures. I would add that if this member

were to be allowed to implement his program of another \$3-billion cut to our health care system, I shudder to think what the good people of Ottawa and Ontario would experience: further health care cuts under this member's—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member for Nickel Belt.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

La communauté francophone est inquiète du manque de nouvelles face au processus d'engagement de la communauté francophone envers les réseaux locaux d'intégration des services de santé, les RLISS. Les francophones sont fortement opposés à la création de comités aviseurs des services de santé en français pour les RLISS. J'aimerais savoir quand le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée a l'intention de faire rapport aux francophones de l'Ontario à ce sujet.

Hon. David Caplan: I do thank the member for the question, because I have instructed the ministry and they are well aware that while the LHINs must engage their public's local leaders, there are two very special and important kinds of engagements which need to happen of a constitutional and a fundamental nature. One, of course, is with our First Nations people. The other, of course, is with the francophone community in the province of Ontario. That's why we posted for comment for the francophone community a proposed regulation. We have gone through that period of consultation and received considerable feedback. I am working with an advisory committee which has been struck and is traditionally providing advice to the Minister of Health and working with my colleague the minister of francophone affairs to be able to ensure that that engagement of our francophone community in the provision of health care service is provided.

I welcome any constructive—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Je suis heureuse d'entendre que le ministre reconnaît que le processus d'engagement a besoin d'être mis en place et que quelqu'un y travaille. Mais ce qu'il ne reconnaît pas, c'est qu'il y a consensus à même la communauté francophone que, dans le court terme, on aimerait voir les réseaux des services de santé en français assumer ce rôle. Il y a consensus au niveau de la communauté francophone elle-même, et la ministre déléguée aux services en français a reçu des centaines de courriels qui vont dans le même sens.

Donc, on se demande, pourquoi le délai? Pourquoi est-ce qu'il faut continuer d'attendre? Il y a consensus. Mettons ce modèle d'engagement de la communauté francophone en place même si le comité veut continuer. Mais les RLISS font leur travail en ce moment. Ils

prennent des décisions qui ont un impact sur la vie des francophones pendant que les francophones n'ont pas un processus d'engagement en place. Quand est-ce qu'on va l'avoir ?

Hon. David Caplan: Well, as the member points out in her question, there is not one view in the francophone community; there are many. The francophone community is quite diverse in the province of Ontario and exists throughout the entire geography of the province. There are needs, whether that would be in Niagara or in northern Ontario, in eastern Ontario or in the southwest.

This government takes the time to listen to the constructive suggestions of members of the francophone community. I would say to the member opposite that if she too has constructive ideas, we would very much welcome her suggestions. I have not heard any in her comments today, but she would be very free to forward any of those particular ideas and ways that we can strengthen the engagement between local health integration networks and members of the francophone community in order to be able to provide French-language services appropriately to members of the community in a way that would be beneficial to them.

We are going to work and continue—

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

NORTHERN HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, in the summer of 2003, I made a commitment to provide enhanced cardiac services in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan and for all of northwestern Ontario. While our Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre provides world-class care in many areas, we had never been able to receive angioplasty services in our region. As a result, thousands of patients from northwestern Ontario have had to leave our region and fly to Ottawa, Toronto or Hamilton for this procedure. This would place a great deal of strain on the patient and the family of the patient, and in some cases result in a death where the patient was not able to reach the southern Ontario destination in time. Many families were unable to accompany their loved ones for financial reasons, making an already difficult situation even worse.

Minister, can you please provide this House with an update on the progress that has been made with regard to the provision of angioplasty services at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, to the benefit of all of northwestern Ontario?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan. I would also acknowledge the incredible work that my colleague Minister Gravelle has done to advocate for continued improvement to health care in northern Ontario.

I am pleased to share with the member and inform him that we're making good on the commitment that he had the pleasure to announce back in 2003. Earlier this month, we announced that this government is investing

\$8 million in a new angioplasty suite at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre.

Northern Ontario has one of the highest rates of cardiac disease in the province. Over the past year, about 450 people from the region had to be transferred to other hospitals in Ontario to receive this angioplasty procedure.

When it's up and running in 2010-11, Thunder Bay's new angioplasty suite will be able to perform 550 procedures per year. This will make life easier for patients and their families, especially in northwestern Ontario, because they will—

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you very much, Minister, for that answer. I know that the constituents in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan will be very pleased to know that we are now expanding the services there that have been running for two years.

Still, given that the new angioplasty suite will not be able to fully accommodate 550 patients until 2010-11, some of the people who require angioplasty will still have to travel to southern Ontario hospitals in the meantime, and the cost of travelling can be very high. I ask the minister: What is our government going to do to help to defray the costs that northern Ontario patients have to pay when they have to travel to receive OHIP-insured services?

Hon. David Caplan: When we don't have the services available close to home in northern Ontario, I'm glad to tell the member that more than 880,000 northern Ontario residents qualify for the northern Ontario travel grant. We process an average of 155,000 applications each and every year.

I want you to know that our government is committed to improving this program. That's why we raised the northern health travel grant mileage rate by 19.7% to 41 cents per kilometre; that's why we implemented an accommodation allowance. We want to help patients who have to travel more than 200 kilometres to pay for a place to stay, if that's needed.

We've come a long way with this program, but we need to recognize that there's more to do to improve the reimbursement time frame. The northern health travel grant enhancement project is on track, I say to the member, to reduce application processing time and to further reduce claim processing time, and the ministry is currently working on—

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

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, as you're well aware, the forestry sector has been devastated in the province of Ontario, but certain areas in the forestry sector have been actively pushing for changes to energy spot market sales so that they could further shut down their mills and sell energy, for those which own dams, rather than run their mills.

Shutting down mills will put a lot more of the people out of work than just the people who work in the mills—the cutters in the forest and the haulers, just to name a few. Minister, how can the Green Energy Act, in relation to the spot market sales, support the forestry sector in the ailing environment it is in?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I thank the member for the question. I would suspect that this is an example of a mill where the mill and the dam work in synergy. There are a number of mills that in fact do that. One of the opportunities that the mill has is that it can have its production at night, it can store its pulp, and then it can go for demand-response and work with the IESO, the independent system operator, in order to receive some dollars for that demand-response.

That's very much what many of these different mills and dams have been doing. It has been part of our responsibility to work with them, not only on the spot market, but they also can become totally independent through cogeneration. That's why we gave Abitibi, as an example, \$20 million for their boiler in Fort Frances-Rainy River, of which they've drawn down \$17 million. It's moving forward on a cogeneration project—

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

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Minister, selling on the spot market could effectively mean that, "In 15 minutes, you're going to be out of work for four hours." How can that be effective in working in the forestry sector so that these individuals have job security?

1130

One of the key areas, when you're talking about job security, is the mill at Iroquois Falls. I know a great number of individuals are concerned in that area, not only at the mill, but also in the surrounding communities, that the sale of that mill could be directly as a result of the inability to sell on the spot market and they're trying to circumvent the system. What this could mean is that the mill could be sold and then the focus would be on selling energy as opposed to providing energy for the mill and the local community.

Will the government commit to ensuring, by buying that mill at Iroquois Falls, that the energy produced at that mill will stay there to support the local communities?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I have absolutely nothing in front of me from AbitibiBowater with respect to Iroquois Falls. At such time as I do, we'll look at the options that are available to us.

You and I both know that AbitibiBowater is under extraordinary pressure worldwide. It has a significant deficit, \$6 billion, a billion that must be paid this year, and they're looking to all of their options.

In the mill in question, they run 24/7 and they work at night. They store their pulp so they can go on the spot market as demand requires it. At first, they thought it was going to be a couple of times a year, and it's maybe up to four or five times a year. That's a plus for any mill, not a minus. They're able to do both: produce, and at the same time help us in terms of the spot market.

What's more important around the green energy is the opportunity to become self-sufficient in another way, through bio-energy—for example, pelletization—using the biomass in a different way—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member for Parkdale–High Park.

MINERAL EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines: NDP candidate Lyn Edwards has heard from many residents of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock who are worried about uranium exploration in their area. They're concerned about the future effects of open-pit uranium mining, such as tonnes of low-level radioactive tailings, contaminated soil and groundwater, and long-term impacts on the local watershed and the farm and recreational land it supplies.

Before exploration heats up and quickly turns to mining, will you commit to commissioning a study to comprehensively examine the health and ecological impacts of uranium exploration and mining?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: As the member will know, we are in the process of going through a modernization of the Mining Act, and we've had a number of consultations which have wrapped up. Discussions involved trying to find a real balance between maintaining a positive investment climate for the mining sector and also properly respecting First Nation communities and others.

In terms of the issues related to uranium, they have been part of the discussion that people have brought up; it's not actually part of the scope of our discussion. We recognize that as a result of our need for nuclear power in the province—and radioisotopes—the exploration is not going forward in that regard. There are many discussions about it. We have opened up the discussions to it. When we had our session, for example, in Kingston, it became a real area of discussion.

I must tell you that we are keen to move forward with a positive result, and we're committed to bringing forward our legislation on the Mining Act in this spring session.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock is an ecological gem and residents are worried about the long-term impacts of uranium exploration and mining, as I said before, on the watershed and natural environment. Studying this impact is a thoughtful and reasonable request from the very people who are most affected. Why won't you today, in this House, commit to commissioning a study to comprehensively examine the health and ecological impacts of uranium exploration and mining?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Again, in terms of the scope of our review of the Mining Act, we brought forward a very clear discussion paper in terms of the issues that were there. We encouraged discussion of all areas, and that became part of it.

As the member would know well, in terms of the future, in any exploration that takes place, perhaps one in 10,000 would end up producing a mine. The fact is that as a result of the fact that we do need to maintain the possibilities in terms of our need for nuclear power, our possibilities in terms of radioisotopes, those discussions are there.

We welcome a discussion in terms of our Mining Act consultations. We have done that throughout the process. We look forward to moving forward on what we think will be a very positive piece of legislation later this spring.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended. There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to introduce Richard Wall, who is a student from the University of Akron, Ohio, who is actually from Tillsonburg, Ontario. He's in fourth-year political science at University of Akron in Ohio and part of the internship program. I'd like to welcome him to the Legislature. He'll be with me until May of this year.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Not that the Speaker should be participating in debate, but I think the record should be corrected that he's actually from Port Burwell in the great riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London. If you ever want some great cherries, visit his mother and father's farm. They've got the best sweet cherries going.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I have no quarrel with the Speaker promoting the cherries from that part of the Ontario, but I suggest he bring some to the chamber come cherry season next late summer if he indeed is going to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will keep that in mind.

Introductions?

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to mention that Jack Doris from Peterborough, a former mayor, with 40 years of municipal service, is here today; Paul Ayotte, who's the current mayor of Peterborough and was a classmate of mine some five or 10 years ago—maybe 50 years ago—and Eric Martin. They are visiting us here today and visiting Jeff Leal from Peterborough as well.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. John O'Toole: It's all news all the time.

I would like to comment: This morning the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Mr. Watson, had kind of a lob-ball question thrown at him, talking about ROMA

and the good roads conference on Monday and Tuesday of this week. I'd like to assure the House that our leader, John Tory, met with the leaders of rural and northern Ontario. He met with the eastern wardens, he met with the western wardens, he met with the northern Ontario wardens and the FONOM group, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities.

I can assure you, Mr. Speaker—and the minister, for the record here, that we didn't hear quite the optimism that the minister would have had the House believe. I wouldn't use the term "misleading." But I would like to say that what I did hear, for the record, is that they're very, very concerned about the economy in northern Ontario, much of which is failed policy from the McGuinty government. They talked about the tragedy of the pulp and paper industry, the mining industry, and now we have the Mining Act under review—another piece of red tape to make the economy even worse. They talked about the lack of infrastructure funding. They don't have the one third because these are communities with populations of 6,000 and potentially less. They talked about the mess they've made of health care in northern Ontario. They've talked about the role of the LHINs, which is really masking the real problem of cutting services in small-town Ontario. I can say the same thing in my own riding: It's anything but what the minister said today—

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

MOPAR CANADIAN NATIONALS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Every weekend, from Victoria Day to Labour Day, thousands of tourists travel to Grand Bend in the northwest part of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. Everyone has a different reason for going there. Some come to relax at the beach or at the cottage; some go camping at Pinery Park or other campgrounds we have there. Then we have our race fans who come to visit the Grand Bend Motorplex.

This summer, from July 17 to 19, Grand Bend Motorplex will host the 10th annual Mopar Canadian Nationals. As one of only two national events held in Canada each year, Mopar Canadian Nationals will draw over 450 participating teams and 35,000 race fans from across North America, including people who travel from BC and Texas. The enthusiasm of race fans makes this event one of the largest race weekends sponsored by the International Hot Rod Association.

The competition will feature the "fastest cars on earth," which have top fuel dragsters, which travel at over 320 miles per hour. There will also be "wild pro modified" cars, low six-second mountain motor stock cars, funny car matches and other things. Fans can take a chance to cheer on local racers, including Rob Atchison, the three-time International Hot Rod Association champion, and Paul Noakes, last year's second-place winner, as they race around on their home track.

I encourage everyone to travel to Grand Bend this July and visit one of Canada's premier racing facilities, the Grand Bend Motorplex, and take in the excitement of the Mopar Canadian Nationals.

ARBORISAN WOOD CRAFT

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I rise today to offer my best wishes to a family in my riding who are starting a small business venture. In these tough economic times, it's a great pleasure to be able to stand in this place and share a good-news story.

Bill and Heather Colls have really rocked in the Kanata economy and community. Heather and Bill started the Kanata food bank some time ago, which now flourishes, but now they have, along with their son, Geoffrey, started Arborisan Wood Craft in November. Based in Stittsville, they produce wooden lawn and garden furniture and sell it online. The English garden and Adirondack-style furniture are available as kits or fully assembled. Pictures of their products can be found on their website at www.arborisanwoodcraft.com, and I understand a complete catalogue will be online soon.

I hope residents of Ottawa, eastern Ontario and all of Ontario will support this local new business. Unfortunately, I was not able to be at the official opening of their production facility last Friday, but I plan to visit it very soon.

In the meantime, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate two great citizens of Kanata and the west part of Ottawa, Bill and Heather Colls, and their son Geoffrey. I wish them every success in their new business.

NIAGARA PENINSULA
CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Mr. Peter Kormos: The Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre down in south St. Catharines provides incredibly important services for the youngest of our residents: diagnostic and rehabilitative and therapeutic work. I've been there and I've seen some of the tremendous things they do. They identify and work with infant hearing problems; they work with language disorders, speech disorders; they have orthopedic, developmental pediatrics and pediatric clinics; they have specialized programs like casting and splinting and gait analysis. These are incredibly important things because all of us here know full well that the earlier you get to detect and respond to these things, the more effective that response is going to be.

The problem is that, unlike hospitals and schools, the Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre is not receiving the modest inflationary increases in the funds provided by the government. They're going to be short \$200,000 over the course of this ending fiscal year and the beginning of next year's. That means that three to four staff are going to have to be laid off and that means that already lengthy waiting lists for these kids are going to become longer.

It's not a huge amount of money. I'm calling upon this Minister of Finance to ensure that the Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre receives that modest inflationary increase in their funding. Two hundred thousand dollars are going to serve a whole lot of kids and save a whole lot of them from ugly waiting lists.

SIEMENS CANADA

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: On January 8 of this year, I had the opportunity to visit Siemens, a rotor production and engine assembly facility in Hamilton. With over 45 years of experience in building gas turbines in Hamilton, Siemens has established an important place for itself in our city and worldwide.

Siemens' contribution to Hamilton can be seen both within its facilities and throughout our community. During my tour I was amazed at how technical, complex and efficient the process was to construct these large turbines. The high-efficiency, low-emission turbine produced in Hamilton and used throughout the world is a great example of Siemens' commitment to excellence in its field.

Siemens is an important part of ensuring that our local economy remains diversified and connected to the global economy. They also have a very strong record of volunteerism within our community. They are dedicated to improving the lives of Hamiltonians.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Brian Maragno, Craig Laviolette and Katie Walton, who made this tour possible, and for their continued dedication and great work in our city of Hamilton.

1510

LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My comments today are on the private member's resolution I'm going to be talking about tomorrow in the House, and I'm going to read it: "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should provide adequate funding to community-based literacy and basic skills programs so that the agencies can properly address the growing enrolment."

It's been a really interesting process to go through this over the last few weeks, talking to all the literacy councils, colleges and school boards about some of the issues we've got with literacy in our province. It's sort of the unknown and hidden issue that we probably don't want to face.

I understand there are almost 2.4 million people who are really unable to enter the future trades and future job market with the kind of literacy they have today. As well, we look at things like the Second Career program, which is having trouble getting people into it.

What we're finding, quite frankly, is that they need to get basic literacy before they can enter the Second Career program. When we lose 200,000 or 300,000 manufacturing jobs, there will be a lot more of these people coming on at a very humiliating time in their lives when they've lost their job and, at the same time, can't read and write properly or even do a resumé properly.

That's the intent of the resolution tomorrow. I look forward to debating it, and I hope that at the end of the day we can have full support of this House to provide more funding for literacy and basic skills.

CRIME STOPPERS AWARDS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today. I want to tell you about some amazing Ontarians who have been honoured with top awards by Crime Stoppers International. Three of the top four awards announced worldwide by Crime Stoppers International went to Ontarians.

On February 19, Minister Bartolucci and I welcomed Sergeant Gary Gold, of Halton region, to Queen's Park to congratulate him on his Coordinator of the Year award. Sergeant Gold has implemented some extremely innovative projects to promote the program at high schools across Halton region.

Kedre Browne, a student volunteer with Toronto Crime Stoppers program, was awarded Student of the Year internationally, and Sharon Marunchak, a volunteer board member with the Sudbury Rainbow Centre Crime Stoppers program, was named Top Civilian of the Year.

We'd all like to send our sincere thanks out to these individuals and to everyone else across this province who is involved with this great organization. They work hard to ensure that our neighbourhoods and communities remain safe.

Since 1984, Ontario Crime Stoppers programs have been responsible for the arrest of 63,000 persons and the recovery of over \$780 million in stolen property and seized illicit narcotics. These recipients personify the true meaning of community safety, and our community should be indebted for the work these people do on our behalf.

TOWNSHIP OF WOOLWICH

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Today, I rise in the House to highlight the township of Woolwich, the township in which I live in my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga.

Woolwich is Hockeyville. Woolwich is in the top five communities in Canada to be Hockeyville, and the last community in Ontario. So we need the help of all Ontarians to help Woolwich become Hockeyville.

Woolwich has a long tradition of hockey: St. Jacobs is the home of Darryl Sittler, and Elmira was the home of the late Dan Snyder.

We need Ontario to vote, and we need Ontario to vote often. There are three ways to vote: by phone, text or online. This is where it gets to be a little bit like Queen's Park Idol: You can text "votewoolwich" to 222111 or phone 1-866-533-8066 or go online to www.woolwich-hockeyville.ca. Vote between February 28 and March 4.

Vote often, vote unlimited and please, we need Ontario to help bring Hockeyville back to Ontario.

RIDINGS OF NORTHUMBERLAND- QUINTE WEST AND PETERBOROUGH

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'm honoured today to have the opportunity to welcome a vast array of businesses from my riding of Northumberland-Quinte West and from my

good friend Jeff Leal's riding of Peterborough. We've been keeping these treasures hidden for far too long and today we're sharing them with all of you.

To the mayors and councillors who are joining us from these municipalities, welcome to Queen's Park.

To all my friends here at Queen's Park, your staff and public service employees, I encourage you to join MPP Leal and me in committee rooms 228 and 230 this afternoon from 2:30 to 6:30. Prepare to have your day enriched.

Today is an opportunity to showcase our ridings and the wonderful things we have to offer, both in Northumberland-Quinte West and Peterborough. You will find award-winning cheese producers, wine manufacturers, representatives from the National Air Force Museum of Canada and 8 Wing Trenton, to name just a few. Take a moment to view the displays put on by our local tourism and economic development folks in Northumberland-Quinte West and Peterborough. I'm sure you'll find yourself wondering why you haven't taken the time to travel just a few miles east of the GTA to enjoy rich culture and deepen your appreciation for small-town business in Ontario.

I'd be remiss not to mention that our very own Mrs. Sonja Bata is here today. It is indeed a pleasure to be in her company.

I encourage everyone to come out and learn more about our special part of eastern Ontario and enjoy some of what we proudly can call home.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that: Mr. Levac assumes ballot item number 75 on the list drawn on November 28, 2007, and Mr. Sorbara assumes ballot item number 56 on the list drawn on January 28, 2009.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

POVERTY REDUCTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DE LA PAUVRETÉ

Ms. Matthews moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario / Projet de loi 152, Loi concernant une stratégie à long terme de réduction de la pauvreté en Ontario.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I will defer that to ministerial statements.

GREENBELT DAY ACT, 2009
LOI DE 2009 SUR LE JOUR
DE LA CEINTURE DE VERDURE

Mr. Dickson moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 153, An Act to proclaim Greenbelt Day / Projet de loi 153, Loi proclamant le Jour de la ceinture de verdure.

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. Joe Dickson: In February 2005, the original greenbelt legislation received royal assent. We currently stand without a day to commemorate this piece of legislation. If passed, this bill will proclaim February 28 in each year as Greenbelt Day in Ontario. This day will provide opportunities to raise awareness and appreciation of the benefits to our 1.8 million acres of protected greenbelt land in Ontario for present and future generations to share.

1520

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

POVERTY

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Today our government is proposing legislation which, if passed, would enshrine in law a long-term commitment to reducing poverty in Ontario.

In December, we launched Ontario's first-ever poverty reduction strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*. It's a comprehensive five-year plan that will reduce the number of children living in poverty by 25%. It will raise the standard of living of all children living in poverty in Ontario and lift 90,000 kids out of poverty altogether. It's a plan designed to break the cycle of poverty by improving opportunities for children and youth, especially when it comes to their education.

But a five-year strategy is not enough. It's a very good start, but if we're serious about reducing poverty and expanding opportunity for all Ontarians, we need a long-term, ongoing commitment that will extend beyond one government's mandate.

The proposed Poverty Reduction Act is that commitment. It means that Ontario would have both the immediate plan and the long-term commitment we need to reduce poverty for generations to come.

Some people may argue that this is not the time for poverty reduction, but we completely reject that argument. Now, more than ever, is the time to act, with purpose and with boldness and with vision. The fact is

that in order to emerge from this economic uncertainty that we are now experiencing, we are going to need everyone at their best, everyone contributing, everyone working together to build a stronger Ontario.

If passed, the Poverty Reduction Act would require future governments of Ontario to develop a renewed strategy with a specific target every five years. It would require the government to report annually on key indicators related to poverty and opportunity. These indicators would typically include income, school success, health and housing. It would mandate future governments to consult people living in poverty as they develop future strategies.

The proposed legislation requires that all future strategies be built on a shared vision, a vision of a province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential in a prosperous and healthy Ontario.

Future strategies must be guided by the following seven principles: (1) that there's untapped potential in Ontario's population that needs to be drawn upon by building supports and eliminating barriers to full participation by all people in Ontario's economy and society; (2) that strong, healthy communities are an integral part of poverty reduction—that their potential must be brought to bear on the reduction of poverty; (3) that there must be a recognition of the heightened risk of poverty among groups such as immigrants, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples, and racialized groups; (4) that families be supported so that they can play a meaningful role in promoting opportunity; (5) that all people in Ontario, including those living in poverty, deserve to be treated with respect and with dignity; (6) that Ontarians, especially people living in poverty, are to be involved in the reduction of poverty; and, finally, (7) that we need a sustained commitment to work together to develop strong and healthy children, families and communities.

We are joined in the House today by some people in the gallery who have long fought the battle against the injustice of poverty. I would like to take a moment to recognize them and thank them for their advocacy. These are some of the extraordinary people who have fought to put poverty reduction on Ontario's agenda. The people here today and many, many others right across this province never gave up this fight. They never gave up hope for a better life for all Ontarians. I want to say thank you for having the courage and the tenacity to sustain this fight for social justice when it may have seemed to have been a futile effort. We would not be here without you. You have left a lasting legacy.

If passed, this legislation would enshrine our commitment that all partners continue to have a seat at the table, that everyone who is committed to reducing poverty and expanding opportunity in Ontario has a voice in that conversation. It is going to take all of us: all levels of government, the business community, the non-profit sector, everyone, all of us working together.

Ontarians have always drawn strength from the fact that this is a province of boundless opportunity. Ours is a

province where everyone has the chance to succeed regardless of where they start in life. The proposed Poverty Reduction Act would, if passed, ensure that we stay true to our best values in good times and in bad.

Thank you.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I rise with great honour today to mark Black History Month. I speak today at a remarkable time in our history books. As the people of this great province and country celebrate Black History Month, it is important for all of us to understand and to reflect on the origins of this special month.

We reflect on the fact that Black History Month began as Negro History Week in 1926 in the United States through the work of African-American scholar Dr. Carter G. Woodson. We reflect on the fact that in the 1950s, community organizations such as the Canadian Negro Women's Association began to celebrate the importance of the history of the black community in Toronto. We reflect on the fact that Toronto became the first municipality in Canada to proclaim Black History Month through the efforts of great individuals and organizations such as the Ontario Black History Society.

Black History Month's aim is to recognize, to celebrate and to reflect on the immense contribution to society made by black slaves and how their enduring struggles have positively shaped our society. As we reflect on this journey, Black History Month is tremendously important to recognize and celebrate our men, our women, our mothers, our fathers, our sisters, our brothers, our daughters, our sons, our colleagues and our friends in the African-Canadian community for their contribution to society at large. Their accomplishments are entrenched in our country and our province's foundation. These individuals paved the way for equal rights and they are part of the reason we continue the journey and the fight for equality, liberty and freedom in all countries.

Black History Month is important to the province of Ontario and important for our youth, who can reflect on this month and not become complacent, but rather look forward to a future, a future that embodies a just society where opportunity and equality is available to everyone.

This past year we had much to celebrate with our neighbours to the south, with their election of an African American, Barack Obama, to the presidency of the United States of America. The election of President Obama builds on the vision that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had for our world.

As we cherish this moment of progress, let us not forget the battle we have fought and the future life of peace and harmony we seek for ourselves and for our children. In a country where we thrive on the riches of multiculturalism, we appreciate the individuals who long fought for equality, whose struggles and accomplishments teach us that any and all obstacles and limitations can be overcome, whether it is Rosa Parks, who refused to move to the back of the bus, or the hundreds of

thousands who gathered to hear Dr. Martin Luther King roar those memorable words, "I have a dream," or our own Daurene Lewis, who became the first African woman to be elected mayor in the entire continent of North America, or the first African-Canadian woman named Governor General, Her Excellency Michaëlle Jean, or the Honourable Jean Augustine, who introduced a motion in the House of Commons in 1995 to recognize Black History Month throughout our country.

All of them have moved us forward. They fought our battles and worked for our freedoms, and this month is a month to honour and pay our deepest gratitude to these individuals.

1530

Ontario has also had its share of heroes. One particular individual comes to mind. Not only was Leonard Braithwaite elected as the first black member of this Legislature; he also left a legacy within these corridors as he fought to give young females the right to serve as parliamentary pages.

As we celebrate Black History Month, I invite all Ontarians and members of this Legislature to remember yesterday and to show respect for today, and let us move forward with great hope and anticipation for an even better tomorrow.

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

POVERTY

Mrs. Julia Munro: The minister began by referencing the goal of 90,000 children who would be lifted out of poverty, but I suggest that when you look at this bill today, not one single person will be lifted out of poverty by this piece of legislation.

It talks about a five-year cycle. In looking at this five-year cycle, let us consider that it takes one year for consultation and writing, and then there would be an annual report. Year two would obviously be done in planning and implementation of making those connections with agencies and so forth, and then an annual report. Year three and four might be the opportunity to have actual implementation, with annual reports, of course, coming with year three and year four. Then there's an election, and after an election, we have year five.

So I think you need to understand that, as a method of implementation, this is very heavy from the perspective of the paper process. It also leaves accountability to the government itself. There is nothing in there that suggests that there is any kind of peer or public consultation or evaluation. I would suggest that a committee of the Legislature or some other public process might be more in order than for the government to comment on itself.

Finally, I would just like to say that people in my riding would be much more impressed if the minister were making an announcement today about greater funding for literacy so that the constituents I represent who need that program would be able to qualify for GED or Second Career money. People in my riding would appre-

ciate equitable and sustainable funding for children's mental health. They would like to know more about that and those kinds of programs than about annual reports and a five-year reporting scheme.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise today in celebration and in recognition of Black History Month. It is my hope as education critic that the proud history and contributions of these black citizens be incorporated into the curriculum in a more fulsome way.

Did you know that Harriet Tubman used the Salem Chapel in St. Catharines as the headquarters for the Underground Railroad? Or that the first meeting of the NAACP took place on the Ontario shore of Lake Erie, where they could meet without fear of persecution?

Ms. Sadlier, president of the Ontario Black History Society, has recently received the Order of Canada, and is a remarkable role model not only for our black youth but for all Ontarians who seek to make this province a better place to live.

As we work to create a balanced curriculum in our schools and raise our children to appreciate the diverse culture that thrives in our communities, we should think about including more black history in our curriculum. We need to ensure that these efforts are being made every day, not just in the month of February.

The year 2009 is an exemplary year to celebrate the accomplishments of the black community in North America with the election of the first black president of the United States. We here in Ontario have many role models from which to choose, Lincoln Alexander, who walked the halls for many years, being one of our greats.

I congratulate the efforts of all who have worked so hard to share the stories and accomplishments with all Ontarians during the 2009 Black History Month. I look forward to hosting a celebration tomorrow at a black history event here in Queen's Park.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to thank all members of the House for their support of the private member's bill that Maria Van Bommel and I introduced in the House before Christmas, the bill to recognize Emancipation Day, which is something that I think we need to think about again today as we celebrate and recognize Black History Month. Again, I express my appreciation for the support of all the members for that noble gesture.

POVERTY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to respond to Minister Matthews and her bill that has been presented. But before I talk about the bill itself, I'd like to thank those activists, those women and men who, in the very dark Harris years and ongoing, have pushed for action on poverty in this province. I have to say to them that I don't think this bill fully honours their efforts yet. I

know their efforts are not over. I know that their energy is not gone. They will continue to fight on, and they'll continue to fight for action in the budgets to come so that, in fact, poverty reduction is made real.

This bill requires all Ontario governments to set targets for poverty reduction, report annually on progress and consult regularly with key stakeholders. This could potentially help push poverty reduction onto the political agenda, push it onto the agenda of governments that might prefer to ignore poverty, and we know what ignoring poverty looks like. We see it on our streets. We see it in the actions and inactions of the federal government and, close to home, we see in this government an administration that talks a lot about poverty, but by any objective measure has fallen far short of the action necessary to really make a difference.

We in the NDP have expressed concerns before and will continue to express concerns about the severe limitations of the McGuinty government's poverty reduction plan, the fact that it focuses only on children, that the resources are not there in the way they have to be there, that this plan doesn't hasten an increase in minimum wage, improve access to affordable housing and child care, improve the adequacy of social assistance rates and, I should add as well, it doesn't bring in card-check certification so that those people who are working for \$9 an hour can organize and fight for a decent wage. All those things have to be part of a poverty reduction plan that has an impact.

As an opposition party, we have consistently raised the problem of poverty as an issue in this House. We hope that we can utilize this bill, not just us in this party but activists in this province, to force this issue forward, to see that action does take place. We're concerned that it addresses only children. We're concerned that it doesn't put in place enforcement mechanisms for governments that don't act. Most of all, we're concerned that we don't see the concrete action. We see a framework for reporting. We see a framework for setting targets, but we're not seeing the concrete action. We want to see that, because only when we see the concrete action will we know that there will be a reduction of poverty in this province.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Peter Kormos: New Democrats, with great pride, join in the celebration of Black History Month here in the province of Ontario. The history of African Canadians dates back to 1603 and we, as Canadians in pre-Confederation Canada, have to accept some responsibility for the fact that yes, we owned slaves. White people owned black slaves in this country, too.

One of the great moments of course, though, was the emancipation of slaves in the British Empire and the British colonies, and then the revolutionary activities. I take pride in having been a frequent guest at the Salem Chapel, British Methodist Episcopal Church on Geneva Street, along with Jim Bradley and others down in Niagara where Harriet Tubman visited on a regular basis between 1851 and 1857. There was a whole community

of black escapees, slaves who escaped from the south on North Street right behind that church on Geneva Street.

1540

The history of black Canadians is not static. New immigrants on a daily basis contribute and add to the community of African Canadians, many of them francophones, enriching that francophone culture here in Canada.

But let's remark on the words of King: "The Negro's great stumbling block ... is not the White Citizen's Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice ... who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom."

As we celebrate Black History Month, we have to renew our commitment to expose racism, confront it, condemn it and abolish it. Canadian racism can oftentimes be so, so polite, the very sort of thing that Martin Luther King talked about. The overt racist, the Ku Klux Klanner, is far easier to deal with. It's that subtle racism, the code language, the phrasing and the attitude that so often can be so much more harmful.

Racism harms all of us. As we celebrate Black History Month, let's commit ourselves to ending racism in this community, in this province and in this country.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care should recognize the importance of rural health care in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network commissioned a report by the Hay Group that recommends the downgrading of the emergency room at the Charlotte Eleanor Englehart (CEE) Hospital in Petrolia to an urgent-care ward; and

"Whereas, if accepted, that recommendation would increase the demand on emergency room services in Sarnia; and...;

"Whereas the Petrolia medical community has stated that the loss of" the Petrolia "emergency room will result in the loss of many of our local doctors; and

"Whereas Petrolia's retirement and nursing home communities are dependent on easy access to the CEE hospital;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to urge the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network to completely reject the report of the Hay Group and leave the emergency room designation at Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital in Petrolia" and at Wallaceburg hospital.

I agree with this petition and affix my signature.

SALES TAX

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of many of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas potential new car and truck buyers in Ontario are having trouble accessing credit and loans; and

"Whereas the North American automotive industry is having difficulty selling vehicles; and

"Whereas the province of Ontario has recently lost more than 270,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector alone; and

"Whereas the auto industry in Canada supports an estimated 440,000 jobs, including in that the auto sector parts sector, and generates many billions of dollars in annual tax revenues;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Dalton McGuinty government to introduce a sales tax holiday in the next Ontario provincial budget for the purchase of North American manufactured vehicles."

I'm pleased to endorse this on behalf of my constituents and present it to Patrick, one of the pages here today.

SALES TAX

Mr. Frank Klees: I have a petition here delivered to me by Ab Cox motors in Aurora signed by Mr. Cox, Tracey Cox and their employees and a number of customers. It reads as follows:

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

"Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

"Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include the PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

I fully agree with this petition and I'm pleased to affix my signature.

CHILD CARE

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a number of petitions—my riding is very active in its discouragement in the current economy in Ontario. This one here is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grand-

parents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance;”—how sad is that?—“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” that the minister, Madame Meilleur, has made “to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren.”

As a grandparent, I am pleased to sign, support and endorse this and present it to Alexander, one of the taller pages here at the Legislature.

SALES TAX

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

“Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

“Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

“Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

“Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include the PST holiday in the next provincial budget.”

SALES TAX

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I have a petition regarding an issue that’s concerning a lot of individuals from Oshawa, where the auto sector is very important. The petition reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas potential new car and truck buyers in Ontario are having trouble accessing credit and loans; and

“Whereas the North American automotive industry is having difficulty selling vehicles; and the province of Ontario has recently lost more than 270,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector alone; and

“Whereas the auto industry in Canada supports an estimated 440,000 jobs, including many in the auto parts sector, and generates many billions of dollars in tax revenues;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Dalton McGuinty government to introduce a provincial sales tax holiday in the next provincial budget for the purchase of

new, North American-produced vehicles sold in Ontario.”

I fully support that.

SALES TAX

Mr. Frank Klees: This petition was delivered to me by Colonial motors in Aurora. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

“Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

“Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

“Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include the PST holiday in the next provincial budget.”

I fully support this measure, and I’m pleased to affix my signature.

SALES TAX

Mr. Frank Klees: I have another petition delivered to me by another auto dealer in Newmarket, and it deals with the auto crisis here in this province. It petitions the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

“Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

“Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

“Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include” the provincial sales tax “holiday in the next provincial budget.”

As I’ve stated before, I fully support this measure. I affix my signature to it.

1550

SALES TAX

Mr. John O’Toole: This seems to be a very popular petition, so I’ll read another one here. This one is from Roy Nichols Motors, one of the dealerships in my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas potential new car and truck buyers in Ontario are having trouble accessing credit and loans; and

“Whereas the North American automotive industry is having difficulty selling vehicles; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario has already lost more than 270,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector alone; and

“Whereas the auto industry in Canada supports an estimated 440,000 jobs, including many in the auto parts sector, and generates many billions of dollars in tax revenues;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Dalton McGuinty government to introduce a provincial sales tax holiday in the next provincial budget for the purchase of new, North-American produced vehicles sold in Ontario.”

I’m pleased to sign and endorse this, and present it to Nancy, one of the pages here in the Legislature.

SALES TAX

Mr. Frank Klees: This particular petition comes from Cookstown, delivered to my office by Jack Hamley. It reads as follows, in support of the auto industry:

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

“Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

“Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

“Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include” the provincial sales tax “holiday in the next provincial budget.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature in support of this measure.

SALES TAX

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m looking for the petition again. It seems that our side is the only one that is speaking up for Ontario. At this time, I’m going to read another petition. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas potential new car and truck buyers in Ontario are having trouble accessing credit and loans; and

“Whereas the North American automobile industry is having difficulty selling vehicles; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario has recently lost more than 270,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector alone; and

“Whereas the auto industry in Canada supports an estimated 440,000 jobs, including many in the auto parts sector, and generates many billions of dollars in tax revenues”;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Dalton McGuinty government to introduce a provincial sales tax holiday in the next provincial budget for the purchase of new, North American-produced vehicles sold in Ontario.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this, and give this to Alexander, one of the taller pages here.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from the good people in Eglinton–Lawrence and Bathurst Heights.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are a growing number of drive-by shootings and gun crimes in our communities;

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

“Whereas a growing number of illegal handguns are transported, smuggled and being found in cars driven in our communities;

“Whereas impounding cars and suspending driver’s licences of persons possessing illegal guns on the spot by police will make our communities safer;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, a bill proposed by MPP Mike Colle and entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law so that we can reduce the number of drive-by shootings and gun crimes in our communities.”

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

SALES TAX

Mrs. Julia Munro: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the auto industry in Ontario and throughout North America is experiencing a major restructuring; and

“Whereas the current economic crisis is affecting the auto manufacturers and the front-line dealerships throughout Ontario; and

“Whereas many potential automobile purchasers are having difficulty accessing credit even at current prices; and

“Whereas a three-month tax holiday of the GST and the PST on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the provincial and federal governments to implement a three-month tax holiday, and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include the PST holiday in the next provincial budget.”

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from constituents in the riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREEN ENERGY AND GREEN
ECONOMY ACT, 2009LOI DE 2009 SUR L'ÉNERGIE VERTE
ET L'ÉCONOMIE VERTE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 24, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 150, An Act to enact the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to build a green economy, to repeal the Energy Conservation Leadership Act, 2006 and the Energy Efficiency Act and to amend other statutes.

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: I understand there’s unanimous consent in this House to stand down the leadoff speech for our party to allow our party to participate at a later date.

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: I would like to lead off by recognizing in this House the family of page Emily Wilson who are here with us today. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature. Emily is one of our current group of pages. She’s doing a great job and making us all proud.

I’m pleased to have this opportunity this afternoon to speak to Bill 150, An Act to enact the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to build a green economy, to repeal the Energy Conservation Leadership Act, 2006 and the Energy Efficiency Act and to amend other statutes.

This bill was introduced in this Legislature by the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure just two days ago. I must say that it is highly unusual that an important piece of legislation such as this, with no less than seven pages of explanatory notes and 65 pages of clauses, opening up the Electricity Act, the Ministry of Energy Act, the Ontario Energy Board Act, the Clean Water Act, the Environmental Bill of Rights act, the Environmental Protection Act, the Ontario Water Resources Act, the Co-operative Corporations Act, the Building Code Act, the Planning Act, the Conservation Authorities Act, the Ministry of Natural Resources Act, the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act, the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act and the Public Lands Act—it is highly unusual that an important piece of legislation such as this would be called for second reading debate 24 hours after being introduced for the first time.

The first question that should enter the public’s mind is: Why the rush? Why the normal departure from parliamentary tradition of introducing a bill, then allowing the opposition a few days, at least, to consult with interested stakeholders and the public? What details are buried in this bill that the government doesn’t want people to know about? What are they trying to hide?

1600

Yesterday, our deputy leader, the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, asked a direct and simple question of the Premier. She asked if the bill could be sent to a standing committee of this Legislature immediately for public hearings. This would allow MPPs to receive the input and advice of industry, homeowners and energy experts before hard lines are drawn and parties take firm positions that might be based on insufficient knowledge and lack of information. This is why the standing orders were changed a few years ago to allow for bills to be referred to standing committees right after first reading. Through this process, on a number of bills in the past, parties have been more inclined to work together in the public interest on complex issues such as this one.

It’s interesting to note that a previous energy bill, Bill 100, introduced in 2004 by the then-energy minister, Dwight Duncan, was in fact referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy immediately after first reading. Again, this allowed for public input on a complicated and vital subject, the management of our electricity system, before things were set in stone.

What did the Minister of Energy say at that time? He said, “Bill 100 was sent to committee after first reading.”

“What a pleasant change we’ve seen in governing in this province when a government actually sends bills out across the province for hearings, welcomes delegations, welcomes debate, welcomes input. That input was so significant that we brought forward a number of amendments resultant from the thoughtful presentations of the many delegations that spoke in favour of this bill.”

Again, that was then-energy minister Dwight Duncan on October 18, 2004, explaining why he had sent his Bill 100 to a standing committee of the Legislature immediately after its introduction.

Now, the Premier’s response to our deputy leader’s question—again, when she was asking that the precedent of Bill 100 be followed, asking that this Bill 150 be referred to committee after first reading—was disappointing and puzzling. It was disappointing because even though it appeared the Premier had not even previously considered the idea, he said no to the people of Ontario who want to participate immediately in a discussion on this issue at a standing committee. It was puzzling because the Premier is suggesting that there will be public hearings after second reading, but of course we know that substantial amendments and revisions to Bill 150 are far less likely if the committee hearings are delayed. That means the public is largely shut out from the fundamental decision-making on electricity policy in the province of Ontario.

Logically, the government’s position makes no sense whatsoever. If they’re going to have hearings anyway, then time will be spent on hearings eventually. Why not have them after first reading to give Ontarians a chance to speak and a chance to be heard? Again, the only logical conclusion is that the government wants to bury the details because it has something to hide in this Bill 150, and that’s why they’ve initiated second reading debate on a bill starting just 24 hours after it was first introduced.

The government wants to call this bill the Green Energy Act. A more appropriate short title, I think, would have been the Power Grab Act, because what we see here is a massive power grab by a power-hungry Minister of Energy. Mr. Speaker, you should have seen his performance yesterday leading off this debate. The standing orders allow a minister leading off a debate on a bill to speak for up to an hour, but this minister spoke for less than 15 minutes. Instead of explaining the details of the bill, he used much of his time to taunt and criticize opposition members by name: the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook, the member for Burlington, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. This is a minister who finds gutter politics irresistible. It diminishes his credibility and makes us question his motives.

We serve proudly in this Legislature. We serve as Her Majesty’s loyal opposition. It’s our job to point out the drawbacks of what the government is doing, to call attention to the flaws in their policy and to speak for those whose interests the government is neglecting or ignoring. It’s our job to stand up against power-hungry ministers promoting power-grabbing power bills. From

what we’ve seen so far, we don’t trust the minister’s rhetoric, nor do we trust him with the extraordinary powers that he’s seeking under Bill 150.

We believe hydro bills will go up dramatically under this approach. As our party’s critic, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, said in this House yesterday, the hydro bills for Ontario customers are likely to skyrocket, he thinks by as much as 30%. How does he draw this conclusion? Let’s look at today’s editorial in the National Post, entitled, “An Energy Plan That Won’t Help.” It is a devastating critique of Bill 150, focusing on the government’s understated cost estimates. The editorial points out that the minister claims Bill 150 will only increase the average household hydro bill by 1%, and they call this claim “incredible.” It further suggests that the minister’s references to the hydro systems in Denmark, Germany and Spain overlook the fact that consumers in those countries pay up to four times the rates we pay currently in Ontario. If we’re holding up these countries as the jurisdictions that we wish to emulate, then get ready for a whopping increase in your hydro bill.

The National Post also makes a good point about the timing of Bill 150’s introduction of mandatory energy audits: This is not the time to add a costly new burden on homeowners. If the government thinks this is such a great idea to bring in mandatory energy audits at this time of extreme economic challenge, it should be prepared to give cash-strapped homeowners a 100% tax credit on the full cost of the energy audit.

The government could go further. They could match the federal government’s tax credit on home renovations, which was announced in the most recent federal budget. This would stimulate the kind of home renovations that would make our homes more energy-efficient.

The other significant point in the National Post editorial is that governments around the world recognize the need for stimulus; they are not digging deeper into the beleaguered taxpayer’s pocket. The National Post goes so far as to say that the energy audits “constitute a new tax on Ontario homeowners, the very people who are being hit the hardest by a decline in the value of their core financial asset and a consequent contraction in their creditworthiness. This tax will presumably be incapable, unlike others, of being deferred, deducted or written off on a prolonged schedule.

“In short, it is the ultimate in anti-stimulus.”

When our party’s critic, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, made reference this morning in question period to the National Post, the government members laughed, as some of them are laughing again today, and the Premier, unbelievably, implied that he didn’t care what the National Post had to say about his legislation. Well, he should, and if he didn’t care about the National Post, what about the daily newspaper that he enjoys reading most in the morning? Our friends at the Toronto Star have some questions too. Just look at the headlines of today’s paper: “Green Audits Have Critics Seeing Red”; “Legislation’s Big Cracks Need Sealing”; “50,000 Green Jobs a ‘Tall Order’”; and “End Green ‘Dithering,’ Utilities Told.”

All of these headlines are in today's Toronto Star, and all of these articles would lead a fair-minded person to conclude that the Premier has not hit the sweet spot, as he said yesterday, using a tennis analogy, but instead, he has mis-hit the ball and it's flying well out of the court and into the stands.

The Toronto Star's Jim Coyle's column today is of particular interest. He writes: "How much Ontario intends to pay for green energy, what it will cost consumers, whether the increase can possibly be held to the forecast 1% a year, the distance wind turbines will be kept from houses, how 50,000 jobs are to be produced over three years: All of these were the sort of details yet to be worked out (and in which the devil is famously set to decide)." Good questions from the Toronto Star.

My constituents in Wellington-Halton Hills are concerned about the cost of hydro, and they're also well informed about the need for security of supply. They know that if the lights are to come on when they flip the switch, there needs to be sufficient electricity capacity at that very moment to meet the demands of all the consumers in Ontario. They know that if the lights are to come on, there has to be a distribution network which has sufficient capacity to transport those electrons into their home.

Industry is likewise is very concerned about security of supply because an interruption in electricity means downtime in our manufacturing plants, the few ones that are left, in part because of this government's lack of leadership, which can cost millions. It is my understanding that 80% of our hydro generation capacity needs to be replaced or refurbished in the next 12 to 16 years, and this government has no effective plan to ensure our security of supply over that time. In fact, supply shortfalls are predicted within four to five years, due to plant retirement. It is therefore critical that new generation resources arrive online reliably every year and that demand management and conservation be part of our new energy model. These are the facts, which leads us to one of the Premier's signature broken promises, the one where he promised to phase out coal generation by 2007.

1610

That promise went up in smoke several times in their first mandate. Who in their right mind would promise to shut down a fifth of Ontario's generating capacity with no idea how to replace it or how long it would take? Today, I expect the Minister of Energy would not have the audacity to state categorically when the coal-fired plants will eventually be eliminated.

Clearly, the Premier should have known better than to make this cynical, deceitful promise, especially given that when he was first elected to the Legislature in 1990, he was appointed critic to the Minister of Energy. In fact, I've had the opportunity to review the Hansard record from 1991, and I found an interesting speech on Bill 118, the Power Corporation Amendment Act, initiated by Bob Rae's government.

In criticizing that bill, one of my colleagues at that time gave an impassioned speech on hydro issues. He

said: "This government has given every impression that it does not just want to control Hydro, but rather that it wants to dominate it totally.... The government should not in any way impair Hydro's ability to look out for the interests of its ratepayers.... I submit I am not going out on much of a limb when I say there is a direct correlation between Hydro's rates and our rate of unemployment in Ontario. As the rates go up, so will the rate of unemployment.... In terms of the context within which this bill was introduced, we should note that it was done without consultation. To my understanding, there was no consultation with the public, no consultation with the ratepayers, no consultation with the Association of Major Power Consumers in Ontario or with the Municipal Electric Association, which combined represent over 90% of the ratepayers in Ontario. No consultation with business, no consultation with labour, no consultation with the elected public utility commissioners."

He went on: "We have got to question the wisdom of the minister in introducing a bill in a recession which is saying to employers and investors, 'Here comes an additional tax which we're going to tack on to your hydro bill, a tax which has nothing to do with hydro, a tax which you won't find in any other jurisdiction in North America.' ... Which group or groups were crying out for this change? Who wants government to use Hydro as a tool for carrying out social policy initiatives and thereby drive up hydro rates? Surely not Hydro's ratepayers.... Surely not business, which is already ... besieged by the recession."

Of course, that speech was given in this House by the member for Ottawa South, Dalton McGuinty. The irony, of course, is that much of what he said to criticize the NDP's Bill 118 can be levelled just as fairly at his own Bill 150.

Let's look at another point the government has raised. The government claims that Bill 150 will create 50,000 jobs. Where did they get this number? Did they simply pull it out of the air? When initially asked by the news media, the minister had absolutely no explanation. Where is the breakdown, sector by sector? What were the assumptions used to draw this conclusion? We don't know. We have no answers to any of these questions, yet the government expects us to accept them on faith.

But according to the Toronto Star today, the Power Workers' Union is unwilling to give the government the benefit of the doubt. Don MacKinnon, president of the Power Workers' Union, said that some of the jobs are technical in nature and would require up to six years of training for individuals entering the field. Frank Macedo, a former Ontario Hydro employee and an expert in this area, said that creating that many jobs in three years is a tall order. But then I guess the more realistic members of this government aren't too worried about being in government in three years' time and won't have to worry about how they're going to explain why the 50,000 jobs didn't materialize.

Today in question period, the Premier told us that Bill 150 is "fundamentally about new jobs. It's about clean,

green electricity and it's about fighting climate change." Noble thoughts and goals we all embrace. But we in opposition believe there are better ways to encourage green energy and promote conservation, and you'll hear more about this in the coming weeks.

Last Thanksgiving weekend, I read Thomas Friedman's latest book, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*. Mr. Friedman is a New York Times columnist and author of *The World Is Flat*, one of this decade's most influential non-fiction books. In *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*, he calls upon American decision-makers to embrace a green revolution with an all-out assault on energy inefficiency. Some time ago, it was reported in one of the papers that the Premier was reading this book as well, but he missed one of its most fundamental conclusions, which is that the free market forces need to be unleashed in this effort. Bill 150 ignores the free market and in many respects represents a government takeover of key parts of our energy system.

I wish that I could go on. I wish the government had been willing to organize a technical briefing on Bill 150 before calling it for second reading. As it is, we're forced to wait until Monday morning next week to hear from the Ministry of Energy staff as to what they think this bill entails and what it implies, and to answer the questions we may have. We have many questions that remain unanswered, and this week the minister failed to answer them in even the most perfunctory way.

As a member of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, I have many questions and have received no answers. As such, I cannot commit to supporting Bill 150 at this time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker.

I listened carefully to Mr. Arnott and his comments. This has not been the free ride for the government that the government thought it was going to be. Indeed, there wasn't even the classic one day of good news. It was within mere hours of the announcement of this legislation that people started to question the claims that were being made by the government—first and foremost, the creation of 50,000 jobs. There may well be 50,000 jobs created in Germany and in any number of other parts of the world, but there's been great, great cynicism expressed, doubt—far beyond doubt; in fact, a rejection of the proposal by writers in the financial pages of almost all the papers over the course of the last day or two days alone. This has been a little bit of a PR flop, if you will.

Look, there isn't an Ontarian who doesn't want to see a more environmentally friendly process of electricity creation. So what's a part of this government's green plan? Millions, millions upon millions—billions—in nuclear power. Nuclear ain't green by a long shot. Never has been; never will be. Not only is it not green, but it's incredibly, incredibly expensive. It's also expensive in this other unique way, because it's unpredictably expensive. It has hidden expenses, not only in the course of building nuclear plants, but in the course of down the road. Every penny of that very ungreen electricity, every

penny of the cost of building those plants and generating that nuclear electricity, will be passed on to consumers, consumers already hard hit.

In a few minutes' time you're going to hear from Peter Tabuns, who is the critic for the New Democratic Party. He will be doing the NDP lead speech. I encourage people to listen very, very carefully.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm pleased to stand today in support of Bill 150, the Green Energy Act. The Green Energy Act has two main goals: one, to bring renewable energy projects to life; two, to create a culture of innovation and conservation where the people of Ontario will begin to live more energy-aware lives.

If passed, the Green Energy Act will create more than 50,000 jobs—more than 50,000 jobs—in three years. These jobs will be created in the construction, engineering and manufacturing sectors.

Bill 150 has a plan that will make it easier to have renewable energy available in Ontario. The plan will create province-wide standards for renewable energy projects, and would include working with cities like Mississauga and Brampton to ensure that new green power is allowed to be developed and fed into the province without long delays.

Bill 150 will set a tone for Ontario to create a culture of conservation. The use of renewable energy to power our homes and businesses will help all of us to play a role in improving the environment. A greener attitude will help make this beautiful province of Ontario an even more beautiful place to live, while at the same time we will be investing in a cleaner, greener future and creating better communities that will benefit our future generations. With the creation of jobs, investment in green technologies—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Questions and comments?

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Mr. John O'Toole: I first want to remind those listening and those paying attention to get a copy of the Hansard for the remarks of the member from Wellington-Halton Hills. He summarized what I think are the salient arguments to a bill that, on the surface, is a shell. It talks green, but it really is a tax hike.

Here's the argument: They're going to invest \$5 billion in a system, and who pays for the system? You pay for it, at your home. When you turn the switch on, you're paying. The \$5 billion translates into about a \$1,200 tax on each household—the four million residents. That's what it is about.

The other part of it: They quote 50,000 jobs. Well, there are going to be 50,000 new government employees knocking on your door, checking your meter—the smart meter, if you're using it. These people will have warrantless entry. This is the most intrusive, diabolical piece of legislation.

The admission of guilt on their side is this simple: They had, back around 2000, Bill 100, which was the

comprehensive review of the electricity system. This is an admission of failure. Now they're coming in with a bill that is a tax grab by any other name.

Many of the articles that the member from Wellington–Halton Hills has cited are to be reviewed.

I caution the viewers and the taxpayers of Ontario to beware. Dalton McGuinty has got his other hand in your other pocket. The trouble is just beginning for Ontario. Now that the economy has gone soft, how are they going to raise all that money? By raising your taxes—and this is how they're doing it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to say that I'm looking forward to speaking on this bill tomorrow, and I'll tell you that I'm going to bring to light a lot of negatives on this bill.

They claim that 50,000 jobs are going to be produced. This is all speculation, this is all forecasts. There is absolutely no concrete evidence. They have come forward with no numbers on what types of jobs these are. Are we talking cement workers, ironworkers? Are we talking meter inspectors? Is the ministry going to send out different types of new legislation requiring homeowners to live up to expectations for the grid?

Now they've got this other \$300 thing they're going to charge homeowners before they sell their home which they can't afford. A lot of these people are on fixed incomes, and they're going to force them to pay \$300 when some of them are barely getting out of their houses now—the elderly—and forced into another situation because they can't afford their homes. Now, they're going to create this new legislation.

Trust me, this bill has to be adjusted and changed a lot before you go to third reading—if it gets that far—because I'm telling you right now that what I've read today and what I've studied today is absolutely a grey area. It's a mockery to the people of Ontario. It's only based on 25% of the entire grid; 75% of it is coal-fired and nuclear power. So don't tell me that you're doing a big, 80% improvement in energy—you're not. You're dealing with 25%. I could sit here today and tell you that they'll be lucky if they touch 4% of the 25%.

This is another show for the public with absolutely no substance—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Wellington–Halton Hills, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to express my appreciation to the member for Welland for responding to my remarks this afternoon. He outlined his view that the government has not had a free ride with respect to this Bill 150, and certainly that has been the case. I think the government anticipated having a completely laudatory response from everyone in the province of Ontario, and clearly that has not happened.

The member for Welland pointed out that he very much questions the projection by the government that this bill will create 50,000 jobs. I certainly agree with

him in that respect, although I have to say that I part company with him on his views on nuclear power.

The member for Mississauga–Brampton South repeated the government's messages very capably. However, again, I don't see the kind of detail that the opposition parties in particular, and I think increasingly the people of Ontario, need to see before they're prepared to sign on in support of this particular piece of legislation.

I want to thank my colleague the member for Durham, who is a former energy critic for our party, one of our most effective members in this Legislature. He represents the Durham riding, of course, and within his riding is the Darlington nuclear generating plant. I would suggest that there is no member in this House who knows more about that particular part of the hydro business, and certainly his views need to be considered by all of us.

I want to thank the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for his comments. I, too, look forward to his speech when he gets a chance to speak in this House. I think the New Democrats are probably looking at this bill in a similar way to our party: While at the same time we agree with the need for enhanced efforts to promote energy conservation and energy efficiency, whether or not this Bill 150 is the way to go is another big question. We're just in a position of not having the answers that we're seeking and not even having had the chance to have a comprehensive ministry briefing, which is the normal process, the normal routine for caucuses on issues like this—and we're still having to wait till Monday. It's just unacceptable. I think the government needs to go back to the drawing board and see how it manages these sorts of bills.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Further debate. The member for Toronto–Danforth.

Applause.

Interjection: That's fake.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. The sincere and devoted response of the other members of the House is deeply touching.

Today, I want to speak about how far Ontario is behind the rest of the world and how long we've waited to act. I want to talk about the few positive things I see in this bill—an attention to new building codes—and I want to address the shortcomings—like a new building code without detail—or the absence of targets so that this government can be held to account. I want to highlight some major flaws, like this government's inexplicable fixation on nuclear power. It's expensive and, frankly, you can't build a 21st-century energy system on a foundation of a 20th-century technology.

I've worked on environmental issues, specifically climate issues, for a few decades. I've seen a lot of false starts and I've seen a lot of broken promises. We only have to look at the promise of the Liberals to shut down coal-fired plants in this province by 2007 to remind ourselves of how far wrong things have gone. We can't afford to have this legislation be one of those false starts. We can't let good-sounding or high-sounding rhetoric from the minister dissipate into an emptiness thanks to

bad regulations that we have not seen, that have not been put before us as legislators. The crises that we face here in Ontario are too substantial, too important for us to fail.

But before I go any further, I want to thank those women and those men out there in the environmental movement and the labour movement who again, for decades, have fought for good jobs and for green jobs, for an approach to the environmental crisis that puts people to work, puts them to work in well-paying jobs, secure jobs; people who have worked hard to push the public and push government to actually take action. If they had not done that work, if they had not been out there talking, urging and convincing, then we would not be here debating this act today. We would not be debating any action on the environment. They have a lot of work ahead of them.

This bill, in my opinion, does not give Ontario what it needs. Action is going to have to be taken to change this bill so that it will, in fact, address our needs, our demands in this province.

1630

We need to look at the background of the problem. What are we dealing with here? Twenty-one years ago in this city, in Toronto, was held one of the first major meetings on climate change in the world. Here in Ontario people came to talk about the challenges we face in this world. They talked about what was coming at us. A few years after that—17 years ago—the world committed to act on climate change at the Earth Summit in Rio. Twelve years ago, Canada signed on to the Kyoto Protocol; six years ago, we ratified it.

Five years ago, this government came to power during some of the best economic times Ontario has ever seen. It came to power at a time when our economy was expanding, when the total wealth of the province had grown. That time was not well used. Five years later, the government is finally starting to say that, yes, there is a link between the economy and the environment, a link between action on climate change and action on jobs.

It's not as if the solutions, the approaches, have not been out there. Back in the depths of the last recession in the early 1990s, when I was on Toronto city council, I had an opportunity to work with construction unions, with businesses and with my colleagues on city council from every political persuasion to put in place the Better Buildings Partnership. Using a revolving fund, we were able to finance energy efficiency retrofits in institutional buildings and office buildings, putting people to work, cutting air pollution and making a difference for our economy and our environment at the same time. We've known about that for a long time.

This government, when it came to power in 2003, looking at the challenge it had shutting down coal, could have simply copied the program still in place in the city of Toronto, which generated in total close to \$200 million in economic activity and about 2,000 person years of employment so far.

In 2003, when I was head of Greenpeace here in Canada, I had an opportunity to work with the CAW and

with the federal NDP to develop a green car strategy. Even then, before the oil crisis hit, before the financial crisis hit, it was clear to a lot of people—and I credit the CAW for this; it was clear to the CAW and to environmentalists—that the direction the auto industry was taking had to change, because problems were going to come down that track toward us.

It's unfortunate that those solutions we put forward at that time, that agreement we hammered out between auto workers and environmentalists, were not accepted by the federal government, which at that time was talking about what should be done with auto in the long run, how to deal with the California efficiency standards that were being discussed at that time. We lost a massive opportunity.

Although I think the credit crisis would still have caused profound problems in the auto sector, if changes had been started five years ago to make the auto sector more sustainable, to develop cars that were far more efficient, then I think the auto sector would have been in a much healthier state when this crisis came down.

It's not as if other places have not acted. In Denmark in the 1970s, they went through the oil crisis and they had a fundamental debate in their country about their energy direction. Would they go nuclear; would they go with alternative energy? That was a profound debate about the direction of a society. I've had an opportunity to talk to some of the people who were involved in that debate.

They decided that the future was in renewable power, and in this small country with a population the size of the greater Toronto area, they took their intellectual expertise and developed the modern wind turbine industry, an industry that in 1980 really didn't exist and now employs 20,000 people in that country. Their second-biggest export is wind turbines. It's an interesting story of conversion and change.

The largest wind company in the world, Vestas, used to make farm machinery. They moved on. One of the biggest wind turbine manufacturing centres in Denmark used to be a shipyard. A friend of mine, Mark Bartlett, who is with the CAW in Windsor, did that research about the conversion of industrial plants from one use to another and the potential, the opportunity, for us here in Ontario.

So when I say we have lessons to draw from the rest of the world, I'm quite serious.

In Germany, a jurisdiction that the minister cited the other day in his press conference, the second-largest consumer of steel is their wind turbine industry. In Portugal, they brought in a mandatory requirement for new buildings to have solar power incorporated into construction back in 2006. It is 2009. Pennsylvania used the action of its state government to bring investment for 3,000 solar jobs in that jurisdiction. In Toledo, Ohio, 6,000 people work in their solar industry. They use the intellectual capital in their university, and they use the work, intelligence and the skills of those who used to make auto windshields to make the glass for the solar panels.

They've in fact done what we need to do in Ontario. They've taken on 21st-century industry and used the skill and the commitment of their population to make those new products.

In California, they're building the world's largest solar electric plant. In Quebec, they have a requirement that if you're going to put up wind turbines, 60% of the value in that wind turbine has to be Quebec-sourced. It's kick-starting the wind turbine industry in that province. In Manitoba—and they've had this for a number of years now—they provide low-interest loans to families so that they can upgrade their homes: put in geothermal heat pumps, insulate the houses and put in high-efficiency windows. And those high-efficiency windows are made in Winnipeg. They take the money in their society and, instead of buying energy from outside of Manitoba, they're recycling those dollars within the province.

So there's tremendous opportunity that has been demonstrated in other jurisdictions to create manufacturing jobs and to transition an economy from one energy system to another. In many ways, it's analogous to the beginning of the coal era, the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in England, a move from horsepower and human power to fossil fuel power. That sparked the Industrial Revolution and it changed the history of the world. We are at that point in the history of our society. We can either take it on and be leaders or we can be like countries a century or two centuries ago that missed out and were superseded by other societies.

Now, in the past year, here in Ontario, we've been rocked by energy shocks, job shocks and market shocks. Our climate is changing, and we are bleeding good jobs. The need for solutions is very clear, and the desire for urgency is obvious. Is this bill before us the response that Ontario has been waiting so long for? Will it do what the government says?

As you know, we are facing the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression. This government has ignored much of it. Dalton McGuinty has gotten some very bad press over what has been seen to be a cavalier and disconnected approach to the economic crisis. Because of that lack of forward thinking, because of that lack of commitment and action, workers in this province are paying a very heavy price. You talk to workers in Hamilton; you talk to them in Sudbury. When people are laid off, when they lose hope for the future, families start to be plunged into conflict and turmoil. You see kids in difficulty in the streets. We're paying a very high price for years of neglect, years of ignoring what challenges were coming down toward us.

We here in Ontario were stuck with a manufacturing base that assumed that oil would flow cheaply forever, that the climate wouldn't change. Anyone who was familiar with what's really going on in the world knew that that could not be the case. But what we had was a legacy of hands-off, do-nothing government—the Mike Harris approach—that was, with a little gentle modification, simply carried on by the McGuinty government, ignoring the fact that you need hands-on government if

you're going to transform industry; that you have to have activist government that looks to the future, looks at what has to happen right now and brings those things together. That has left us unprepared for the economic tsunami that has hit. It leaves us in a position where we're both trying to protect jobs and running to catch up with economies elsewhere which got with the program earlier. In Michigan, their state government is doing an inventory of all the auto parts plants to see which can be diversified to make renewable energy products. I have no sense whatsoever in this province that that level of mobilization, analysis and preparation is going on, and I'm not seeing in it this bill.

1640

Across the United States for the last few years, governments, unions and environmentalists have been working together to try to build a new energy economy. Over a year ago I was in Pittsburgh for a conference that was put on by the Steelworkers in conjunction with the Sierra Club of the US, and at that time, in the depths of the Bush presidency, the view from Canada was that nothing was going on. But when you go down there, there's a ferment going on. People understand where the future jobs are going to be, how we get them, how the investments have to be made. What has happened with the election of Barack Obama is that that ferment has burst into the open for the world to see: \$100 billion committed to redeveloping the energy system, to developing energy security and autonomy for the United States, to breaking away from the importing of foreign oil. Here in Canada we had a succession of Liberal and then Conservative governments that dithered and did nothing, and here in Ontario the same story, except that we had Stephen Harper to blame. It is, in fact, quite sad that we waited until change came to the White House for Ontario to act, for this bill to be brought forward.

We have to remember, if you want to understand where Ontario is and where it is going, that we are addicted to imported energy. We spend about \$40 billion a year on energy in Ontario. We import 90% of our primary energy. We have very little oil, very little gas. We don't mine coal. We import, and so tens of millions of dollars a day go out of this province to buy that energy: money that leaves our economy, leaves our industry, leaves our working people, and builds economies and jobs elsewhere.

It's against this backdrop of economic decline on the one hand—everyone is aware of that—and environmental crisis that we need to look at this bill. Is it adequate to take on that scope of issues? It's not enough to say, "Is this better than this government's sorry record on climate change?" because that's a very low bar to clear, a very low bar. Ask, "Is this bill up to the enormous challenge of shoring up our economy, rebuilding it, redirecting it and taking on the climate crisis?" I don't believe it is, but I'll start with a few constructive comments and then I'll go to the elements where I think this bill has substantial problems.

I think it's a good idea that we're talking about good jobs and climate in the context of a bill. It's good to see

that that old debate of environment versus jobs is set aside. We know that to take on environmental issues is an opportunity to create jobs. It's good to have that on the table. We want to stop pretending that one, jobs, is at one end of the spectrum, and the other, environment, is at the other end of the spectrum. They are joined. They are linked.

A feed-in tariff for new renewable energy projects could be helpful. For those at home listening and thinking, "What is a feed-in tariff and do I pay it when I come across the border from Detroit?" no, it's a guaranteed price for electricity produced from renewable sources. Linked, in this bill, is guaranteed access to the market, to the grid. So guaranteed price and guaranteed access to the grid have the potential to create investment, create new sources of electricity generation in this province.

I think it's a good thing that we're talking about beefing up the building codes and mandating energy efficiency. It's long past overdue—far, far overdue. We haven't seen any details yet, and frankly, this government hasn't earned the benefit of the doubt, but my hope is that in the course of this debate we will actually have the opportunity to push for some of the most robust standards that exist in this world.

Likewise, higher efficiency standards for appliances: We may have a small market for appliances here in Ontario, but my hope is that, if we push hard enough, we will show other jurisdictions that there's an opportunity here, possibly linking up with those jurisdictions so that we create a larger demand for products that are very high efficiency and undermine the market for those products that are so inefficient that they shouldn't be sold.

I think it's a good idea that homeowners get assistance to put in place small-scale renewable energy. I was in Sault Ste. Marie yesterday and had a very interesting opportunity to talk with a fellow who's running a small manufacturing business in the Sault area—St. Joseph Island, to be correct. He makes frames for solar panels that have an actuator on them that turns the panels to follow the sun. He makes about 20 or 30 a year. He creates jobs in that area and installs them himself. People are putting them up on their homes, particularly those who are remote from power lines. There's an opportunity there for us. If those people are going to get help, I think it's a useful thing. I'm not sure this bill will deliver it, but I think it's worth having the debate about the opportunity that's there, the opportunity we should take.

That's the constructive; these are the things that I think are very useful, and I look forward to seeing where we can make improvements. My concerns are that when you look at this government, you have to judge it on its record, not on its lofty promises. The Premier has broken many promises. That's no surprise to anyone in this House.

So, goals are one thing, achieving them another. One good way to achieve a goal is to set a target. This bill doesn't do that. I raised that in the briefing I got with ministerial staff before we had this bill presented. This was raised with the minister when he was at his media

conference. When you don't set targets, you give a government incredible wiggle room. If almost nothing happens, they can say, "Well, something happened." If what happens is far below what is really needed to make a change in Ontario, they can say, "Well, something happened." A lack of targets is a lack of a commitment and a lack of accountability. If the government knows where it wants to go with this bill, it needs to tell us where it wants to go, where it expects to go, where it forecasts to go so that we can tell whether or not in fact this initiative has been effective.

You have to ask, will this act actually stimulate the kind of green energy transformation that this province badly needs, both environmentally and economically? The minister claims that it will, and the minister claims a lot of things. The minister claims that Ontario is a leader in green energy, while a more objective look at the Ontario Power Authority would suggest otherwise. In fact the OPA, the Ontario Power Authority, which actually goes out there and contracts for energy supply, is very conservative in terms of its renewable energy ambitions. It only aims to achieve about one sixth of what the Green Energy Act Alliance has deemed possible. In the NDP, we ask, and all serious Ontarians would ask, "Where does that really leave us if in fact their ambitions are so limited and so low?"

My colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek said, "So where are these 50,000 jobs going to come from?" Frankly, if your ambition is 500 kilowatts or 3,000 megawatts, those are very different implications in terms of jobs. Will this bill actually significantly increase the percentage of renewable energy in the electricity system in Ontario? Will it enhance the level of conservation and energy efficiency in the province? Will it help reduce our reliance on polluting and non-renewable forms of power such as coal, natural gas and nuclear? Will it protect individuals and companies who are vulnerable to electricity price increases? Will it ensure that Ontario becomes a leader in the manufacture of renewable energy technologies? I have to say, I don't see those answers being forthcoming.

I asked many of those questions the other day when I had the briefing about this bill, and the ministerial staff, question after question after question, said either, "It hasn't been worked out yet," "We'll know in a month," or "Can't tell you that." So I have to say, you can't say you brought along something that's the best thing since sliced bread and not know how many slices there are going to be, not know how many jobs are actually going to be created and not know what the real price of electricity is going to be from your initiative.

1650

Ontario's integrated power supply plan, the plan for electricity production over the next few decades in this province, had very modest targets for renewables and conservation. They're not on track to meet those modest targets. Perhaps that explains why there were no new targets announced when this bill came forward. The government knows it's going to fail—probably better not

to set a target and put itself in a position where it can be held accountable. That is a substantial flaw, a fundamental flaw in this bill.

It's not only the NDP that's concerned about the lack of a baseline in this energy bill. Two University of Western Ontario profs, who interviewed 63 wind developers, were quoted in the newspaper story yesterday saying that the act doesn't go far enough because it fails to include long-term targets for renewable capacity and leaves too many decisions to ministers. They say that the act doesn't remove investor uncertainty that's hindered investment to date, because it doesn't establish long-term targets for renewable capacity, and instead "leaves key decisions on targets and power pricing in the hands of the minister." They say the Green Energy Act further broadens ministerial powers, exposing policy even more to political pressure.

Will the act, in the context of Ontario's ongoing commitments to nuclear, actually result in a significant increase in renewable power in Ontario? That takes us back to that question of targets. The minister said yesterday that Ontario is following the European approach of no targets or caps. Well, in fact, Dr. Hermann Scheer, who was the person who sponsored the legislation in Germany that radically changed the environment for energy production, does have a target. His target is the elimination of nuclear and conventional energy systems. That's his target.

The German government has set a 30-year phase-out period for nuclear power in that country. When they go forward for renewable power, it's with a view to substituting that renewable power for the other sources of power. When the minister says they don't have caps or targets in Germany, Dr. Scheer's target, the architect of their energy direction, is to make this the dominant form of power. He's pretty clear about that.

We've got a situation here where the minister says that by paying an attractive, guaranteed price for renewable power, the feed-in tariff, the government's creating an open-ended opportunity for the production of renewable energy. It's not up to the government to set limits on how much green energy is provided to the grid. But in the next breath, the minister says that 75% of Ontario's energy will continue to come from nuclear and hydro. That says to me, and my colleague from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek said the same thing, that we're talking about a small part of the pie. We're not talking about the whole pie; we're talking about a small part of it. If that's what you're doing, then you're not going to take on the economic crisis in this province, and you're not going to take on the environmental crisis.

If we continue that whole path of investing in unreliable and expensive nuclear, then we set a de facto cap on the development of renewable energy in this province, on the development of conservation in this province, because you only need so much, ultimately. If half the electricity demand is met by nuclear, then you're certainly not going to build enough renewable power to fill in that gap; you're not going to overbuild two and three and four times.

Right now, I can tell you it's capped. When I was asking ministerial staff the other day, "So how much new renewable power will this bill actually put in place?" they had no idea. It hasn't been set; we're going to have to wait. So, again, it's not quite the millennial bill that it was advertised to be when the minister talked about it.

We have tremendous opportunity for renewable power here in Ontario. According to the Ontario Clean Air Alliance, our potential for wind power in this province is more than 10 times greater than our total electricity consumption. We actually could be putting in place enough wind turbines, not just to power our electricity system but to fuel the green cars of the future. We don't have to have nuclear power to do that. We have the opportunities right here. We have untapped water power potential. If we wanted, we could import power from Quebec; I'm sure they'd be very happy to sell us some of their hydro power.

Despite all of this, in the latest Ontario Power Authority plan the McGuinty government only plans to develop 8,000 megawatts of new renewable energy by 2025. That's 500 megawatts a year for the next 16 years. The renewable energy contribution in Ontario, according to the current OPA plan, will increase from 22% this year to 30% in 2016. Doesn't sound like a transformation of the energy system in this province to me. The numbers don't support that kind of hype. Between 2016 and 2025, renewable energy will be flatlined. That's no new renewable energy for nine years.

To put this in perspective, over the next 20 years Ontario will install less than one fifth of the solar panels that Germany has put up in one year. Again, that doesn't sound to me like you're transforming the energy system in this province. It sounds to me like you're repackaging the renewable energy goals that existed previously.

You and I, Speaker, are operating in an information vacuum, because until that integrated power supply plan, the electricity plan for Ontario, is brought forward, we won't know whether this plan, this act that's on the table now, is going to have any substantial impact. It may simply be a repackaging of all that we've been dealing with for the last few years.

In 2027, according to current plans, Ontario will have less wind capacity than the state of Texas already has today—Texas, one of your premier oil centres in North America. Doesn't sound to me like we're as ambitious as the minister is stating we are.

Why are we in Ontario setting our goals for renewable energy so low? The answer, in the end, is that we have this stubborn commitment to nuclear power. If you're going to have a commitment to have 50% of your electricity made with nuclear power, then you're going to have to cap the growth of renewable energy. That's the message from leading environmental groups in this province.

According to Greenpeace, "The government's 2006 electricity plan caps the development of green energy, so the government could meet its self-imposed target of maintaining nuclear at 50% of supply."

According to the Pembina Institute, “Ontario’s electricity plan actually halts construction of ... new wind turbines in 2018, in order to leave space for the new” nuclear “reactors that the province is considering purchasing.”

According to the David Suzuki Foundation, “To be effective in making Ontario a global green energy leader” the government must avoid “new investments in nuclear facilities, to avoid ‘capping’ renewables and efficiency gains due to oversupply from non-renewable sources.”

According to the World Wildlife Fund, “We will get a sign of the degree of ambition when we see the new” OPA “plan in March.” If the OPA plan is radically different, then this bill will be of greater consequence, but if it leaves all the major pieces in the same place, and the same targets are there, then this bill will just be a reshuffling of the cards and not actually a change in direction for this province.

The bill supposedly establishes the “right to connect” for renewable projects, but the McGuinty government is putting nuclear first and leaving only the leftover space for green energy. In other words, as much as Bill 150 might encourage new investment and production of renewable energy, it will be doomed to failure unless the McGuinty government reverses its plan to build new nuclear plants at Darlington and refurbish its Pickering B plant. It has to open up space on the grid for renewable energy if it really wants to talk about large-scale investment in renewable energy.

Monday, the minister said we need nuclear energy because renewable energy sources like wind and solar are unreliable and intermittent. It’s interesting to see the double standard here. Complex, next-generation nuclear energy plants, like the ones that the government of Ontario is considering, are facing unresolved technical setbacks around the world. New designs from Westinghouse, AECL and Areva, the contenders for the contract to build new nuclear plants in Ontario, are all either in prototype stage or years behind schedule in development. There’s still no accepted way to safely store radioactive waste, yet this government talks of nuclear as proven and reliable. On the other hand, it characterizes renewable energy as flawed, unreliable and intermittent, ignoring the fact that storage of wind energy is viable. It ignores the complementarity between solar and wind—wind may not blow as much on a hot day, but the sun is shining—and ignores the vast and reliable potential of renewable energy sources, such as waste heat recycling from industrial sources, combined heat and power, and biomass.

1700

Similarly, it’s one thing to promise strong building codes, but another to deliver them. This government has a patchy record on regulation and a dubious record on caving in to developers. Until the exact targets for building efficiency are known, the jury is still out.

I’m also concerned that the government is relying on people and businesses to make the switch to a greener future, not investing in it directly. In other places where a

new energy economy is emerging, the government plays an active role beyond that which this bill contains. In Australia, for example, the government is dealing with a recession and their environmental problems by directly funding the energy efficiency retrofits, the insulation of more than two million homes—direct action on the part of the government to reduce energy consumption in that country.

Ontario has an economic downturn too, yet it isn’t helping construction workers find work right now by helping to make buildings more efficient. Presumably, the logic of making new buildings more efficient also applies to making old buildings more efficient. Unless we reduce our overall use of energy, it will be much more difficult for renewable energy to meet demand.

One question that came up that I find curious and others may well comment on is the question of costs. The other day, the minister suggested that this bill would only increase ratepayer costs by 1% per year. I have to ask, if the government hasn’t set the price at which it will buy green energy, if it doesn’t know what the supply mix is going to be, if it doesn’t know what the distribution system is going to be with new, distributed generation, then how do they know electricity rates will only go up 1%? Maybe it’s true. But if you don’t know the costs that are coming in and the factors that are going to generate those costs and the scale of those factors, then how do you prepare an estimate that’s better than a guess or a wish?

Energy conservation investments are very cheap. The only thing that’s comparable in cost to the coal power that’s being phased out is energy conservation and efficiency. Then you’re talking equivalents. Saving a kilowatt hour with efficiency costs about the same as generating a kilowatt hour with coal. Renewable power is more expensive, sometimes two or three times more. We need to invest in it. We need to have it. It needs to be part of the mix, and we’ve got to build the capacity. That’s a simple reality.

So I have to ask the minister, if he’s saying there will be only a 1% increase with a substantial change in our renewable energy investment, how do those numbers add up? One of the possibilities is that the minister expects very low uptake on this; that this isn’t a turbocharging of green energy development, but a continuation of the snail’s pace development of green energy in this province. Otherwise, I don’t think that his numbers can add up. Frankly, we haven’t been presented with the numbers, so it’s hard for us to say whether they add up or not. If he has them, they haven’t been released.

We know that there are people in this province who are vulnerable to higher costs. I have to say, I think if we continue to go down the nuclear road, at the very high prices that nuclear power is coming in at, people will be hit hard. Whichever road we go down, we are going to have to take action to make sure that vulnerable, low-income households are protected. We know that people have difficulty paying their bills. This minister has said that low-income households will be protected, that there

will be assistance, but we can't tell from this bill exactly what that's going to be. At this point, until we're actually presented with more documentation, we're left in a "Trust us" situation, and as you know, Speaker, from having been here for a while, that doesn't generally work in this environment.

There are concerns not just about people on low income but about industrial transformation. We in the NDP have called for an industrial hydro rate to protect large power-consuming industries, and we've tied it to job guarantees and guarantees of investment in conservation so that we actually get back out of that commitment to industry the sorts of things that we need in this province. A question I have to ask the minister: What sort of protection will there be for those large power-consuming industries so that we don't see more job loss in this province? I would rather have those heavy industries here in Ontario than have them move to other parts of the world that have lower standards for environmental protection.

I'm concerned about the vagueness on the domestic-content requirements. In fact, if we are going to build a new energy economy here, we have to use our procurement policies and our energy policies to create a domestic market. That will give us the potential to incubate the industrial development that Ontario will need for decades to come.

I was earlier talking about being in Sault Ste. Marie yesterday and talking to a fellow who is putting in solar panels. I asked him where he got the actual solar panels from: Tennessee. I just thought: Tennessee; not exactly a jurisdiction you think of as an environmental leader. Why is it that Tennessee is doing that sort of work and we aren't? When are we going to actually put in place the domestic-content requirements so that to access our market, we get that kind of investment?

The government cites its 50,000 job creation. Let's assume that they're correct when they say that 50,000 person-years of employment will be created. As you well know, we've lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs over the last four years. I don't know whether 50,000 is a correct number or an incorrect number; I haven't seen the basis for the calculations. But I know that in comparison to the scale of the loss that we've endured, that we've been stuck with, it is not, at this point, adequate.

To recap: I don't see the targets; I don't see the specifics for efficiency measures. I see vagueness about real costs and no specifics for domestic content. It's an awful lot of wiggle room for the government, an awful lot of wiggle room. It would be very difficult to hold them to account, to say whether or not they have been successful in what they've decided to put forward. That lack of accountability is something that we in this province can't afford.

I want this government to revise the bill, to bring forward a program so that we have targets that we can look at, numbers we can assess, so that we can determine whether, in fact, what's been brought forward will give us the results and the changes that we need. I look

forward to working with colleagues in committee and in this House to make those changes.

One of the concerns I have with this bill and its coupling with the electricity production in this province is that if we go forward with the investment in nuclear, we won't have enough demand to actually build a renewable energy industry here. I can't understand why this government is not willing to accept going in that direction. The minister has said that making conservation a priority is part of the thinking of this government, but the Ontario Clean Air Alliance notes that for every \$1 that the Ontario Power Authority spends on energy conservation and efficiency, it spends \$60 on new energy supply. I think that says right there where the commitment and the direction of this government is on these matters.

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The minister says that the government's approach to the electricity supply is balanced, but the Ontario Clean Air Alliance recently showed the McGuinty government was willing to spend 50 times more for a kilowatt of nuclear energy than it is to pay for a kilowatt of energy conservation. If we're going to invest tens of billions of dollars in renewing our electricity system, we need to invest it in 21st century technology, not 20th. We need to rethink this bill; we need to rework it in committee; we need to rework it before it comes back for third reading.

I have concerns about reliance on the market to kick-start new renewable developments. I have no doubt that Ontarians are ready to buy renewable energy and that in the long run efficiency and renewable energy are economically viable. But we need to have governments step up, take action and be willing to be leaders.

If the last few decades have taught us anything, it's that saying nice things about the environment and then taking a passive approach as a government is not adequate. We here in Ontario have said that we have to take an all-hands-on-deck approach to dealing with the environmental problems we have and the economic problems we have. One glaring omission in this bill is the permission for Ontario Power Generation to actually come on board in a big way and develop renewable energy projects.

If we say that the problem before us is as great as it is, and in fact I believe it is very large, then we need to be utilizing the public sector, its skill, its commitment, its talent, to develop renewable energy and conservation in this province and not simply leave it to the market. My hope is that we can actually match the rhetoric that's coming out of the new American administration with a commitment in Ontario to making the changes that we need, to building the economy that we need here. We need targets with teeth in this bill for renewable energy, we need regulations that are ambitious, we need to reconsider spending \$100-billion-plus on a nuclear-centred electricity system, and we need an active government to lead and build a new energy economy.

I look forward, Speaker, to working with you and other members of this Legislature, to working with

people in the environmental community and the labour community and the citizenry as a whole, to actually make sure that this bill is driven in a direction that will make a difference for Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm proud to stand here today to speak to this bill and to the presentations by the member from Toronto–Danforth.

The Green Energy Act, if passed, would help the government to ensure Ontario's green economic future by building a stronger, greener economy, better protecting our environment, combatting climate change, and creating a healthier future for generations to come. The Green Energy Act is a bold series of coordinated actions with two equally important thrusts.

I have to say that when I was listening to the member from Toronto–Danforth, I think that he said a lot of things that support what we're going to do. The feed-in tariff: He was all for that; a guaranteed price. As-of-right grid access: He agrees with that. So we have a lot of areas that we're going to do that he has supported. Service guarantees, streamlined approvals for renewable energy projects: These have been brought forward and are getting good support from the municipalities of Ontario. A renewable energy facilitator: He didn't mention that, but that's going to be important, because we all know about projects that would like to hook up to our grid that can't hook up to our grid. These changes have to be made. Streamlined approvals for the large transmission projects, because we have to rebuild the grid; the smart grid implementation, supporting the establishment and implementation of a smart grid for Ontario which will bring an additional new renewable energy project; setting the stage for the electric car; solar panels, which the minister has spoken of, on all those flat roofs in Toronto; distributed generation; incentives for small-scale renewables. These are all things that I think the member supported. Updating Ontario's building code: It's right in here. This is going to be a five-year review. We've come a long way and we're going to go further with that. Establishing mandatory electricity conservation targets for local distribution companies: Those targets are important. I agree with you, and I think you support that. That's in this.

Establish sustainable funding for conservation. Green Ontario government broader public sector building facilities—that's going to be important.

I thank you, Speaker, for this. I'd like to go on on all the things that this member supported in our bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Toronto–Danforth has indeed a respectable history on speaking up on behalf of the environment. As a side note—if I stay on topic here—I wish him luck in his leadership campaign.

That being said, once again it's too far, too fast. That's the real theme here. If you want to really understand what I'm saying, if you look back to the original promise in

the 2003 election by the Liberal government, they promised then—Mr. Speaker, you would know that because you ran—that they would cancel coal by 2007. Now, here's the dilemma for the people of Ontario: If they promised they were going to cancel all the coal plants by 2007, if they promised it and they didn't know they couldn't do it, then that was irresponsible. They shouldn't promise when they don't conclusively have the technical plan to make it work. But if they promised it and didn't know it, then they have another word for that. That's called not telling the truth.

Now, they did the same thing in 2007. They promised 2011. Now, the people of Ontario know, or should know, that coal represents about 20% to 25% of the power base in Ontario. They still don't have a plan that works.

With all due respect, I support renewable energy. Renewable energy at its very maximum contribution to the grid will be around, if maxed out, 10% of the generation capacity. It is not reliable; you'll have to have backup power, usually natural gas or coal. So be careful of what they're saying. They know not what they do. I'm very suspicious. It's another misgiving to the people of Ontario. You're going to pay more and use less.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to respond to the comments made by the member from Toronto–Danforth. I'm pleased to be in the Legislature today and in the weeks ahead as we continue the dialogue and debate on this transformational piece of legislation.

What I would like to do at this moment is add the voices of others into this debate and let this House know what others have said about the Green Energy Act.

"The Green Energy Act makes Ontario the leader in renewable energy policy in North America. Our call for the critical elements of a feed-in tariff, the right to connect and community power has been answered. If the regulations and directives to follow result in a culture of conservation being created and open opportunity for greening our supply mix that also creates 50,000 manufacturing jobs, we will no doubt be able to call ourselves a world leader in installed green energy within the next decade." That's Deborah Doncaster, the chair of the Green Energy Act Alliance.

Another strong voice with respect to green energy states, "Ontario's Green Energy Act represents North America's most ambitious and far-reaching enabling legislation and will place Ontario as a world leader in renewable energy development, industrial innovation and climate protection." That's Dr. Hermann Scheer, general chairman of the World Council for Renewable Energy, member of the German Bundestag.

Other powerful voices with respect to the actions being undertaken by our government come from CanWEA, the Canadian Wind Energy Association, who applauded the announcement and said: "With today's tabling of the Green Energy Act, the Ontario government has sent a clear signal that wind and other renewable energies will play a key role in meeting the province's

economic and environmental objectives going forward.” CanWEA believes that the GEA is an important step towards achieving CanWEA’s wind vision for 2025.

These and others voices have applauded this step.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Toronto–Danforth, you have two—oh, I’m sorry. I apologize to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex.

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Mr. Pat Hoy: I’m pleased to join this debate—clean energy, in the main, is what we’re talking about.

I have significant wind farms in the Chatham-Kent portion of my riding, and I’d like to respond to the member who was just speaking that there indeed are job figures that go with these wind farms. The local economy is stimulated as well. The municipality will be receiving taxes from these wind towers in the future, when they’re up. Currently, there are 44 in place at the Port Alma Wind Farm, enough clean energy for 30,000 homes. The local landowners, be they farmers or otherwise, will receive up to \$300,000 a year for leasing the footprint those towers have in place.

Three new ventures have been granted permission to move ahead—in excess of 100 towers—and more money and jobs will be created because of that. These three projects have a capital cost of \$760 million and again provide leases to the landowners where the towers would sit, a much-needed economic boost for Chatham-Kent. There would be monies going to the municipal treasury as well, and in this case, there will be 558 jobs created and enough green power for 74,000 homes.

So this is part of what has happened today, and I can see the expansion of jobs, growth and increasing monies for municipalities and landowners with the passage of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Not much of what was said on questions and comments related to your remarks, member for Toronto–Danforth, but you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I appreciate your observant commentary. Nonetheless, I want to thank the members for Ottawa–Orléans, Durham, Etobicoke–Lakeshore and Chatham–Kent–Essex for getting up and making comments.

I have no doubt in my mind that hundreds of thousands of jobs can and will be created in renewable energy. Whether they will be created in this province is another matter. Whether this bill will actually deliver the goods is another matter.

The member from Ottawa–Orléans is correct that there are a number of elements in this bill that, if actually applied with regulations that are written to give effect and have teeth, then, yes, it would create jobs. My worry is that we have been presented with a bill without targets within the framework of a government that is still profoundly committed to nuclear.

When I asked ministerial staff about how this would actually change the mix of electricity generation in Ontario the other day, they had no answer to that ques-

tion. So until I see very substantial numbers, all I can assume is that we have a repackaging of what has gone before, with some minor improvements. That is not adequate to deal with Ontario’s environmental or economic problems. It may be nice and it may be useful—it may be—but the scale of problems we face is quite profound.

If we spend \$40 billion a year on energy in Ontario, we spend somewhere in the range of \$10 billion or \$12 billion a year for electricity. We’re not talking about the whole of the electricity file with this bill; we’re talking about a portion of it. We need to be talking about the whole \$40 billion. We need to be talking about using domestically generated, renewable energy to replace more and more of those imports. When we start talking on that scale, then we do talk about rebuilding Ontario’s economy.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I join this debate with excitement and optimism. The Green Energy and Green Economy Act, to me, represents a way to the future in our province.

I’m actually quite dismayed by the pessimism being demonstrated by the two opposition parties, almost reminding us that these are political parties from the fossil fuel era. We, in this government, are focused toward creating a 21st-century Ontario, an Ontario with a vision to the future, not looking at 20th-century ideas but looking at and championing 21st-century solutions. That’s what this act is about.

One political party is too concerned about the process. The other is quibbling about details, as opposed to looking at the motivation, the inspiration behind this legislation and saying, “Hey, we’ve got to get together, collectively, and make sure that Ontario is not stuck in the bad old days; that the Ontario we leave behind, as this Parliament, is one which looks after our future, our children—an Ontario which is truly green, an Ontario which is truly the basis of a new economy.”

We in North America are really concerned about our lifestyle. We’re a lifestyle-driven continent. That’s part of our culture. It’s something we’re very proud of. But it’s a culture where we also want to make sure that we live in a sustainable fashion, that we take into account the impact we are having on our neighbourhoods, our communities, our towns and our villages and the environment around us. Legislation like Bill 150 ensures that not only do we enjoy our lifestyle, something which we are very proud of, something our ancestors worked extremely hard to build, but also that we do so in a manner that is sustainable, that we do so in a manner which keeps in mind the future we are building on this continent. We need to ensure that we are making changes in our lifestyle, that we are taking action in the way we live to reduce our environmental footprint, to ensure that our actions are not harming our communities, but in fact enhancing and fostering them.

I’m very proud to represent the riding of Ottawa Centre—which is, I sometimes joke, the centre of Ottawa—a community which very much takes a sustainable

way of living close to heart. There are many, many community organizations in my riding which work very hard at the local level, at the street level, at the block level, at the community level, at the neighbourhood level, to ensure that we are living in a sustainable fashion, and I'm sure all the members in this House have organizations like that—for example, the group called Sustainable Living Ottawa East, SLOE, led by Rebecca Aird, a committee of the Ottawa East Community Association, which conducts projects that help people who live, work and study in Old Ottawa East to take concrete, practical steps to live more sustainably by reducing environmental pressures. This type of legislation helps groups like Sustainable Living Ottawa East to accomplish their goals right in their communities, right in their neighbourhoods.

EnviroCentre—Dana Silk is the executive director—conducts energy audits. The member from Ottawa—Orléans got his energy audit through EnviroCentre, who work, in fact, with a lot of people living in low-income housing to ensure that they can live in a fashion which is sustainable, helping them to ensure that not only can they enhance the environment, but also save money doing so. Economically, it makes sense.

One Change, another great group led by executive director Stuart Hickox—all of you may know One Change through Project Porchlight. This is a group which recruited volunteers in 100 communities across the province—3,000 volunteers going door to door and giving out light bulbs. We're really proud, right here in this Legislature, as part of the McGuinity government supporting this group through the budget in 2006, of giving them \$1 million so they can accomplish that task. Right in the middle of the riding of Ottawa Centre, they're coming up with great ideas to mobilize the community to ensure that we live in a sustainable fashion.

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I want to talk about Living Lightly, a project led by David Chernushenko. Some of you may know David—he ran for the leadership of the Green Party—a committed environmentalist who brings forward real, practical ideas at the community level by which we, as members of the community, can foster our environment by coming up with ideas which are good for the economy and good for the neighbourhood. It is all these groups and organizations in my community, in my riding and in yours, which we need to support by coming up with ideas and giving them policy and legislation such as the Green Energy and Green Economy Act.

So what is this legislation trying to do? It is bold legislation, in my opinion. It is legislation which is trying to do two things: One, it's trying to make it easier to bring renewable energy projects to life right here in the province, to make it easy for big groups and small groups, large corporations or community groups, to start renewable energy projects. That is an important step. And number two, it's trying to foster a culture of conservation by assisting homeowners, government, schools, individuals and employers to transition to lower and more efficient energy use.

I come back to my original point: We in North America like our lifestyle, but we also want to ensure that we conserve, that we live in a sustainable fashion. This legislation provides that perfect blend of ensuring that we have access to renewable energy in our province, which, by the way, will create new jobs. We're very quick in this Legislature to give examples about the great things other states and other countries may be doing. We keep hearing about Sweden, Denmark, Germany and everybody else on the planet, but somehow we are so negative about everything else we're doing right here in Ontario. I really hope, and I am sure that all those other jurisdictions are looking at us and saying, "Oh my God, look at Ontario and how great they're doing," because we are, right here, through this legislation, trying to ensure that we create a significant demand for products and services that help in creating these renewable energy projects.

We're looking at jobs in domestic manufacturing and assembly. We're looking at jobs in architecture, construction, trucking, servicing and installation. We're looking at jobs in financing, engineering; electricians, inspectors; computer software and hardware. We're talking about the full spectrum of jobs one looks for in any economy right here through this very important piece of legislation.

And on the other hand, we're trying to foster a culture of conservation. We are all trying to say, "Hey, look, we all have to live responsibly, and we, the government, are going to give you the tools necessary to make that happen." These are two really important aspects of this legislation, and that's why I'm very proud to support this legislation, because it really brings the right blend and the right mix, which are necessary.

Let me just sort of outline some of the key measures that are part and parcel of this legislation, and then I'm going, towards the end, to hone in on three elements which I think are really important from the perspective of my community in Ottawa Centre. What are some of the key measures in Bill 150?

Bill 150:

- creates an attractive feed-in tariff regime, a pricing system for renewable energy that will guarantee rates and help spark new investment in renewable energy;
- establishes a streamlined approvals process and provides service guarantees for renewable energy projects;
- establishes a right to connect to the electricity grid for renewable energy projects;
- appoints a renewable energy facilitator to offer one-window assistance and support to project developers in order to facilitate project approvals;
- streamlines approvals for large transmission projects;
- establishes for the first time province-wide standards for renewable energy projects like standardized setback requirements for wind farms;
- helps local communities to build and operate their own renewable energy—and I'll come back to that;
- generates facilities, including support for community projects;

—implements a smart power grid in Ontario, making it easier to connect renewable energy generation to the system;

—offers incentives for small-scale renewables, such as zero for low interest loans to assist homeowners in financing and capital costs of residential renewables.

These are some key measures that are outlined in this very detailed legislation.

Let me talk about three important aspects which really sort of caught my attention, something which I've been talking about in my community in Ottawa Centre, something I've been hearing from my constituents on a repeated basis. That is, one, the local contribution of members in the community in renewable energy projects and the interaction with the Planning Act; two, a need for something like a community energy co-operative; and, three, home audits, which have been spoken of a lot in the last couple of days of debate.

I have a story to tell about—I'm not sure if you want me to tell the story, but I will share a story about a good friend of mine, Graham Findlay, who lives in my riding of Ottawa Centre. Not only is he my constituent but he is a good friend, a person I have known for many, many years, who speaks passionately about wind power. He's an engineer by profession. He not only speaks passionately about wind power but he is involved in the trade, in making sure that there is wind energy not only in Ontario but also across Canada.

Graham came up with this great wind ball, which is Energy Ball V100, which stands about 10 metres high, which was made for our urban communities. It's not a windmill; it's a wind ball. It's a very interesting-looking device which is meant for urban communities. If you've got a backyard, you can put your own windmill—it creates about 10 or so megawatts of energy—and be part of the grid.

Because of the local bylaws in Ottawa—the bylaws in question limit accessory building structures, which wind turbines are classified as, in residential areas to 4.5 metres and require they be set off from property lines at a distance equal to their height—he needed to go to the committee of adjustment to get approval. NIMBYism came into play: not in my backyard. I think a lot of us have heard of that. One of the neighbours, who is also my constituent, did not like the idea of having a wind ball in the backyard and challenged it at the committee of adjustment. Graham lost the approval, did not get the approval from the committee of adjustment and has now actually appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board.

Here's somebody—and many like him are just trying to lighten their footprint, just trying to help in creating renewable energy and putting it back into the grid. This legislation will allow Graham Findlay and others to accomplish that. This legislation will allow the requirements under the Planning Act and create a province-wide standard through the facilitator to ensure that certain criteria are met where we don't get into the business of NIMBYism, that one person will not be able to derail a worthwhile project, so that all of us, one by one, could become creators of energy and contribute in that aspect.

The other aspect that I am quite a fan about in this legislation is supporting community power. It's enabled community ownership of renewable energy projects by citizen-led energy co-operatives and clarified the local distribution companies, like Ottawa hydro in my city—municipalities are able to invest in under-10-megawatts renewable energy projects.

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For some time before I even ran for public office, I always talked about this. I got an estimate done as to how much it would cost me to put solar panels on the rooftop of my house. I've got a flat roof. The cost was prohibitive. I, as a young professional, was not able to bear that cost. I thought at that time that it might be interesting if some of my neighbours and I got together and invested together to bring the cost down and still be able to feed back into the grid. I started talking to a lot of the people I mentioned earlier about that idea.

Recently, a group has been created in my community called the community association for environment and sustainability. Just two or three weeks ago, we were discussing the idea of an energy co-operative. I'm really happy, I'm really excited, to see that idea right here in this legislation; that we the government, through this legislation, will allow for energy co-operatives. We have experienced co-operatives in terms of housing, and they're a successful model. We have seen food co-operatives supporting local producers, local farmers. Why not have community energy co-operatives? So I'm very, very excited that this is part and parcel of this legislation, because I can tell you that my community, right there in Ottawa Centre, an urban community in the middle of the city, is really going to benefit and there will be quite a few takers for such initiatives. This is exciting news.

Lastly, I want to talk about the issue of home audits, something that has come up quite a bit. I want to congratulate my colleague from Ottawa-Orléans, Phil McNeely, for requiring home audits, something which I understand the Progressive Conservative Party—

Interjection.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Well, the Conservative Party—has supported not only in their platform in the October 2007 election, but more recently during the debate on Bill 101 by Mr. McNeely.

We make many purchases. When we buy a used car, we need a safety check. We spend anywhere from \$2,000 to maybe \$15,000 to buy a new car, but we need a safety check in order to have the car registered, in order to have insurance. When you buy a house anywhere in Ontario now—probably, on average, about \$200,000—you get nothing. You don't know what shape the house is in. You can waive the inspection. By having an energy audit done, at least you get some basic information about the property you're buying: whether this house is an energy hog, or whether this is a house where you can save and conserve, or at least get some marching orders of what you need to do to make it energy efficient.

Cost has been talked about. It costs \$300 to do an energy audit. Right now in Ontario, \$150 of that \$300 is

paid by the Ontario government, so the net cost to the homeowner, to the seller, is only \$150. I think that is worth incurring, that we are paying a part, to ensure that the homes we are living in are energy efficient.

My time is ticking down. I just want to congratulate the Premier for his leadership, for his vision, through this legislation. I want to congratulate the Minister of Energy, George Smitherman, for his hard work.

I think this is an important piece of legislation. I hope I will get more opportunity to speak on this, because I know that my community is really excited about this legislation. I think it has all the right elements. Together, we can really build a 21st-century Ontario, and this legislation will ensure that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always interesting to hear a young, modestly experienced member speak on a very technical subject. He brings a great deal of passion to it, and I do respect that.

A couple of little things, some clarifications—it's important to read the bill, not just the notes they give you to read.

This section on the feed-in tariff is fairly technical, and I think it's worth reading. For the record, let's just look at what the feed-in tariff means. It's going to cost a lot. I'll give you an example. If everybody had a wind turbine in their backyard, or solar panels, and they wanted to feed into the grid, you'd have to have an upload. Often, you'd have to have a voltage regulation interface, whether it's DC power converting to AC power, and there's a tariff for these charges. In fact, there's a congestion on the grid today. So if he looks at section 25.35, he will see, "to develop a feed-in tariff program," means "a program for procurement" that provides "standard program rules, standard contracts and standard pricing regarding classes of generation facilities differentiated..." What this is is more red tape; in fact, appeals in courts and litigation.

For instance, the other comment he made was that he's got a friend—and it's good to see that you have innovative friends—with a wind ball. There are many new innovations that are going to come on. I think he's got a windbag, not a wind ball. However, to me, every house will want to get off the grid, because if you look at your electricity bill, about 70% of the bill is actually tariffs. It's not for electricity. It's the debt reduction charge. It's the delivery charge. All of these bills are about 65%—so unless you're off the grid, you have to pay the charge. So if everybody wants off the grid, everybody is going to have a wind ball or a windbag or a wind turbine on their house, and the neighbourhoods will look like trash.

Now, I would say to you that you should read some of these bills because I'm not sure that the member is familiar with what he's asking for. Thank you very much.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm very conscious of the clock tonight, so just bear with me.

The member for Welland for questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I want to tell you that it was a delight to listen to the comments from Mr. Naqvi, the member for Ottawa Centre. He's a first-termer. He spoke for the 20 minutes allotted him. He spoke with rare reference to notes. He spoke using storytelling techniques. He clearly researched the matter and had personal input in this Legislature by virtue of his comments. I would caution or ask some of his other colleagues to understand that that's the way you do it. You don't use two-minute questions and comments to say, "I'm pleased to participate in this debate." You do a little bit of work, you do some research, you bring some novel ideas to the issue, and people are going to sit and listen and your constituents are going to respect it. You come here and read a government script for two minutes and somehow suggest that that's called participating in a debate, and you're a waste of a seat.

I want to caution people, though, that this member and I very much disagree on the effectiveness of the legislation. He's enthusiastic about it, as he should be as a government member, as a person who's ambitious, I'm sure. I don't share his optimism about Bill 150, but I do appreciate his effective participation in the debate, bringing a unique perspective to it and not using the very oftentimes shabby government scripts that are handed out to government backbenchers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to rise today as well to support Bill 150. I do want to compliment the member for Ottawa Centre for all the remarks. They were certainly, I felt, very well researched and very pertinent to the bill.

But I could not stand up and talk about renewables without talking about my own riding of Huron-Bruce. I know the members here in the House are curious as to how many renewables the riding of Huron-Bruce has brought online in the last couple of years: 434 megawatts. That's what we have brought online from my riding. When we think about the potential for my agricultural community to not only harvest the wind—they can harvest their crops. We look at the footprint that is left by the turbines, and it is such a small portion of the workable land that is taken out of production. It's another revenue source for my agricultural community, and it's a steady source of income. I can tell you the challenges that they are facing right now. This energy act, the Green Energy Act, could not come at a better time. I would remind the members in the House that this is working land. This is working land that feeds the people of Ontario. This is the land that will also fuel our energy grid, and it will ensure that we have a reliable, clean, affordable source of energy.

I also will be speaking later about the Green Energy Act, but I do want to talk just for a moment about switchgrass. A number of my farmers are now switching to switchgrass, which is made into pellets and then it produces energy from that. I have much more to say. I'm very strongly supporting Bill 150, and I look forward to a little bit more time in the next round.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Just in the brief moments that we have, I'd like to make a couple of comments. I think the things that the public naturally wants to know about any kind of generation are: the efficiency, the opportunity for savings and the question of the environmental footprint. It's interesting to look at the kind of generation mix that we currently have, where 36% of the current generation mix is nuclear. Sometimes, people don't appreciate the fact that it is a steady flow. It is the base upon which the generation is made. Hydro represents 24%; coal, 20%; and gas, 10%.

One of the advantages of coal and gas is that they are both able to come online and also meet peak demands and then be reduced back. As I said a moment ago, nuclear is just a steady, constant amount. Then we look at others, which would be biomass at 6% and wind at 1.5%. I think it's important to understand that this is what we have as a current mix. What we have to be careful of, I think, in this bill and in the generation that falls from it, is the fact that we have to maintain this balance, and I think that that's really part of this discussion for this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Ottawa Centre, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I really like this peer review mechanism we have after our speeches. I want to thank the members from Durham, Welland, Huron-Bruce and York-Simcoe for their insightful comments. The member from Welland, I've been listening to you often in this Legislature for a year and a half. I'm trying to pick up some tips, so thank you very much for your positive

feedback on that; I really do appreciate it. But I don't share your pessimism. I'm an optimist by nature, and I'm also a very optimistic Canadian. I think a lot of you have heard my story. I came from a country where my father spent nine months in prison because he did not have this opportunity to participate. So no matter how long I am here and how many bills pass or don't pass, I will always feel encouraged about this process, where we can, in a civilized manner, debate our issues, agree to disagree and make sure that this province is a better place to live for all of us. That's why I'm so supportive of this particular legislation, because it is charting a path to the future. It is providing a map, looking to the 21st century and not looking back to something we should have left a long time ago. This is very, very exciting.

I've gone into detail as to the elements of this legislation which are particularly important and interesting to me. I think that, in terms of the economic impact, by creating this massive demand, this hunger for green energy, we will inevitably create a lot of jobs right here in this province, hiring Ontarians, who will be very proud to say that this province is at the cutting edge in the global economy in terms of building a community and a society which is energy-efficient and green in nature, and ensuring that we as a province, and eventually we as a country, will flourish and prosper.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): According to my trusty pocket watch, it's 6 of the clock, or some proximity thereto. This House is adjourned until Thursday, February 26, at 9 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1756.

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