



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 3 March 2009

Mardi 3 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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



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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 3 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 3 mars 2009

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREEN ENERGY AND GREEN ECONOMY ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR L'ÉNERGIE VERTE ET L'ÉCONOMIE VERTE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 2, 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 / Projet de loi 150, Loi édictant la Loi de 2009 sur l'énergie verte et visant à développer une économie verte, abrogeant la Loi de 2006 sur le leadership en matière de conservation de l'énergie et la Loi sur le rendement énergétique et modifiant d'autres lois.

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: This is the remnant of the time allowed me that I began using yesterday evening.

I suppose, just to wrap up, I want folks to recall the very interesting comments made by the member for Haldimand–Norfolk, Toby Barrett, when he talked about conservation and green lifestyle as being a very significant commitment. That was echoed by the member for Eglinton–Lawrence, Mike Colle, when he responded and commented on Barrett's 20-minute presentation. We really do have to have a major cultural shift.

I repeat that I was very disappointed that somehow we've lost the focus here. Howard Hampton has been leading this province in explaining that if you really want to have a direct, significant impact—not some PR-spin type of impact, but a direct, significant impact—you address, from a residential homeowner's point of view, the two largest electricity users in your home, and those are your furnace motor and your refrigerator. That's something that this province could take a very direct and active role in doing: helping homeowners upgrade those two appliances, if you want to call a furnace an appliance.

The other one is the observation that audits alone aren't going to save a single kilowatt. Mere audits are not

going to save any energy at all. Most folks know full well if they've got obsolete fenestration in their homes. Most folks know full well if it's an older home that isn't properly insulated. Most folks know full well if there are drafts coming in through the baseboards. Most folks know full well if they're using a mid-efficiency furnace rather than a high-efficiency furnace. So audits aren't going to solve anything when it comes to greening this province. I reject the suggestion that somehow people, homeowners, need this audit—and Toby Barrett spoke to that very cleverly. He talked about all the hidden energy conservation things that he built into his home. He asked if he's going to get credit for that; I suspect not, because they're buried in the ground. It's the insulation under the concrete pad that constitutes the ground floor, amongst other things. All audits are going to do is make jobs for auditors.

What folks like the folks where I come from need is help, because these folks who live in homes that they know aren't as efficient as they should be are the same folks who just lost their jobs. They need help upgrading those homes so that they can live a little more economically and so that they can save a little bit of energy.

I want to go back on this 50,000 new jobs—50,000 new jobs. What horse feathers—absolute bull spit. It's made up; it's fabricated. This is Alice in Wonderland. Some spin-doctor type figured that 50,000 would be a good number so they just wrote down 50,000. The government can't explain where those 50,000 new jobs are going to happen, and all the more so when there isn't a clearly articulated Buy Ontario component in any new technology or any new hardware that's being built.

My colleague Paul Miller from Hamilton talked about the 75% of the staff at National Steel Car out of work in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario: no jobs, none whatsoever, and no prospect.

Oh, and what do Professors Martin and Florida say? "Oh, these unemployed workers in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario"—they literally said this; I was there—Professor Martin, when they were presenting this boondoggle of a \$2.2-million Martin and Florida report, said, "Oh, well, workers who lose their jobs can open beauty salons or maybe art galleries." Good God. You might as well dress up those John Deere workers in Welland—800 of them just lost their jobs—dress them up in tutus and send them down the road to the opera-ballet house and have them dance to the Nutcracker Suite. What a stupid, stupid comment to make.

These are the same workers who are being called upon by this government to green their homes. They'd love to,

but they can't afford to, because they just lost their jobs and their property taxes are going up, because this government hasn't uploaded the download from the Conservatives. Their hopes for the future are diminishing.

I'm encouraged by the fact that there's going to be some consideration of amendments to the building code. Far too many developers have built far too many high-rise buildings with electric baseboard heating. Why? Because it's cheap to install and because it's easy to put a meter in each apartment and make the consumer pay for it, so the front-end costs are very low. But the back-end costs are very, very high.

I, for one, can't understand why we wouldn't ban electric heating, especially in rental units in any new construction, unless it's in an area that doesn't have access to natural gas, which is the clear alternative. I appreciate that there are some parts of the province where electricity is the only source of energy, especially in a multi-residential building.

This government has generated some spin and tried to do some PR. It quickly proved unsuccessful. It makes up numbers like 50,000 jobs that it can't justify at all, at all, at all. Are there going to be 50,000 new auditors? Is that where the jobs are, Mr. Ramal?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Not really. Real jobs.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Of course not, and you know it.

The Liberals are just lining up and bowing. You know that RCA Victor ad? You're too young, but there used to be a RCA Victor ad where the dog is sitting beside the gramophone—folks here remember that—and the tag line under it was "His Master's Voice." These Liberal backbenchers are like that dog sitting in front of the gramophone just listening to his master's voice. I know what they're thinking. I can see their body language. They know that there's no substance to this legislation, that it's more fluff than body, it's more hot air than reality, and it does nothing to green Ontario.

This government's vision of a green Ontario still includes at least 50% of our electrical power coming from nuclear power plants, and not the existing nuclear power plants—new nuclear power plants. And we know this much about nukes, don't we? They're unpredictable in terms of the cost—exorbitant prices, billions and billions of dollars, and of course, when you spend billions and billions of dollars building these plants, you pass those costs on to the electricity consumer. Then, of course, there's the prospect of what you do with the waste once it's exhausted. It's dangerous and expensive. This government appears to have abandoned any sense of highly concentrated conservation programs, and I find that truly a shame.

I finally want to comment on this government's failure to acknowledge that wind farms—and we support wind as a source of electrical energy; of course we do, in the New Democratic Party—in and of their own right can constitute a nuisance for people whose homes are adjacent to them. We need clear guidelines and standards from this government about the proximity of wind farms to residential homes. This government is prepared to

inflict the persistent vibration and noise, along with the prospect of some other environmental impacts, on people willy-nilly in their mad rush to try to demonstrate themselves as somehow being greener than anybody else, because that's all it is. It's all about imagery; it's all about spin. It's not about substance. They're not green. They're addicted to nukes and they have no interest, there's nothing in this legislation whatsoever that will facilitate, accommodate, encourage or assist in real, radical conservation, which is the first step that has to be taken.

0910

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

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Good morning. It's a pleasure to have a chance to share with this House, in response to the member from Welland's comments, some more detailed information about the analysis that we have done with respect to the creation of jobs arising from the Green Energy Act. It is of critical importance to the government that the Green Energy Act be one that helps our province transform our energy system but also protects our climate and, very importantly in the economic climate that exists, creates jobs. By 2012, investments of \$5 billion are expected to support over 50,000 direct and indirect jobs.

Let me just share with the Legislature how we calculated the job figures. We calculated those job figures using information from the Ontario Power Authority with respect to the projections of future renewable wind and solar capacity, enhanced conservation initiatives and the expected incremental dollar investments associated with enabling transmission and distribution, as well as the implementation of a smart grid. We used that data to examine what construction, manufacturing and engineering positions would be created. We're cognizant of the fact that, at the beginning of the investment period, limited amounts of solar panel and wind turbine manufacturing would be conducted in the province, but over the longer term, it would be projected that our investments would support the creation and expansion of renewable energy manufacturing facilities. So we do have some detailed analysis undertaken with respect to that job creation.

I'm very proud of the work that we're doing and I'm very confident that, with a \$5-billion investment coming into this sector, we will see these jobs created. That's what our province needs, wants and desires. We look forward to that future.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: We have just, this morning and also late yesterday, received a presentation from the member for Welland expressing his disappointment with this legislation, in particular with the proposal for the imposition of mandatory home energy audits. I agree, and we look forward to this government rethinking that mandatory aspect, at minimum.

As the member for Welland has indicated, the information has been out there. It has been out there for decades. The federal government, regardless of the party

in power, has done an excellent job over the decades of informing consumers about the importance of doing the kind of things that this government feels they can ram through in a mandatory way.

As Peter Kormos indicated, people know about insulation. They know about air leaks in their windows. Why not build on that strength and that information, build on the education programs and the informative brochures that are out there?

Further to that, don't call a mandatory audit an incentive. This is not a carrot; this is a stick. I myself am disappointed in this legislation. I do ask: Where is the vision? Where is the vision that we saw in the 1960s and in the 1970s, when people—architects—were encouraged to rethink and redesign the layout of their homes?

I'm very let down by this legislation. A number of issues were raised this morning and yesterday, and the question is out there: Is nuclear green? Is natural gas green? How many windmills will it take to run a steel mill?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Timmins-James Bay.

M. Gilles Bisson: Merci beaucoup. Ça me donne l'occasion de commenter le discours de notre bon collègue M. Kormos de Welland. Écoute. It's clear that what the government is trying to do in this legislation as far as direction is not bad. I think there's hardly a member in this assembly who would say this is not a direction in which we have to go. I guess it really is that the devils are in the detail, and it will be interesting to see, as we go into committee, if the government's going to be prepared to amend this legislation so that we can achieve some of the goals that are set out.

I'm going to get a chance a little bit later to get into some of the details of things that I think we need to do. But the member for Welland, as other members have in the debate previously, has raised the issue that what we have in this bill, although a step in the right direction, lacks the kind of policy that is needed in behind the legislation, and the programs that are needed from government in order to be able to make sure that we actually end up where this bill is trying to bring us.

For example, one of the areas that is of great interest to the Ontario economy, and I think of great interest to those of us who would like to have an opportunity to retrofit our houses with better insulation, better windows, or utilize new technologies as far as solar, wind or geothermal—there really aren't the types of incentives in place to make that affordable for the consumer. If a consumer looks at trying to get into these technologies as a way to be able to find a way to green the economy, and at the same time lessen our environmental footprint, you need to have something to make it interesting for the consumer, because at current cost it is very expensive to put some of these technologies in, and the payback can be as much as 10 or 15 years. So, from a straight economic point of view, they may not be affordable to the consumer, and I think one of the failures of this legislation is that it doesn't look at what kinds of policies and

programs we can put in place to make sure that consumers are able to do what they need to do within their own homes to green this economy and green the environment.

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

Mr. Mike Colle: One point that a lot of members are missing, and maybe it's because they haven't done the energy audit at home, is that there's a federal government rule that says that if you don't have an energy audit, you're not eligible for the \$10,000 worth of rebates. So the federal government now tells us that you have to have an energy audit to be eligible for \$10,000 worth of rebates. So just remember that.

The other thing is—and I think the member from Welland made a good point—there are some serious concerns about the cost of nuclear. But the mindset we now have in this province—the old NIMBYist mindset—is that people are protesting against transmission lines. They don't want them. Wind power? They hate wind power. Solar farms? Not in my backyard. And no wonder you're stuck with nuclear. Let's get rid of the opposition that is just about the visual effect of a windmill that you'll never see and is only a couple of percentage points of the whole energy total. We need a major mindset change.

The jobs: There are the incredible numbers of jobs. I've been saying for four or five years, like Mr. Lisi, who lives in my riding. He's got this 50-gallon water tank in his basement; 50 gallons cooking away like we all do back home; 50 gallons cooking away in Mr. O'Toole's basement—yet if you want to get rid of that 50-gallon tank and replace it with an on-demand water heater, you can't get one made in Ontario or Canada. You have to pay \$3,000 to get a little water heater that they have in every country in the world but Canada—and Ontario. Could you imagine all the jobs we could create in Timmins and James Bay and Oshawa by manufacturing the on-demand water heaters that they've been using for 50 years in South America? Why not get some factory in Sarnia to make the darned things? Save energy, save money, and create jobs in Sarnia, for Pete's sake.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? In rotation, the member for Durham.

0920

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to stand on this time allocated. Just 10 minutes; it's hardly enough time to talk about the importance of today being square root day. That's the third day of the third month in the ninth year. Three is the square root of nine, so that's an important starting point; we got something right. What we haven't got right is Bill 150.

I think this bill here—I want to start, at the outset, on my own behalf. I can't necessarily speak on behalf of the party, because this is a wedged bill. This bill is the Green Energy Act, and personally, I'm in support of green energy.

It comes down to a very minute description of how you would define green energy. I would say that hydro-electric—that's water dams—would be green energy,

with the exception that often, to create a dam, you have to flood property. In many cases, it's property that has been affecting First Nations for hundreds of years. It's a huge issue in Quebec. They have hydroelectric power, and for most of it they flooded land that was in dispute in the courts.

This bill is light on the description of green energy. I'd say that green energy is a popular term. After all, Barack Obama is using it. It alludes to the terms "innovation" and "creativity." The word "green" is an optimistic colour.

Then they get into the natural gas. Natural gas, of course, is a carbon-based fuel. It emits carbon, which is against Kyoto. Coal, of course, is opposed to the Kyoto accord, and it would not conform with the green energy thing. The United States, our largest trading partner, is convinced, and their scientists are convinced that they can come up with carbon-capturing coal sequestration. The largest resource for energy in the world is coal. There's more coal than natural gas and petroleum, or crude.

This topic of Bill 150—there was a report done when Dwight Duncan, the Minister of Finance, was the Ministry of Energy. They commissioned a special ministry under Bill 100. Bill 100 was when they kind of restructured the energy file. It's important to look at the history if you want to know much about the future. This bill, Bill 150, is an admission that Bill 100 was wrong. They had a report, and it was called the supply mix report. "Supply mix" means how much of the energy, the power, on the transmission system is going to come from what source of power. In Ontario, the mix of energy inputs has traditionally not changed since the time of our government, really, and prior to that.

If you go right back to the genesis of electricity of Ontario, Sir Adam Beck, in 1906, I think it was, had a theory for Ontario, and a vision. It would be nice if we had a vision today, because the economy is in the tank. His vision for Ontario was power at cost. What he meant was power at any cost. That's really what he meant. That's why Ontario became the industrial heartland of Canada, the wealthiest province and the furnace of energy for Canada. In fact, I would say, up until recently, it still is.

If you look at the supply mix—Niagara Falls is the best example—it was hydroelectric-based. Then, as our economy grew, we could not have enough hydroelectric power—which is the cheapest form of power, by the way—to energize our economy. They mapped out most of the hydro opportunities, and the farther away you got from the large centres, like Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa and London, these hydroelectric power projects weren't as efficient, because when you start transmitting power all the way down to Toronto, you lose about 20% of the power that's been dispatched from the plant. That lost energy is called line loss, and now we're seeing that in our hydro bill at home.

This whole thing is about our hydro bill at home. Talk about green energy; I'm going to bring the supply mix

into it full circle here, but here's the real issue: They're going to add power onto the system. Wind is 12 to 15 cents a kilowatt hour. What do we pay at home today? About five cents a kilowatt hour. So that means, if you're buying wind power, either you or the taxpayer—which is really you, anyway—it's a 300% increase in price. What's that going to do to seniors and people on fixed incomes? I'm for green energy, remember that; I'm also for being honest with the people of Ontario.

They're talking about wind turbines. They're also talking about solar power. Let's talk a bit about solar power. I have one in my riding. It's about 40 kilowatts. It's invested in by a young, new Canadian. He's from the Netherlands, I believe. Very technically competent—he designed most of it himself. He's an engineer. He wasn't employed because he couldn't get his engineering credentials legitimized here, but anyway. He went on a standard-offer contract being offered by the minister for wind. Do you know what he's being paid for a kilowatt hour? Forty-two cents a kilowatt. That's eight times the cost of energy on the system.

All of the renewables, digesters, biomass, all of the alternatives they're offering are about four times more expensive, on average, than the energy we're using today. My solution is, there's not enough information here about consumer protection or about conservation strategies, not just the squiggly light bulbs.

There are technologies today called smart systems, which would allow me—now, this is a very good example. I could be driving home tonight, or in the GO train, which I take most of the time to save energy, and I could phone home and turn on the microwave oven. Do you know that? That's a smart system.

They said that they're going to give us the smart meter. It's not a smart meter. No, no; the meter you're putting in our house is not a smart meter. Here's the information, for the people of Ontario: First of all, it's a time-of-use meter. It will calculate the load dispatched to your home at a certain time. That's what it does. And if you look at the fine print and the way Dalton is doing this, it's so treacherous it frightens me.

There are going to be bands of energy cost. If you get the energy cost at 3 o'clock in the morning, it's going to be about five cents a kilowatt hour. If you have your breakfast at 8 in the morning, you're going to be paying about 14 cents a kilowatt hour. You're paying five today; it's going to be 15. It's a 300% increase. So to make it smart, you're going to have to have timers on all these little gadgets, on your dishwasher, dryer. You'll have a whole pile of them on your table, attaching them to things. This is nothing but a misleading—potentially that's not an appropriate word—but it's a difficult way to tell the people of Ontario—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would caution the member on the word that he's used.

Mr. John O'Toole: Yes, well, I apologize. That's too strong, but it turns out it's true.

Here's the issue, what you really need to know: You're going to use less—that's called conservation—

and you're going to pay more. That's what Bill 150 is all about. It's a tragedy in action, and it's being communicated in such a spurious way that it troubles me. Why don't they just say, "Look, Ontario, we've got to be a leader. We're going to charge you more for something that you have no discretion in using"? Because energy—this is the final line—is a non-discretionary consumption. It's not like cable TV; if it's too much, you can cut her off. A non-discretionary consumption is price-inelastic. In other words, your consumption does not change with price. In fact, you use about 1,000 kilowatt hours per month in your home. You cook your food, you wash your clothes, you wash your body, you heat your home, and that's the climate we live in. Tell me how much the consumer can actually save—maybe 10%.

By the way, 62% of all energy produced in this province is used by industry. What's the strategy to retool energy use in Ontario's manufacturing, pulp and paper, forestry, mining, auto and steel sectors? They use the energy, and you're going to put them out of business in the economy that's already in the tank. This is a failed plan, and if you vote for it you don't understand what you're doing.

0930

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, that was an interesting comment made by my friend from Durham. I always enjoy listening to what he has to say, because he does feel passionately about these issues and sometimes raises them from a bit of a different perspective from other members—I mean that as a compliment—in the sense of trying to look at things from the perspective of what it means to the average individual.

I think he's right on the issue of the smart meters. I've long felt that these things are not smart meters; they're really smart in the way they bill you. That is about all they really are. They're not smart as far as anything else. What you're going to end up with, and the member is quite right, is that people will be forced, by way of having to pay higher rates of electricity during peak times, to move their usage to other times.

There's an environmental issue here in the sense of how you're able to better balance your load. In fairness to the government, you do want to have some way so that not everybody is using all the utilities at the same time, making it difficult for OPG to provide the amount of electricity we need. One of the difficulties you have is that at particular times when you have heavy usage, they have to ramp up generators—for example, coal-fired and others—in order to provide that extra electricity that's needed within those peak times. Then, later on during the day and in the evening, obviously those particular generators come off-line as they're not needed. So the issue becomes: Does the hydro grid have the capacity to deal with the peaks? The answer is yes. If the answer is yes, that you can deal with the peaks, then you've got to see this for what it is. It's not really about conservation; it's about finding ways to whack the consumer with yet

another hydroelectric charge that we can ill afford to pay. At the end, people are still going to have to cook their bacon and eggs in the morning, you still have to run your washing machine, you still have to do many of the things you've got to do, and a lot of those things physically can't be moved to other periods of time because that would be pretty impractical. So I thought the member raised an interesting point that people should pay some attention to.

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

Mr. David Oraziotti: It is a pleasure this morning to comment on the remarks that were made this morning by the member from Durham. Bill 150, the Green Energy Act: What a positive bill, and I'm very excited about this piece of legislation.

I can tell you that in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, we have seen such a tremendous transformation already when it comes to energy production that it's really remarkable. The 189-megawatt wind farm, the Brookfield wind farm, with an investment of \$400 million in Sault Ste. Marie, has created new jobs, construction jobs, a new wind energy training program at the college and all kinds of spinoffs. It's been absolutely fantastic. Essar Steel right now is building a cogeneration project with 200 jobs. It will reduce their electricity need by about 70 megawatts. The steel mill uses 140 megs of power, so that's about half of all the energy they're going to need right from cogeneration. St. Marys Paper, a very important employer in our community, is applying for a biomass cogeneration project which will help to reduce their costs. The Pod solar generation company has received a contract of about \$360 million from OPA to develop a 60-megawatt solar farm.

This act continues to build on the renewable initiatives we've already made in the province of Ontario and will continue to demonstrate our commitment to protect the environment, while at the same time creating a stable and sustainable electricity grid, as well as creating jobs. There's been a lot of discussion about the economy these days; rightfully so. This act helps to enhance our economic base and improve our manufacturing capabilities.

I hear from the opposition benches some negativity around the bill. I want to ask the members: Are you prepared to support the Green Energy Act? I want to know where you stand on this, because this is what Ontarians want and this is the future in Ontario.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a chance to comment on the speech of the member from Durham on Bill 150, the green energy bill. The member from Sault Ste. Marie was just commenting about the cost of energy, which was brought up by the member from Durham, when he pointed out that the majority of energy used is used by industry—I think he said 62%. As the member from Sault Ste. Marie would know, most industry in the north, certainly the forestry sector, is shut down and part of their problem is the cost of energy. So what is this bill

going to do to the cost of energy? That's a question we in the opposition are asking, and I think the general public would appreciate the fact that we're asking that question. The minister has said that it's going to mean a 1% increase for the consumer's energy bill. Well, I find that one a little hard to believe, frankly. They're also talking about spending \$5 billion, and if you do the math, I think it's more than 1% just on that \$5 billion that's being spent. So a point that we certainly question and that I think consumers worry about is what is going to happen to the cost of energy. Equally important for business, there's not going to be any industry left in the north. Up in Iroquois Falls, we have AbitibiBowater shutting down their paper mill and looking at selling their hydro assets. Certainly, the cost of energy is something that has to be considered.

We're all in favour of green energy and having more green energy in the mix, but we also need industry in this province. Under this government, we lost something like 70,000 jobs last month. Are you just going to make it worse by forcing up the cost of energy, making more and more businesses uncompetitive in this province? It's like death by a thousand cuts from this government. They keep introducing another piece of legislation that makes it harder to stay in business in this province. Every month we have something else coming down the stream making it more and more difficult for business to survive in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment. The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: I guess the key thing to keep in mind is that there are serious international, global transformations taking place.

Prime Minister Harper was saying yesterday, "You know, you guys have got all the criticisms, but you don't have any solutions and aren't even offering any solutions." We see the opposition constantly talking down any legislation that comes forward. They're talking down this energy act which is transformative, but I'm saying, what do you suggest?

We're saying that conservation is critical and there are all kinds of conservation incentives here. There is a total shift into renewables, like solar, wind. There's also a recognition that everyone has a role to play in this transformation. It can't be done by government alone, so that's why it's engaging the public in this process. We hope that the public will understand that this is about all of us changing the way we live, because it not only reduces our carbon footprint—and that costs not only the air quality we live in and the quality of life in our environment, it costs us huge amounts of money.

Anybody who stands up here in the opposition will always say they're basically going to freeze the cost of fuel and energy. You can't do that. It's always going to be expensive. What we're trying to do by getting people to conserve, getting people to look at more efficiency in energy production, is we're going to maintain it at a level where industry and homeowners can have reasonably

priced energy. That's what this is about. It's not about a panacea; it's about being reasonable.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I seek unanimous consent to have another hour, please, to speak on this topic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Durham is seeking unanimous consent of the House to continue his remarks for another hour. Agreed? I heard a couple of noes.

Mr. John O'Toole: This one here is actually an article by—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Member for Durham, when the Speaker is standing, your mike is turned off, the camera is turned off you. Take your seat.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Yes. You can't use that as a prop, and I'd ask you to keep it on your desk. If you're going to refer to it, that's okay, but don't use it as a prop. Thank you.

0940

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Speaker. I hope you have restored my time.

I would only say that this is a bill that has been deliberately designed in a treacherous sort of way to wedge us.

Here's our position, from my point of view: First of all, we support green energy. We support green energy and conservation. We also support truth in legislation. Here is the issue: The numbers don't work out. Five billion invested—there are no details on it. Fifty thousand jobs—most of them will be government inspectors going around to your house. Here's why I'm having difficulty with supporting it overtly: I want, first of all, thorough public hearings around the province. I want to make it clear to you that I don't like certain provisions: the warrantless entry, the overriding of municipal law and the overriding of the conservation act. There are parts of this bill that the people of Ontario need to know about.

Can you imagine the Oak Ridges moraine, which is a pristine area in my riding, allowing, as a right, a whole series of wind turbines? How tragic is that? I am just so disappointed in this treacherous bill.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I get an opportunity to participate in this debate on the heels of what was an interesting two-minute wrap-up, I must say.

I want to come at this from a couple of different perspectives, because we need to set the record straight. I was listening to government members as they were doing the responses to the member for Durham's comments. They're trying to portray it as if the opposition is opposed to what the government is trying to do here.

Now, let's be real clear. There's nobody here, at least in our NDP caucus, who is opposed to the intent of what this government wants to do. In fact, it's part of our party platform. If you'll notice, pretty well all four leadership

candidates have been ascribing to doing exactly that, moving Ontario toward being able to move by—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You should stop heckling me like that. That's not nice, is it?

So the point I would make is that there's hardly anybody who disagrees with the intent of what the government's trying to do as far as direction. I think we all understand that we need to, as a jurisdiction, find a way—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm having difficulty hearing the member for Timmins–James Bay because of some of the extraneous noise in the House. I would ask all members to quiet down a bit so we can hear the member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much, Speaker.

As I was saying, just to start over again, there's hardly a member in this House who is opposed to the direction that the government is trying to take in regard to trying to find ways of increasing conservation within the province of Ontario and trying to develop a greener economy, a greener industry. There's nobody who argues with that.

The problem is, when we look at the legislation, it goes in that direction—there are some measures in this bill, yes, that are positive in the sense of bringing us in the direction that we all want to go—but in the details, it doesn't get us there in some cases.

I think the real test is going to be—with all candour, this bill has to get into committee so that we can have people come before the Legislature and say, “How can we strengthen this bill, by way of both the legislative changes that have to be made in it and the policy changes that have to be made by the government, in order to deal with getting us to that point?”

I'm just going to go through a couple of things that I think are important to talk about. For example, the minister says that the act will lead to a rapid expansion of renewable energies, but you refuse to set any targets or timelines to get us there. If the government is saying that they want to move us in the direction of more renewable energy, it seems to me that you have to set some targets.

We know the experience of Germany. Germany, some years ago, decided that one of the things that it wanted to do is exactly that, move itself from what is primarily their—coal-fired and nuclear are a big part of what they do and they were trying to move themselves on to renewables. They decided one good way to do that was with solar. What the German government did is set some targets. It said, “We want to install X amount of solar panels on roofs per year for the next five years in Germany, in order to move us toward getting more renewable energy put into our grid.” They decided to do that by way of solar.

You looked at Norway and you looked at Denmark, which went the way of wind. They set targets. They said, “We want to be able to produce X amount of the total capacity needed for electricity in our country. We want to move to a certain percentage by a certain date.” So they

set targets and timelines. What that did is it forced industry, it forced government and it forced everyone to move toward those targets and those timelines.

When you have a bill that doesn't have targets or timelines, it's a little bit like saying “motherhood and apple pie.” Well, who's going to disagree with the government on motherhood and apple pie?

The issue is that there are no timelines and no targets, so I say to you that I agree with what you're trying to do in the bill—I have no problem supporting the concept of the bill. The problem is that there need to be targets and timelines so that we're clearly trying to get to a certain objective within a certain timeline. I don't think that's an unreasonable request on the part of the opposition and the public. It seems to me that if you want to get somewhere, you have to say, “Here's where we would like to be in a certain amount of time.”

The other thing is that you say the act is supposed to provide loans and perhaps grants to retrofit and for conservation. Let me explain that: If you look at the bill, it's supposed to provide some sort of grant-to-retrofit program to allow consumers to reinsulate their houses, to change the windows, maybe to put in solar panels or geothermal or other things when it comes to renewable energies in their homes. But, again, if you look at the policies the government has in place within the various ministries that it's responsible for and if you look at what's in this bill, it is very silent on what the actual programs will be that will assist consumers in making those transitions from having everything coming off the grid to both conservation and possibly themselves generating electricity by solar, wind or other means.

Again, if you don't have targets and you don't have the programs to assist in getting you there, it's a bit of an empty shell. I guess that's part of the problem with the bill. Yes, we're supportive of the direction that the government wants to go. We all agree that we want to build a greener economy, and we all agree that we want to do more in the way of conservation. There's nobody who is going to disagree with you on that, but when you look at the bill, it doesn't give us any of the details on how we're going to get there.

I'll just give you my situation as I see it as a consumer. My brother and I own a cottage out at Kamiskotia Lake, and unfortunately, often enough, there are electricity failures out at that lake because of the transmission system, I guess. So we're having a bit of a problem. We need to keep the power going because we heat the water in the winter, and we need to have a heat system going in the event that the power goes down so that we don't freeze the pump water and pipes etc. within the cottage. We need to have a constant supply of electricity, so we looked at putting in a backup generating system. We decided against that because environmentally, it doesn't make a lot of sense. Number one, running a gas or diesel generator is not very economical, and number two, it's not the greenest option.

So we said, “Maybe what we can do is look at solar panels charging a battery system so that we can convert

electricity to AC as a way of putting enough electricity into the home so that we can at least keep the heat trace on the water line, we can keep the heat on the pump,” and that kind of stuff. But the problem is that the technology to get us there, just a simple system of backup for two or three hours, is fairly expensive and when you look at the payback, there is no payback.

So we said, “Okay, there’s another way. We could look at possibly putting a solar panel on the roof along with a small wind turbine, generating electricity. When we don’t need it, we can sell it back into the grid through a reverse meter set-up, and when we’re consuming electricity, we’ll be able to pull it off that and at the same time have a battery backup unit that would achieve the goals that we want.” The payback on something like that is 12 to 14 years. So for the average consumer, who has that kind of money to invest in order to get us to where we want to go?

I’m saying that we need to have specific programs that allow consumers to make those types of investments, with some assistance. I would argue that one of the things you’re able to do is to say, “All right. If you’re going to be saving as a result of all of the energy retrofit stuff that you do in your home”—you put in better windows, better insulation, you’re going to put on a solar panel with a wind turbine etc., and you saved X cost; let’s say the number is \$15,000—“you’re going to be able to finance that \$15,000 upfront cost by the savings on your utility bill, be it gas or electricity.” You say, “All right, it will save, on average, 20% or 25% of my energy bills.” That is worth a certain amount of money. Work that out over a 10-year period; it’s a certain amount of cash.

So the government says, “Okay, we’ll upfront you the money in order to offset your capital outlay at the front,” and then it will be paid back to the government from the savings that you would have on your energy bill. It’s one way of being able to reduce the capital cost upfront so that the consumer can actually go out and do it.

The good part about doing something like that is, it really then starts to build the market that you need in order to make these things happen. This is where we agree. If you’re able to develop a market where consumers in large numbers, industry in large numbers and the government, which own buildings such as hospitals, schools etc. in large numbers, are now having some form of incentive in order to invest in energy retrofitting, you’re going to spin a local industry in Ontario that cannot be exported or outsourced. You can’t move the house, you can’t move the building to Mexico to have it done. It’s got to be done wherever it is physically located, and then you have to have Ontario content rules that say 60%, or whatever number we come up with, of the equipment that is being used has to be sourced by suppliers in Ontario. You’ve now created a market that is for Ontario. It is sustainable over a period of time. We position our economy in such a way that we then can become the exporters of some of these technologies and services and goods to other places around the world, incubating it here in Ontario itself.

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So it seems to me there are things that are missing in this bill to get us to where we want to go, and that’s really what the opposition is to the bill. It’s not the intent of the bill. Nobody refuses the intent of the bill or says anything—well, I’m saying within my party, within the New Democratic Party of Ontario, and I’m sure there would be very few otherwise in other parties that would do the same. But my point is that we need to have the details in this bill.

I just end on this point: We all know that every kilowatt of electricity that is saved by way of energy efficiency is a kilowatt that we don’t have to generate. Therefore, it is estimated that 20% to 40% of electricity could be saved if we went this way, and it would lessen our need to expand the nuclear fleet, something that at the end I think will be very costly and dangerous.

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

Mr. Phil McNeely: One of the areas I’d like to speak to this morning would have a lot to do with the member who’s just spoken.

I was with the finance and economic affairs committee on a tour of the north and of the First Nations area some three or four years ago. One of the things the minister has made sure that he has put in his bill and something that he’s going to do, and there’s a directive sent to OPA on this: There just have to be more discussions with the First Nations. They have to be part of this. Aboriginal partnerships and capacity-building will be important to the development of new, renewable energy projects. A lot of the small hydro projects are on—First Nations could develop them.

When you’re depending on diesel, certainly wind is an option that should be investigated. So this will be one of the areas that is important to the minister. He specifically mentioned it in his directive, the amount of renewables that come back in the energy mix that we’ll get into that report in the next two months. This is one of the areas that we’re going to go to.

Also, the community power: If a group of people in a community—and this comes, I guess, from the European experience—can come up with a good project, then there is going to be assistance for them. Enable community ownership of renewable energy projects by citizen-led energy co-operatives and clarify that the local distribution companies and municipalities are able to invest in the community in renewable energy projects under 10 megawatts: That’s going to be very important. That’s where the grassroots conservation, the grassroots support for climate change initiatives, is going to come from.

So that whole thing of expanding and supporting the green economy at the community level, First Nations, is where we have to go. It’s where we have to understand what we’re facing in 2014, 2020 and 2050 with our climate change targets, our greenhouse gas reduction targets. So this is the right bill. This will involve the communities that we have to involve.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I think the member from Timmins–James Bay said it as best as I've heard it described, and I wish him success in his attempt to be leader of the party, because he approaches things in a sort of reasonable way. I think what he said is a good lesson for those viewers listening today. Certainly the government members aren't listening, probably because they've been told how they're going to vote. So we understand that.

Here's what the real story is. He was saying that the conservation part should have a much broader focus and a much more compelling argument. We would be supportive in the fullest sense. When he said that the kilowatt that you don't use is the kilowatt that isn't generated, that's the true psychological outcome that we want here. But all the toys and triggers you're using are just load-shifting; it's not conservation. When I use a kilowatt at a different time of the day, I still have to generate it. So it's not conservation; it's called load-shifting. This is a very technical subject, and I'm so disappointed that the members of the government side haven't been properly briefed on this. In fact, the tragedy is I think if they really listen to some of the things that Mr. Bisson was saying, they would question their Minister of Energy to have a fuller briefing for all of the members here. This is a technical, substantive shift.

Adam Beck had it right: We've got to make this product affordable for the people of Ontario. There has to be an assurance for seniors; for people on ventilators, who need it for breathing in their home; and for children. This is going to be a rigorous imposition into people's lives. This is something we shouldn't be taking lightly. Yes, I support green energy, but conservation is where we need to be focused more specifically.

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

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I want to speak to the issue with respect to the feed-in tariffs once again. A comprehensive understanding of what feed-in tariffs will do, in terms of the incentivization of more renewable energy products, gives the comfort that the member opposite is seeking with respect to that aspirational aspect.

The member opposite is saying let's set some targets and let's try to attain those targets. In our view, that could establish an artificial cap for the amount of investment that would be undertaken in the province with respect to the construction of those renewables. If you are aspiring, as we are, to be and establish the North American lead as a jurisdiction for renewable energy, then what you want to do is set the stage for anyone who wants to participate in that process to have the certainty that they need to go after each opportunity to build those renewables. That's what this legislation does, and I believe that's the key reason why we have received the significant amount of support that we have.

You put in place a feed-in tariff that sets your price for the varieties of electricity being generated, whether it's wind onshore or offshore, solar, hydro or biomass. You say it's a certainty that we will purchase that electricity, a certainty that we will connect it to the grid and a certainty

that we will issue permits in a timely way to allow you to move forward with that project. That allows the highest level of participation and it is part and parcel of the transformative nature of feed-in tariffs.

If the members opposite take a look at the aspirational nature of the feed-in tariff and the system that we're establishing, they too will have the confidence that we have in this piece of legislation.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak briefly on Bill 150, after the member for Timmins–James Bay added his comments.

One of the points I wanted to talk about was the whole audit procedure and whether it really makes sense. In the past year I went through the procedure of having a voluntary audit done on my own home. Just to tell you how it came to be, I had decided I was going to replace a broken air conditioner with a heat pump, which would then heat and cool. The installer of the heat pump said to me, "Well, if you get an energy audit done, then you get \$800 back from the government," I think it was. So even though I'd decided ahead of time I was going to do this heat pump, I had an energy audit done, which told me that, yes, I could put a heat pump in. But you have to spend \$400 to get the audit done to get \$400 back.

I would say to the government, why not just give the \$800 back on the purchase of the energy-efficient product? Make it simple for people, instead of coming up with a complicated process where you have to spend money to get money back. I think it would make a lot more sense.

I had an interesting meeting last weekend with a constituent who's in the—not a constituent; a business located in Ontario that is in the business of solar hot water. He had installed a system in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. He was making me aware of that. It was John Verway of Copperhill Solar. Certainly, it looks like a very interesting business and one that might make a lot of sense, with solar hot water versus the photovoltaic, where you're spending 42 cents a kilowatt hour on the photovoltaic. So I hope the government is looking at systems like the solar hot water, which would probably make more sense for hot water and heating than the photovoltaic systems.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins–James Bay has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I forget the member's riding—I don't have my glasses with me—but one of the government members was making the point that this bill is going to deal with trying to spur hydroelectric and other development on First Nations communities. I just want to remind the member that if we're waiting for this bill to do that, I think we'll be waiting for some time.

The reality is that the communities of James Bay, along with the communities of northwestern Ontario, as you well know, are mostly landlocked communities. Most of them are off the hydro grid. There are many

issues that we need to deal with in order to electrify those communities. I know we've done some up on the western part of James Bay with the power line going up. De Beers has helped tremendously in regard to electricity for Attawapiskat, Fort Albany and Kashechewan, but those were projects that were done by the First Nations themselves. In every case, it's the same story: It is very hard to engage provincial and federal governments to help and assist by way of helping to finance these projects or developing policies within the government and OPG in order to be able to move forward with electrification projects for those communities. It has been a really frustrating process.

I know that Martin Falls Ogoki has been trying now for the better part of five or six years to get the provincial government to accept them into the OPG system, and to have OPG run the electrical plant there. Currently it's run by the band. It's very expensive. Fuel costs are extremely high, and people are having to pay exorbitant amounts for electricity and have no other choice, because where else are you going to go? You're in the community. There isn't even a road to get in there, so you're going to have difficulty.

I just say to the member: I appreciate your concern for the people of the First Nations of northern Ontario, but let's not try to make pretend that this bill is going to deal with what is a very difficult issue, and the lack of policy that we presently have, both at the federal and provincial levels, to deal with those issues.

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: It's my pleasure to add a few comments this morning on Bill 150, the Green Energy Act. I want to begin by thanking the member from Timmins-James Bay for his comments. As a fellow northerner, I wish him well this weekend. I'm sure that he's happy, in one form or another, that the end is near. They can be long and difficult processes, and we wish them all well across the floor in that regard.

I listened with some interest to the comments made by the opposition parties on this particular piece of legislation, and I want to begin by referencing, just briefly at the beginning of my comments, those made by the members of the Conservative Party when it comes to the price point that this may have, or the effect that this bill may have on energy costs in Ontario. The two members of the Conservative Party who spoke in this regard, from Parry Sound-Muskoka and from Durham, would have left or attempted to leave the impression with those watching on television and people living in the province that somehow, the comments made or the legislation brought forward—if it does, in fact, increase costs on hydro in the province of Ontario—will be the first time that this has ever happened. Well, the Conservative Party had nine years on this file, and what they did was bring in a price cap. While they would like to let people in the province believe that while they were in government their actions did not have any effect on the price of your hydro bill when it showed up at your door, of course

that's not the case. The price cap led, in effect, to about \$1 billion of costs being transferred off-book. Of course, people are still seeing the effect of that on their hydro bill. It's important for people to understand that, while it wasn't a direct rate increase, it was about a billion dollars as a result of the rate cap, off-book but still reflected in the price that you're paying when your hydro bill arrives at your door. So I think it's important that we remind people about that.

I was in the House yesterday as well when a member of the third party had about 20 minutes to speak on this particular piece of legislation. That member—I think it was the member from Trinity-Spadina—spent most of his 20 minutes speaking about nuclear waste. I'm not sure what the point of that particular 18 or 20 minutes was, speaking about nuclear waste as if the people in the province aren't aware of the dangers associated with nuclear fuel material, but clearly that's something that's out there and part of the public discourse.

I think what we need to do, and what the people in the province are expecting from government, is a choice. We can't be paralyzed by indecision. We know that under previous governments, going back from 1990 to about 2003, when we came into power, very little was done in terms of bringing on new supply in the province of Ontario. At this point, I don't think people are interested in discussions about those sorts of issues. They want to know what we're going to do to bring on enough supply in the province of Ontario so that we can meet the energy demands of the province of Ontario.

The Conservative members who talked about the price point, what they didn't talk about was when they did nothing on this file. When they transferred the cost off-book, we saw the blackout in 2003 which clearly illustrated for people how close the demand and supply were in the province. What happened under the Conservative Party was that we had become a net importer of electricity into the province of Ontario. How much do you think that we were paying for the cost of that imported power?

I think people are looking for a little bit of leadership on this issue. We know that from 1990 to 1995, the cost of hydro in the province of Ontario went up by some 40% to 45%. While I was listening to the member of the third party speak yesterday, I was interested to hear him talk about the commitment that they had, or lack of commitment, to renewables in the province of Ontario, which was clearly illustrated by the cancellation of a project in about 1990 or 1991, the Conawapa project, which was signed under the David Peterson government. That was a project that would have brought 1,000 megawatts of renewable power into the province of Ontario at about 4 cents a kilowatt hour. It was cheap power. It was clean power. It was affordable power. That would have brought about 1,000 megawatts into the province of Ontario, and it would have led to an incredible boom in construction across northwestern Ontario. I'm not sure what that speaks to from the third party's perspective, if in fact they support green energy or not. I guess we are going to find out when this bill comes for voting.

To govern is to choose. When you do choose, invariably there are groups and individuals who are going to be less than happy with your choices, but as I said, you can't let that paralyze you into indecision. You need to move forward, and that's what we're doing. It's important that the people in the province understand that what is before us today, Bill 150, the Green Energy Act, is not the beginning of what our government has done on renewable energy. In fact, this is the next phase of it.

Since we've been in government in 2003, somewhere I think in the order of magnitude of about 1,000 or more megawatts of renewable energy are already online in the province of Ontario. I don't want people thinking that what we're doing today is just the beginning of this. In fact, we have been working in this regard for most of the four or five years that we've been in government, since 2003.

Our standard offer program, offered through the Ontario Power Authority, has been the vehicle through which we have brought those renewables online. There are many projects. Even in my own riding I can reference a few: a 10-megawatt cogen approved in Atikokan, a solar farm in my riding, another wind farm in my riding. I know that just maybe two weeks ago in the small town of Dorion, just northeast of Thunder Bay, in the riding of my colleague Michael Gravelle, an announcement was made of a 99-megawatt wind farm. My colleague from Sault Ste. Marie, David Oraziotti, spoke earlier. He talked about 190-megawatt wind farm that's been established in Sault Ste. Marie, about a \$400-million commitment. In fact, to this point already, we have about 1,000 megawatts of wind energy online. This isn't the beginning of this process. We have been moving forward in this regard for quite some time.

I think it's also important to remind people in the province—and they know this, but I think it needs to be a bit part of the debate—that there are no perfect energy sources. If somebody's got one, let me know what it is. We know the problems associated with nuclear, but we also know that nuclear has been around for 30 or 40 years, and neither of the opposition parties, when they had their opportunity, took any of it offline or did anything to bring new energy online. They just kind of ignored the file. We know there are problems with nuclear.

We know even with hydraulic, there are people that aren't happy with that. If you have to build a dam and flood out lands, we know people don't like that. We know that gas is a diminishing resource and that it's expensive, so people don't like energy to be produced by using natural gas. We know about coal and the greenhouse gas emissions, and we know there are people who don't like that. We know that wind and solar are far from perfect, because if the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine, you've got a problem there as well. That's why it's important for us as a province to get the energy mix correct. That's what we're trying to do. There's going to be a mix of nuclear; there's going to be a mix of gas; there will be some other renewables brought online. It's important that we do that.

We all know that for industry to establish in the province, they want baseload power. They want to know that when they need it, with the flick of a switch it's going to be there. That's why we're always going to have some peaking plants, like gas, around, even though it's a little bit more expensive. That's why we're going to have nuclear as baseload. We know that. That's not going to change, and I think the parties across the way know that as well.

I've only got a few minutes left. I want to close by talking about how our open mind around bringing renewables on stream has led to some success stories in north-western Ontario. For example, in the community of Fort Frances, the pulp and paper mill, AbitibiBowater, has completely converted their energy requirements to renewables. They have a biomass boiler there now, I think, that produces 85—I forget the total megawatts that it produces, but an \$85-million construction project in the community of Fort Frances in the AbitibiBowater mill there, funded in part by a \$22-million grant from our government. That's a commitment that began three or four years ago. That pulp and paper mill now is completely energy self-sufficient, off the grid. I say this to my friends from the Conservative Party concerned about cost: There are programs in place that will help them get off the grid if they're concerned about cost. There's one example of a \$22-million grant, an \$85-million construction project. If you're looking for some quantification of the jobs created through green energy projects, I would suggest that there's a very good one right there. That \$85-million project employed dozens, if not hundreds, of people from my community in the building trades of Thunder Bay.

Finally, I want to talk about a community in my riding, Atikokan. The Atikokan coal plant was in jeopardy of being closed. We fought like heck to see what we could do to keep that open, and we've now seen, as well, what's going on in terms of our government having an open mind on the renewables file. Back in 2006, we announced in our budget \$4 million for the Atikokan bio-research initiative. Two million dollars of that research has been expended at Lakehead University, in my home community of Thunder Bay. Through the work of Lakehead University and other universities across the province, the research that has gone on has now led us to the point where they have been testing pellets in wood biomass, in coal-fired generating plants in the province of Ontario, for the better part of a year. The results are very good and encouraging. The thermal output from the plants is equal to or better than coal, depending on the pellet that's being burned. The handling systems are accommodating the biomass very well. The boilers are accommodating the biomass very well. I was pleased when, shortly after his appointment as Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, George Smitherman toured Atikokan with me and that particular plant. While it is no slam dunk yet, things look very positive in terms of our ability to convert that plant to biomass, at the same time remaining cognizant of our requirement to ensure that private industry has as much biomass as they require.

I wish I had more time, but I thank you for my 10 minutes this morning.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1012 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to introduce Shirley Csonto from Woodstock and her daughter and granddaughter, Teresa and Sarah Cameron, from Ingersoll. They are here today to visit Jordan Plummer, Sarah's cousin and one of our legislative pages. Although Jordan isn't from Oxford, her extended family has the fortune of living in one of the best ridings in Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Joe Dickson: In the east members' gallery, I would like to take the opportunity, on behalf of Ajax's page Jordan Plummer from Westney Heights Public School in our Ajax-Pickering riding, to welcome her parents, Brenda and Jeff Plummer; her brother Andrew, with a slightly colourful hairdo; grandparents Ann and Gordon Plummer; as well as Jennifer and Suzanne Tewnton and Brad, Lianne and Ryan Page, who are joining us in the Legislature today.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: This is Agriculture Day at the Legislative Assembly. We're delighted to have the Ontario Federation of Agriculture host this very important event.

In the gallery today, we have Bette Jean Crews, who is the president of the OFA; Don McCabe, who is the vice-president; Wendy Omvlee, an executive member; and Neil Currie, the general manager.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Today I would like to introduce William Birch. He's from the riding of Scarborough-Guildwood and he's a student at Seneca College.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take a few minutes to caution the House once again about the use of intemperate language and general tenor of speech in this chamber. I have observed over the short period that this House has been convened an increased tendency towards disrespectful, insulting comments and insinuations directed from one member to another.

Recent question periods provide some troubling examples. Words like "stupid," "jerk," "bamboozle," "hoodwink" and "fabrications," along with references to booze cruises, pickpockets and bathroom breaks, do nothing to enhance decorum in this place or garner the respect of the citizens we serve.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I could name names, Mr. Minister.

Neither, frankly, does constant and repetitive heckling to the point where it is difficult or impossible to hear a colleague speak.

This is a place to put forward like and opposing viewpoints. That often brings with it an element of passion and sometimes antagonism. However, I think it is incumbent on all of us to treat each other with the kind of respect we ourselves expect to be treated with. Hurling insults and engaging in personal attacks debases this institution and casts a shadow on each of us.

We are all members of Ontario's provincial Parliament. We have been sent here to represent to the best of our ability a constituent of citizens who have the right to expect that, as their representatives in this place, we will conduct ourselves with dignity and honour. This does not, in my view, include the kind of schoolyard name-calling and derision that has become the trend of late.

I genuinely seek the co-operation of the House in maintaining a higher level of decorum in this place, each of us having due regard and courtesy for all honourable members and respect for the authority of the Chair. I know that each of you is capable of a higher standard.

As a footnote, given some recent incidents of disregard for the Chair, I also want to remind members that at any point in the proceedings, if the Speaker and a member are both standing, one of those two is out of order, and it's not the Speaker.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier. Ontario families received the equivalent of a shot to the gut yesterday when they saw that the TSX had fallen to levels not seen in more than five years, the single lowest close since October 2003. These people have savings and pensions that many of them depend on, and what do they get on top of that from Dalton McGuinty? Nothing but higher taxes, higher user fees and higher energy prices. Now, this morning, they hear the Premier musing that you're going to further mortgage their future with potentially the highest deficit in the history of Ontario. Premier, tell us that's not true.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We intend to run a deficit. I think we were the first province to announce that. We've been followed by the federal government through its actions. I expect that we'll see deficits in many of the Canadian provinces, and I'll tell you why we're going to run a deficit, for a few reasons.

First of all, we've been asked by international organizations like the G20 and the International Monetary Fund, and the Prime Minister himself, to do what we can to stimulate our economy. We will have to borrow money to stimulate the economy in that particular way, more so than we've been doing already. At the same time, we are going to protect the gains we have made in

our schools, in our hospitals and in our protections for the environment.

Finally, in addition to helping people today who need help, through our immediate stimulus package we want to begin to build a solid foundation for a future economy at the same time. All of those cost money. We have no choice but to do those things at this point in our history.

Mr. Tim Hudak: While working families and seniors are seeing their life savings plunge, seeing their pensions at risk and seeing their home values decrease, they have forked record tax dollars over to the McGuinty government, only to see them frittered away. At this time last year we were heading for a \$6-billion surplus; now we find we may even be further than that into the red. Instead of setting aside any cushion whatsoever for tough times, you spent every single penny in one massive end-of-year spending spree. It's nothing short of shocking. From \$6 billion potentially in the black to \$6 billion in the red in less than one year: Premier, does that not represent extraordinary failure in leadership?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that my colleague has a different perspective on this than do I, but just by way of interest, I noticed that Alberta had an \$8-billion surplus last year. This year they are projecting, so far, a deficit of over \$1 billion. What my honourable colleague fails to recognize is that the world around us has changed, and it's had a profound impact on our economics here in Ontario.

We are going to use this budget to do what we believe Ontarians want us to do. They want us to stimulate the economy. They want us to create jobs in the short term. They want us to build a stronger economy, on a go-forward basis, that is there for us when we emerge from this global economic recession. They want us to protect our gains that we've made in our public services. They want us to help people who are up against it through no fault of their own whatsoever. Our budget will strive to do all of those things.

1040

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, these are your own numbers over five years. You've benefited from a \$27-billion increase in revenues, largely from higher taxes and transfers from the federal government, and you blew it all, saving nothing for when times got tough. For five years, Premier, you had this province on cruise control. The results: Ontario is now a have-not province, with a have-not Premier. We're in a deep deficit, with the worst jobs record in Canada, and the Royal Bank says that our economy will shrink by 1.4% this year, the worst performance in over a decade. Dalton McGuinty's emerging bio: Honey, I Shrank the Economy.

While other Premiers, Presidents and Prime Ministers have acted, all we're getting from Dalton McGuinty in the time of crisis is vacuous, vacillating and weak-kneed leadership.

Premier, will you finally—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It may be that my honourable colleague is the only person in Ontario who thinks

that somehow the global economic recession can be sourced here, at Queen's Park. I just don't think anybody else believes that.

He certainly is not in agreement with the priorities that we've brought to bear during our first five years. We have invested significantly, that is true, in nurses, MRI and CT technologists, personal support workers for our long-term-care homes, home care workers, public health unit inspectors, water inspectors, meat inspectors and the like.

I want to quote from the federal Minister of Finance, who said the following: "Our government will be making a deliberate choice in this budget to run a substantial deficit. The deficit will be a temporary tool—one that allows our government to invest in a stimulus plan that injects money into our economy and delivers real benefits to Canadian families and businesses." I agree with the federal Minister of Finance.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: Let's review the Premier's legacy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Who's the question to?

Mr. Tim Hudak: To the Premier.

The Premier has become the first Premier in Ontario's history to make us a have-not province, receiving welfare payments from Ottawa. He has taken us to last in growth in Canada and in job creation. Now we hear today, potentially, that this Premier has succeeded in digging the biggest deficit in Ontario's history, to make Bob Rae look like a piker. Premier, is this not an extraordinary failure in leadership?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Let's review the facts, first of all. First of all, this is not the first time Ontario has qualified for equalization payments. Second of all, this government has invested in vital public services, and I'll remind the member we had—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'll remind the member that we have paid down \$3.2 billion in Ontario's debt. We have paid off \$2 billion in stranded hydro debt, and I'll remind him, unlike the government before us, every year, our expenditures did not grow as fast as revenue, yet we managed to restore health and education. Sir, let me re-emphasize: In this budget, we will continue to preserve those services in the context of a broad, global financial crisis.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think the minister knows full well that, for the first time in history, Ontario is receiving equalization payments from the federal government. We're on the welfare rolls of Confederation because of Dalton McGuinty's failed economic policies.

What are the results since the last election? Ninety thousand private sector jobs gone. Dalton McGuinty has

stood by while almost 300,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have fled our province in five years, that he characterized as just a little bit of a contraction.

Premier, you raised taxes through the roof on the backs of working families, seniors and small businesses. You went on end-of-year spending sprees. These decisions are yours, and yours alone. Isn't it time to take a new course to start creating jobs in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, we have balanced budgets. We've paid off a \$5.5-billion deficit that we were left with from the previous government. We restored transparency and accountability in budgeting. But most important, we invested in those things that are the foundation, sir, of a growing and prosperous long-term economy.

Education is crucial to long-term growth. Infrastructure is crucial. A strong and sustainable public health care system is one of our key competitive advantages. As we've balanced budgets, as we've addressed these problems, we now confront a world financial crisis. I can assure you the plan we lay out on March 26 will deal with these immediate challenges, build growth into the future, and maintain and preserve those vital services which are the foundation of future economic growth.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: In the face of economic crisis, Dalton McGuinty is utterly paralyzed. The only time he ever moves is to point the finger of blame at someone else.

Harry Truman had a sign on his desk that said, "The buck stops here," because all real leaders understand that they ultimately must take responsibility for their decisions and make change where necessary.

The Premier had this province on cruise control for five years, failed to set aside any rainy day fund for when things got tough and refused to address a tax rate that has chased almost 300,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs from our province.

Premier, when it comes to the economy, when it comes to controlling your spending, you have one extraordinary failure in leadership. Isn't it time to bring forward a new course?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Real leaders like Premier McGuinty understand the importance of investing in health care and education for a strong future economy. Real leaders like Premier McGuinty understand that you have to strike a balance in all public policy. That's why we've cut business taxes—\$3 billion. That's why we've invested in skills training. That's why we started a fairness campaign for Ontario, to see that this province is treated fairly in the broader context of Confederation. And that is why this Premier and his government invested \$9 billion last year—the first province in Canada to have a stimulus plan. Seven billion dollars of that is now in the ground and has created 100,000 jobs, representing 1% of the gross domestic product.

We have more to do. We're going to build on that, we're going to preserve our public services, and we're going to see this economy back to growth, back to a future for our children that all of us can—

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

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier.

Today, Vale Inco announced the layoff of 261 workers in Sudbury, with many more job reductions to come. Employment insurance claims are up 30% year over year, with some municipalities in Ontario having employment insurance claims up by more than 50%. More than 300,000 good manufacturing jobs have been destroyed in Ontario over the last four years.

New Democrats have outlined a five-point jobs plan. As thousands of Ontario workers lose their jobs every week, can the Premier tell us what the McGuinty Liberals' jobs plan is?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'd be only too delighted to speak to this once again.

The leader of the NDP knows a great deal about our five-point plan. He knows that it's in existence, but he just doesn't support it. That's unfortunate, because we've been doing a number of things that have been very helpful to Ontarians. For example, at this point in time, by investing billions of dollars in infrastructure like new schools and hospitals and roads and bridges and transit projects, we're creating thousands and thousands of jobs. But the NDP don't support that.

We're cutting business taxes by \$3 billion, and in particular, we're doing that in a way that's of special benefit to our manufacturers, by eliminating capital taxes. We're doing that right now, but the leader of the NDP does not support that initiative. I can tell you that those businesses and those manufacturers in particular support that.

Those are just two points of our five-point plan. It really would be helpful if at some point in time—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: As hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs leave the province every year, the Premier says he's helping.

Let me give you an example of something you could do. The McGuinty Liberals fail to require Ontario manufacturing content for new green energy projects. In Quebec, 60% of the manufacturing has to happen in that province for new green energy projects. The McGuinty Liberals are satisfied with a 25% domestic manufacturing content requirement for new transit vehicles. In Quebec, it is 60%, and the manufacturing of new transit vehicles is happening in that province.

New Democrats want a strong Buy Ontario program that will create and sustain jobs in Ontario. Why don't the McGuinty Liberals?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We do, and that's why, in fact, when it comes to our transit spending, 82% of our

transit investment is being spent in the province of Ontario. We expect that this will create 190,000 direct and indirect jobs. We're investing billions and billions of dollars in transit projects, particularly here in the GTA and beyond. There's another project we want to proceed with as soon as we can in Kitchener-Waterloo, and another one in Ottawa. There are all kinds of investments being made, and it would be helpful if at some point in time we had the support of the NDP in making these kinds of investments so we can create the jobs that flow from those very kinds of infrastructure projects.

1050

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: It's interesting that the Premier wants to confuse construction work with manufacturing work. It's not going to work, because here's the example: The Toronto Transit Commission is considering two bids for a streetcar contract that could ultimately be worth \$3 billion and tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs. One bidder, Bombardier, will make the streetcars in Thunder Bay, sustaining hundreds of good jobs in that community. The other bidder, Siemens, would do the majority of the manufacturing work in Europe. If Ontario had a 50% domestic manufacturing requirement for transit vehicles, as New Democrats advocate and as Quebec already has, we would see Ontario taxpayer money being used to sustain Ontario manufacturing jobs. Why is the McGuinty government satisfied with a modest 25% when the United States says 60%, Quebec says—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Sixty per cent sounds good, but I repeat, 82% of transit investment in the province of Ontario is being spent here. It's creating jobs right here where we need them.

It's interesting that the leader of the NDP stands in favour now of doing what we can to create jobs through investment in transit, but there was a time when he voted against our investments in subway and transit expansions. They were very unhappy with him at a particular plant in the city of Thunder Bay.

We will continue to do everything that we can to create new jobs in the province of Ontario and we will continue to ensure that 82% of our transit investment is in fact being spent here in Ontario, where it's creating jobs.

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Premier. The McGuinty government's new poverty reduction bill states that the implementation and success of the government's poverty plan depends on a growing economy.

Now that the Ontario economy has officially stopped growing and, according to most reputable economists, is likely to remain stagnant for some time, is the McGuinty government no longer committed to implementing its poverty reduction strategy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We are absolutely committed to doing what we can to help address poverty in the province of Ontario. We're proud of the strong start that we've made. We have a first-of-its-kind strategy in place; there's a specific target; we have legislation being passed in this Legislature. But we've made it clear from the outset that grappling with poverty, reducing poverty and ideally eliminating poverty is not something that the provincial government can do on its own. We need partners at the municipal level, in the voluntary sector, but I think most importantly, we need a partner at the federal government level. We also need the support of a growing economy.

We will continue to do more when it comes to moving forward on our poverty strategy, but again we're going to look to help from the federal government as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The Premier has now stated that he and his government will do what they can. The Premier says that he is committed to implementing the strategy and achieving a 25-in-five target, yet the government's poverty plan states "meeting this target depends on having a willing partner in the federal government and a growing economy"—your words, not mine. Now Bill 152 says that even implementing this strategy depends on "the sustained commitment of all levels of government, all sectors of Ontario society and a growing economy." Again: your words, not mine. If the McGuinty government is so strongly committed to action on poverty, why does it keep linking action on poverty dependent on factors beyond your own government's control?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's part of leadership. I think it's part of helping Ontarians understand that while poverty has historically been seen as intractable, something that is part and parcel of the landscape, so to speak, we see it differently. We believe that something can be done that's real and meaningful to families who are affected by this. While we bring that perspective to it, we also understand that we can't do this on our own. We have made that clear from the outset.

The NDP in government didn't have any kind of formal strategy in place when it comes to addressing poverty. We have the first of its kind. We're proud of that, and we look forward to making more progress on a go-forward basis.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: People of many faiths are gathered in prayer today on the front lawn of this Legislature. Their message is that governments have to have a heightened responsibility to the most vulnerable citizens during difficult economic times. In Quebec, the Liberal government passed a poverty law with teeth and reduced poverty in that province by over 60%—not just children but everyone. When will the McGuinty government take the escape clauses out of Bill 152 and put into it a serious, long-term poverty reduction target dependent upon your own actions and not everyone else's?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me just talk a little bit about what we've done so far. I can understand why my

colleague remains doubtful, but I think Ontarians are entitled to know what we've done so far as evidence of our commitment to this.

We have been increasing the social assistance rate. It's up 9.3% since 2003. The NDP voted against raising those rates, by the way. We put in place a new Ontario child benefit that will cost us \$1.3 billion on an annual basis. It will be \$1,310 annually for 1.3 million children in the province of Ontario. We've increased the minimum wage five times so far. We've doubled the amount of money in our student nutrition program, helping out kids who are coming to school hungry.

Again I repeat: We have in place a strategy—the first of its kind. I would hope that at some point in time we have the support of the NDP as we move forward on this front.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Premier. My constituents are concerned about the state of the province's finances. They were shocked to read that Don Drummond of the TD Bank is predicting that Ontario's deficit could explode to \$17 billion in the foreseeable future.

The Premier and his Minister of Finance have often said that the time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining. That's exactly why I introduced a motion back in the fall of 2003, right after the election, calling on the government to commit itself to a long-term plan to pay down the provincial debt based on the common-sense philosophy that in good years you pay down your debt so that you're in a stronger position when times get tough.

Could the Premier explain why every single Liberal MPP present voted against my resolution for even modest fiscal prudence?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The first thing we did was pay off the \$5.6-billion hidden deficit that that member and his party left. The next thing we did was, we paid down an additional \$3.2 billion in the provincial debt over the balance of our last three balanced budgets. Finally, we were the first government to pay down stranded debt from Ontario Hydro, more than \$2 billion over the course of our first and second mandates.

While we did that, we undid the damage that his party did to our vital public services. We rehired inspectors. We rehired nurses. We rehired teachers. We restored confidence in the broader public sector, and we made investments that will serve this province and its economy well, well into the future. We have more to do, and we will undertake that on March 26.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: No one is buying that. If the Premier has no explanation for his government's refusal to support a motion calling for modest fiscal prudence, I'll offer one.

His government couldn't wait to open the vault and spend: spend with abandon, spend with impunity, spend

like there was no tomorrow. Well, tomorrow is now here, and the Premier's facing a deficit that has paralyzed the government, delaying the budget by a full month.

Their program spending is up 50% since taking office. What do we have to show for it? Ontario taxpayers are paying more than \$1 million an hour to service this massive provincial debt that they've all but ignored. It's obvious that instead of fixing the roof, the Premier has put the province into a fix. How can he possibly claim to have any regard for future generations with this sorry record of fiscal recklessness?

1100

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We have more teachers, more doctors, better hospitals, better schools, among other things, and that's only a start.

Let me remind my friend and colleague that when the McGuinty government took office in 2003-04, the debt-to-GDP ratio was 25.2%. Today it's 18.1%. Let me tell him something else. During the last four years of his government, revenues rose far less than expenditure. They were spending money without the revenues. That's why they left a \$5.6-billion deficit.

Yes, we have proudly invested in restoring our vital public services that that member and his party cut, but we did it responsibly as we paid down debt and reduced our debt-to-GDP deficit.

There's more to do. March 26 is the beginning—

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

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. According to a study by the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences, wealthy Ontarians have benefited far more—38% more, in fact—than their poorer counterparts from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's wait times strategy on MRI. But we all know that poverty is the strongest determinant of sickness and poor health. Low-income Ontarians have more health problems and need the health system more. What is the minister going to do to ensure that low-income Ontarians have access to MRI?

Hon. David Caplan: I certainly welcome the findings of the report. I would like to thank ICES for the work that they do, because it highlights that we have, as a government, made the right investments to double the capacity for magnetic resonance imaging in the province of Ontario.

This government went to work right away, and we are working hard to increase access to MRI services for all Ontarians. The report makes it very clear that we are on the right track. Since elected, as I've mentioned, our government has doubled the number of MRIs offered in the province of Ontario. Thousands more Ontarians are undergoing these important diagnostic tests no matter what their income level.

As the ICES report outlines, MRI usage in Ontario's poorest neighbourhoods has actually increased by 80%

between 2003 and the present date, and I am proud of that accomplishment.

We are increasing access right across the board. We're funding approximately 160,000 additional MRI—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I remind the minister that the wait times have not gone down, but we'll agree that a whole lot of money has been invested. What I'm talking about is a gap between rich Ontarians and poor Ontarians. The government's ill-advised wait times strategy has not helped low-income Ontarians. Actually, factors other than medical needs are driving the decision to order MRIs. These facts are troubling.

Will the minister ensure that those who need MRI scans receive them regardless of their income?

Hon. David Caplan: The member presents factually incorrect information to this House. Wait times, in fact, are down 22% in this province, right across the board. I hope that the member will have the gumption to stand in her place and correct the record, because the wait times strategy that this government implemented is working.

We are seeing expansion of MRI right across the province of Ontario. In a previous government, Ontario's only French-language-speaking hospital was under a guillotine order. Under this government, not only has that hospital survived; it is now offering MRI services in the province of Ontario.

There have been 16 MRIs opened since 2003—three in the city of Ottawa; in Owen Sound, Richmond Hill, Markham, Halton, Windsor, Niagara Falls, Orillia, Guelph, Belleville, Cobourg, Brantford, Chatham and Hamilton—and there are more on the way.

It is because of the determined effort of this—

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

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. On behalf of the farmers of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, I would first like to welcome and thank the representatives of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture who are here with us today for their inaugural Agriculture Day at Queen's Park.

The OFA is the largest general farm organization in Ontario, representing nearly 39,000 farm families. Members of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture are here to meet with MPPs to help us understand the issues and opportunities faced by the agricultural community during these challenging times.

I know, Minister, that you've been working closely with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and other partners in our agricultural sector over the past number of years. Could you highlight for this House and for our visitors today some of the accomplishments that we have achieved—

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

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We are certainly grateful for all of the good work of all of the farm agencies, not the least of which is the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. My job, of course, is to listen very closely to what they would bring to us. We have worked, I believe, very well in partnership over the years. They have made it very clear that their members expect this government to do all we can to support and promote the fine-quality food products that we have here in the province of Ontario. That is why we have established the Ontario Market Investment Fund, a \$12-million initiative. We are also investing \$56 million over the next four years on our Buy Ontario, Buy Local strategy.

I just want to say to the members of this Legislature that Bette Jean Crews, the president, indicated that, "Incentives provided to expand Ontario's buy-local initiatives have proven their value many times as society shows"—

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

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Mr. Speaker, agriculture, as you know, is the second-largest economic driver in Ontario, and it employs over 700,000 people in this province. Our government knows that Ontario farmers make significant contributions to our strong economy through innovation, new market opportunities and value-added products, but it cannot be forgotten that agriculture, like other sectors of the economy, is facing challenges during these difficult economic times. For a number of years, many farmers have experienced the challenges of low market prices and high input costs. I know our government has been there for the farmers during these challenging times and will continue to work with our farmers to ensure the industry remains a sustainable one for generations to come, including the next generation on our own farm in Middlesex county. Could the minister talk about other incentives our government has undertaken to support the agricultural industry since 2003?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm delighted that the member has identified that agriculture is the second-largest economic driver. Our government has made sure we've invested since we've come to government: \$1.2 billion over the past five years on farm income support; another \$50 million for the risk management program for grains and oil seeds producers; and \$150 million for the cattle, hog and horticulture payment to address the long-time hurt that there was in that industry. Our investments, along with the hard work of farmers, are paying off. Just last week in the National Post, an article, "An Engine for Economic Health"—it is the agriculture sector: "Equally important, Ontario farms are preserving the viability and even driving growth in smaller rural communities"—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member from Renfrew, I would hope that you were listening to my statement earlier about long, prolonged heckling.

Minister, please continue.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Again, Mr. Hoskin has indicated that there has been growth in his region. In

Norfolk county, as a matter of fact, “He points out that gross farm receipts in his county grew by 6.8%.... While current figures are not available,” it is estimated that “Ontario farmers pump about \$8.8 billion” into our provincial economy—

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

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: Glad to be here. To the Premier about the going-in-the-red energy bill: Yesterday, when I asked a question about how this bill was going to give government inspectors the power to go into businesses and private residences to look for audit documents, the energy minister said, “There is no opportunity for warrantless search.” Section 15 of the bill allows inspectors to go into businesses without notice and without warrant.

Premier, has your energy minister even read his own bill? When the minister doesn’t know—and he had to admit on Focus Ontario on the weekend that he has no idea where these promised jobs are going to come from—it doesn’t give us a whole lot of confidence. Would you confirm that the minister was in fact wrong in his answer yesterday, and that your bill, his bill, will unleash energy audit inspectors on unsuspecting businesses here in the province of Ontario?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don’t know if we’re talking about the same bill here. I think Ontarians are going to grow ever more enthusiastic about this bill. I think they want those 50,000 new jobs, I think they want clean and green electricity, and I think they want all of us to do more in the fight against climate change.

There have been some wonderful experiences in other parts of the world where they have moved forward with this kind of legislation. This is certainly the most aggressive of its kind in North America, and we’re proud to be leading in that regard, but there are all kinds of job opportunities that will flow from this.

For example, when it comes to building transmission and distribution upgrades, there will be direct jobs in construction and indirect jobs in equipment supply, equipment manufacturing, engineering/design, transportation and conservation. There are all kinds of jobs in the construction trades, specialized professions, energy auditors, building and renovation, installation contractors, technicians and the like—

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Remarkably, I don’t believe he answered the question.

Again, you have to wonder whether this government even knows if it’s coming or going. Yesterday, both the Premier and the minister said that when it comes to the invasiveness of this bill, they are open to positive and constructive amendments. We’re glad to hear that, be-

cause the news of a mandatory audit costing \$300 or more at a time when so many people cannot afford it is strongly opposed by seniors and struggling families. Premier, will you agree to amend the bill to defer mandatory audits, or is your promise to be open to amendments another one that is not to be believed by the people of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I want to remind Ontarians that this very commitment that we have made was one that was found in the Conservative Party platform, but as they like to say over there, that was then and this is now.

We think this is a good idea. We’ve always said we’re looking forward to constructive and positive debate. We’re looking forward to positive recommendations with respect to how we might improve this bill. We’re very open to ideas, for example, as to when this might take effect. I know my friend understands as well that the government, at present, is providing a \$150 rebate, so the net cost is \$150. But as I say, we’re open to constructive recommendations.

I think what Ontarians want to see from us are solutions, and they’d love to hear positive, constructive suggestions coming from the opposition. We’re certainly very open to those too.

DON JAIL

Mr. Peter Kormos: The question is to the Premier. Why won’t the Premier and his Minister of Correctional Services accept the invitation to visit and tour the Don jail, the Toronto Jail, like Howard Hampton and I did last Friday?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Thank you, Premier, and I thank the member for the question.

We understand the challenges that are in our correctional institutions. That’s why we’ve decided to build a new facility to replace the Don jail, unlike the previous NDP government, which took money out of correctional services, refused to build one new jail, and in fact chastised the correctional officers when they suggested that they should increase capacity. The fact of the matter is that we are doing something to improve the working conditions for correctional officers, unlike the NDP government that was in place from 1990 to 1995 that withdrew millions and millions and millions of dollars from the correctional services section of the Ministry of Community—

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: Chronic understaffing—and it doesn’t take a new jail to address that; mentally ill inmates locked up in segregation cells because that’s the only place to put them, screaming through the day and into the night, their urine leaking out of the cell from underneath the locked solid door: Is that the sort of thing that this minister is afraid to witness first-hand?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: The fact of the matter is, I've been and toured the Toronto Jail. I saw the working conditions. But I have to tell you, Speaker, and the people of Ontario that, over on the other side, with the NDP, we have people who profess to support correctional services officers, profess to want to increase the amount of money that they put into the correctional services section, but in fact, when they formed government, in 1993-94 withdrew \$20 million out of the budget, in 1994-95 withdrew \$13 million from their budget, in 1995-96 withdrew \$25 million from the correctional services budget, and did not increase capacity by one bed.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Mr. Mike Colle: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Yesterday, the front page of the Toronto Star, the Globe and Mail and papers across the world announced that Ontario researchers had scored a major breakthrough in stem-cell research. Dr. Andras Nagy and his team of scientists at Mount Sinai Hospital have discovered a safer way to make human skin cells act like stem cells, which could be used to help people with spinal cord injuries and diseases such as diabetes and Parkinson's.

Minister, given the great breakthrough that Dr. Nagy has made in helping people with diabetes, Parkinson's and spinal cord injuries, could you tell us how your ministry is helping to support such incredible researchers like Dr. Nagy making these world-renowned breakthroughs?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my colleague for the question. For those of us who are suffering from disease and for those of us who know those who are suffering from disease, the future is brighter this week than it was last week. All of us in Ontario, and I think all of us in this House, are extremely proud of Dr. Andras Nagy and his team at Mount Sinai Hospital, who have just in months announced a fundamental breakthrough in stem-cell research, what experts are calling an elegant discovery. Their discovery, which was just published on Sunday in the journal Nature, unlocks the possibility of new medical therapies and provides hope for Ontario families that suffer from spinal cord injuries and diseases such as diabetes, cystic fibrosis and Parkinson's, unlocking the power of our own bodies to repair and regenerate ourselves. Dr. Nagy's team is part of some 10,000 scientists, clinical investigators and researchers in Ontario conducting some \$850 million worth of research, making Ontario the number one biomedical cluster in Canada.

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

Mr. Mike Colle: These researchers are some of our great Ontario heroes.

Another article on the front page of yesterday's Globe and Mail speaks of the fear researchers across Canada are feeling as they look at Canada's ability to attract and retain research stars of the future. In these challenging economic times, it is more important than ever that juris-

dictions like Ontario draw world-class researchers. Researchers are attracted to the development of new infrastructure, but are not attracted by infrastructure alone.

In the United States, President Obama is investing \$10 billion to finance research. Ontario hopefully will not be pushed aside by this massive investment in the States but rather boost its own programs. Minister, what is the Ministry of Research and Innovation doing to ensure that Ontario will continue to attract the best and the brightest of these researchers right down the street at Mount Sinai?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I can assure the members of this House that one of the fundamental principles that we follow in our government in the Ministry of Research and Innovation is that we believe that it is science that drives our science decisions—not political science but science; scientific excellence. We're attracting researchers from around the world because of our commitment to scientific peer-reviewed excellence.

We welcome the move by new President Obama to commit to scientific excellence in his country and not allow political science to interfere with that work. We have been ahead of the curve. It's a great opportunity for Ontario, I think, because of our commitments that we've been making since 2005, for us to ride the wave of this new investment in the States to strengthen our collaborations with our friends to the south.

Because of work like Dr. Nagy's, we know that we are truly globally competitive. We reach out to all other—

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

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services. Minister, small businesses are struggling in this province. They are suffocating under the burden of your new rules and regulations in these challenging economic times. It's like death by a thousand cuts. Your government seems to be picking off one sector at a time. Construction businesses will hurt with an \$11,000 WSIB tax. Lawn care companies will suffer with your politically motivated, not science-based, ban list. Also, Minister, I'm hearing from many small businesses unable to cope with your rapid minimum wage increase.

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What is more troubling to me is this is all being done at a time when our small businesses simply cannot afford it. Will the minister agree with the people on the ground and finally admit that small business is suffering in this province?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member for asking this question.

There's no doubt that the small businesses are having challenges, not just in Ontario or Canada but throughout the world. It is a global phenomenon because of our reliance on the US economy, and the US economy is having challenges in their construction sector, they are having challenges in their banking sector, and they're

also having challenges in their manufacturing sector. So the small businesses that provide services to the US, and also to a broader sector, are having some challenges.

I will be more than pleased to elaborate in the supplementary about what our government has actually done to support those small businesses. We are actually on the job, and we're doing a great job to support the small businesses.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Well, I think the minister is really out of touch. The US economy has nothing to do with all the new rules that you're bringing in.

Minister, small business is vital to Ontario's economy. Small business comprises 96% of all the businesses in the province of Ontario—96%. Small business is the job creator in this province.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that two out of three businesses surveyed find the overall burden of provincial regulations has increased in the past three years under your government. What's next on your hit list? I know you have the temp help agencies—Bill 139. Where's the minister on this issue? Why won't he defend and protect the interests of small business?

When will you, as the Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services, start to stand up for small business in this province?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: It's one thing to ask questions in the House; the other thing is to actually do something about it.

Let me tell you, our government actually has worked very closely with the small business community. We have, in the manufacturing sector, a Smart program, which is being run by the CME, the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters association. It's a program to increase the productivity of the manufacturers.

We also have a program with the Yves Landry Foundation. Again, this is to look at their processes and provide the money for the training funds. We also assist them with their export access program, through the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, so that they can actually not look at the market just in the US but actually look at the markets across the globe so that they can be more successful in penetrating new markets.

In addition to that, we have the AMIS program, under which they can apply for money so that we can assist them with regards to their capital needs.

We have a lot of these programs, and we are working very closely with the small business community to address some of their needs.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Peter Kormos: My question is to the Premier. How does shutting down the emergency department at the Port Colborne hospital improve the quality of health care for the folks of Port Colborne and Wainfleet?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. David Caplan: I understand that there's always anxiety whenever communities consider making changes to the way health care is delivered, but I want to stress that our government is committed to strengthening and improving health care in Niagara region.

I want to say to the member opposite that I am confident the local health integration board continues to act in the best interests of the people of Niagara, making decisions to ensure the sustainability of the Niagara health care system.

In Port Colborne, the LHIN has taken great care to ensure that the plan will result in safer and higher quality for the residents in the Niagara health system. The plan will ensure that patients get the care they need.

I want to quote the independent reviewer of that plan, Dr. Jack Kitts, in his final report to the LHIN. He said: "In critical cases it is vital that patients receive definitive treatment as quickly as possible. The ED at the Douglas Memorial site is unable to provide this service as it lacks the necessary diagnostic equipment and specialist"—

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: The people of Port Colborne didn't make the decision to shut down that emergency room. That decision was made by this government's hand-picked, unelected LHIN.

The people of Port Colborne and Wainfleet built that hospital brick by brick and they've paid for its operation with their taxes, even more so now with this government's special health tax surcharge.

Why won't this government, the McGuinty government, listen to the people of Port Colborne and Wainfleet?

Hon. David Caplan: The facts are that I, as the member well knows, recently met with Mayor Badaway from Port Colborne, Regional Councillor Bob Saracino, and Wainfleet mayor Barb Henderson. I would quote Mayor Badaway where he said, "He thanked Port Colborne for coming forward"—referring to myself—"with positive, constructive suggestions on a way to address these very important health issues for rural communities such as the city of Port Colborne.... The minister acknowledged that what works in an urban environment was not always the best fit for rural application."

In fact, we've seen New Democrat governments close hospitals, as they did in Saskatchewan: 50 rural hospitals in that province. That's not the track record of this government. In fact, I thought that Regional Councillor Saracino put it very well: "He said"—referring to myself—"he recognized our concerns and the needs of the people and they are prepared to work with us here; he did give us that commitment." And I did.

POLICE OFFICERS

Mr. Pat Hoy: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, public safety officers in our province face a monumental task: They keep us out of harm's way and keep our

families safe. I think all members in this House would agree that they do so with courage and integrity, but every day they face uncertain situations and certain danger, and they do so continually, without hesitation.

When a public safety officer dies in the line of duty, a community never fully heals from that wound. It lingers, and we are forever touched by it. My community has not been immune to tragedy. In June 2000, we lost Sergeant Marg Eve. Mourners turned out in the hundreds to pay tribute. Fellow officers came from across the province to pay their respects.

I know that everyone in this House would offer whatever support possible during this time. Would the minister tell us what the government does to support the families of fallen public safety officers?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member for the question. He's right: The community never, ever truly recovers from the loss of a police officer. I know that in 1993, Constable Joe MacDonald was shot and killed, and in 1999, Rick McDonald from Sudbury was shot and killed. Our community has never, ever recovered from those two tragic deaths.

Because of the sacrifices made by those police officers, the Constable Joe MacDonald scholarship committee provides spouses and children of officers who die in the line of duty money for post-secondary education. It's no replacement for a husband, a son, a father, but what it does do is show the amount of caring that the people of Ontario, all sides, without partisan political stripe, have for our police officers, especially those who fall in the line of duty.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Pat Hoy: I know that in the time that follows the loss of a public safety officer, the outpouring of support from the community is very much appreciated by the family, just as I know that the support of the families with scholarships for post-secondary education will help to ease their financial burden following that loss.

We all know that when a public safety officer is killed in the line of duty, a community comes together. We mourn together, not just in the community where the officer lived and worked, but all across this province.

I'm glad to know that Ontario's Constable Joe MacDonald committee helps support the families to ease the financial burden following the tragic loss of a loved one in the line of duty. I would also like to know whether there are any other ways the government recognizes the sacrifices made by our public safety officers. Minister, do we have any other ways to honour their memory?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Thanks again for the question from the member. Yes, we have other ways. In memory of fallen police officers, the Legislature can now dedicate highway bridges and other structures to those who have courageously and unselfishly given their lives in the line of duty.

Here are some of the officers who have been honoured to date: certainly, Sergeant Margaret Eve from the member's riding, Ontario Provincial Police officer, Highway 401 at Highway 4; Senior Constable Jim McFadden from

the Ontario Provincial Police, Highway 401 at Merlin Road; Senior Constable Phil Shrive, Ontario Provincial Police, Highway 17 over Bonnechere River; and Constable Richard Verdecchia, Ontario Provincial Police, Highway 11 at Highway 141.

It is a small way for us to remember the enormous sacrifice—

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

1130

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, in your answer today you said that you're looking forward to constructive suggestions as to how you could improve this bill. We're going to give you one right now.

Will you consider an amendment that would remove the mandatory provisions in your energy audit bill and make it voluntary instead of shoving it down the throats of homeowners and seniors who can least afford the \$300 cost? Will you consider, Premier, an amendment that will remove the mandatory provision of your energy audit bill?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague knows this is a matter for consideration by the committee. I expect that through committee there will be a number of proposals that will be put forward to strengthen the bill. We look forward to considering those various proposals and to making changes that the committee, in its wisdom, deems appropriate to enhance the quality of the bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: We're looking forward to that, but I'd certainly like some sort of commitment today, Premier. When you look at the broad-brush approach, for example, your mandatory energy audit applies to homes that may be less than a year or two years old. It puts everything under one broad brush.

We're asking you for a reasonable amendment: Remove the mandatory provision of this audit, as it is unwieldy, it is unfair to seniors, it is unfair to those people who are losing their homes through no fault of their own but that they cannot afford to keep the home, let alone a \$300 tax bill by your government.

I'm asking you again: Will you remove the mandatory provision of this audit and make it voluntary, as we are suggesting?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think I addressed that pretty explicitly in my first response, but I want to remind my honourable colleague about the commitment they made on page 48 of their platform. I want you to know that this issue of the energy audit was not to be optional. It specifically says, "We will require home energy audits before every sale of a house so that the market will reward homes which are energy-efficient." There was no sense of any option. There's no sense that

this might be something a seller might want to consider. It was going to be a requirement.

Again, we look forward to giving this full consideration, because apparently they've changed their minds over there. I think we should give this full consideration at the committee.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The Globe and Mail revealed that a Metrolinx document on public consultations suggested that the agency salt the session with supporters in an effort to quash public concern with transit proposals.

Does this minister, responsible for Metrolinx, believe that stacking public consultations is an appropriate way of engaging everyday Ontarians on transit proposals?

Hon. James J. Bradley: As one who has been familiar with the New Democratic Party over the years, I know that they have never, ever stacked any public consultations.

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm aware of that, but that doesn't answer the member's question, he will say.

I can tell you that there was very widespread consultation that took place. People who were opposed to or in favour of any of the plans put forward had a wide opportunity. I'm pleased that they took advantage of the opportunity in very large numbers to come out to meetings, to submit written submissions to Metrolinx to ensure that a wide variety of opinions were presented before any decisions were made. I'm delighted that the process turned out that way, and that the plan that was evolved is one that has very widespread support—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: The minister's day job: He'd better stick to it, because stand-up comedy's not his gig.

Metrolinx appears to be hiring consultants with expertise in quashing public discourse, this at a time when residents along the Georgetown corridor are fighting to ensure that a Union-Pearson link benefits their community and doesn't harm their homes and important institutions like churches and schools. Given the contents of the consultation document, how can the public have any faith that Metrolinx actually will listen to them?

Hon. James J. Bradley: First of all, I would say to the member that widespread consultation takes place before any of these matters are proceeded with. There's ongoing opportunity for them to make representations, and indeed, as a result of the representations that have been made, modifications to plans are made. So that wide consultation is there. It's the kind of consultation that I think Andrea Horwath, the other member for Hamilton, whom you don't support in the leadership—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It is the kind of consultation that she wants. Unlike myself, who supported Dalton McGuinty at the convention vociferously, you're not supporting your fellow member's—

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

The House recessed from 1136 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Joining us very, very soon in the west members' gallery will be a number of visitors from the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance: Shelagh Ross, Avi Goldstein, Matthew Main, Toby Cox and John MacEachern; and from the adult congenital heart disease clinic at Toronto General: Dr. Erwin Oechslin, Jeanine Harrison, Nicole Bodner and Carole Ryan.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise to recognize the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, who are here today to hold Agriculture Day at Queen's Park. It's great to see so many of the members of the OFA board here to ensure that everyone is aware of the challenges that our farmers are facing. With more than 38,000 members, the OFA is the largest voluntary farm organization in the country and is a strong voice for our agricultural community.

I want to recognize Bette Jean Crews, who was elected as the new president of the OFA in November. I know that she will serve the agriculture community well and ensure that their concerns are heard.

Agriculture is the second-largest economic contributor in Ontario and the third-largest employer. With the many economic challenges our province is facing, it is especially important that we work together to keep our agricultural sector strong. The OFA and farmers across Ontario are looking to the government to do the fair thing in the upcoming budget and compensate farmers who have been negatively affected by their legislation, such as the Clean Water Act.

They're also asking the government to do more to encourage new farmers, such as allowing young farmers to get a farm business registration number based on projections of income, so they can qualify for government programs. The government needs to take steps to get more young people farming so that agriculture can continue to be a strong industry and a solid foundation for Ontario.

I hope to see all members at the OFA reception this evening to show our support for agriculture in Ontario.

EMILY TIEU

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I rise today to share with this House the story of an incredible young woman I had

the opportunity to meet today. Emily Tieu of Kanata received the Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year Award from Lieutenant Governor David Onley a few minutes ago. Emily, who is just 11 years old and is sitting in the gallery, received this award for raising money for research into a very rare fatal enzyme disease called sialidosis.

There is only one case of this that has been discovered in Canada, but Emily was concerned about this young boy named Tyler, and therefore decided to do something about it. This disease is so rare that the government doesn't fund the research being done into it at McMaster University. Emily decided she could make a difference. First, she held a garage sale, where she sold her old toys and raised \$91. Since that first garage sale, Emily has raised more than \$12,000. She has spoken to the Nepean Rotary Club and Keller Williams Realty in Ottawa about this cause. Just last month, she spoke to almost 10,000 people at the Keller Williams Realty annual conference in Orlando, Florida. I hope she visited Disneyland at the same time.

I congratulate Emily on this award and thank her for her impressive contribution to our community, Ontario and Canada. I also want to thank the Ontario Community Newspapers Association for sponsoring this awards program and recognizing young people like Emily. I would like to add our congratulations to the other 11 recipients as well. I want to say how proud her mom, Carol, her dad, Phil, and her young brother, Malcolm, are of her. Congratulations all on a job well done.

AVRO ARROW

Mr. Monte Kwinter: February 20 was the 50th anniversary of the cancellation of the Avro CF-105 Arrow project. It was 50 years ago that the production of the world's most technologically advanced supersonic interceptor aircraft came to an abrupt end. This political decision to scrap the Arrow program cost over 40,000 jobs across Canada, including more than 14,000 jobs in the Toronto region.

Five Arrows were built and flew at speeds exceeding Mach 1, the speed of sound. One of them logged the maximum stabilized speed of Mach 1.98, which is twice the speed of sound. A sixth Arrow, the first Mark 2 model, was completed and was awaiting its new engines, the Orenda Iroquois. If it had flown, it would without doubt have set new world records, but it wasn't to be.

The government not only cancelled the program but ordered the scrapping of the five completed planes, plus the five that were in production. They also ordered the destruction of all blueprints, technical and research data, so that there would be no memory of the Arrow. The resulting brain drain made significant contributions to the US Apollo space program, which culminated in the first human landing on the moon, on July 22, 1969.

The Arrow's legacy, after a few decades, is the current global leadership position of Canada's aerospace industry, the fourth largest in the world.

On February 23, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the first powered flight in Canada by J.A.D. McCurdy, with Alexander Graham Bell's famous Silver Dart, at Baddeck, Nova Scotia.

Last week, we also launched the new Canadian Air and Space Museum, formerly the Toronto Aerospace Museum, at Downsview Park in my riding of York Centre. The museum's star attraction is the only full-scale museum-quality Arrow replica in existence. Come and see it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to congratulate the honourable member on your successful surgery. It was a pleasure to see you being able to read that statement today without your glasses.

PESTICIDES

Mr. Toby Barrett: Tomorrow, we understand, the Ontario Liberals will release the final list of banned products under the cosmetic pesticides act. Lawn care companies and farmers have been asking me why the environment ministry hasn't consulted with them to make the regulations more reasonable and why government has only consulted with supporters of the legislation.

To the minister: Time and again you've stood in this House claiming this legislation is for the children. I ask you: What kind of an example are you setting for children when you make the rules solely with an exclusive group?

Minister, I know you don't really believe in this legislation, but unless you speak up, it will be you who will face the music tomorrow. What will you tell the lawn care companies that are already struggling due to the economic crisis? Will the regulations be phased in for these businesses? How soon will they have to comply?

We know this government has problems with the illegal tobacco trade, due to high tax and overregulation. What do you think will happen with the pesticide products that are banned? What will this government do to stop pesticide products from being brought into Ontario from other jurisdictions, products that may well end up being sold out of the backs of trucks?

When will this government realize that banning things in this province is rarely the right answer?

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: Last Friday, Hamilton's ROCK group, Raising Our Children's Kids, threw a surprise party for me. At the Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club, we celebrated our recent success in having temporary care assistance funding reinstated in the Hamilton area.

Many grandparents raising their grandchildren have been unjustly cut off TCA funding. Through ROCK's and other grandparent groups' strong advocacy, and the help of my staff, the municipality recognized the problem and reinstated their temporary care assistance.

Although we celebrated in Hamilton, the fight is not over. Legislation and directives have to be changed to

accurately define eligibility and the reality of these families. Many grandparents across this province are still struggling to get the TCA funding their grandchildren need. Organizations like ROCK, Grand-Parenting Again, Cangrands and Second Chance for Kids work tirelessly to make this happen.

This government and local municipalities should follow Hamilton's example, work with these organizations and reinstate temporary care assistance to the grandchildren and their grandparents who are so deserving of it.

1510

BY-ELECTION IN HALIBURTON– KAWARTHA LAKES–BROCK

Mr. Jeff Leal: I rise today in astonished reaction to the high voter turnout in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

I know that the by-election results are still two days away, but it appears that the voters have already spoken. A running poll in the local paper, the Lindsay Post, was set up as an informal marker of voter sentiment on the race. This poll, unfortunately, has become a source of local controversy. Their own reporter recently revealed that the polling numbers “indicate that someone feels strongly enough to take the time to skew the results.”

The poll was giving the voters an unofficial way of following voter sentiment until, on “Monday morning, the number of votes for Tory had skyrocketed to 89,463, giving him 66% of the total.” These numbers might just indicate a healthy democracy until one realizes that in the 2007 provincial election, the total number of votes cast for all candidates was only 48,599 votes.

Where did all this support come from, you ask? The only response coming from the paper's IT department—again, and I defer to the expert—was, “It appears someone has written a computer script to vote over and over.”

I know that all members on this side of the House wish Mr. Tory the best of luck. Just remember that you need more than a computer and a talented computer programmer to win an election.

CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm delighted to see that my visitors have now arrived from the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance and the adult congenital heart disease clinic.

I rise today to highlight the issue of congenital heart disease, or CHD. A structural problem present at birth, CHD can include developmental problems with the heart, valves and blood vessels. The most common type of major birth defect, CHD requires lifelong monitoring and intervention in many adults. It affects one in 70 Canadian newborns, and there are currently 37,000 adult patients in Ontario. The Toronto General Hospital/University Health Network, as a world leader in this area, is home to the world's largest adult congenital heart disease clinic, headed by internationally renowned cardiologist Dr. Erwin Oechslin.

In speaking to this issue today I want to highlight the need for health and quality-of-life improvements for those dealing with CHD and, in particular, wish to recognize Mr. John MacEachern, a former resident of my riding who underwent Canada's first successful CHD surgery in 1945. He is now president of the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance.

I wish to commend the medical professionals at the adult congenital heart disease clinic, the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance and all those who work tirelessly to promote awareness of this important health issue.

FREEDOM OF INQUIRY AND EXPRESSION

Mr. David Zimmer: In Ontario, equality is champion. Multiculturalism is held in the highest regard, human rights are enshrined in our legislation, and minorities are celebrated. Our province's diversity has meant that we have conscientiously built a society that demands equal treatment of all religious and ethnic communities. This expectation, this right of all Ontarians, protects all our religious institutions, our cultural institutions and our educational institutions. Schools and universities are no exception.

Universities perform best when they stimulate new and innovative research, enable professors to teach and inspire students to learn, all in an atmosphere of civility, diversity, equity and respect consistent with the tenets that provide the foundation of this great province. A guiding principle of conduct for Ontario universities is the understanding that every member of a university's community has a right to equitable treatment without harassment or discrimination. I believe that Ontario's universities are committed to providing students with an environment conducive to freedom of inquiry and expression.

I'm sure we all agree that, as a province, our diversity is our strength and that we are stronger when we all work together. Let us ensure that these principles are respected and upheld at all times in all of Ontario's educational institutions.

NURSE PRACTITIONERS

Mr. David Oraziotti: I rise in the House today to share some great news about an exciting health care initiative that will benefit the residents in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie.

Recently, I had the privilege of announcing that our government is creating a new nurse practitioner clinic at Sault College. The clinic will benefit thousands of local residents, who will now have greater access to primary health care, as nurse practitioners are able to treat common illnesses and injuries and order lab tests, X-rays and other diagnostic tests. The Sault College clinic will include nurse practitioners, on-site physicians, consultative physicians and other health care professionals, who could include pharmacists, dietitians and social workers.

The creation of this nurse practitioner-led clinic will relieve pressure on the Sault Area Hospital and provide support for local health care professionals. It marks a historic step in improving patient care, as we are the first province in Canada to implement this tremendously positive initiative. I want to congratulate the Sault College group. I know that the clinic will be a success, as our government will work to ensure that the health care providers have the resources they need to deliver care to patients in our community despite the challenging economic circumstances.

The Premier and Minister Caplan have shown tremendous leadership on this new health care initiative, which will continue to be expanded across Ontario, and our community appreciates their efforts. This step also builds on our government's commitment to increase access to primary care, which has resulted in the first new medical school in Canada in more than 30 years, an increase in medical school spaces and more than double the number of foreign-trained physician spaces. This is more good news on the road to providing every Ontarian with timely access to primary care.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to announce that the Provincial Animal Welfare Act has been proclaimed and went into effect on March 1, 2009.

The Provincial Animal Welfare Act marks the first comprehensive changes to Ontario's animal protection legislation since 1919. It modernizes and strengthens the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, gives Ontario the strongest animal protection legislation in Canada and makes Ontario the only jurisdiction in Canada to specifically extend these protections to include law enforcement animals.

The need for strong animal protection has been well documented in this House: dogs left in sweltering cars by their owners, the existence of puppy mills, wild animals escaping from badly maintained roadside zoos, and a Toronto Police Service horse intentionally struck down by a reckless motorist.

Two weeks ago, we learned of the bust of a barbaric cockfighting ring operating in York region. Seventy-four birds had to be destroyed and six more were found dead—for the purpose of cruel and senseless gambling.

Ontario's animals must be protected from the few who would do them harm, and tough penalties must await anyone who may cause or permit distress to an animal. For the first time, Ontario is protecting our animals with legislation that has real teeth.

The Provincial Animal Welfare Act includes new animal protection and investigation powers. For example, the OSPCA inspectors now have the authority to enter

zoos, circuses, petting farms and any other property where animals are kept for exhibition, entertainment, boarding, hire or sale. Just as doctors are required to report suspected cases of child abuse or domestic violence, veterinarians are now required to report suspected cases of animal abuse and neglect, and will be protected from personal liability for doing so.

The act has established new provincial offences to protect animals, including a specific offence for causing harm to a law enforcement animal. This is the first of its kind in Canada. So far we are the only jurisdiction in Canada to have this type of legislation, and it backs up these new offences with strong penalties, including fines of up to \$60,000, possible jail time and a potential lifetime ban on further ownership of animals.

Finally, the act also recognizes that the vast majority of Ontario's hunters, fishermen and farmers conduct themselves in a responsible manner, and has set out appropriate exemptions for these practices.

I am pleased to add that the Provincial Animal Welfare Act has earned the support of such respected organizations as the College of Veterinarians of Ontario, the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the World Society for the Protection of Animals.

1520

The McGuinty government cares about animals and is a strong supporter of those who are dedicated to their care and protection. We have more than quadrupled the annual funding to the OSPCA to support the training of animal cruelty investigators. We have invested an additional \$6.8 million for the modernization of the OSPCA infrastructure and to offset the financial pressures brought by a growing demand for its services.

Our government will continue to work with our partners to ensure that Ontario remains diligent in our protection of animals and vigorous in dealing with their abusers.

This is a good day. I ask every animal owner in the province of Ontario to not only celebrate this good legislation but to support the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, Leeanna Pendergast, in her quest to make sure Woolwich is the Hockeyville of Canada again.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Toby Barrett: Last summer, I attended public hearings on what is now the Provincial Animal Welfare Act. The legislation still raises some questions for rural and northern Ontario. They are concerned about the slippery slope; it's always in people's minds in dealing with Mr. McGuinty's government.

One area of concern with respect to this animal welfare legislation is to what extent it may be used in the future to compromise one's right to hunt or fish or engage in normal farm or animal husbandry practices, in spite of the promise we just heard of the exemptions. However, the minister said he will continue to work on this issue with respect to animals.

I recall that various deputants to the standing committee on justice stressed that the legislation must not apply to wildlife and activities including hunting and fishing, including hunting with dogs. These activities and animals are presently under the purview of the Ministry of Natural Resources. It was felt that the OSPCA, if this was the government-sanctioned agency, should not be involved and have control over or interfere in any way with these kinds of activities.

As well, there was concern with respect to the vague wording in the legislation. Perhaps a lack of understanding of normal farm practices could lead in the future to impractical expectations or orders on farmers.

A case in point: discussion around the definition in the legislation of the word “distress.” I quote: “... the state of being in need of proper care, water, food or shelter or being injured, sick or in pain or suffering or being abused or subject to undue or unnecessary hardship, privation or neglect.” That definition, to some, was felt to be highly subjective and of concern if the legislation applies to all animals in Ontario: domestic pets, zoo animals, wildlife or farm animals. Today’s farms host a wide variety of animals. Their requirements and their needs for water, food and shelter vary differently. Appearances can be deceiving. Also, even some veterinary procedures or treatments may cause distress.

It was pointed out during those hearings that the bill states, “No person shall train an animal to fight with another animal or permit an animal that the person owns or has custody or care of to fight another animal.” Now, farmers with livestock on pasture—I think of sheep in particular—often are required to use one or more dogs to protect their flock; I know we certainly did. You have issues with coyotes, wolves and bears in some parts of Ontario. The question is, how would this section be applied if a farmer is using guard dogs to defend their livestock? There’s a legitimate concern, especially if you’re fighting off predators, trying to protect calves or lambs or mature sheep.

As we receive royal assent, I think of the royal family’s involvement, their love of livestock, their love of hunting. We know that dogs are used legally in various forms of hunting in this province. It’s not beyond the scope of possibility that in the pursuit of an animal during the hunt, that dog could come in conflict with another animal.

Thus, the committee, and these are during the hearings in London, received a proposal that the bill be amended: “No person shall train an animal to fight with another animal or permit an animal that person owns or has custody or care of to fight another animal,” and here it’s specific, “for the purposes of competition or entertainment,” as in the cock fighting that was just mentioned this afternoon.

A number of presenters to the committee advocated that the legislation be voted down or amended to protect these traditional practices between human beings and other animals. Concern was expressed that the animal rights agenda would be promoted through this legislation, perhaps under the guise of animal welfare. There was a

need for more consultation on the development of these hosts of regulations—the feeling that that was not there. The big worry for the future, as this minister continues to work on animal issues: Where are we on the slippery slope?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I appreciate that there are conversations that are taking place, but I would just ask the honourable members if they could lower the tone of those conversations a bit, or, if you must, use the outer chambers.

Responses?

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Kormos: And a fine admonition that was, Speaker.

I suppose I should first indicate that the Solicitor General, the Minister of Community Safety, has leaned on me—it didn’t take too much leaning—and, in view of the fact that I’m going to tear a strip off of him in a couple of minutes, I will accommodate him and his colleague Leeanna Pendergast from Kitchener–Conestoga. You see, Tim Hudak worked hard to make Lincoln the Ontario candidate for this nationwide Hockeyville contest. Lincoln lost out—

Mr. Tim Hudak: Narrowly.

Mr. Peter Kormos: —to Woolwich.

Mr. Tim Hudak: We want a recount.

Mr. Peter Kormos: We down in Niagara feel that it wasn’t necessarily the best ref’s call, but we’ll live with it. It would be a shame for an Ontario community not to be considered in this way. I’m very disturbed by the little promotion that says, “Vote often.” Voting is unlimited—

Mr. Tim Hudak: It is CBC.

Mr. Peter Kormos: —but then again, it is CBC, as Mr. Hudak points out.

I too encourage people to vote Woolwich. Go online: woolwichhockeyville.ca. And today’s the last day, effectively—tomorrow midnight. So vote Woolwich, and if you don’t know how to do it, call Leeanna Pendergast’s office in Kitchener–Conestoga and keep her staff occupied.

Talk about flogging something. I don’t mind flogging the “Vote Woolwich,” but how many more announcements are you going to get out of the passage of this bill? For Pete’s sake, we supported it. I can’t recall the last time a minister stood up and made a ministerial statement on the fact that a bill has been proclaimed. “Flogging a dead horse,” I suppose, is not the best choice of words in the context of the legislation. We supported it. How many more times are they going to do this? They are desperate, these guys, the Liberals, to somehow find good-news stories, although I doubt if there will be press pickup on this, to the chagrin of the Solicitor General.

I do want to acknowledge the work that Cheri DiNovo from Parkdale–High Park did on the committee, because, although this was technically within my critic portfolio, she very much wanted to be active in the consideration of the bill. She worked very hard on it and regrettably

cannot be here today. She tried very hard to do the response to the ministerial statement.

I still very much regret that my friend David Zimmer, who presented a very, very important private zoo regulation bill—I very much regret that that bill wasn't incorporated into this legislation. The government, the Premier's office—and it isn't the Solicitor General. He doesn't make those calls. The Premier's office makes those calls; they call those shots. Heck, Pierre Trudeau said that a backbencher, once he or she was 15 minutes away from Parliament Hill, was a nobody. Over the course of 25 years, a cabinet minister sitting in their seat is more often than not a nobody in view of the fact that there's so much power concentrated in the Premier's office. All the vetting and the control comes from the whiz kids, the brain trust, the minions in that office. For the life of me, I don't know what David Zimmer has done to the Premier to not have his very important zoo regulation bill acknowledged.

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I understand that this bill applies to zoo animals. I've become increasingly opposed to the concept of private zoos in any event. For the life of me, I don't know what business the private, for-profit sector has in running a zoo, a commercial zoo, for the purpose of generating profit. Our public zoos are interesting experiments in ensuring the survival of certain species of animal and continue to become less relevant as a showcase for animals as they are for research and the survival of the species. That's probably as it should be.

The incredible response to the Zimmer proposition about zoo regulation was, well, incredible. Across North America, people clamoured for it. I would ask this government to very, very seriously—the days of these dusty roadside attractions are really dated. I understand why a private sector operator may want to maintain a zoological facility specifically for research, again, for the breeding of particular species; I understand that. But roadside commercial zoos as a tourist attraction are as dated as can ever be. They tore down Crystal Beach years ago, to my regret. But if Crystal Beach is no longer relevant, then certainly these dusty roadside zoos are really no longer relevant.

The other issue, of course, is funding. Down where I come from, animal control officers are scarce. Municipalities don't have the funding. You've got coyotes eating chihuahuas down there in the Beaches. Mind you, the people of the Beaches say, "Please don't shoot the coyotes." But I suppose that's a Beaches phenomenon, and I shouldn't be critical. Here we are. I say, fine and good. Let's see what happens next.

PETITIONS

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have received petitions from Alec and Lisa Bilty of London, Ontario, and Ms. Clark of Cambridge, that read:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is no law in Ontario prohibiting pornography and other sexually explicit material from being viewed on computers in public schools and libraries; and

"Whereas there are public schools and public libraries that do not use Internet filtering software on computers that blocks such inappropriate material; and

"Whereas parents in the province of Ontario have the right to ensure that their children are protected from pornography and other inappropriate material available on the Internet in their public schools and libraries;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: That all public schools and libraries in Ontario be required to install Internet filtering software on computers to avoid the screening of sites of inappropriate, explicit sexual content."

As I agree with the contents of this petition, I sign on the face thereof.

SALES TAX

Mr. Pat Hoy: I have 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."

This is signed by a number of residents from Tilbury and Leamington, and I have signed it as well.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition received from the Reverend Robert Merritt of Cambridge.

"Whereas there is no law in Ontario prohibiting pornography and other sexually explicit material from being viewed on computers in public schools and libraries; and

"Whereas there are public schools and public libraries that do not use Internet filtering software on computers that blocks such inappropriate material; and

"Whereas parents in the province of Ontario have the right to ensure that their children are protected from pornography and other inappropriate material available on the Internet in their public schools and libraries;

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

public schools and libraries in Ontario be required to install Internet filtering software on computers to avoid the screening of sites of inappropriate explicit sexual content.”

As I agree with the contents of this petition, I've signed them.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition that's been sent to me by some of the patients of Dr. Bard, who practises medicine at the Credit Valley Medical Arts Building on Eglinton Avenue in Mississauga. It's addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition provided to me by Dr. Robert De Miglio.

“Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

“Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

“Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their children's schools several times throughout the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

“Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

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

“(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring

of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

“(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian.”

As I support this petition and will be introducing for second reading on Thursday a bill to cure this problem, I affix my name thereto.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of residents from my 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 sent it to the clerks' table.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas elementary school-aged children in the province of Ontario suffering from diabetes require regular blood sugar monitoring and may also require insulin and glucagon to manage their disease; and

“Whereas there is no medical or nursing assistance readily available in schools as there was in the past; and

“Whereas the parents/guardians of these children must currently visit their child's school several times through-

out the day in order to test their child's blood sugar levels; and

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"Whereas the absence of medical support in our elementary schools results in substantial stress and disruption to the lives of children and their working parents;

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

"(1) That elementary schools in the province of Ontario have on-site staff trained in the daily monitoring of blood sugar levels of children who suffer from diabetes; and

"(2) That the trained staff also administer insulin and glucagon when required, with the consent of the child's parent/guardian."

As I support the contents of this petition and will be moving second reading of a bill to cure this problem, I affix my name thereto.

BATHURST HEIGHTS ADULT LEARNING CENTRE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition from the students and staff at the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre.

"Whereas there are over 2,000 adult ESL students being served by the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre, operated by the Toronto District School Board, in partnership with the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas this is the only English-as-a-second language (ESL) learning centre in this area of the city," located directly on the subway; and

"Whereas newcomers to Toronto, and in the Lawrence Heights area, need the Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre so they can succeed in their career opportunities ...

"Therefore we, the undersigned, request that any revitalization of Lawrence Heights include a newcomer centre and ensure that the Bathurst Heights centre continues to exist in the present location" of Lawrence and Allen Road.

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

SALES TAX

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have a petition entitled "Implement a Sales Tax Holiday for Vehicle Sales," an idea that was brought forward to me last November by Allan Hedley of Hedley Seeds in Canfield. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas potential automobile customers in North America are having trouble accessing credit and loans; and

"Whereas the automotive industry is having difficulty selling vehicles;

"We, the undersigned, petition provincial, federal and state governments to implement a sales tax holiday on the purchase of new and used cars and trucks."

We have signatures here from the Waterford, Dundas, Simcoe and Delhi areas, and I affix my signature to this.

INTERPROVINCIAL BRIDGE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas:

"(1) ROCHE-NCE, a consulting firm hired to study potential sites for an interprovincial crossing between Ottawa and Gatineau, is recommending that an interprovincial bridge across the Ottawa River be built at Kettle Island, connecting to the scenic Aviation Parkway in Ottawa, turning it into a four-lane commuter and truck route passing through downtown residential communities;

"(2) Along the proposed route are homes, seniors' apartments, schools, parks, the Montfort Long Term Care Facility and the Montfort Hospital, all of which would be severely impacted by noise, vibration and disease-causing air pollution;

"(3) A truck and commuter route through neighbourhoods is a safety issue because of the increased risk to pedestrians and cyclists and the transport of hazardous materials; and

"(4) There are other, more suitable corridors further east, outside of the downtown core, which would have minimal impact on Ottawa residents;

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

"To reject the recommendation of a bridge at Kettle Island and to select a more suitable corridor to proceed to phase two of the interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study."

I concur with the petition and send it to the table by way of page Reed.

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am pleased, on behalf of my seatmate, the very hard-working member for Niagara Falls, to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

I’m pleased, on behalf of the member for Niagara Falls, to sign and support this petition and ask my page Andrej Rosic from Streetsville to carry it for me.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POVERTY REDUCTION ACT, 2009 LOI DE 2009 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DE LA PAUVRETÉ

Ms. Matthews moved second 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Does the minister choose to lead off the debate?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Yes, I do. I am sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

It is a great privilege to stand in this House today with the opportunity to move debate forward on a landmark piece of legislation. The Poverty Reduction Act is our next step in the commitment to reduce poverty in Ontario. It is a commitment we made when we launched *Breaking the Cycle*, Ontario’s first-ever poverty reduction strategy, last December. We are honouring that commitment now.

To be clear, this legislation is about the long term. In December, we laid out a five-year plan, but we acknowledged that much more needs to be done. If passed, the Poverty Reduction Act would ensure that future governments will be required to continue the work that we have begun, to set out strategies and targets to reduce poverty for generations to come.

Reducing poverty is the right thing to do. It is also the smart thing to do, because in order for Ontario to succeed, we need everyone at their best, everyone contributing, everyone working together.

We are committed to making sure that Ontario remains the province of boundless opportunity, where everyone has the chance to succeed, regardless of where they start in life. That is the ideal that sits at the heart of what will be the first poverty reduction strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*.

I rise today to speak to the Poverty Reduction Act, but I would also like to speak to the process that led us here, the process that led us to the creation of Ontario’s first-ever poverty reduction strategy.

I had the extraordinary experience of consulting broadly across this province on how to build a long-term poverty reduction strategy. I have to tell you that I’m very pleased that so many members of this Legislature

decided to embrace the question: How do we reduce poverty? How do we improve opportunity in this province?

We heard from a wide range of people—front-line service providers, experts—but, most importantly, we heard from people who are living in poverty, people who have first-hand experience with the challenges related to poverty. They offered unique, creative ideas about tackling poverty. They offered innovative solutions, and they offered some breathtaking real-life stories.

But more than any one idea or story, the consultation process showed me that the only way we’re ever going to succeed in the fight against poverty is for it to become a core responsibility of governments now and in the future. If passed, the Poverty Reduction Act will ensure that the dialogue continues not just over the course of this government’s mandate or the next but over the long haul.

We’re aiming to stand together in this House one day and proudly proclaim that we have worked together, we have kept the conversation going, and we have succeeded in our goal of reducing poverty.

We do have to be realistic. The day may not come as soon as we all would like. It’s going to be tough work over the long haul and the burden of this global economic crisis is going to make things tougher. But we have a concrete plan to get there now and the legislation to keep us on track well into the future.

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The preamble of this proposed legislation includes our first target of reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25% over the next five years. That would not only raise the standard of living of all children and their families who are living in poverty but it would raise 90,000 children out of poverty altogether. We will meet that target by moving forward with the initiatives set out in the *Breaking the Cycle* strategy we launched this past December. It’s a plan that requires participation of our partners, of the federal government. It is a target that requires a growing economy, and we are all committed to doing whatever we can to ensure that happens. It’s a plan that will allow us to take the next step in the Ontario we have been building together over the past five years.

We’re boosting the landmark Ontario child benefit to give low-income families the financial support they need to provide essentials like food and shelter for their children. I have to tell you that in my consultations, I heard over and over again that what we need to reduce poverty is to make sure that people in poverty have more money. The Ontario child benefit does exactly that. The benefit also makes it easier for people to leave social assistance for work, because low-income children will receive it regardless of whether or not their parents are working. So it transforms social assistance, as well as puts more money in the hands of low-income families.

By the time our strategy is fully implemented, 1.3 million children in low-income families will receive up to \$1,310 a year per child. This initiative, in combination with the minimum wage increases that are coming, means that the total income of a single parent with two

children, working full-time at minimum wage, will be 54% higher than it was in 2003. Their family income will have gone from under \$20,000 to over \$30,000 because of the initiatives that we have taken. That means more stable housing for those families. That means fewer moves to different schools. It means more nutritious food. It means more opportunities for kids to participate in the activities that we like to give to our children.

We're also building on the signature investments we've made in education. We believe there is no better poverty reduction strategy than strong, publicly funded education. We're going to build on our progress by investing in supports for low-income families, outreach programs for youth, summer jobs for youth, and after-school programs, and expanding the student nutrition program.

That's the background on how we got here, but I'd like to speak to where we are going. I'd like to speak to the proposed legislation, which will take us on a long-term journey to reduce poverty in Ontario for governments and for generations to come.

The Poverty Reduction Act, if passed, would hold future governments responsible for reducing poverty by requiring the government to report annually on key indicators related to poverty and opportunity. These indicators would typically include income, school success, health and housing.

This legislation requires future governments of Ontario to develop a new strategy, to renew the commitment—to set a new strategy with a specific target every five years.

Lastly, it would mandate future governments to consult with Ontarians, specifically with people living in poverty, as they develop their future strategies.

On a momentous occasion like this, I know it's tempting to focus all of our energy on the exciting new opportunities that are ahead. But it's also worthwhile looking back at how far we have come together, to remind ourselves what the political discourse looked like not so long ago.

I'm pretty sure that we can all agree that 10 years ago, no one was holding out much hope that the government of the day was going to act on poverty reduction. No; in 1998, the very services that for so many people make the difference between struggling day in and day out or having the ability to live a dignified and decent life were being torn down.

Let's move forward a bit. Where were we five years ago? Well, our government had just been elected. We were planning how to rebuild the very services that had been torn down: building our health care system, our education system, our social services—and, while we made some important progress, it wasn't enough. People were still struggling. Too many kids were facing too many barriers to success. We knew we needed to do more.

This legislation is about making sure that we and all future governments do just that. The proposed legislation requires that all future strategies be built on 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 people and racialized groups;

(4) That families be supported so 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

(7) That we need a sustained commitment to work together to develop strong and healthy children living in strong, healthy families in strong, healthy communities.

The Poverty Reduction Act is our commitment to poverty reduction in Ontario for generations to come, beyond the term of a single elected government. Our five-year strategy is a very good start, but it is not enough. We are committed to reducing poverty and expanding opportunity for all Ontarians for future generations, and we need a long-term, ongoing commitment that will extend beyond one government's mandate. That is the objective of the Poverty Reduction Act.

This legislation is about securing hope for generations to come, to commit to law and to state clearly to all Ontarians that poverty reduction is and always will be a priority for the Ontario government. We are a province that has always drawn strength from the fact that we live in a province of boundless opportunity, a province where everyone has the chance to succeed. The proposed Poverty Reduction Act would, if passed, ensure that we stay true to those values, our very best values, and recognize the power and potential of our most valuable resource, the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I too am pleased to speak in support of this bill. If passed, the proposed Poverty Reduction Act would bring about a fundamental shift in the way we approach the fight against poverty in Ontario. It would ensure that as long as poverty continues to exist, it remains top of mind in the public conversation and discourse. It would ensure that all who serve in this House in successive governments are focused on the issue. Perhaps more importantly, and most importantly, it would ensure that people who are working in this fight to reduce poverty in Ontario have their voices heard.

It was those very voices that informed the development of Ontario's first-ever poverty reduction strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*, which we launched this past December. I'm proud to say that it is a historic plan for Ontario, a plan that, for the first time in the history of our province, sets a hard target to reduce child poverty by 25% over the next five years, lifting 90,000 children out of poverty and giving low-income parents the support they need to build better lives for their children.

I know that it's one thing to stand here and to say that increasing opportunity for our most vulnerable, especially children, is the right thing to do; it's quite another to come up with a concrete plan and a long-term commitment to get the job done. Taken together, our *Breaking the Cycle* strategy and this proposed legislation will do just that. That's because our strategy will provide low-income children and their parents with the tools they need to reach their full potential. Our proposed legislation will ensure that we are held to account for the progress we make.

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If passed, the Poverty Reduction Act would require successive governments to report annually on key indicators of opportunity. These will typically include income levels, school success, health care and housing. It would require Ontario to develop a new strategy at least once every five years. It would require future governments to set a specific poverty reduction target every five years, and it would mandate governments to consult widely before developing these future strategies, including consultation with those who live in poverty.

This proposed legislation requires that future governments develop poverty reduction strategies with a vision in mind, a vision of a province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential in a prosperous and healthy Ontario.

Furthermore, future governments would be guided by seven principles when developing those plans.

First, there is untapped potential in Ontario's population that we need to draw upon by building supports. We need to eliminate barriers to full participation by all Ontarians.

Secondly, strong, healthy communities are an integral part of poverty reduction. The potential of communities must be brought to bear on the reduction of that poverty.

Third, 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.

Fourth, families are the backbone of healthy communities. Families must be supported so they can play a meaningful role in promoting opportunity.

Fifth, all people in Ontario, including those living in poverty, deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

Sixth, we need to honour the voices and efforts of all Ontarians, especially people living in poverty, who are engaged in poverty reduction.

Seventh, but not finally, we need a sustained commitment to work together to develop strong, healthy children, families and communities in our province.

In this current economic climate, tackling poverty is both the right thing to do and the smart thing to do. Some would try to argue that now is not the right time to do this. They'll say that the economic situation ties our hands, that it limits our ability to fund new programs, that we really should be focusing on other things. Well, this sort of thinking simply misses the point. The fact is that tackling poverty has everything to do with building a stronger economy.

A recent report from the Ontario Association of Food Banks and TD Bank's Don Drummond drove this point home. It found that the federal and Ontario governments are losing as much as \$13.1 billion a year because of poverty. That puts the real cost of poverty at almost \$3,000 for every household in this province. That's a price that is simply too high for us not to act.

The evidence is clear: There is a moral and an economic imperative to reducing poverty. Tackling poverty in tough economic times makes more sense than ever before. It's about making our people, our workforce and our economy stronger. It's about investing in our communities and our future.

This leads me to the first detailed part of our plan that I want to address today, and that is education. One of the biggest thrusts behind our *Breaking the Cycle* strategy is to continue building a strong, publicly funded education system. The proposed legislation will help ensure that we deliver over the long term by mandating annual reporting on key indicators of opportunity, and there is no better indicator of opportunity than access to education.

Our plan includes a range of new educational projects that build on the signature investments that we have made over the past five years. We're bringing together more supports for at-risk kids in schools, more after-school recreation programs in high-needs neighbourhoods and more help for parents to get involved in their children's education. For example, we are tripling the number of parenting and family literacy centres, to a total of 300 across the province. We're encouraging families to engage in children's learning, familiarizing them with school routines and linking them with resources for special needs, health and other services. We will also launch a community hub program that brings together a range of community partners to better coordinate social and educational support services so that they meet the needs of those who are using them.

Education programs like these are only one piece of the puzzle, though. The second component of our plan that I want to address is income supports. Our plan includes an increase in the Ontario child benefit. It gives low-income families the financial support that they need to provide essentials like food and shelter for their children. Since 2003, the income of a single parent who is working poor will have increased by 54%, or over \$10,000 a year.

The Ontario child benefit is a real breakthrough in the way social assistance is delivered in this province. That's because it reaches low-income children directly, whether their parents are working or are currently on social

assistance. That means that families can continue to receive income support for their children when parents leave social assistance for employment, and it allows families receiving social assistance to keep much more of the income support for their children as their earnings increase. As part of our plan, we are increasing the benefit so that 1.3 million children in low-income families will receive up to \$1,310 a year for essentials like food, shelter and clothing. This will represent a total annual investment of \$1.3 billion at full implementation.

This brings me to the third and final theme I want to address today, and that is targets and measures. One of the decisions we made early on was that setting a hard target was the best way to mobilize resources and focus people on a shared goal. That's why our strategy sets the ambitious target of reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25% over five years, lifting 90,000 children out of poverty, as the minister and I have both indicated. This target truly marks a new era in the fight against poverty in Ontario. Our government will be held accountable for the progress that we are making in the coming years, but setting such a bold and public target will require successive governments to act on poverty for years to come. That is why the proposed legislation, if passed, would mandate the government to set new poverty reduction targets every five years.

We are in the early days here. There is a long road ahead, and we need to be realistic about the fact that global economic hardships will challenge all of us every step of the way, but I believe there is a cause for optimism here. For the first time ever, Ontario has both a concrete plan and a long-term commitment that is needed to break the cycle of poverty.

The proposed Poverty Reduction Act is a bold piece of legislation. It speaks to our best values and to our commitment that Ontario remain the province of strength and opportunity, a province where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their full potential, regardless of where they start in life.

There is no doubt that tackling poverty is going to be a tough job to do. It's going to take all of us, citizens, governments, the business community and the non-profit sector working together, but for the first time, Ontario has a comprehensive strategy to break the cycle of poverty and an opportunity to legislate a plan for generations to come. We've taken the first step towards our strategy. This proposed legislation holds our future governments to account when it comes to poverty reduction. It holds our current government to account. To ensure that Ontario is a province where all people have the opportunity to succeed, we need to move forward on this legislation.

1610

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

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the speeches of the Minister of Children and Youth Services and the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex on Bill 152, the Poverty Reduction Act, 2009.

I was called on last week by my local media and asked about this bill. They asked me if I thought it was going to make a difference, and I said quite honestly that I'm skeptical about it. I think it has been quoted in the papers by some other folks commenting on the bill that it's a plan without a plan. I would ask the minister, "Where's the beef?" They made their Breaking the Cycle announcement in December, and it involved \$300 million over five years, except that they seem to be looking for everyone else to make this plan a reality. They are asking for \$1.5 billion from the federal government. So it seems a little strange that the provincial government comes up with what they'd like to do, but they want others to pay for it.

I also said that I sincerely believe that the best answer to poverty in this province or in this country is a strong economy. This government has, through almost every bill they introduced, made it more difficult for businesses to survive in this province, and in fact have made things worse through their actions. Every bill they come out with makes it that much harder for businesses to go about their jobs and provide those good-paying jobs. Just last month, we lost some 70,000 good-paying jobs. Last year, the big part of the budget was the job retraining program, the Second Career program. That has been a complete flop. They talked about 20,000 retraining opportunities; I think we've seen something like 3,000—and as I just pointed out, we lost 70,000 jobs just last month.

So this sounds really nice and fluffy, but do I think it's going to make a significant difference? No, I don't.

And them talking about asking future governments—they're just putting off what they can't do today to other governments that won't be accountable in this Parliament.

So I am very skeptical about this legislation, and I would like to see more details as to how they're actually going to make a concrete difference.

I know that when the Premier was asked about what this bill does, his response was that it elevates interest. Well, that's a lot of meat, isn't it? It's very vague, indeed.

I would be very interested to hear the minister tell me how it's really going to make a difference.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to say that we welcome any government initiatives in the area of poverty reduction.

I do believe that the minister is sincere in her effort to bring this tragedy forward in our province, but I too will be a bit skeptical of Bill 152 until, I guess, the proof is in the pudding.

They want to reduce it—25 in 5. That's a hefty goal, considering what has happened in our province in the past. The government has made an effort to address this very important issue, obviously not to the extent we'd like to see. Sometimes we have loftier goals in our party.

I feel that we would like to work along with the minister in these initiatives. I also would hope that when we get to second reading and it goes to committee, the members of the committee from the government side are

actually going to listen to us and read our amendments and really take them into consideration. From our perspective, in our party—and also the official opposition—we do have good ideas once in a while, and we would hope that the government would be open-minded and work in a non-partisan manner, because this is all about people who are struggling, and we all represent the people in this province who are struggling. I think if cooler heads prevail, and people can work together to better the situation for the people who are hard hit in this province, then it will be a much better place to live.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I rise today just to offer my support for Bill 152. This legislation will ensure that successive governments, not just our government, are required to have a strategy to work on poverty reduction, which means that as you take these governments together over time, we can ensure that there will be a long-time strategy in Ontario to make sure we are all working together on a strategy to reduce poverty.

This really received a lot of interest and support in Guelph when Minister Matthews was first doing her consultation on poverty reduction. We were very fortunate to have Minister Matthews's parliamentary assistant at the time, my colleague the member for Northumberland–Quinte West, who came to talk to people at a poverty workshop that I hosted. We had a great turnout at that workshop: a lot of people with some very good ideas which we can incorporate into our poverty reduction strategy.

More recently a number of community members, because they were so enthusiastic at that initial workshop, organizations and agencies got together to have a second poverty reduction forum just a few weeks ago. They invited the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to send a representative, and someone attended and talked about our poverty reduction strategy. Again, that was very well received.

One of the things that people are particularly interested in is our child poverty reduction strategy and the Ontario child benefit. They strongly support making sure that children living in poverty receive assistance, and the Ontario child benefit will do just that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question and comment.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'll look forward to bringing some more extensive remarks momentarily about Bill 152. As my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka said, to paraphrase, I think there's more meat at a vegetarian picnic than there is in Bill 152. I'll talk about it. It's rather thin gruel. There's not much meat between the slices of bread here.

I think all parties obviously support the principle of poverty reduction, but, holy smokes, you have to have some tools in order to do so. As I said when this bill was introduced, it's awfully hard to hit a target when you don't have any arrows in your quiver. In fact, we've seen jobs shrink under the McGuinty government. We've seen

welfare rolls increase. We now have the unfortunate distinction in Ontario of being a have-not province, receiving equalization payments from Ottawa, for the first time in our history accepting what are basically welfare payments from the other provinces; and for the first time in 30 years, Ontario had a higher unemployment rate than the Canadian average. It's shocking.

Ontario has always been the strongest engine of growth, and under the McGuinty government we crossed that line and have stayed there since, above the average unemployment rate of the other provinces. So the most important way—I'll reinforce this in my comments momentarily—to reduce poverty is good, well-paying jobs, and I had hoped that there would be some kind of jobs plan, some kind of an economic strategy and some tools to help elevate people to a better lifestyle for their children and grandchildren than they experience today. Sadly, in this bill there's nothing of that kind.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. One of the government members has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me first start by saying that I really appreciate the comments of the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. I think I heard a tone of conciliation that I have not yet heard from that party on this topic. The notion that they want to work with this government to reduce poverty is music to my ears, I must say.

1620

I want to thank the member from Guelph for talking about what this means in her local community. What we know for sure is that the best solutions to poverty are at the local level. People want to be engaged; they want everyone in their community to have the opportunity. Of course, the provincial government has a very important role, the federal government has a very important role, but the community level is where magic can really happen.

I want to respond, though, to the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka and Niagara West–Glanbrook. I have to tell you that when I heard the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook say, “We all want to reduce poverty”—I tell you, your record speaks for itself. Yours is a party that slashed welfare rates, that froze minimum wage. You vilified people living in poverty. You excluded them from the conversation. You turned your back on the poor of this province. I tell you, I think it's time for you to rethink your position on that.

Where's the beef? I'll tell you where the beef is. The beef is in our strategy that includes increases to minimum wage, which you froze; increases to the Ontario child benefit, which you voted against. It includes a range of programs that support our kids in the schools so they get the education they need to be successful in life. Kids growing up in poverty in this province are not doing as well as we need them to do. We're going to be there for them.

We welcome the support of the party opposite. I hope that, under your leadership, you will come to the table and work with us to reduce poverty in this province.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise in debate on Bill 152. I understand we have unanimous consent to defer our critic's leadoff speech, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there unanimous consent of the House to allow the Conservative Party to defer its leadoff speech? Agreed.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I appreciate all the members for supporting that motion. I know my colleague Julia Munro, the member from York-Simcoe, has worked very hard on this file and cares very deeply about the issue, and we look forward to her more lengthy remarks, which no doubt will be very thoughtful, later on as we debate Bill 152. I know that she has had some good discussions with the minister on this issue and attended a number of her poverty forums that took place in the last year and a half in the set-up to Bill 152. I know my colleagues will enjoy the member for York-Simcoe's remarks as this bill progresses in debate.

I'll try to discuss a couple of these issues. The closest tie to reducing poverty will be the state of the economy. Only when you have healthy, thriving communities with good job prospects, not only at the entry level, but to climb up that ladder, can you truly make a dramatic impact on reducing poverty.

You also need to ensure that communities are safe and secure. If you want businesses, particularly small businesses, to open up in hard-pressed communities and neighbourhoods at risk, you need to provide them with an environment where they know that they can operate safely, to ensure their employees arrive at the workplace in a safe manner and can sell their products, if they're a retail or commercial establishment.

As was illustrated very recently in a series in the National Post, the McGuinty government has, unfortunately, the worst record of all the Canadian provinces in obtaining convictions of those who are charged. I do hope that we will see, in further discussion, if they're putting more meat on the bones around Bill 152, what some of their initiatives are going to be around public safety and security.

I'd say the third pillar is that we see support for families. No doubt the values conveyed by families—their ability to make long-term decisions, to provide a stable environment for their children—are an essential element of success to help the next generation escape poverty—some suggestions in that regard as well.

I had hoped a number of those initiatives—improving the economy, supporting families and creating safe and secure neighbourhoods and schools, for example—would be part of Bill 152, but as my colleague Mr. Miller had pointed out, and I noted as well, frankly, there's not much to this three-and-one-fifth-page piece of legislation. As I said somewhat facetiously, there's more meat at a vegetarian picnic than is contained in Bill 152. I know the minister doesn't like to hear that, but it certainly has been the response. I'm not the only one who has said that; it has been a widespread response to this bill that

lacks any real tools to reduce poverty in the province of Ontario.

Certainly there are a lot of motherhood and apple pie statements in the legislation. Subsection 2(2), for example, reads:

“Importance of all Ontarians

“1. That there is untapped potential in Ontario's population that needs to be drawn upon by building and establishing supports for, and eliminating barriers to, full participation by all people in Ontario's economy and society.”

Certainly, nobody would disagree. I think all members would support paragraph 1 of subsection 2(2) of the legislation. But, again, it's a bit of a motherhood and apple pie statement. I think it would be responded to with greater enthusiasm by members of the opposition benches if there were some illustration of how that goal was going to be fulfilled.

“2. That strong, healthy communities are an integral part of the poverty reduction strategy; their potential must be brought to bear on the reduction of poverty.”

No doubt, a vital and safe community where people can move back and forth to the workplace and can proceed to buy something at the store, a place where children can play safely and not be exposed to many of the vices, the crime and the risks that have become a growing problem, not only in our urban centres, but in suburban centres as well—it's almost like an episode of *The Wire*, some of the brazen murders that have taken place in the GTA where it's been fully caught on video. A couple of punks with guns shooting madly, and sadly, some just got off the hook on a recent high-profile murder here in the city. We were treated to a similar unhappy spectacle on last night's news.

I would certainly hope that the minister will be working very closely with the minister for public safety to work on ways—and with municipal law enforcement agencies as well—to target neighbourhoods at risk, to provide that much more secure environment.

We have a major problem with people who witness crimes not coming forward to report them because they don't believe that their safety will be protected if they do so. As a result, there is more and more brazen gunplay in the city of Toronto and other cities in our province that you would think, only years ago, we would hear about in Detroit or the battle of New York City, certainly not in the city that works.

So I hope that as part of this strategy, as this bill moves forward, we'll see some concerted efforts to provide safe and secure streets.

One of the initiatives that has been tried in various American jurisdictions—we actually put it forward in our platform under Premier Eves—is enterprise zones. Enterprise zones would help to compensate new businesses that set up in downtrodden neighbourhoods and communities at risk so they could start hiring people in those neighbourhoods.

Certainly if you come from a poor family, you may not have access to reliable transportation to get to work

on time and on a regular basis. An essential part, as a student particularly, when you're trying to get your first job experience, when you go back for a better-paying job, is to get something on the resumé that you can point to as a measure of success.

So in trying to actually get jobs—whether it's in manufacturing, a commercial operation, what have you—in an at-risk neighbourhood, probably we'll need some ways of compensating them when they set up as new businesses.

Enterprise zones in other jurisdictions have been shown to help address those situations. Once you have healthier businesses and a cluster of them in a neighbourhood, you can certainly help to turn that community around and help those who are within close distance to find better and steady employment.

1630

The bill also says another important point, but it's sadly almost platitudes, the content of this Bill 152:

“Recognition of diversity

“3. That not all groups of people share the same level of risk of poverty. The poverty reduction strategy must recognize the heightened risk among such groups as immigrants, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and racialized groups.”

It is an absolute tragedy when you see, as I know my colleague Mr. Miller from Parry Sound–Muskoka has done, the depravity of many of the reserves across the province of Ontario. Boy, if you're a young person growing up in that environment with such limited opportunities for work, no wonder so many talented individuals find their only livelihood comes from moving away from their families into the cities. I have not, sadly, seen much progress despite this government's promises to the contrary in assisting this.

We have a major challenge as a province to ensure that our replacement rate exceeds our retirement rate. We have a number of people, baby boomers, who until the stock markets plummeted were heading into retirement in the near future. To try to compensate for that, because the birth rate is so low in the province of Ontario, you can rely on a number of areas. Increased immigration is one, but there is certainly a massive pool of untapped potential in the young aboriginal population.

The other group, quite frankly, are people with disabilities, and what I had hoped would be one of the tools that this government would use if it were truly putting its money where its mouth is when it comes to 152 would be a number of initiatives to help the disabled people trying to access a job that they have the talents to do to overcome some of the obstacles they may find in the workplace; for example, tax credits to employers to help make adjustments in their workplace, whether it's a computer or whether it's a physical change in the workplace, to help to compensate for those additional costs. That would be of tremendous benefit to move people from ODSF who want to participate in the workforce, to actually matching their skills with a job. I believe the government's up-front costs for such an initiative would pay for themselves in the long run.

Secondly, I know that in New York state—there are probably others—when government lets contracts for various services, they actually try to set aside a number of contracts for employers who have a high participation of disabled individuals in the workplace. Again, there may be some up-front costs to making adjustments in the workplace, and businesses then are rewarded by having some preferred access to ongoing government contracts. That would be one suggestion on how the government can actually put its money where its mouth is, put some arrows in the quiver, so to speak, to hit the so-called targets that they speak about—actually, there are no targets in Bill 152, but in their companion document that goes along with it.

Item 4 under “Principles”:

“Importance of support and involvement of families

“4. That families be supported so that they can play a meaningful role in the reduction of poverty and in promoting opportunity.”

Certainly one of the great challenges, if you ask any elementary school teacher in particular how much her job has changed from teaching reading and writing and arithmetic to basic social skills—it's a major cause of concern in our communities because of the breakdown of families in many of these neighbourhoods at risk.

One suggestion that I had brought forward as well that I believe supports families is the notion of joint filing of tax returns. Right now we're a tax system that penalizes any family that chooses to have one spouse who stays at home or works at a part-time job. You pay a higher marginal tax rate as a result. If you had joint filing, they could put in their joint income and have tax savings that would allow for those families who choose to do so to have a parent take a part-time job or work in the home without facing this tax penalty. Right now the tax system penalizes couples that choose to do so. I think the government shouldn't be making value judgments. They should be neutral, whether both spouses are working or not. There may be some impact on the government's bottom line as you move to the notion of joint filing. It does exist in the States, in France, in Germany, I believe, and other comparable jurisdictions. It allows families to make choices in how they distribute their time, and we've seen some movement at the federal level to allow for joint filing or income splitting—another name for it—for pension income and for those with an individual with a disability in the home. Certainly, extending that to a greater portion of the population can help out families. Families at risk, in challenged neighbourhoods, may often find that they have to work quite a bit, and therefore have less time with their children that they would need, exposing them to risks that they otherwise would hope to avoid if an option like joint filing had been made available to them.

This is paragraph 5 of subsection 7(3):

“Regular consultation

“The minister shall regularly consult at such times as the minister considers appropriate with such key stakeholders, other levels of government, members of the

private, public and non-profit sectors and individuals, including those living in poverty, as the minister considers advisable with respect to the long-term poverty reduction strategy.”

That is absolutely, at the end of the day, meaningless. The minister consults when he or she wants with whom-ever they want. There are no time frames that have been set out. What usually occurs in the bill is some form of sanction if the legislation is not followed. This is merely guidance for the road ahead as opposed to any kind of substantive legislation with tools to reduce poverty, support neighbourhoods, fight crime, give greater economic opportunities and ensure that children have a safer environment in which to play and to learn. None of that resonates in Bill 152.

The minister took some exception with my earlier comment and I think gave an inaccurate portrayal of the successes of the previous PC government in bringing jobs to the province Ontario. In fact, the figures you'll see are that some 1.2 million jobs, net new jobs, were created in the province of Ontario, a record that stands to this day. By the way, that was the fastest rate of job creation not only in Canada but in North America as a whole.

This boom in job creation also helped to remove hundreds of thousands of individuals and families from poverty. We saw a reduction in the welfare rolls by I think roughly—my colleagues will correct me if I'm wrong—700,000 individuals. Of course, the minister didn't mention the fact that then-Finance Minister Ernie Eves on several occasions raised the basic personal exemption and took hundreds of thousands of individuals off the tax rolls altogether to encourage folks to work, to get a job so they could keep more of their own money. They faced extremely high marginal tax rates, which is one of the major obstacles to getting people from poverty and moving them up the ladder to the middle class, when the government would be clawing back 50 cents, 60 cents on every dollar. By raising the personal basic exemption, you enable folks to keep more of their own money, to climb the ladder economically and to better their lives, their place and their family's.

Manufacturing jobs often provide a very important pivot from poverty into the middle class. Manufacturing jobs tend to pay better than the service sector. They tend to have pensions. They tend to have a longer-lasting relationship with the employee. The record of Dalton McGuinty, sadly, is that almost 300,000 manufacturing jobs have fled our province. Unbelievably, about 22% of the manufacturing jobs that existed in 2003 are no longer with us in 2009. From 1996 to 2002, contrary to the minister's remarks, Ontario created 241,000 net new manufacturing jobs, and that was spread throughout the province. The greater Toronto area had a 26.6% increase in jobs—over half a million, by the way, in that area; eastern Ontario, 20.3%; central Ontario, 20%; south-western Ontario, 13.5%; and northern Ontario with a 3.7% increase.

I know my time is running out rapidly. My colleagues in the Legislature from Sarnia-Lambton and Parry

Sound-Muskoka both brought to the floor the concerns of the small business sector with respect to minimum wage increases.

1640

The problem is, the government is set to increase minimum wages once again. We are now the highest minimum wage, along with Nunavut. The challenge faced by small businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector, is that they're going to have to lay off more people. Young people coming out of school, people getting their first job and those who are trying to climb up the economic ladder are going to find themselves without an opportunity. Those who keep their jobs may have a slight increase in pay. But in this current economy, sadly, we're going to see many more people—people in poverty, young people, those at risk of falling into poverty—lose their jobs entirely.

My friend Mr. Bailey, just a week or so ago, read into the record a letter from the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, expressing their concern about the layoffs that will result from this latest minimum wage increase.

My colleague Mr. Miller today in the Legislature brought up a similar issue. Here's a quote from Mr. Miller. He talked about how small business is “suffocating under the burden of your new rules and regulations in these challenging economic times. It's like death by a thousand cuts. Your government seems to be picking off one sector at a time. Construction businesses” with the “\$11,000 WSIB tax. Lawn care companies” with the “politically motivated, not science-based, ban list”—and small business is very concerned about the rapid increase in minimum wage.

I do hope that the government is truly committed to helping people to escape poverty, to get essential job experiences, to develop that skill set and provide a better life for their families and for themselves; that they will take a good, hard, second look at causing even more unemployment than exists today in this sector.

Their own study by Professor Gunderson from the University of Toronto concluded that a 25% increase in minimum wage would reduce employment by as much as 15%, or approximately 180,000 lost jobs, even if phased in gradually, as proposed by the government.

We have lost far too many jobs already under Dalton McGuinty. The economy is shrinking. The private sector is shedding job opportunities. I think it would put more people into poverty if they continue on the current path. It's chasing jobs out of our province.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My colleague from Niagara West—Glanbram—Glanbrook—

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I know. I tried.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Erie—Lincoln was easier.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Toronto—Danforth is easier; no question.

He has spoken to this bill and talked about minimum wage, talked about a variety of approaches, talked about the loss of jobs.

I want to come back to the bill itself. The 25 in 5 coalition needs to be recognized and credited for the work they have done as activists to push this government to come forward with this bill. There is no doubt that they took an issue that had been shunted to the back pages, moved it forward, made it noticeable again, and in fact deserve a lot of credit for putting it on the agenda of this government.

I know the minister personally. I have no doubt, none in my mind, that she cares personally about this issue and will do all that she can as an individual to move this forward.

But I have to say, with all of that, I am concerned about this bill because I know, in part, that the reality of reducing poverty is something that is not going to be addressed until we see what's in the budget. Will there actually be an allocation for increases in social assistance so that people can eat, and eat properly? Will there be increases in funding for affordable housing so that people can have a roof over their head and not have to worry about being out on the street? Will we see action taken not just for children—although I understand why the focus would be on children—but for all who are poor? If you are a child living in a poor family, even if action is taken for you, if your family itself continues to try to exist, to try to survive in a state of deprivation, then there is no doubt in the world, no way in the world that that won't have an impact on you, an impact on your well-being and your outlook on life.

My hope is that this bill will be strengthened in the course of debate.

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

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: I'm happy to have the opportunity to participate in this very important debate. It's really significant that for the first time ever, Ontario has introduced legislation that, if passed, will commit our future governments to fight against poverty.

The Peel Children's Aid Society recently reported that since 1997, Peel has seen a 51% increase in the number of children living in poverty. This means that more than 70,000 children in Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon live in poverty. This is why I stand today to express my support for Bill 152 and our government's poverty reduction strategy.

In December, our government introduced a plan to reduce the number of children living in poverty by 25% over the next five years. Bill 152 will build on this strategy, and includes guiding principles that will create long-term goals to reduce poverty.

For Ontario to prosper, we have to find ways for everyone in our community to prosper and reach their full potential. Bill 152 will put us on the path to poverty reduction and on the path to a better future for all Ontarians. That is why I support Bill 152 and encourage all members of this House to support this bill.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to comment on Bill 152, the poverty reduction bill.

I'd like to commend the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook on his erudite remarks, and also all the other members who spoke.

As someone said one time, the best way out of poverty is a job. I think that the economy in this province is on the wrong track. We've witnessed more announcements every day of job reductions, job closures, and layoffs, and the minimum wage is going up at the end of the month. Again, it's admirable that we're going to increase the minimum wage, but at this time, members of the small business community and others have told our party—and I'm sure others have communicated with them as well—that while it's all well and admirable, it's not the right time to do that in this recession. Let's get out of this position that we're in financially in this province, try to improve things, and then at that time we can look at making increases in the minimum wage.

Every day, we're faced with more cutbacks. The strong economy that the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook talked about, that we witnessed in the latter part of the 1990s, when they had tax policies in effect, created new, real net worth jobs. That's what we need to get back to again. I'm not too confident that's going to happen with the green energy bill. They're talking about 50,000 jobs, but they're not going to be full-time jobs. They're going to be there for a year or so while they're doing construction, which is admirable, but then again, they're not the types of jobs that we're losing every day in the manufacturing sector.

I would just caution the members to take a look at this and see if there's some way that we can improve the economy in Ontario and try to get people back to work full-time. Again, the best way out of poverty is a job.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to commend my colleague from Niagara West–Glanbrook for his comments and his grave concerns about job loss, which we have also shared in the last couple of years.

I've just received information that the Poverty Reduction Act is really going to get tested very quickly. It has come to my attention that—I don't even know how to say this without being rather emotional—Hamilton Steel and Lake Erie Steel, under US Steel Corp., are shutting their operations in Canada. We're talking about thousands and thousands of jobs. We're talking about secondary industries that support steel industries. They say it's a temporary thing. Well, I think the sooner we get this infrastructure money into works, into the place—my community has an 18% poverty rate at this point, right now. With this devastating news, those numbers are going to skyrocket.

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I am crushed by this news. My grandfather worked there; my father worked there; my uncles worked there.

A proud history in our family of almost 300 years' service in this plant, and now for the first time in history it's closing down.

Hamilton has been hard hit, Mr. Speaker, as you well know. This is a blow. I hope we can move this money quickly into the steel sector, the construction sector and all the other sectors that are hurting, because for the people in my community, this is devastating news.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Tim Hudak: It certainly brings a very sobering message from my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. I know he cares very deeply about this because of the community he represents. He's a proud Stelco guy himself, so I know he'll be personally very devastated by this sad news of Stelco, also known as US Steel, shutting down. As he said quite rightly—I know he's speaking shortly—this will put this act, Bill 152, to the test in the Hamilton, Niagara and Haldimand areas.

I want to add a few more points just to counter the minister's argument, and then I'll look forward to my colleague's remarks.

The number of low-income individuals actually declined under the Mike Harris government from 1.8 million to some 1.6 million—I think about a 19% decline, 257,000 individuals. As I mentioned, 750,000 escaped dependency on welfare. The proof is there, as my colleague from Sarnia said.

The best way to escape poverty is a job, and the government has a duty to create a healthy environment for job creation. You can spend all kinds of money on consultations and bills like Bill 152, but poverty has actually increased under the McGuinty government, welfare rolls are up, and unemployment is the highest it has been in a long time, above the Canadian national average for the first time in 30 years.

I also wanted to note—I mentioned Gunderson's study on the minimum wage—another study by Professor Dave Neumark, University of California, and Dr. William Wascher. US Federal Reserve Board economists reviewed more than 90 studies in 15 countries and found the overwhelming majority of studies consistently show that minimum-wage increases result in decreases in employment, impacting on young people and low-skilled individuals the hardest.

There are better ways, like the working income tax benefit and increasing the basic personal exemption to allow people to collect more of their own money. That's how our approach contrasts to Bill 152.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to start off by saying I believe there's a unanimous-consent agreement to stand down the NDP lead and have it take place on a later date.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Toronto–Danforth is seeking unanimous consent of

the House to stand down the leadoff speech by the NDP. Agreed? Agreed.

I'll return to the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you, colleagues, for allowing that to be stood down.

I must say that indeed it's true: The announcement about the shutdown of the steel works in Hamilton and Nanticoke casts a pall over today's debate. We know very well what that's going to mean to thousands of families; we know what it's going to mean to the economy of Hamilton; we know what it's going to mean to the economy of Ontario. This is very bad news; very bad news indeed.

While it's hard to say that I welcome the opportunity to discuss the Poverty Reduction Act, I must say that it is a privilege to be able to stand here in this House and debate this matter. We in the NDP are pleased that there are initiatives taking place on poverty. We hope that there will in fact be concrete action taken to reduce the unacceptable levels of poverty in Ontario. My colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is quite correct that this bill will see some very severe tests of its viability, of its effectiveness, in the months—and, unfortunately, probably the years—to come.

It's not clear to me or to my caucus, my party, at this point if this bill is up to the task. We all know that poverty plagues far too many people in Ontario and that more and more Ontarians are being cast into poverty as they lose their jobs. We know that more and more Ontarians are being forced to rely on social assistance. The payments have declined by 25% since 1994, and yet the reality is that the cost of housing, food, warmth, telephone, all the necessities of life in this modern world have continued to rise. We know from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that the gap between rich and poor in Ontario has reached an all-time high, with the richest 10% earning 75 times more than the poorest 10%. We live in an unprecedentedly rich society which has an unprecedentedly great gap between those at the bottom and those at the top.

We know from the Ontario Association of Food Banks that food bank use has been rising amongst Ontarians. I have to say, as a personal recollection, when I was running in the by-election in my riding in 2006 I was taking a break one afternoon, a few minutes between canvassing, and I was just having a coffee in a Coffee Time, and a woman who was sitting a few tables over came to see me. She said, "Are you the candidate running in this election?" I said yes, I was. And she said, "You have to know that we are hungry."

My guess would be that she was in her mid-30s. She was neatly dressed—not fancily dressed; neatly dressed. I assume she was on OW—Ontario Works—or the Ontario disability support program. But she just said, "We are hungry. Please don't forget that if you're elected." And I haven't forgotten that. It is a reality. It's a reality in my riding and it's a reality in ridings across Ontario.

We know from yesterday's report for the Co-op Housing Federation that more and more Ontarians are at

risk of eviction and homelessness, with 20% of Ontarians spending half their income now on rent. It's a very substantial number. There are people who, every day, are having to grapple with, deal with, the impacts of poverty on their lives and the lives of everyone in their families. They know what it means in an ongoing psychological and physical way to live with the stress of not knowing that you have continuity in your housing, not being certain if you will have food at the end of the month, not being sure if you will have food at the end of the week, and they feel ignored. They feel as if they've been judged, that their fate has been dismissed. For them, this, in this extraordinary society, is a very cruel fate. They know what it's like when they can't provide for their children the way others are provided for. They know what it's like when their kids go to school and they can't dress—not in the best, but just to keep up with the other kids. It's a difficult life.

It doesn't just damage, doesn't just hurt those who are subjected to poverty themselves, although for them the toll is highest; it costs society as a whole. It costs every last one of us: financially, personally, psychologically. Financially, the Ontario Association of Food Banks says that \$13 billion a year is lost in government revenues and lost economic activity because of poverty. That is a fundamental expense. That is a huge expense.

There was a health policy analyst at the University of Toronto, whose name eludes me at the moment, who did an analysis of the impact on poverty on the health care system in Ontario. He concluded in his research that the elimination of poverty would have an impact on the health care system equivalent to finding a cure for cancer, because there are health impacts to poverty: increased rates of heart disease, increased rates of type 2 diabetes, increased rates of all kinds of diseases that are related to stress and poor nutrition. So we do not escape the cost of poverty even if we personally do not suffer from it, do not personally find ourselves victims of it.

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Economic insecurity breeds a preoccupation with oneself and one's family. It undermines community solidarity. It's in all of our interests to eliminate poverty, to create strong communities, ones wherein everyone can at least live with dignity.

We need to reduce poverty in this society, and there's hope that in this society today, such action can be taken. If you poll Ontarians, you will find that 80% of them believe this government should reduce poverty by 25% over the next five years. It isn't something that they think is alien, something that is not a worthy goal for this society; they see it as necessary. They see it as something that would make the lives of all of us better.

Recent polls by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives show that, again, 80% of Ontarians believe that a recession makes it even more necessary for us to take action on poverty. Many more people in this recession will be cast out of the middle class and into situations of desperation. Again, this news from Hamilton about the shutting down of Stelco, what we've known as Stelco, US Steel—very, very troubling.

The message from other jurisdictions is that poverty can be reduced through concerted government action. It is not an eternal state. It is not something ordained by destiny. It is something amenable to the actions of humans, of governments, and we are in a position to take that action.

The government of Quebec has succeeded in reducing their poverty rate from 19.3% in 1997 to 11.8% in 2005. That's eight years—a very substantial reduction in poverty in that province, a reduction in misery, a reduction in lost talent and lives.

The government of Ireland succeeded in reducing its long-term rate of poverty from 5.8% in 2003 to 3.7% in 2005. Ireland now faces profound economic problems, but the simple reality is that when the times were good, they actually acted on poverty. Here in Ontario, when times were good, poverty in fact deepened.

The government of the UK managed to lift 800,000 children out of poverty between 1997 and 2005—800,000. Again, when the times were good, they acted. When the times were good in Ontario, more people fell into poverty.

The reality is that governments can have an impact if they're committed. If they're willing to put programs in place, if they're willing to make a difference, they can actually reduce the amount of misery that exists in this society.

All of these governments developed and implemented comprehensive poverty reduction strategies to help achieve these results. They set public targets for poverty reduction. They took action in a number of common areas. They increased social assistance rates. They invested in affordable housing and child care. They increased minimum wages. They invested in public education and employment training. In other words, they understood what we were going to face in the 21st century, the kind of economic issues before us, the need to have a population that was well educated, healthy, able to take on those challenges.

About three to four years ago in this province, community activists noticed that in other Canadian jurisdictions, particularly Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, there was success in reducing poverty through the development and implementation of poverty reduction plans. So we didn't have to look across the ocean; we could look in our own backyards, to our neighbours, and see that they had taken action, that they had acted as governments who didn't believe that poverty was something untouchable, unmovable, a given, but something that they could act on. Those activists feared that Ontario was falling behind.

In 2007, a very impressive array of labour, faith, social service, health and anti-poverty groups came together to form a coalition to push the Ontario government to commit to develop a poverty reduction strategy. They all deserve our thanks for having taken on this issue. Poverty is rarely a top issue in provincial or federal elections in Canada. That may change, but historically it has not been a top issue. Through its persistence, the 25 in 5 Network

for Poverty Reduction put poverty on the agenda of the 2007 Ontario election. Ten days before the provincial election, they held an energetic and packed rally at Massey Hall—the first time in a long time that participants in an anti-poverty rally had to buy scalped tickets to get in. Poverty activists were successful in getting the McGuinty government to publicly commit to develop and implement a poverty reduction strategy in Ontario. The network has kept up the pressure and, to its credit, the government has delivered on its promise and released a five-year poverty reduction plan.

We believe the plan has serious weaknesses, and we've spoken about these weaknesses in the House. We're concerned that the plan only addresses children. We're concerned that it fails to include key actions, such as improving access to affordable housing and child care, and increasing social assistance rates and the minimum wage. If you're serious about this, those steps have to be taken. A bill is a useful thing, but there are other actions that have to be taken in concert with it to actually make a difference in the numbers.

These actions that I've just noted, actions on affordable housing and child care, were part of successful poverty reduction initiatives in other provinces and a key component in poverty reduction.

We've made it clear, and I made it clear in my remarks earlier, that the plan as it currently stands appears to be seriously underfunded.

We're glad that the plan has been introduced. We think that it affords an opportunity to take a step in the right direction, an opportunity for the members of this Legislature to debate and prod and push to try to get changes to this bill and actions taken in the budgeting process to really make a difference.

The 25 in 5 Network has advocated strongly for anti-poverty legislation to compel future governments to also set public targets for poverty reduction and develop and evaluate long-term poverty plans in consultation with citizens. Now the government has responded to this demand and has tabled Bill 152. The bill requires government to take action on poverty, collect information, consult, and be accountable to the public. We welcome that.

We agree that having the legislation introduced keeps poverty on the provincial agenda, but we need to ensure that this bill is more than simply a symbolic gesture. It's critical that it be more than a symbolic gesture. People living in poverty in this province, and all Ontarians, deserve more than symbolism. To be worthwhile, it must actually lead to differences in poor people's lives in Windsor, Kingston, North Bay, Toronto. To that end, we will be constructively critical of this bill because, as I said before, it has some significant weaknesses.

There are some good elements to the bill. It includes some important principles: the recognition of at-risk groups and the importance of dignity and respect for low-income people. It includes the need to monitor indicators that measure the causes of poverty, not just its effects. It requires government to regularly report on and review

their plans in consultation with Ontarians, including low-income Ontarians.

However, when you compare this bill to the government of Quebec's 2002 act to reduce poverty and social exclusion, a number of limitations and weaknesses of the bill become apparent. The Quebec legislation is more substantial, both in terms of length and areas that it touches on. Their bill is backed by investment. The Quebec government has invested about six times as much money in their strategy on a per capita basis than the government of Ontario is proposing to invest in its strategy.

Their bill is stronger in three ways.

First, the bill sets no ongoing specific and strong targets for poverty reduction. It does require the current government to pursue its current 25 in 5 target, but it sets no minimal baselines for future poverty reduction targets. In other words, future governments can choose to set poverty reduction targets as low as they would like. Twenty-five in five might very well become 5 in 25 in the future. This bill wouldn't prevent that.

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Additionally, written into the preamble to this act is the following escape clause: "The implementation and success of the strategy will require the sustained commitment of all levels of government, all sectors of Ontario society and a growing economy." Well, I have to say that when you look around today, those preconditions don't seem to be there in great supply. The Premier has regularly stated that without economic growth and billions of dollars in federal money, the province can't meet its 25% poverty reduction target. This provides what is also written in the government poverty reduction plan that was released in December. The bill reiterates these conditions but goes further by saying that the success and even the implementation of the government's poverty reduction strategy require the sustained commitment not just of the federal government but all levels of government. Not only that; success and implementation require the sustained commitment of all sectors of Ontario society. I don't think it's a bad idea to reach out and bring in the rest of society to deal with a broad social problem. But in terms of legislation that will govern the direction of this particular administration, what is the use of enshrining a requirement to set targets for poverty reduction if that requirement is contingent on so many vague conditions? Right now, our economy is not growing. As I understand it, that would mean that these targets would be set aside. As I understand it, the federal government has not been exactly deeply committed to poverty reduction. That will present tremendous challenges to actually delivering on this act.

In contrast, the Quebec poverty reduction law sets strong and precise targets for their poverty reduction strategy: namely, to "progressively make Quebec, by 2013, one of the industrialized nations to have the least number of persons living in poverty." That's the kind of goal we need in Bill 152, not unspecified targets with escape clauses; a far more concrete target that people can use to hold government to account—not just this government

but any future government—to see that they actually make a difference in people's lives, actually make a difference in this society.

The second problem is the lack of comprehensiveness of Bill 152. There's no requirement in the bill that the poverty reduction strategies that are developed be comprehensive. From the start, the Premier and the minister have repeatedly promised "a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy" for Ontario. However, as I've already mentioned, the government's current strategy focuses only on children, a worthy enough goal but not broad enough for this society. It ignores other groups at risk of poverty. Seniors, youth, people with disabilities, women, unattached adults, people of colour, aboriginal people and new immigrants are all left out of the calculation, all of whom deserve to live with dignity and respect, to have an opportunity to live fully in this society. The McGuinty government poverty reduction strategy also fails to take comprehensive action on the full range of areas related to poverty, fails to improve access to affordable housing and child care, fails to improve the adequacy of social assistance rates. It lacks the requirement that current or future poverty reduction strategies be comprehensive. It leaves open the possibility that future poverty reduction strategies will be far narrower. Again, Quebec's law does much better: It requires a comprehensive range of action to be taken to reduce poverty.

I can see that I'm running short of time. My colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will take up this argument, but I have to say that we need strong poverty reduction legislation. The government has introduced a bill that can be reshaped. In the course of this debate I hope that in fact the minister and the Premier will take into account what we've said and make this a bill that Ontario can be proud of.

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

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: First of all, I want to thank the member from Toronto–Danforth for his comments. I think his review of what's going on in other jurisdictions is very important to us.

He talks about the fact that our strategy, at this time, addresses children and is concerned that it addresses only children, but I think that there's an urgency about the need to address poverty for children. When we talk about what potential we have in our children—you mentioned that in other jurisdictions they use things such as minimum wage, education and that sort of thing—our children have their whole lives ahead of them yet, and if we are going to ever move them forward, we need to start with them first.

We talk about, and you mentioned many times, 25 in 5. We look at that and we say we want to achieve a 25% reduction in poverty in five years. That is our plan, but the reality is that that still leaves 75%. We have a lot of work ahead of us. That's what this bill is intended to address. It is intended to say that we are not going to be satisfied with just achieving 25 in 5. We need to make sure that in the future, all governments work on the 75%,

that we move that forward. We need to make sure that those strategies are such that we don't just entrench a particular strategy into legislation. We need to make sure that, over time, we deal with this.

But I think the old colloquialism about eating an elephant one bite at a time holds true here. If we look at 100% of the poverty, it would be a frightening experience for anyone to think how they're going to tackle that. We, as a government, have said we are going to tackle that through the children first. I think that is a plan that will see some success for us.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to the member from Toronto–Danforth for his speech on Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario.

In his talk, he hoped that this bill is not just about symbolism. I would say that I'm afraid—being a bit of a sceptic, I think it is about symbolism. I'm holding the bill in my hand, and it's all of three pages long. I question whether it's really going to make a difference in this province.

Of course, we all want to see poverty reduced in this province, but as even the government has stated when they were introducing this bill—they have said, very clearly, that this plan can only have success if the economy grows. As the member from Toronto–Danforth pointed out, the economy is not growing in Ontario at this time. In fact, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek just announced that US Steel was shutting down operations in Ontario, which would affect some 2,100 good-paying jobs. I just got an e-mail from a forestry company in my riding that's shutting down some of their operations, and every day I seem to get another announcement. That's why I say—and our party, I believe, says—that the best thing you can do to fight poverty is to provide good-paying jobs. We need to look at what we need to do as province to get our competitive edge back that we've lost under this government so that we attract those good jobs here in this province.

We have the highest marginal tax rate in North America. We have the highest corporate tax rate. Businesses can locate wherever they want, so if we have a higher tax rate in Ontario than every other province and every other state, and if a business is looking at locating, they're probably not going to locate in Ontario. So we need to look at those things, as well as many other aspects, to fight poverty in this province.

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

Mr. Mike Colle: I was, as always, impressed with my colleague from Toronto–Danforth and his deep understanding of poverty and the reality of it.

I just heard the Conservative member, again, giving us the old bromides about tax cuts and competitive tax rates. That's our problem: We still have too many people thinking backwards, looking in the rear-view mirror. They tried the competitive tax rates in Iceland; it's bankrupt.

Then Ireland tried the competitive lower tax rates; it's bankrupt. Estonia just tried it; it's bankrupt. These business magazines were always saying, "Canada should be more like Estonia, more like Ireland, more like Iceland." Obviously, it's much more than competitive tax rates, and it's going to be challenging.

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We are fortunate that the minister is very sincere, very capable and very dedicated to doing something about it. She recognizes that it's not going to be easy.

I know the Tories like to talk about another hunk of bad news: "We told you so." Well, that's not going to solve anything. We want solutions. We want to work with everybody who's willing to work to solve some of these problems, because you can talk about being competitive, but our competitors are in the same boat that we are. England, the US, Germany—they're all looking for answers; as we are. So by throwing stones at ourselves, we solve nothing, but we've got to commit ourselves, despite these most difficult times, to try and take care of people who cannot take care of themselves. I think that's what the minister is saying: It's not going to be a very easy thing to do by any stretch of the imagination, but it is worth the effort.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Seeing none, I'll return to the member for Toronto–Danforth, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the members from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Parry Sound–Muskoka and Eglinton–Lawrence for their commentary. I want to deal with a few of the points that they raised.

I have no doubt that it's critical to take action on childhood poverty. I'm not arguing that it should be set aside; I'm just saying that if you're actually going to deal with poverty, children in poor families have to have their whole family structure dealt with. I can't say anything other than that. If you are in a family where the stress is constant around housing, around food, around the future, then it will impact you. It is important that children get support in schools and the base so that they can establish their lives, but that base is also rooted very profoundly in their family. So when you talk about poverty, you have to talk about the larger society and the larger community.

Those who have contributed over the decades to building this province and to building this country, those who are seniors, should not be left in poverty because their whole life is not ahead of them. They should not be left in poverty, because they have done so much for us. That has to be recognized. I don't disagree that children have to have action taken to get them out of poverty; I argue that it has to be broader than that, because the needs are so broad—morally, socially and economically.

I am concerned about the potential for this bill to be simple symbolism. I want to see real allocation of funds, real change in other pieces of legislation around the minimum wage and around unionization so that people can live better lives. It isn't just a question of government money; it's a question of people being able to bargain better in the workplace and the marketplace.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario, or the Poverty Reduction Act, 2009. I must confess that I've really, thus far, found this debate on Bill 152 to be truly engaging, and I want to commend all the members who have spoken thus far on this very, very important topic for really bringing out their motivation behind being in public office.

I think it would be true to say that we all entered politics, not only in this particular body, but at the federal level, the municipal level and in other provinces, in order to help others, in order to help those who are not able to help themselves and in order to find ways and solutions to resolve the bigger problems in our communities—the community at large, such as, in our case, the province of Ontario, but also our individual communities—for me, the city of Ottawa and my particular riding of Ottawa Centre. It is our way of giving back to our community for everything they have given to us.

That's why, in a debate on an important issue such as poverty reduction, it is extremely important to ensure that we have collected everybody's views, that we have ensured that we have listened to everyone, to ensure that the chart we are putting forward is one which leaves no one behind.

Of course, there are going to be many differences between our opinions, and that should be always the case. Because of how societies are, especially democratic societies, we will not always agree 100% as to what is the right course of action. But the debate, such as the one that is taking place here today, allows for perfecting options that are available, the courses of action that are available to all of us.

I am heartened that we are having this debate on a very important issue, an issue that goes to the core of our responsibility as legislators, as policy-makers, as law-makers, to ensure that we help everyone in our community, in our society. I've often spoken in this Legislature about our collective responsibility as individuals to help our communities, to help the broader society as a whole, and I think we are doing that here.

Reducing poverty is, of course, not an impossible task, but it's a task that will require a lot of coordinated action, a lot of working together. In an ideal world, and I'm sure every single member in this House will agree with me, our aim should be to eliminate poverty. There should be no poverty, especially in the kind of society we live in. It's unfortunate that people live in poverty. That's the ideal thing I think we all aim and aspire toward. But we have to be practical and we have to be cognizant of the realities that are around us. What is happening today in our economy in Ontario, in Canada, and globally is indicative of that practicality, which is extremely important. That's why it's important that we work together, that we be in sync to reduce poverty and we come up with a plan which is coordinated.

One level of government alone will not be able to reduce or eliminate poverty. I think our communities understand that. We need everybody at their best, to ensure that we eliminate or we reduce poverty. We need to make sure that all levels of government are involved in the quest to reduce poverty. The federal level, the provincial government, and the municipalities—all three levels of government—need to be engaged in order to reduce poverty.

Not only governments, but various sectors within our society have to be coordinated in order to achieve this task: the public sector—that is, the government; the private sector, our corporate partners; and, of course, the voluntary sector, those members of our communities who are out there spending their time, their resources through various social service agencies, helping out the communities. All three sectors have to work together. They have to be coordinated. I think we have to be very mindful of that, and we as a body can be the agent to make sure that coordinated action takes place. That's why it's essential that we not only work together in this particular Legislature, in this room, but also outside of this Legislature and in our communities.

As many of you know, I was elected in October 2007. One of the campaign pledges I ran on in my community, which was part of my political party's platform, was to come up with a poverty reduction strategy. I have to tell you, as somebody running for the very first time for public office, I was and am still very, very excited about that prospect, that we are going to work together to ensure that we reduce poverty. What better motivation to seek public office than a commitment to reduce poverty?

When the government initiated the whole consultative process, I was involved, on behalf of my community, with Minister Deb Matthews and her office, on this particular issue from the forefront, because I think it's extremely important that we listen to our communities when we are trying to understand: What is poverty? How does it really impact people? What actions do we need to take to reduce and eventually eliminate poverty? How can we all work together to reduce and eventually eliminate poverty? In that regard, I had the honour to hold three meetings, three public consultations, dealing with poverty reduction. I want to thank all the members of my community who have come out in very large numbers, rich and poor, from various different sectors—from the corporate sector, the private sector, the volunteer sector, social service agencies—to talk and share their ideas as to how we as a province and other levels of government can reduce poverty.

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The very first consultation I hosted was on May 9, 2008, at the Bronson Centre, and I was very happy that the minister responsible, Deb Matthews, attended that particular consultation, which was very well attended. I held the second one just as an MPP on June 26, 2008, again with very broad participation from the community. One of the things we wanted to do, and we did, was to develop a report from my community of Ottawa Centre

as to the different steps we as a community, we as a government, can take to reduce poverty. In fact, we actually submitted that report to the minister. Most recently, on February 3, after the strategy was released, I invited Minister Deb Matthews again, and she came to the community to have another town hall meeting where we could discuss with the members of our community the scope and breadth of the strategy and how we're going to implement it.

I've been talking to my community, saying, "We've all got to work together." I'm fortunate to belong to a community where they've taken that on and said, "Yes, absolutely. We all need to work together to ensure that we reduce poverty in our communities."

Ottawa, as you know, is the capital of Canada. It's the second-largest city in Ontario. It's fairly prosperous because we have quite a stable employer, the federal government of Canada. The average income in Ottawa in 2005 was about \$72,600, which is higher than the national average of \$65,500. But that does not mean that there is no poverty in Ottawa. Unfortunately, there is. I want to share some statistics with you, and this comes from Ottawa's Vital Signs report 2008, done by the Community Foundation of Ottawa:

"Female-headed lone-parent families continued to experience a higher poverty rate, at 31.3%, than other family types, despite a slight improvement of 2.7% between 2000 and 2005." So essentially, the poverty rate has gone down in families which are headed by a female lone parent. "In contrast, the poverty rate in Ottawa among male-headed lone-parent families in Ottawa in 2005 was 17%, while the rate among two-parent families was 7.4%.

"In 2006, the child poverty rate in Ottawa, based on the low income measure (LIM), an indicator of relative poverty, was 20.3%, which was down from 23.7% in 2000. Ottawa's rate in 2006 was lower than both the provincial rate of 23.4% and Canadian rate of 23.1%."

Though the trend is in the right direction in Ottawa, since 2000, the measures the government has taken have resulted in a decrease in rates of poverty in Ottawa, both in terms of households which are led by single, lone-parent females and also in terms of child poverty. That's a good sign. The bad sign, the bad news, is that there's still poverty. About 20% of kids in Ottawa still suffer in poverty, and we need to take action to resolve that.

Let me talk about how this strategy and this act will help in that. First of all, for me what's really important is that the Poverty Reduction Act, 2009, for the very first time in Ontario puts in place a long-term strategy to reduce poverty, keeping in mind that this is a long-term goal. We would like this to happen immediately, but unfortunately that's not practical or realistic. The way I see it, this is almost a constitution on how we are going to reduce poverty. It puts in those basic fundamental principles needed for any government—not just this government; any future government—as to how poverty is going to be reduced. That is a very positive sign, a real sign in the right direction because, again, no matter who is in power, the responsibility remains that we need to

make sure that members of our communities are not living in poverty.

The other important thing is that the Breaking the Cycle strategy puts in place a target to reduce child poverty by 25% in five years. That strategy and that target are very well-referenced in Bill 152. That is the stated aim and purpose of this government.

In addition to that, the legislation requires that the minister report to this House on an annual basis as to the progress that has been made to meet that target. That is a very important point in terms of accountability, that we have an opportunity on an annual basis to see where we are: Are we doing the right thing in order to reduce poverty?

Lastly, keeping in mind the aim to have a long-term strategy, there is a requirement that the government undertake an update of the strategy every five years. Realities change. Problems change. We need to ensure that we are coming up with more up-to-date solutions to reduce poverty. In this particular strategy, for the first five years, the focus is on children and families, a very important focus.

We need to ensure that we break the cycle of poverty, to ensure that poverty doesn't become intergenerational. The last thing you want to inherit from your parents is how to be poor. We need to create a community, to create a society where, just because you were born in a poor family, that does not mean that you are going to be a poor adult as well. I am very happy and pleased to see that that is a key focus of the poverty reduction strategy.

There are many studies done which demonstrate that the chances are fairly high that if you're born in a poor family, as an adult you will be poor as well. I want to quote from a study by Professor Miles Corak, who happens to be my constituent, an economist by profession and a professor at the University of Ottawa. In March 2006, he did a study called *Do Poor Children Become Poor Adults? Lessons from a Cross Country Comparison of Generational Earnings Mobility*. In the study, he states:

"In the United States almost one half of children born to low-income parents become low-income adults. This is an extreme case, but the fraction is also high in the United Kingdom at four in 10, and Canada, where about one third of low-income children do not escape low income in adulthood. In the Nordic countries, where overall child poverty rates are noticeably lower, it is also the case that a disproportionate fraction of low-income children become low-income adults. Generational cycles of low income may be common in the rich countries, but so are cycles of high income. Rich children tend to become rich adults. Four in 10 children born to high-income parents will grow up to be high-income adults in the United States and the United Kingdom, and as many as one third will do so in Canada."

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In conclusion, Professor Corak talks about some of the policy options available to address child poverty. He states:

"It is increasingly claimed that child poverty in economies of plenty should be no more tolerated than poverty among the elderly, the elimination of which has been one of the important accomplishments of the more progressive welfare states. This claim is often buttressed by the fact that children differ from other groups because current circumstances are important not just for their well-being in the present but also decades into the future. However, the capacity of children to become self-sufficient and successful adults is compromised not only by monetary poverty, but by poverty of experience, influence, and expectation. This argument calls for broader thinking on the mechanisms and causes of generational mobility, and may draw public policy into areas of social and labour market policies that touch on the functioning of families. Money is of consequence, but it is not enough"—the idea being that we know, both from social studies and economic studies, that a child born in poverty will carry that forward.

What we need to do, as a first step to reduce and hopefully eliminate poverty, is to break that link, to ensure that those kids who are born in poverty in Canada, in Ontario, don't take this with them and then pass it on to their children. That's why I'm very happy that the focus of this particular strategy is children and their families.

But that does not say that we should not focus on anybody else. I mentioned earlier that I've held three round-table consultations on this particular issue, and some of the issues that often come up are: What about the disabled within our community? What about single people who are poor? Should we leave them behind? Of course not. We need to ensure that we find ways that those who have disability challenges, those who may be single and don't have families, are also not left behind.

That is why it is extremely important that we in this chamber work together to come up with positive solutions. I'm very optimistic, and I'm looking forward to the discussion that will take place not only at this level, in this debate, but also in committee, to fine-tune Bill 152, where we'll make sure that we find solutions for everybody and that we don't leave anybody behind.

We have to make sure that we are realistic, that we come up with real, tangible ideas which are achievable, which we can measure, so that we can say, "You know what? In these first five years, we've accomplished A, B and C. Here's our challenge for the next five years," so that we are not just grandstanding but actually accomplishing results. That is my objective, and I look forward to working with every member of this House to accomplish that and reducing poverty in Ontario.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to add some comments on the speech from the member from Ottawa Centre on Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario.

I happen to believe that one of the keys to reducing poverty in our country and our province is education—

and one of the weak links is the community college system. I think the community colleges are very successful, but in terms of their funding, they actually receive less funding per pupil than just about any level of education. In fact, I recently met with Barbara Taylor from Canadore College, and they're looking at expanding into Parry Sound with a new campus. It's something that I think, and would hope, the government would support, because that is the sort of campus that can provide the skills to provide an opportunity for people to upgrade their skills so they can get those well-paying jobs, and also the people that industry needs to be able to be competitive. So I think, as one of the planks in terms of fighting poverty in this province, more support for the community colleges would be a good investment.

I also received a letter from Brian Tamblin, the president of Georgian College. He was making a case for how community colleges are in a tough spot right now and need more funding. I think that would be money well spent. Georgian College has a newly opened campus in the town of Bracebridge that's filling many of the needs of the local community.

So I hope that the government will support those community colleges. They are vital to providing the skills that people need to be able to get the well-paying jobs and get out of poverty.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to compliment my colleague from Ottawa Centre. He seems to be getting very proficient at standing up without notes in this House, and I hope his colleagues can follow suit. He's doing a great job in that area.

I must say, in reference to the Poverty Reduction Act, that our party obviously will be supporting it to the next reading. But after today's news of US Steel closing all Canadian operations in Hamilton and Lake Erie, coupled with all the other closures that have been going on, I think that unfortunately Bill 152 is going to fall short, with the number of people who are going to require assistance in our province.

I can't emphasize enough to this government that they should move ahead quickly with their infrastructure money and maybe a little Canadian protectionism. It sounds like poverty will be created through American protectionism of the steel industry, forestry and mining, because they will close their foreign operations, which to them is Canada, and they're doing that at 3 o'clock today—a devastating announcement for my community and for all of Ontario.

I'm telling this House, the government and everyone else that if we don't get our act together as far as getting this economy rolling, we are on the borderline of a depression. The Steel Company of Canada operated during the Great Depression. My father worked two days one week, three the next. He shared his workload with his mate so the families could keep working and wouldn't starve.

This is absolutely devastating. I don't know if Bill 152 is up to this task. Hopefully, the government is going to push forward quickly with money for our communities, because this poverty reduction plan is going to be overwhelmed extremely quickly.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I listened with great interest to the member from Ottawa Centre and I was struck with just how comprehensive is his understanding of poverty and how capably he articulated not just his vision but his values.

It's been said that budgets—and I believe this—are more than just economic documents; they're moral statements. I think the government on this side has done much—nowhere near enough yet, but much—to reflect the values which we on a good day would hold to be self-evident, and that's that everybody ought to have opportunity. In fact, opportunity doesn't truly exist if anyone is denied the opportunity to in fact have an opportunity.

It's written in the Good Book somewhere that the poor are always with you, and I think that's probably true. But maybe the question is: What are we doing to always be with the poor? What are we doing to stand in solidarity with those who don't have the kind of opportunity that we'd wish for our own kids?

I remember that Bobby Kennedy—I worked on his campaign in the States in 1968—used to say, “We ought to reach out to people who are vulnerable because we love them.” But if we can't get to the point where we can say we love somebody, we ought to do it simply because it makes good economic sense to make sure that everyone's at that level field.

It begins with putting building blocks in place. Those building blocks include early childhood education, education generally, nutrition, and economic opportunities. I think the member opposite spoke to those things well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Seeing none, I'll return to the member for Ottawa Centre, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to extend my thanks to the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale for their responses to my comments.

We live in the era of hope today, where we are open to new ideas. We are open to dream and make those dreams a reality. These are definitely very challenging economic times, challenging in Ontario, in Canada and globally. Of course, we would have to all work very closely together to ensure that we come out of these times stronger, united and more future-oriented than we went into them.

This poverty reduction strategy is just one element. I concur with my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek that we need to do more to ensure that we help all our brothers and sisters and members of communities who are suffering through this economic crisis. I am also very optimistic that we, as a collective body, are capable of helping. We are capable of coming up with those right ideas and making them happen, just like, through this

poverty reduction strategy, we are capable of reducing child poverty by 25% in five years. I really urge all of us to work together to come up with our best ideas, the brightest ideas, and make that reality happen.

I just want to take this opportunity to thank Minister Deb Matthews for her commitment to this very important task. I know she's worked very, very hard, and through

her, I want to thank her policy adviser Tatum Wilson for his dedication on this very important issue.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1752.

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