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Tuesday 24 March 2009

Mardi 24 mars 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 24 March 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 24 mars 2009

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POVERTY REDUCTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DE LA PAUVRETÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 5, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario / Projet de loi 152, Loi concernant une stratégie à long terme de réduction de la pauvreté en Ontario.

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: Good morning, and thank you very much. I'm pleased to have 10 minutes this morning to make a few remarks on Bill 152, our government's poverty reduction strategy.

I think it's important for us to mention that when we were first elected in 2003, we realized quite quickly, as a government, that there was a lot of work that needed to be done in respect to poverty reduction in the province of Ontario. I think it's fair to say that we had inherited a history of some regression or neglect in this regard.

The previous administration, beginning in 1995 to 2003, had made some significant reductions—I think that's acknowledged by most people in this Legislature—in 1995 or 1996, seeing an approximate 21% reduction in social assistance rates almost immediately, and then, going forward until approximately 2003, no inflationary increases attached to social assistance rates in the province of Ontario.

So what we saw when we came to government in 2003 was that there was a significant amount of work to be done. We feel that we have, as a government, taken positive steps in this regard. I'm sure there's no one on our side of the House who wouldn't suggest that there is more work yet to be done, but we do feel that we have made significant strides in terms of trying to address what had been some neglect over the last number of years upon our arrival to government.

One of the significant policy pieces, while there are many, and legislative pieces that we've brought forward

since forming government in 2003—I think it's fair to say that most of our members, if not all of them, and I think perhaps even some members on the other side, would suggest that the main plank and the main policy piece that we brought forward to try and address poverty in the province of Ontario would be our Ontario child benefit, brought forward by the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I know it's a piece that that minister has worked very hard on, obviously, with the leadership and direction of Premier McGuinty. We have managed to bring forward what we feel is the single most important piece in terms of addressing poverty in Ontario.

Like many members in the Legislature, just this past Friday, I had an opportunity to make a wonderful announcement. I think most members likely did the same. What we were able to announce—and, of course, this will be subject, should this be contained in the budget, to passage of the budget. What we will see, should it be contained in there or anywhere else going forward, with the support of the Legislative Assembly, will be significant increases on the OCB from where it currently sits, at \$600, up to in the order of magnitude of \$1,100.

This was originally intended to max out at about \$1,300 per year per child in the province of Ontario for those who are eligible, but what we see going forward is that this \$1,100 watershed mark will be ramped up and moved forward by approximately two years. Originally, moving from \$600 up into the \$1,100 range was not intended to be met until approximately 2010 or 2011, so on a go-forward basis, it is our hope that with the support of the Legislative Assembly, we are able to fast track that piece and move it forward.

As I said in my opening remarks, it's extremely important that we're able to do that. We have a long history here, going back to 1995—and some would say even earlier; 1992 or 1993—where several of these issues that are fundamental to addressing poverty in Ontario had not been addressed. In fact, not only had they not been addressed, but some would say that they had gone backwards. So the 21% reduction that I mentioned, in 1995 or 1996, is a significant piece that we have to address going forward.

I will tell you that what I really like about the Ontario child benefit is that it's not just about people on social assistance, but it also captures those whom we refer to often in this place as the working poor. I can tell you that shortly after the election in 2003, I, like many members in the assembly, would have people coming into my office discussing poverty reduction issues. Most of the time, the conversations would focus primarily on—and

justifiably so to some degree—people on social assistance in the province. I would respond to them, “Well, what about the working poor?” That was 2003-04.

That’s why I want to tell you that I’m extremely proud of what we’ve done with the work on the Ontario child benefit, because as most members have come to realize, the OCB does capture people who are the working poor. They will be eligible for it. It’s clearly laid out in terms of who’s eligible, what benchmarks are available for people to begin receiving the Ontario child benefit. So it’s a very significant policy piece. I’m thrilled, as I think most are, that it’s not just about people on social assistance, but it also captures the working poor.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, there are a significant number of other policy pieces that we have brought forward over the course of the last five, going on six years that we feel are significant and important in terms of addressing poverty reduction in Ontario. One of those that I’d like to touch on briefly here today is our affordable housing program. I can give you some wonderful numbers in terms of what it has achieved directly in my hometown of Thunder Bay and my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Under the affordable housing program, the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administration Board for the northern homeowner repair program received \$5 million to address housing repairs for 250 northern housing units. These, of course, are for people who own their own homes; again not simply addressing people who are on social assistance, but the working poor.

In the riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, I can report to you the progress on that particular program. As of January 30, 2009, 152 units were approved, for a total of almost \$2.9 million under the affordable housing program: 70 units are occupied and 82 units are under repair and construction. The link, of course, with this program to poverty reduction in the province of Ontario is that these are the working poor. These are people who own their own homes, and these repairs, under our affordable housing program and the northern homeowner repair program, will allow the working poor to retrofit their homes, and we think they will see significant reductions in the costs associated with owning their own homes when it comes to gas, energy costs of all sorts, insulation and windows that will help reduce their costs to maintain and live in their own homes. It’s a very significant piece, and we’re obviously very proud of it.

That program has just had an extension, I can tell you, in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan to August 2009, to allow the Thunder Bay District Social Assistance Administration Board to get more of the units out the door and ensure that this money is not left on the table. So we’re working very closely with them to ensure that as many people as possible have an opportunity to tap into this program.

Another one of the pieces that we feel is significant in terms of addressing poverty reduction is our rent bank program. Again, I can give you local examples from my Thunder Bay DSSAB. Our district social services admin-

istration board was allocated almost \$300,000, which has, to this point, prevented just about 260 evictions. In 2004 the allocation was \$132,000; in 2006, \$56,000; in 2007, \$27,000; and in 2008, \$75,000. Almost \$300,000, it is estimated, that the money under the rent bank has delivered, which has avoided 260 evictions in Thunder Bay–Atikokan. I’m sure the numbers across the entire province are obviously much larger than that.

0910

One of the other things I’d like to highlight in my last minute and a half or so is our work as a government when it comes to employment insurance. It’s obviously a federal program, but something that I think we’ve seen very recently, perhaps in the last four or five months, finally gain some broader-based provincial and national traction in Canada. For, I would say, at least three years, under the leadership of Premier McGuinty, our government has been advocating strongly to the federal government that the disparities in the way the employment insurance program is rolled out in Canada, specifically in the province of Ontario, are unfair and discriminate against workers in this province. We have been leading this fight, I would say, for at least three years now here in the province. When we first began talking about this, we were portrayed as simply blaming some of our problems on the federal government. It’s nice to see, since the federal government has finally woken up to the challenges that exist in Canada, that they too, as a federal government, federal parties—and other parties, I should say now, in the province of Ontario—I think are finally on side in terms of this fight. I think it’s fair to repeat that it was Premier McGuinty who began this fight fully three years ago. I’ve presented petitions in this Legislature in that regard going back a couple of years, and I know many other members have as well.

This is a significant part of our reduction strategy as well. We’re happy to see that it’s finally being recognized and acknowledged by other parties and by the national government, and we look forward to seeing more positive work on that as we move forward.

I see that my time is up. I’m pleased to have had an opportunity this morning to do my 10 minutes on Bill 152, and I’m thrilled that we are doing what we’re doing. I thank the Minister of Children and Youth Services for all of her great work, especially on the Ontario child benefit. I know she’s very proud of that particular piece and I was pleased to present that to my community of Thunder Bay–Atikokan on Friday.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I’m pleased to have a moment to add some comments to the speech from the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan talking about Bill 152, the poverty reduction bill that doesn’t seem to have a plan in it. Now, the member was talking about past governments and about “significant regression”—I think that was his exact terminology—back under the past PC government. I would say to him, we’re talking about poverty. What about the lost 300,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs

that we've seen under your watch? What about those jobs? What about your attack on business in this province that you seem to be carrying on relentlessly, going after one sector after another? Most recently, I just learned about another sector that is under attack by this government, and that is the small bus companies that run the school buses in this province. You've now brought in an RFP process. I was talking to operators in my riding last week, and you're forcing these very small companies that have had bus routes for years and years and years to now engage in a request-for-proposal process. What do you think is going to happen with that? Well, I'll tell you what I think is going to happen—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I think I know what it is, and I would ask the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka how this relates to the speech that was given by the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Norm Miller: It relates to the fact that this government is continuing to cause further poverty by causing other businesses to no longer be able to stay in business in this province. What this government is doing is forcing these small bus companies that have had small routes—and I see I have eight seconds left, so I won't be able to fully explain my point now, but I will, at another opportunity, expand on the point I was about to make.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: The member for Thunder Bay has presented us with, I think, a very well researched, well-rounded explanation of this particular bill. I'd like to add a couple of comments to it.

One of the intangibles that is one of the government's greatest accomplishments in its campaign against poverty is to restore something called hope. It's no longer an economic crime to need help. The list of the accomplishments that the member stated give people who need help at a crucial point in their time a really good overview of some of the ways in which the province of Ontario can look at them and say, "We are all part of the same family of Ontarians. If you need help, you're one of us. If you need help, we'll help you."

I want to touch on just a few of them. I want to talk about affordable housing. Last summer, I had an opportunity at one of the affordable housing complexes in Streetsville, Fletcher's Creek Co-op, at the corner of Bristol and Creditview, to look a development taking a set of older town homes and going through them and replacing the roofs, replacing the windows. The homeowners were telling us in detail about the difference it was going to make in not having frost on the inside of their windows and not having snow blow through some of the cracks in the walls. That project was completed on time and on budget. For those people who really needed the help that Fletcher's Creek Co-op provides, this government's activity, this government's initiatives, made their lives easier. That's one of the reasons that I think this is a good measure. That's one of the reasons why I'll support it.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: In response to the comments made by the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, I would like to remind the member that when the previous government about which he commented took office, there was a \$12-billion deficit in this province. One in 10 people were on welfare. There was no industrial activity taking place. Ontario was in fact at the bottom of the list of provinces in terms of economic activity. When his government took office in 2003, there were in fact renewed activity and economic development activities taking place in the province. There were the fewest number of people on welfare at any point in the history of this province. Today, the welfare rolls are on the climb again. We are facing an \$18-billion deficit, which is the highest that this province has ever seen, there are more people living in poverty today in this province than ever before in the history of this province, and this member and this government have no plan whatsoever.

Today, we're debating a bill that is hollow rhetoric. There is nothing in this bill that will do anything about poverty. So I say to the member, before you stand in your place and wax eloquent about the failings of the previous government, please have a very careful analysis of your performance as a government and ask yourself carefully, what is it that people in poverty in this province will have as a result of this hollow piece of legislation that we're debating today?

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

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I would like to just recognize the remarks of some of our opponents over there, who no doubt are practising some of their leadership speeches coming up in June.

I think probably it's best illustrative of the fundamental difference between the approach that this government has and other governments have taken in that we don't engage in wedge politics. We try not to divide and rule, but actually govern for all Ontarians. That's why, for example, initiatives such as the increase of the child benefit are going to be particularly beneficial to modest-income-area ridings such as my own, Etobicoke North. I know, for example, that individuals, especially during this time of manufacturing job sector challenge and economic downturn, are going to be especially challenged in times going forward. But is our approach to hire Andersen Consulting on how to rid the welfare rolls—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to caution the member for Etobicoke North and ask how this relates back to the speech that was given by the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I'd be honoured to, Speaker. The way this relates, sir, is with regard to poverty reduction, which is of course on the agenda, and the approach that current governments take and previous governments took—which, by the way, is in direct reply to the two minutes preceding me. I hope that's suitable to you, Mr. Speaker.

0920

Having said that, as I say, the approach that this government takes is one of inclusivity, of attempting to in-

crease opportunities, whether it's investments in education or with our social support network. I thank you for this opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'll now return to the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, who has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'd like to thank the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Mississauga–Streetsville, Newmarket–Aurora and Etobicoke North.

One of the members, in their response to my 10 minutes, mentioned that when they came to government, they inherited about a \$12-billion deficit and that there were people on assistance and they needed to find a way to address that. I guess that was the justification for the 21% reduction in social assistance rates in the province of Ontario.

What the member forgot to mention was that when we came to government in 2003, we found ourselves in a very similar circumstance. In fact, we also inherited a deficit of \$5.6 billion, but that deficit was not acknowledged until maybe three days before election day. Our circumstances were similar; the only difference is that, even under similar circumstances, when we came to government we still found a capacity under which to address social justice issues. Some governments find the capacity to do it; others ignore it. The circumstances were similar. We took a different path.

As I said in my remarks, this is not just about the Ontario child benefit. Since 2003, we've addressed significant policy pieces that will help people who are finding themselves in challenging circumstances in the province of Ontario. I mentioned briefly a rent bank; I didn't mention the energy bank. I didn't have an opportunity in my 10 minutes to talk about minimum wage. I didn't have an opportunity to talk about providing free immunization for people in the province of Ontario. I talked about the northern home repair program. I didn't have an opportunity to talk about baby screening. We talked a bit about social housing. We didn't talk about the increases we brought in to Ontario Works and Ontario disability support payments. We didn't talk about the increases that we brought in to injured workers for the first time in about 10 or 15 years in the province of Ontario, or the infrastructure that we've invested in to help keep taxes low for people.

There's a lot that we've done, and I think that most people in this place acknowledge it. We took a different path.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to participate in this debate.

I find it quite odd that the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan stood in his place and advised the House that it's unfortunate he didn't have the time to talk about all of the wonderful things, and then he enumerated a half dozen areas that he should have or could have elaborated. Well, he had another 10 minutes on the clock. Why didn't he choose to take the 20 minutes allotted to him and let us know what his government has done or intends

to do? But the reason he chose to cut himself off from that time is because he knows that the things he would talk about are, in fact, hollow rhetoric, that there is no plan, and that when he begins to talk a little longer than 10 minutes, the substance starts to wane. So what we will do over the next 20 minutes—I'll take my full 20, and I will talk about this bill, Bill 152.

I want to talk about the five action words that are contained in this bill. Stakeholders from across the province who are listening to this debate, and who are listening to the spin of this government as to what they're going to do to fight poverty, will find only five action words in this entire piece of legislation. I want to share them with you, and then I'll deal with them one at a time. The action words contained in this legislation are as follows: (1) publish; (2) consult; (3) review; (4) inform; and (5) solicit. Those are the action words contained in this legislation. There is nothing more than that.

I would submit to you that if this government was serious about dealing with poverty in this province, they would have had a plan when they were first elected in 2003. It is today 2009, and every time issues are raised in this House about the dire straits of people, whether it's people in poverty, whether it's children who are not being served with regard to mental health services, children with autism—against whom the Premier broke his promise—every time that we raise an issue in this House, this government has nothing to say other than to blame the previous government of 15 years ago. Given the opportunity, they would blame Sir John A. Macdonald. This government refuses to take responsibility for the actions that they have failed to take since their election in 2003.

I want to talk about the substance of the bill as this government suggests it is. The first thing that the minister is required to do under this act is to commence at the end of 2009—I don't know why that is. What is the date today? It's March 24, 2009, and the government brings in a bill today that we're debating, but the minister is required to do nothing until the end of 2009. What is the minister going to do between now and the end of the year? Oh, I know: probably have a few press conferences. Let's travel the province and let people know. Do some more dog-and-pony shows. Let's have a few consultations. Let's show and let's talk, but let's not do.

So the minister is required under this act, commencing at the end of 2009, to do what? "To prepare, and subsequently publish on a government website"—now there's action. Beginning at the end of 2009, the minister will then begin to publish something on the government website. We anticipate what that will look like, having had months to prepare for that website. We can't imagine what wealth of information might be contained on that government website at that time.

The second action word here—listen up: "The minister is required to regularly consult with ... key stakeholders." Well, what has she been doing since 2003? What has the government been doing since 2003, if not consulting? And by the way, why would you not consult before you bring in legislation? First, you bring in

legislation, then you have to consult. But I know why: The reason that the minister has to consult after tabling the legislation is because there's nothing in the legislation. There is nothing here. What the minister now has before her is a piece of legislation that will have been debated in this House, at second reading, committee and third reading—and then she'll go out and consult.

What will she be told? Well, she won't start until the end of 2009, and by that time, I suggest the \$18-billion deficit will have ballooned into a \$25-billion deficit, and there will be more people in poverty than ever before. What she'll be asked by people at that time, who will be rising up against her and her government, is: "Why didn't you act in 2003? Why didn't you act before now to do something about an issue that you knew full well was growing under your watch?"

The next action word in this bill is "review." Let's see what will be reviewed. "At least every five years," according to the legislation, "the government of Ontario must review the long-term ... strategy"—every five years. Let's see. That would be after every election. I don't want to in any way be presumptive here, but I have a feeling that this minister will never have an opportunity to review her long-term strategy. I'm convinced that as a result of the non-action not only on the issue of poverty, but on the issues of economic development which would in fact resolve many of the poverty issues, this minister will no longer have an opportunity to review anything as a minister because the people of this province will have said, "Enough is enough." What they will want is to have some leadership, not only on the issue of poverty, but on the issue of economic development and stability, so that people in this province will once again have hope.

0930

We know, on this side of the House, that the best answer to poverty is to ensure that those who have the ability to work are given the opportunity to work; that those who have the ability to learn are given the opportunity to learn; that it's not just about having press conferences and making announcements, but it's about putting in place a solid plan that is going to give young people some hope by giving them the right kind of information; that it's not just simply placating immigrants to this country with promises, but giving them specific programs so that they can take their talents and expertise and knowledge and become involved in a meaningful and positive way in their communities. None of that has been provided by this government and over the last number of years they got away with it. Why? Because they were riding the wave of the previous government's work in this province to establish economic stability. They had the privilege of riding the wave of previous work that had been done to create jobs, to create economic activity. That momentum has come to a grinding halt, after a number of years of this government's inaction and lack of a plan.

The fourth action word in this bill is "inform." Now, there's a challenge. Here's what the bill requires the minister to do: "The minister is required to inform the public

of the review...." That's a huge job. Get those communications consultants out. Roll out those—

Hon. Jim Watson: Is that Paul Rhodes?

Mr. Frank Klees: Yeah. Roll out those experts, the spin doctors.

I have to say, the one thing that this government does well is spin. There is no other government that I have ever observed, whether at the federal or provincial level, that has been better at spinning information than the McGuinty government. They do it so well that they have stakeholders believing them, they have the public believing them. Sometimes even they believe it.

But you see, here's the problem: Spin eventually spins out. The reason that this is all coming to a grinding halt is because the momentum is gone. There's no more energy left. They've consumed it all. Now, out of the depths of an \$18-billion deficit, they will try to resurrect. It just won't happen. And do you know why? Because in order to generate recovery, you have to have a plan, and that plan has to be based on principles. This government not only does not have a plan; there is a dearth of principles. It doesn't matter whether it's health care, the economy, social issues; there is no relevance to what is going on in this province today.

I have yet to see a piece of legislation come forward from this government that is not 90% spin and public relations and 10% substance. That's why we face the crisis that we're facing in this province today.

The final action word in this legislation is "solicit." As a result of each review, the minister is required to solicit the views of the public and carry out—what?—further consultations. So you see, we're going around in circles here, and the spin is going to have the minister dizzy, because she starts out with a review, she goes through consultations, she then does her report, she then posts it all on the website, and then that leads to what? It leads to a further review. Honestly, I find it difficult to understand how members of this government can in good conscience stand in their place and defend what we have before us.

I want to take the next few minutes to do what the government has not done, and that is to share with this House and those who are observing this debate what we believe should be done and what we believe a real plan of action should contain to address the poverty issue.

In the explanatory note, this government talks about the fact that they should be addressing issues of poverty reduction to fulfill the objectives of social, economic and cultural development. You see how upside down this government has it? Because it is in fact economic development that will resolve the poverty issue, not a poverty strategy to contribute to economic development. It's the other way around. The best plan for poverty reduction, I submit, is a good, strong economic development plan that will allow people who are wallowing in poverty today to take themselves out of that circumstance with the help of a plan that will allow them, either through retraining or through education, to become productive in our society. Although it's important, obviously, that people at the lower end of the pay scale

have a respectful pay for the work that they do, the debate needs to be about creating good jobs and creating an environment in this province that is going to encourage employers to create those jobs.

What this government has done consistently since their election is create an environment that is making it more and more impossible for businesses to exist in this province. Look at the number of times that I've brought to the attention of the Minister of Labour in this House that he has an army of inspectors roaming this province who are making it virtually impossible for employers to keep their doors open because of red tape and unnecessary intimidation on the part of individuals who should be civil servants. They should be working with businesses, helping them comply, not threatening them. But the minister refuses to understand. I'm asking him as minister to simply take the time to recognize what's going on on the front lines and to instruct his army of civil servants to have a change of attitude, to have a change of mind, to work with businesses and help create an environment that will actually encourage people to invest in this province and to create additional jobs. But that's not what they've been doing. Instead of doing that, they've been layering more red tape and more regulations onto the very people who are the solution for poverty in this province.

What else have they done? I can tell you what we would do: We would eliminate those barriers of red tape and regulatory burden, and we would form partnerships with businesses to say, "What is it that government can do to help you as a business create opportunities in our communities?" Entry-level jobs, jobs into which people can grow, advanced technology jobs, whatever they might be—that's the solution.

0940

There is another aspect that I want to speak to and leave on the record for this government. We have been appealing to this government for the last number of years to ensure that funding for mental health is a priority. The number of times I have submissions in my constituency office from social workers in our community, pleading with me to help lobby this government to ensure that mental health services are properly funded, because of the number of people who become disengaged from activity within our communities because of mental health challenges that are not being treated, and as a result they end up on disability as opposed to being able to earn their own way—we can't continue to ignore the mental health challenges in our communities. They are a challenge from the very young through to the adult ages. We cannot continue to ignore that issue and pretend that we care about our communities and pretend that we care about poverty. Those are practical steps, amongst many others, that this government knows about, that we've called on them to address, and they continue to turn their backs on the most vulnerable. Their answer is hollow rhetoric such as we have in Bill 152. Surely this government can do better.

They will be held accountable, not by us, because they don't listen to the official opposition here, but by the

people they serve. I know that many of the backbenchers in this government feel the same way that we do. I ask them to take some action as members of this government.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I find myself in the odd situation of having to try to discount some of what has been said by the Conservative member. I agree with the Conservatives that the Liberals are doing a lot of press announcements, that they're trying to look good on the poverty issue, that they're really not attacking the core issues. I agree. But to be lectured by a Conservative having to do with the avails of what should be done when it comes to poverty is pretty hard to take. I was in this Legislature when Mike Harris and Mr. Eves were Premiers of this province, and there was more done to attack the poor in the time that they were in government than any other time since I've been here. So I take it a little bit as passing strange. I remember a reduction of 24% that people on welfare were given as a result of the 1995 election. So I find it a little bit hard to take that all of a sudden the Conservatives profess themselves to be the saviours of the poor, because clearly what's going on is that this party is taking another shift to the right. That is the decision they'll make, and we'll see where that gets us in the next election. On the issue that he talks about, should the government be doing more, I think the answer is definitely yes.

Ce qui est bien clair pour moi, c'est que ce gouvernement a toujours voulu dire d'une belle manière au monde : « Ah oui, regardez ce qu'on fait. C'est donc excellent. On a cette initiative-là, on a une autre initiative là-bas, et on va faire de belles affaires. » Mais comment le monde va être affecté dans leur communauté, chez eux, ça, c'est une toute autre affaire. Donc, on va avoir une chance pendant ce débat de parler de la vision qu'on pense qu'on doit prendre comme gouvernement pour être capable d'avancer ce dossier pour vraiment avoir un impact. Mais ce qui est clair, et je suis d'accord avec le député, c'est que ce gouvernement veut parler une belle parole quand ça vient à la pauvreté, mais quant à l'action, il n'y en a pas.

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

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm pleased to participate and support this particular piece of legislation for a couple of reasons. This legislation will keep the government's feet to the fire as a result of a requirement that we come back to this Legislative Assembly and report on progress that's being made in our fight against poverty.

I was very pleased to be part of the cabinet committee on poverty reduction, chaired so ably by my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services. It was a first for the province of Ontario: to have a cabinet committee dedicated to coming forward with an action plan to reduce poverty, to bring in specific targets.

Some of the initiatives, obviously, that I'm pleased with include the Ontario child benefit, which is in place and in effect, and children are benefiting from that; and

social housing, affordable housing, which is part of my portfolio. I'm pleased that we were able to sign an agreement with the previous federal government for an affordable housing program that is seeing literally tens of thousands of individuals in Ontario get a break in terms of the cost of housing, which is, in many instances, their single largest cost when it comes to their household budget. I'm also pleased that the current federal government has agreed with us that they need to be back in the affordable housing business.

Last week, I was at 20 Rochester, in the riding of Ottawa Centre, with my colleague Yasir Naqvi and other members of the Legislature, including Phil McNeely, and I was asked a question about the minimum wage: "Are you going too fast?" And I said, "The Liberal approach is a balanced approach." There's one party that wants us to raise the minimum wage overnight and another party that doesn't want us to increase the minimum wage at all. We've taken a balanced, thoughtful approach where we're bringing in incremental increases to the minimum wage—again, in our fight against poverty, to help some of the most vulnerable in our community.

I look forward to this debate continuing, and I'd ask members to support this very progressive piece of legislation.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: The very first thing that comes to mind is that the member from Newmarket–Aurora, in his time here, has always shown great compassion for people who have lost hope and opportunity. I guess what's happened is, he's trying to make sure that we address the first, primary issue, and that is creating opportunities for people to take advantage of.

I recall the first remark I heard, I believe from Premier McGuinty, during the first signs of the economy tipping. He said—I think it was in reference to some of my constituents, the auto sector—there's a slight contraction. Well, it was anything but; it was more like a coronary attack rather than a slight contraction.

We see the trouble now, and what has the reaction been? Well, it's been in typical Liberal fashion, quite honestly: tax and spend. They've raised the health tax, and now almost every hospital is in deficit. We know that the whole long-term-care system was promised more money: \$6,000 more for the care of persons in long-term care. How much is there? There's less. In fact, they haven't built any new facilities for long-term care—to take care of the hospitals.

So I'm very concerned for those vulnerable people, as we march towards a deepening recession with a government that has no plan except to spend more money—which is future taxes—and now we're talking about a strategy to address poverty.

The member for Newmarket–Aurora concentrated on five key actions that the minister would take. I think he had it right when he said the timing of it is almost strategically mapped out to avoid the problem. Imagine not consulting extensively with all of the people who wanted to participate in the public process leading up to Bill 154.

This is nothing more than more chatter with no solutions. I am so disappointed in the minister's actions this morning.

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you for giving me a chance to comment on the speaker from Newmarket–Aurora. I listened to him for 20 minutes, speaking about his record when he was in government, and he was taking pride in cutting the welfare rolls by 24% and making more poor. He was also taking pride in deregulating most industries in the province of Ontario, many different regulators in this province. And what happened? We had the Walkerton tragedy. He was taking pride in cutting taxes for the wealthy. What happened? It affected the most vulnerable people among us, affected our health care, our education—and all this just to make the wealthy wealthier.

Our approach to deal with poverty is a great approach. As you heard from many different speakers who spoke before us in this place, who talked about our plan, our strategy, to support the poor and support the vulnerable people among us, to create affordable homes across the province of Ontario, to house the people who cannot afford to have a regular home—all of these strategies are taking place in the province of Ontario. I know the dilemmas are huge, the disaster—we are facing a challenging time—but you know, due to the leadership of the Minister of Children and Youth Services in this province and the chair of the cabinet committee to reduce poverty in this province, we are going to see the light at the end of the tunnel, because we are on the right track, going in the right direction.

0950

I want to applaud our government, and I'll applaud the minister and all of our government for the job they do on a daily basis on behalf of all of us in this great province of Ontario to address this very issue, because it's important to all of us. We cannot prosper in this province when we walk alone. We have to bring all of us, all of the people from every economic level, to walk together. It's the only way we will have a prosperous future.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I will return now to the member for Newmarket–Aurora, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to thank my colleagues who commented on my remarks: the members from London–Fanshawe, Durham, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the member from Timmins–James Bay.

In response to the member from Timmins–James Bay, who said that he found it hard to take that I would speak in support of supporting the most vulnerable in our community, I want to say with all due respect that he does not have a corner on compassion. In all of my life, it has been a core value of mine that we have a collective responsibility to support those in our communities who cannot support or help themselves because of circumstances in their life. That core value informed me in my life prior to coming to this place, and it continues to

inform my opinions and my view to social justice as a member of this Legislature. It's in the context of what I personally believe that I entered in this debate today. And it's with this that I appeal to this government to move beyond the empty rhetoric of the bill before us and to put in place a substantive plan that will, in fact, address the poverty issues, not simply by way of a pronouncement, but by way of real action.

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

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being reasonably close to 10 a.m., this House stands in recess until 10 a.m.

The House recessed from 0953 to 1000.

LEGISLATIVE MACE MASSE PARLEMENTAIRE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It being 10 a.m., I do now adjourn the House during pleasure.

Members, pray be seated.

Please open the doors so we can invite our special guests to enter the chamber and be seated.

Honourable members, it is my pleasure this morning to introduce to you representatives of those organizations which have contributed to the successful completion of the Mine to Mace project.

Before I do so, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, Michael Gravelle, whose ministry acted, first, as a liaison between De Beers and the Legislative Assembly, then as the coordinator for all those who contributed goods or services to the project.

Please allow me in particular to recognize the efforts of Rob Merwin, executive director, diamond sector unit at the ministry, whose enthusiasm for and logistical organization of this project contributed mightily to its completion.

The story begins approximately 1,150 kilometres north of here, in the James Bay lowlands. The area is home to the Attawapiskat First Nation, and that community has been an integral part of the success of De Beers Canada's Victor mine. Today, the community is proudly represented here by Chief Theresa Hall of the Attawapiskat First Nation.

Chief Hall is accompanied by Nicole Edwards. Nicole is a graduate of the De Beers process plant trainee program. Members will be interested to know that Nicole is also the aunt of one of our former pages, Jordan Edwards. Welcome to both of you, and thank you for helping us mark this historic occasion.

The origin of the Mine to Mace project lies with De Beers Canada, which has generously gifted the people of Ontario with three diamonds from the first commercial production of the Victor mine. This gift will commemorate in a lasting way the historic discovery of Ontario's

diamonds and the industry that produces them. Joining us today is Mr. Jim Gowans, president of De Beers Canada.

The stones chosen for this unusual project were expertly hand-picked by Ontario's chief gemologist, Ron Gashinski. Mr. Gashinski can attest to the purity of the diamonds extracted from the Victor mine, and he made certain that the quality of these particular stones would equal their intended setting.

Many of you took the opportunity to view the cutting and polishing of one of the diamonds right here at Queen's Park a couple of weeks ago. This was made possible by Crossworks Manufacturing, who were good enough to provide the cutting and polishing tools and the services of an expert diamond cutter, Jack Lu. We are pleased to have Uri Ariel, president of Crossworks Manufacturing, with us this morning.

Every diamond needs a setting, and every setting should be platinum. The Sudbury platinum used for the mace setting was graciously donated by Vale Inco. Jennifer Sloan, executive vice-president of corporate affairs, represents Vale Inco here this morning.

Casting the setting which would fix the diamonds to the mace proved to be possibly one of the greater challenges of this project. However, its success is a tribute to the skill and tenacity of the Corona Jewellery Company, represented here by its president, John Minister. Corona also arranged to have the mace cleaned and replated in preparation for the diamond setting.

Finally, Reena Ahluwalia is a Toronto-based jewellery designer who is world renowned. It was Reena who created the setting design for the diamonds in the mace. The design incorporates two diamonds, one rough and one polished. Its designer has described the setting as a spiralling form that gently secures the rough stone signifying the mine. The spiral itself leads up to the polished diamond, symbolizing the promise of prosperity. The design is intended to convey the concept of "communities coming together to elevate the emerging status of the diamond industry in Ontario."

Members will be interested to know that this project has been particularly special to Reena, since it converges with a remnant of her childhood. Reena's grandfather, T. H. Tembhe, was the Speaker of the House in the province of Madhya Pradesh in India. Reena told me she can recall her grandfather wearing his robes and regaling her with stories of Parliament, memories that have made her recent visits here to the assembly warmly familiar. Reena, thanks.

To all of you, and to those in the gallery who have also been involved in this project, I am pleased, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, to express sincere appreciation for your efforts towards making this once nebulous idea come to fruition. Thank you all very much.

Originally a medieval weapon, and once the symbol of the supremacy of the crown, the mace was first used for ceremonial purposes in 13th-century England and France. In modern times, it symbolizes the authority of the Speaker and signifies the independence of Parliament. It

also serves as a potent reminder of our parliamentary heritage and tradition.

Ontario's current mace was crafted by Charles Zollikofer in 1867. It is made of gilded copper and is the third mace used in the province's history. The original mace, taken out of retirement and pressed into service this past January, dates back to 1792, and will once again be placed on display in the lobby.

Today, this assembly is presented with a mace transformed. The placement of the diamonds in Ontario's mace represents the uniqueness of our northern community and the wealth of our mineral resources, merged with one of the most powerful symbols of this province's parliamentary democracy. The parliamentary symbolism is in turn represented on the girdle of the polished diamond, which is inscribed with the motto of the Legislative Assembly, "Audi alteram partem"—hear the other side.

Now I would like to recognize the Premier.

1010

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, on behalf of the government, I would like to thank everyone who was involved in this wonderful project, the restoration of Ontario's mace. Not only has it been repaired, it has also been renewed, with the addition, as you mentioned, of two diamonds.

Je dis souvent que nous sommes au mieux lorsque nous travaillons ensemble. Par conséquent, il convenait que pour ce projet, un tel nombre de personnes se réunissent pour ajouter un nouveau chapitre à la riche histoire et aux traditions de l'Ontario.

I often say that we work best when we work together, so it is fitting that for this project so many people came together to add to the rich tapestry of Ontario's history and traditions.

As you mentioned, Speaker, the diamonds used in this project were generously provided by De Beers Canada from their Victor mine near Attawapiskat. I can mention in passing that I had the good fortune to visit the Victor mine and the community of Attawapiskat, and it is a great pleasure to welcome Chief Theresa Hall from the Attawapiskat First Nation to our Legislature today. Ontario's chief gemologist, Ron Gashinski, hand-picked the stones. The platinum used in the setting was mined in Ontario and provided by Vale Inco Ltd. The setting was crafted by Corona Jewellery Canada. The diamond cutting tools and master cutter Jack Lu were supplied by Crossworks Manufacturing. They tell me that Jack and those tools have been hard at work for more than 30 hours here in the Legislature to shape one of the diamonds. Finally, I want to thank Reena Ahluwalia for designing such a symbolic setting.

I might add one further thanks. Speaker, I am convinced that if it were not for you and your usual good humour and enthusiasm, this is not a project that would have achieved the success that it has. So, on behalf of everyone here, I thank you as well.

Le diamant brut est un exemple de la richesse naturelle de l'Ontario et sa forme polie nous rappelle ce que notre magnifique province est capable d'accomplir.

The rough diamond signifies Ontario's natural riches and leads to the polished stone reminding us what our great province is capable of. The mace is a symbol of our heritage and parliamentary democracy. It represents the authority of the Speaker and the supremacy of our laws. Its history in the provincial assembly is both long and distinguished, and now with two of Ontario's first-ever mined diamonds added, it represents much more than that. It shows the wealth of our resources, the strength of our manufacturers, the talent of our artisans and, above all, the spirit of our people: their commitment to democracy, the value they place in our shared heritage, and their unrelenting drive for progress.

Au nom du gouvernement, je remercie toutes les personnes qui ont permis à cet événement de se produire, et je suis heureux de m'associer à mes collègues pour souligner le retour de la masse à l'Assemblée législative.

Again, on behalf of the government, I thank everyone who made today possible. I am pleased to join my colleagues in welcoming the return of our mace and all that it represents.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, Premier. The Leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: There may be a little repetition in terms of my comments with respect to your contributions, Speaker, and the Premier's, but I think this is one of those memorable occasions when repetition is appropriate.

It's an honour to rise on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to comment on the return of the mace, now fitted with two diamonds courtesy of De Beers. The diamonds, as we've heard, come from the first commercial production of the Victor diamond mine near Attawapiskat in northern Ontario.

For those watching and wondering why this is a significant event, I thought I'd take just a few moments to explain and perhaps elaborate beyond what the Speaker did, in terms of the special place that the mace occupies in parliamentary history, dating as far back as the first meetings of Parliament in England in the 13th century.

Our lineage of maces in this province has a colourful and interesting history. The first mace of Ontario was used in the chamber of Upper Canada's first Parliament in 1792 at Newark, which is now Niagara-on-the-Lake. It was crafted, we're told, from wood, either pine or fir. When the Parliament of Upper Canada moved to York, now Toronto, so did the mace, only to be stolen during the War of 1812 by the United States Navy. It was returned in 1934 under special goodwill orders of President Franklin Roosevelt and the United States Congress. This mace was used as our backup while the mace being celebrated today was being transformed. I'm told it's going to be retired once again to public display in the main lobby of the building.

In 1845, a new mace was purchased for \$500. This mace resembled the mace used in the British House of Commons. It was silver and gilded, and adorned with gems and pearls. Unfortunately, this mace met the fate of

mace number one. It too was stolen, this time in 1849 by an unruly mob in Montreal. The mace was rescued and returned to the Speaker the very next day, but it was destined for worse. In 1854, the mace was twice rescued from fires at the Parliament buildings in Quebec. That mace was used by the Union Parliament in Toronto and Quebec until Confederation. It eventually ended up in the House of Commons in Ottawa, but didn't survive the fire of February 3, 1916, and was reduced to a tiny ball of silver and gold.

Now the present: Our current gilded copper mace was created in 1867 by Charles Zollkofer of Ottawa. At the time it cost \$200. I'm sure its value has gone up considerably since it left the table.

I can't help but mention here that I'm sure we can all agree in this chamber that we don't want history to repeat itself. We need to keep a watchful eye on our third and recently bejewelled mace. One of our staff members already tried, I'm told unsuccessfully, to get the diamond cutter to cut two pieces of glass from old Coke bottles for the mace instead of the diamonds.

As the Speaker mentioned, the mace has evolved from a weapon in medieval times to a symbol of the Speaker's authority in current times. Just as the hockey game can't start until the puck is dropped at centre ice, the House can't begin until the mace takes centre stage on the Clerk's table in front of the Speaker. With its distinct history and lineage, the mace has also come to represent our rich parliamentary heritage, of which we in this province are extremely proud.

To know where you're going is to understand where you've been. The mace also symbolizes our belief in parliamentary democracy, both literally and figuratively. The girdle of the stones on the mace bears the inscription of our motto at the Legislative Assembly, "Audi alteram partem"—my old the Latin teacher would be proud of me—which means, "Hear the other side."

Interjections.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I didn't say a word. We cannot debate freely yet civilly in this chamber unless the mace is in its rightful place on the table, a sign that the House is in session.

I'd be remiss in ending my remarks without thanking, on behalf of the entire Progressive Conservative caucus, all of those involved in the Mine to Mace project: the workers of the Victor diamond mine who extracted the diamonds from deep within the ground of northern Ontario; Ontario's chief gemologist, Ron Gashinsky; De Beers, of course, for their generous gift of the two diamonds, and a third diamond that is going to be on display at a later date in an exhibit about the mace; of course, Chief Hall and the people of the Attawapiskat First Nation for their successful partnership with De Beers in the Victor mine project; Crossworks Manufacturing for supplying an expert diamond cutter; Corona Jewellery for incorporating the setting on the mace; and Vale Inco Ltd. for supplying the Sudbury platinum. I'd also like to thank the designer, Reena Ahluwalia. As the Speaker mentioned, Reena's grandfather was a Speaker in India, so

this project undoubtedly holds a special place in her heart.

In closing, I hope that our improved mace will inspire us all in this chamber to offer valuable debate that is pure and true, just like the diamonds that it now holds.

1020

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On the historic occasion of the reintroduction of Ontario's mace, I'm honoured to rise in this House and to speak to one of the great symbols of our provincial Legislature and to the gift bestowed upon the people of Ontario today, for, as everyone in this House knows, there has been a great deal of work and a great amount of collaboration to bring our mace, in its renewed form, back here to its rightful place in this House.

The mace is an extraordinary symbol of democracy. It speaks to the value Ontarians place on the democratic processes that occur within the walls of this very building and to the highest hopes and standards that each one of us brings to our work in the Legislature each and every day. This mace tells the story of the hard-working women and men of Ontario, some of whom helped to reinvigorate our mace, and the many, many more who should be a constant reminder to us elected members of the people we are meant to serve here.

On this occasion, we do owe a debt of gratitude. The transformation of our mace is a generous gift from a number of individuals and organizations. De Beers Canada donated three diamonds, two of which are now set in the mace. These exceptionally valuable diamonds, selected by Ontario's chief gemologist, Ron Gashinski, are from the first commercial production of the Victor mine near Attawapiskat First Nation and the James Bay lowlands. They are some of the finest diamonds in the world and De Beers's \$1-billion project is a reality because the company decided that it would not move forward without the buy-in of our First Nations.

The process was a unique one. In the absence of public policy, the De Beers organization took considerable time to engage First Nations in the process of developing this mine. It wasn't an easy process for First Nations and it wasn't an easy process for the company. First Nations leaders worked very hard over a number of years to determine how best to ensure that the interests of their people and communities would be served. Together with the company, all of the James Bay First Nations negotiated impact benefit agreements, which provide for jobs, economic opportunities and other benefits.

With us here today, of course, is First Nations leader Theresa Hall, Chief of the Attawapiskat First Nation. I've had the opportunity as well to see the mine first-hand before it was in full production—it was still under construction—and to visit Attawapiskat and other First Nations communities along the James Bay coast, communities like Peawanuck and Fort Albany.

But there are others that we should salute also for this magnificent mace: Reena Ahluwalia, an internationally renowned and locally based jewellery artist who designed the setting and worked with Toronto's Corona Jewellery Company; Vale Inco Ltd. of Sudbury, which donated the

platinum used in its setting; expert diamond cutter Jack Lu from Crossworks Manufacturing, a Canadian diamond-cutting firm, who donated the more than 30 hours of work it took to cut these fine diamonds—and I have to say it was an excellent brainstorm, whoever thought of it, to have that happening right in our building. It was an amazing opportunity for people who visited the Legislature to see the work that was being done by Mr. Lu as he cut those diamonds to be put into the mace.

On behalf of New Democrats, I want to thank you all, all of these individuals and companies, for your generous donations to the people of Ontario. But I want to talk very briefly about the mace as well. Its symbolism is great. We've already heard that in medieval times it was used as a weapon, but today the mace represents the Speaker of the House's authority and role in overseeing proceedings of this Legislature. The mace symbolizes the transfer of power from the crown to the people, as represented by their members of provincial Parliament. The mace should stand as a reminder of the work that elected members have signed up for to serve the interests and the needs of all Ontarians. It should stand as a reminder of the democratic principles that lay at the very foundation of our Legislature.

Here, today, as we lay eyes for the first time on our renewed mace in its proper place, we should also be wise to take a moment to pause and think about its significance. It represents the hard work and collaboration of people from across our great province. It should also remind the members of this House of the hard work ahead of us and the demands placed on us to stand up for all Ontarians who look to us for leadership during these specifically and especially difficult economic times.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1025 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I am pleased to recognize guests of page Michael Niven, who is the page captain today. He is from Providence Bay on Manitoulin Island, an area that you know very well, Mr Speaker, and are also familiar with his parents' restaurant.

In the members' gallery east, we have his mother and father, Greg and Heather Niven, and his sister Maddy. We have Craig Cress and Donnie Schramm, Dr. John Brebner and Ardith Brebner, Barry Snztzinger—did I get that right?—and Bev Ritz. Welcome.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my pleasure to introduce the members of the Save Our Structures steering committee, who have worked long and hard for those in social housing—Susan Gapka, Wally Simpson, Karlene Steer, Kathrine Wallace and Lyn McCormick—with no small success.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just want to recognize the guests who were in the Speaker's gallery earlier for the Mine to Mace project presentation.

From De Beers were Derek Teevan, Ashley Brown, Peter Mah, Rachel Pineault, Tom Ormsby, Daphne Wace, Simon O'Brien, Ingrid Hann, Kathleen Gowans and Annie Stavridis.

From Vale Inco, Cory McPhee and Brad Ryder; from Corona Jewellery, Michael Minister; from Crossworks Manufacturing, Dylan Dix; Kamal Ahluwalia; the family of Ron Gashinski, his son Michael, daughter Laurie, his son-in-law John Pringle and his grandson Matthew Crosgrove; and from the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, Christine Kaszycki and Rob Merwin.

There being no further introductions, it's now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The question is for the Premier. Premier, this weekend's National Post reports that auto sales in Canada will fall 10% this year from 2008; that's representing 200,000 units lost. On March 12, my colleague the member from Halton asked your deputy to consider a provision in the upcoming budget for a three-month PST holiday on new car sales. That's a win-win measure, in our view, for everyone. It gives overtaxed consumers a break, and it will stimulate car sales, which is good news for car dealers and carmakers. Premier, can you confirm that a PST holiday on new car sales will be part of Thursday's budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. I know that my honourable colleague knows I can't confirm what's going to be in the budget on Thursday, particularly insofar as tax measures are concerned. I know that my honourable colleague understands that.

We have received quite a bit of advice, including this particular measure, that would have some benefit to the auto sector. I can tell you that the Minister of Finance has the responsibility to take into consideration all the varied advice we have received. I certainly sense that there is a strong consensus in this House that we need to find more ways to lend further strength to our auto sector, and that's going to be in part what the budget is going to speak to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The Premier has a puzzling standard in terms of releasing budget information, as we saw his colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs making an announcement last week.

Premier, a PST holiday on new car and truck sales has a proven track record. It was introduced in 1980 by a Progressive Conservative government. When that happened, car sales jumped 17%. The member from Haldimand-Norfolk proposed the PST holiday in a letter to your Minister of Finance last January. He never got a response. Premier, why won't you confirm that there will be a PST holiday in Thursday's budget? Or are you simply not prepared to give the PC Party any credit for a budget proposal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague mentioned that there was a lack of response. Just so we're clear in terms of the approach that we try to bring, we offered, and it was gracefully accepted by the Conservatives, a technical briefing by the Deputy Minister of Finance as to the state of the economy. That was accepted—I think it was Mr. Hudak who accepted that—and also a meeting with the Minister of Finance, so we could hear directly with respect to their views for the budget. So there was an openness on our part to hear them out in that regard.

I can only say once again to the leader of the official opposition that we've received a number of pieces of advice as to how we might improve the strength of the auto sector in the province of Ontario. We've got to find a way in our budget to reconcile some of the advice. Some is conflicting, I might say, but we certainly remain very much committed to strengthening the sector here in Ontario.

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We hear this kind of rhetoric on regular occasions from the Premier and some of his colleagues, that they're prepared to consider opposition ideas on the economy, but then they simply dismiss them out of hand at the end of the day. If the Premier had done a little more listening over the last five years, Ontario's economy wouldn't be in the mess it's in today.

Our proposal will also have an immediate positive impact that's not dependent on the broader discussions on the auto industry's future in Ontario. Premier, why won't you commit to this hand up to the auto industry, an initiative that I believe has the support of taxpayers, car dealers and carmakers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure I can add much more of value to what I've already said. This is one idea among many that speak to the challenges faced by our auto sector. We are working with all parts of the sector, whether it's suppliers, labour, management, folks involved in financing the sector, to see what we can do to strengthen the sector.

We have a table in Ottawa, involving all of the players as well, to see where we can go working together with the federal government. But I do share fully the sentiment which is embodied in the proposal put forward by the Conservatives, which is that we need to find a way together to further strengthen the sector. We remain very much committed to doing that.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier, and again it's about fuelling Ontario's economic engine. Last Thursday, members of the PC caucus put forward another proposal to help the auto industry. In partnership with the federal budget's proposed Retire Your Ride program, we're proposing a \$2,000 credit to Ontarians toward the purchase or lease of a new car after turning in their vehicles of 10 years or older. So again, Premier, you've selectively leaked a number of initiatives out of this year's

budget. Will you confirm today that a Retire Your Ride credit will be included in Thursday's budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I can't speak to a specific tax measure in the budget. I know that my honourable colleague understands that. What I can say, and I know that my colleague would not want to lose sight of this, is that there are costs associated with each and every one of these measures. If there were to be a full uptake of this particular proposal, it would cost the treasury \$4 billion. I'm not saying that it would go that far, but if there were only a 10% uptake, I think the cost is \$400 million. So there are costs associated with each of these. There are competing demands, whether we need to do more for health care, for education, for environmental protection, for forestry, for mining, for the auto sector, and the Minister of Finance's privilege is to find a way to reconcile all of these competing interests and come up with a budget that speaks to the values of Ontarians.

1040

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I suspect the Premier is painting a worst-case scenario in terms of revenue loss. We're going to have revenue investments and revenue returns with respect to this kind of a program. There are partnerships with the federal government that could be worked out. There is job creation which is going to generate tax revenue as well. This is an initiative, a suggestion, a proposal, that I think merits serious attention. The idea has global appeal. Germany has been very successful with a scrappage fee. Italy's proposal along these lines is, as we understand it, working well with respect to hybrid vehicles. France and Spain have also introduced similar programs, with great success. Premier, will you include our retire-your-ride proposal in the budget and provide that much-needed stimulus to the auto industry and Ontario's economy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't think a Minister of Finance has ever been more thorough than has this one of late in preparation for this budget. I think that's perfectly appropriate, in keeping with the extent of the challenge before us. He has received all kinds of suggestions and ideas and proposals and recommendations and pieces of advice on so many fronts. We cannot possibly do everything. But as I've said many times in the past, we will do everything that we can to both strengthen the economy and provide support for our families as they seek to weather this economic storm. That is kind of the gist of where the budget is going to go: to help Ontarians weather the storm and strengthen the economy at the same time.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: One of my colleagues reminded me that the Premier, when he's talking about the auto sector, has frequently talked about the triggering of so many benefits in the economy when a car is sold. I want to suggest to him that this program has, I think, and our party believes, widespread support and can have an enormous benefit to the economy in Ontario. It has support, certainly, from the automobile dealers' association. They believe that this scrappage program that we've proposed will benefit the environment, make our roads

safer and stimulate new sales of autos. If you take one 1987-model-year automobile off the road, it will reduce smog emissions by an equivalent of 37 2007-model-year automobiles.

Premier, there are over two million pre-1997-model cars currently on the roads. Again I ask you, will you support our proposed scrappage fee program?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think the honourable member is aware of my answer now on this score. Let me just take the opportunity to talk a little bit more about why it is that we need to strengthen the economy. This could be one measure that might be incorporated into that. We need to strengthen the economy because, while we don't know when this worldwide recession will come to an end, we know one thing for certain: It will end. And when it does end, we want Ontario to be ready to seize the new possibilities to be found in that post-recession world. That's why, just as we are committed to finding ways to help Ontarians weather the storm, we are also equally committed to building a brighter future by investing in our economy today. This is one of many measures which we are considering as we seek to strengthen the economy.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: These are tough times for Ontario families. Since October, we've lost some 160,000 jobs in the province—an average of over 30,000 jobs a month. That's a lot of families feeling a lot of pain. While Ontarians are looking for a government that is going to protect their jobs, the Premier is talking about sales tax harmonization, a move that would drive up the cost of basic necessities for families. Why, in this time of crisis, is the Premier looking to nickel-and-dime Ontario families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. I think my honourable colleague knows that we have received advice, and I think there seems to be a fairly broad consensus among businesses—not all are supportive of this measure, but there seems to be a fairly strong consensus among businesses—that we ought to adopt a single sales tax here in Ontario. That's the strong recommendation of many economists as well.

As I've said in the past, it's not the kind of thing that we can possibly entertain unless we have significant support from the federal government and unless we can put in place measures to protect families. Just so we're clear with respect to that particular approach, if there was a way for us to pull that all together, that might be something that we'd want to consider. But again, I just want to make it absolutely clear: While we're receiving strong requests from the business community in this regard, we can't do this without support from the federal government, and we would never do this unless there was a way that we could also protect our families.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, the Premier has been quite clear about his thoughts around this issue, but what

we need to be clear is that the Premier is not going to be implementing this, and he needs to tell families that very clearly. Instead of focusing on jobs, however, he's talking about it. We're hearing comments constantly that this is something that is on his agenda and on his mind. Instead of slapping an 8% tax on basic goods, which means things like \$1.76 more for diapers, \$1.04 more for girls' shoes, 72 cents for children's vitamins—these are all the kinds of things that people buy every single week, the kinds of things that go in the grocery cart every time people go grocery shopping. Especially in times of difficulty, families do not need this extra tax.

So I need the Premier to very clearly state right now, to tell Ontario families, that he is definitely not going to move ahead with the plan to raise sales taxes in this province.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure I could be any more clear with respect to our resolve on a couple of fronts. It's not the kind of thing that we could undertake without significant support from the federal government. It's not the kind of thing that we would undertake unless we can put in place measures that would protect Ontario families.

But I say to my honourable colleague, I'm just wondering if the party's position has now changed, because it had recommended—I have a letter from November 2007, under then-leader Mr. Hampton, recommending that we increase the PST to fill in the space that had formerly been occupied by the GST. Now, that would have resulted in an increase in sales taxes for Ontarians. I'm just wondering if that remains their position, because it seems to conflict with the position that this particular leader is taking today.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I know the Premier knows how to do math, and that would have been a zero-sum game, but nonetheless. We also know, and the Premier talked about it in the scrums this morning, that the very high-level talks that he claims need to happen with the federal government are, in fact, already under way. That's something that he admitted to just this very morning.

The family of the auto parts worker in Etobicoke is wondering how she's going to be able to replace her lost income; the Premier says, “8% more taxes.” To the pulp and paper mill worker in Thunder Bay, the Premier says, “8% more.” To families hit hard by layoffs at Xstrata, the Bay, Nortel and CTV, the Premier says, “8% more.” Why won't the Premier assure Ontarians unequivocally, right now, in this Legislature, that Thursday won't mean 8% more for them and their families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think I've spoken to the specifics of the question, but just to speak more directly to Ontarians, we have to find a way and we will find a way, through this budget, to both meet the urgent needs of our families today and, at the same time, build a stronger economy for the future. We need the Ontario economy to grow stronger; we need it to be more com-

petitive. We need our businesses to hire more Ontarians so that they can enjoy better standards of living, so that we can create more wealth in Ontario, so that we can, in turn, support good schools, good health care, good environmental protections and supports for our vulnerable. That's what it's all about.

I wish I would hear just a few more ideas from the leader of the NDP when it comes to suggestions as to what we might do to strengthen our economy, to strengthen the competitiveness of Ontario businesses so they can hire more people and create more wealth to support our public services.

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This question is to the Premier. Across Ontario, there is a growing feeling of outrage about how laid-off workers are being treated in this province. Plant after plant, from the auto belt of southwestern Ontario to the sawmills of the north, workers by the thousands are being denied monies legally owed to them by employers who just don't seem to care. Despite the real pain and suffering of so many workers and their families, we have a government here refusing to act as the scale of this tragedy continues to grow, with more layoffs, more plant closures every day.

1050

Our Bill 6, which passed second reading in this Legislature back in 2007 and in fact went to committee, directly deals with this particular issue. I need to know why this government has refused to act on Bill 6.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: One of the areas where I believe that we can make common cause—the government and the New Democratic Party and working people in Ontario—is to convince the federal government that it needs to make changes to its bankruptcy legislation to ensure that working men and women receive preferred creditor status. At this point in time, should a company fail, should it go bankrupt, it turns out that banks and insurance companies, for example, would rate ahead of those who had been employed at the plant. We think that there should be a change to the federal laws to better protect our working men and women so that in the case of a business failure, their salaries, their compensation, would rank ahead of corporate interests.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is not just a federal issue. The primary responsibility for the sorry state of affairs lies right here with your government, the government of Ontario.

What we're talking about here are monies that are legally owed to workers, in the form of back pay, vacation pay and severance. What we're talking about are monies that are owed to loyal workers, workers who have given their lifetime to their employer.

So the question is this: Why has this government refused to make the necessary changes to the Ontario Employment Standards Act—and that's the legislation that

Bill 6 would amend—to protect workers from employers who just don't care?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member, we're all very saddened when anybody loses their job or when a company closes its doors.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: The Premier, my predecessors and I have written—I've heard some of the members over there say, "Have you written? Have you advocated on this?" Yes, we have. We want to change the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to make an employee a super-first-status creditor. That's what we are asking for. I'm now asking the new leader of the third party, has she called her federal counterpart in Ottawa and asked that they do the same? Have your members contacted your MPs and asked them to change the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act? That is what we have done.

We have also advocated on the wage earner protection program—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: No, we're writing and advocating to our own government to do something to Ontario laws to make a difference for Ontario workers. That's what we're doing.

Since neither the minister nor the Premier seems to want to take responsibility for the issue, I'll tell him exactly what he needs to do. He should create a wage earner protection fund, as outlined in Bill 6, that would fully compensate workers for back pay, severance pay and holiday pay that is legally owed to them in this province. He should make changes to the Employment Standards Act that require justification for plant closures and support interventions to help keep plants open.

There are growing voices of outrage and concern in this province as we see workers walk out the doors of these plants. These laid-off workers are being treated terribly, and it's your responsibility, Minister.

Why does this government continue to ignore the voices and the plight of these workers, who deserve what is owed to them under Ontario law?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: This government has taken leadership. We have pushed the federal government on the wage earner protection program. That program has now brought forward funds. We've asked them to enrich those funds for employees who have lost their jobs.

Also, the member may or may not be aware that prior to our advocacy on the wage earner protection program, the federal government did not have termination and severance as part of that legislation. We have pushed for that. We are also asking that that be retroactive to when the wage earner protection program came into place, which was July 2008.

We continue to advocate for the hard-working men and women of this province. I would hope that that member would do the same and pick up the phone and call her federal counterpart in Ottawa.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier. Today we learned that in Ontario, employment insurance requests in January were up a staggering 43% from that time last year. Premier, that is 54,500 people who are out of work lined up at the EI office. These are part of the same families who have given you some \$27 billion in increased revenue, largely through higher taxes. You've spent every penny, so that when times got tough, the cupboards are bare. You have no plans for jobs. You've spent every penny. You've plunged us deeper in debt.

Premier, isn't this a spectacular failure in your leadership?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Michael Bryant: The government's industrial strategy is, has been and will continue to be to jump-start businesses, particularly at this time, to allow them to jump ahead of their competitors. That's why the government has invested, through grants programs, the Next Generation of Jobs Fund, loans programs, the advanced manufacturing strategy—both of which the member voted against—and made investments of millions of dollars. That has leveraged, in fact, billions of dollars of investment in this province. This capacity of the government to make these direct investments in businesses gives Ontario a jurisdictional advantage, one that will allow some businesses that are in the midst of consolidation battles to survive, which will allow them to thrive coming out of the recession. We'll continue with that strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'd say back to the minister, the EI requests in Hamilton are up 69%; in London, 70.3%; in Windsor, an incredible 81.6% increase in EI requests. You tell those folks what you're doing to jump-start our economy.

The Ontario PC caucus has brought forward good ideas to bring jobs back to our province and help working families. We've talked about a PST holiday on new car purchases. We talked about trading in older polluting cars for \$2,000 to put toward a new or leased car. That will jump-start jobs in our province. That will help our auto sector.

Surely to goodness, as the Minister of Economic Development, you're going to favour both of those proposals?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I say to the member, he was certainly supporting the investment in Stanpac Inc., a \$2.85-million investment in his riding in Niagara West-Glanbrook. He mentioned Windsor. The government invested \$7.1 million in Valiant; in PM Plastics in Windsor as well, significant investments to leverage millions of dollars of investments. The member, I believe, also made reference to Simcoe-Grey. The member Mr. Wilson will know about the \$15-million investment that's been made in his region, in particular to Honda.

We have been making, in every pocket of this province from the west to the east to the north, investments

directly into companies that in turn have leveraged greater investments that, in fact, have allowed us to be in a position in this province to thrive with those particular businesses, to grow those businesses—

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

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Tomorrow, hearings begin for Bill 139, the minister's own bill looking to amend the Employment Standards Act. Will the minister make the viable and necessary amendments that are possible within the parameters of this bill to protect vulnerable foreign caregivers and workers who are so poorly protected?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Something has to be done when it comes to our live-in caregiver program. Now, through Bill 139, through temp help agencies—I have consulted with ministry officials and they have told me that it is outside the scope of that legislation.

But what I am continuing to do, when it comes to the live-in caregiver program, is advocate with the federal government. I know that they are bringing forward some proposed amendments to the temporary foreign worker program. I hope that they address the poor practices that we are seeing.

I also have a call scheduled today to speak with Minister Allan, the Minister of Labour for Manitoba, and see some of the steps they have taken to address some of the precarious practices that we have seen out there.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?
1100

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's astounding that the minister would ask a federal Conservative government to make the reforms that the minister could make immediately.

The Manitoba government has not shirked responsibility on this matter. Manitoba has taken action on licensing and regulating nanny recruitment agencies. In fact, the Manitoba Minister of Labour, Nancy Allan, is asking Ontario to borrow from that legislation. To quote her, "I wish that Fonseca would look at Manitoba's legislation. We can't be finger-pointing here and off-loading responsibility for this.... It's modern-day slavery, and we're going to put an end to it." That's what she said.

Will the minister follow the lead of the Manitoba legislation and make the necessary amendments to Bill 139 to put an end to the exploitation of foreign caregivers?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member that, first off, she should understand, and she should be calling her federal counterpart, that it is the federal government's responsibility to administer and monitor the live-in caregiver program. I don't know if the member heard me, but I will be speaking to the Minister of Labour for Manitoba, Nancy Allan, later today. I have a call scheduled in to her, and I will be speaking about some of the steps that they are taking. But this is the responsibility of the federal government, and we implore them to do their job.

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

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Dave Levac: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In late February, the communities of Dunnville and Cayuga in Haldimand county were severely impacted by the flooding of the Grand River. The severe flooding along the Grand River caused damages to the homes of many area residents and strained the resources of the community as they coped with this very unfortunate, dangerous and urgent situation.

At the time, because of a situation that you assisted with previously, I contacted your office to find out what steps could be taken by Dunnville and Cayuga to obtain support and assistance from the ministry. It's through the work of Councillor Lorne Boyko that this issue was brought to my attention, and I want to acknowledge his hard work and that of Mayor Marie Trainer and all of council who are dedicated to supporting their community.

I understand that the minister recently received an application for a disaster area to be declared for the impacted regions. Could the minister please inform the House of the status of this request today?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me begin by thanking the honourable member for Brant, who has been front and centre in supporting the people of Dunnville and Cayuga in their time of need. This in fact is not even his riding, yet he's taking the time to get in touch with our ministry to help out. I'm not sure where the local MPP from the Conservative side is on this important issue, but thank goodness those folks in Haldimand county do have the support of the member from Brant.

Mr. Tim Hudak: On a point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Niagara West—Glanbrook is of the understanding that we do not raise points of order in here. I'll just stop the clock.

But I would say to the minister that I believe that you were crossing a line in specifically making reference to another member of the House, a member who is not present today. I would just ask that he withdraw his comment, please.

Hon. Jim Watson: I withdraw, but I'm still very pleased that the member from Brant has taken a leadership role in this particular community.

I received council's March 2 resolution requesting the Ontario disaster relief assistance program. I thank the honourable member from Brant for working with the mayor of Haldimand county as well as other councillors. I have approved the request to declare a disaster for the purposes of the ODRAP program for private losses sustained during the flood event and—

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

Mr. Dave Levac: Minister, in fairness, I did contact the member from Haldimand—Norfolk and he contacted the mayor.

I know that members of the community in Dunnville and Cayuga are appreciative of the news of support from the government. It is a very important step to show

support, that when these things happen, the government is there to help during damage by flooding.

I know that over the years, other communities across Ontario have faced similar issues as a result of severe flooding and have applied to your ministry for assistance. The cases that come to my mind are the ones in East Ferris and Bonfield last year, in northwestern Ontario last summer, and of course the ones that most of us recognize and remember, the Peterborough area in 2004 that resulted in massive flooding.

For the benefit of the members of the House, so that we can better understand the process to provide municipalities with the direction that's needed to help people during a time of disaster, could the minister please outline the process by which a community can apply for assistance through ODRAP? It's an important issue, and I know that all communities along the river need that assistance—

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

Hon. Jim Watson: The individual community has to develop a disaster relief committee, which I understand they are in the process of doing in Haldimand county. I understand the committees have already begun raising funds to help cover the cost of the damage, as part of my ministry's Ontario disaster relief assistance program. We will provide a ratio of up to \$2 for every \$1 that the community has raised.

The honourable member also mentioned other floods we have been involved with in providing assistance, including in Nipissing—and my colleague from Nipissing was very helpful working with the mayor of East Ferris—Peterborough and Thunder Bay.

I thank those colleagues for working closely with the local councils, standing up to make sure they understand how the program works, and ensuring that the province of Ontario is at the table providing assistance at a very traumatic time in the lives of the people of Haldimand county.

Again, I congratulate the member for Brant for the good work he's doing in another riding.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM
FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. It concerns the borrowed billions that the government announced yesterday, \$27.5 billion, that will in large part be borrowed to make up the \$18-billion deficit that we're told will be in the budget; that in part will consist of hard-earned dollars from the taxpayers.

Given the government's track record of fiscal mismanagement in this province, will the Premier commit today to ensuring that he will table a specific plan that sets out the application and approvals process for infrastructure projects and to which his ministers will be held accountable?

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

Hon. George Smitherman: It's nice to have the honourable member from York region back on his feet again on the matter of capital. We remember from just a few weeks ago that the honourable member was on his feet on the matter of capital, and instead of using the language like he has today, he said that we're not putting enough money into local hospital projects. So we are pleased to see that the honourable member is seemingly now in favour of capital.

For a figure that is as substantial as the one that was spoken of yesterday, of course there will be a wide variety of government ministries involved in making capital expenditure. Certainly, there are some of those circumstances where it's done on an intake basis in partnership, as an example, with municipalities. Although it is a fairly complex matter, I'll certainly endeavour to keep the honourable member informed of the nature of those intakes. An example of those would be the one—

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

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to stand on my feet again to speak about capital, and I speak about it in the same context as I did when I last raised it, and that is with regard to accountability to the taxpayers of this province.

My question is very simple. If in fact this government is going to incur an \$18-billion deficit, and with those borrowed funds will fund infrastructure projects, the very least the taxpayers of this province are due is an explanation, a transparent process, of how the application is made, how it's approved and how those dollars will be rolled out over the next number of months.

Hon. George Smitherman: I could tell the honourable member that, of course, substantial investments that will be made over the course of the next two years are investments which are already slated to be made. But we will certainly be in a position to take advantage of the opportunity to show Ontarians, on a regional basis, on a localized basis, where actual investments are occurring.

So I think that the honourable member's question offers good advice. We've already got mechanisms in place, and I'll be very, very certain to work with the honourable member and all members of the House to make sure that they're aware of where these investments are going and where intakes are occurring to be able to achieve a list of additional projects. I'll certainly continue to do that in partnership with, as an example, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs—where, through the communities component of the Building Canada fund, we've recently announced almost 300 projects totalling more than \$1 billion of investment from three levels of government.

NIAGARA PARKS COMMISSION

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Premier: A 1999 review and a 2004 employee survey revealed serious concerns about the Niagara Parks Commission's governance structure, yet this government has hired a high-priced con-

sultant to review the very same matters. Instead of wasting more public money on a report that's going to tell us what we already know, why doesn't this government scrap the Niagara Parks Commission and bring its responsibilities under this government's direct authority?

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: As the member opposite knows, the Ontario Integrity Commissioner recently undertook a review of some questions that were put to her with regards to the Niagara Parks Commission. As part of her report back, she recommended that we undertake a governance review, which we were only too happy to do. We are undertaking a governance review of all of our tourism agencies. We will be starting with the Niagara Parks Commission. We are happy to respond in this way to the Integrity Commissioner's recommendations, and we will be moving forward in due course.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Kormos: The 2004 employee survey concluded: "Respondents feel that strategic decisions have been impacted by political influences which may not represent the best interests of the NPC as an entity."

So instead of hiring yet another high-priced consultant to defend a pretty rotten state of affairs at an unelected and unaccountable Niagara Parks Commission, why won't the minister realize that the best and most cost-effective decision is to simply scrap the commission altogether?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Thank you to the member for allowing me the opportunity to speak to the Integrity Commissioner's report and some of the recommendations that she made.

I do want to note that in the report she found no wrongdoing on the part of the Niagara Parks Commission board of directors, although she did feel that there needed to be some work to restore public confidence in the commission. To that end, she recommended a governance review, which we are undertaking.

As well, she recommended, and we are undertaking, to conduct a special audit of procurement and lease processes, an audit of recent procurement practices. We are providing guidance to facilitate accountability and sound business decisions, and we'll also be providing our board with additional governance training. These are all recommendations that were made by the Integrity Commissioner, which we are moving forward with forthwith.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: My question today is for the Minister of Economic Development.

I recently formed an organization in my riding that's called the Oakville Provincial Economic Council. It's composed of local leaders in business, education, labour, construction and finance. At our first meeting earlier this month, we discussed new ideas and best practices, and we're going to continue to develop them in future

meetings, hoping to see our community through these challenging economic times.

This group, like all of my constituents and like all Ontarians, is resilient and hard-working, and it knows that we have better times ahead. But, Minister, they've got concerns about what lies ahead. They've given me some great ideas about how we in Oakville can temper the effects of the recession, but I ask the minister today, what is our government doing to help Oakville and all of Ontario's communities to get through these difficult economic times?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I thank the member for his question.

The Premier, in fact, attended the Oakville Chamber of Commerce to announce the launch of the Open for Business initiative that will see the government provide assistance to businesses so as to relieve some of the pressure of the regulatory burden.

In addition to assisting businesses directly, the government invests. It invests through programs that funded major hospital projects, including the construction of a new hospital in Oakville and an expansion to the maternal child care unit at Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital. It has invested in Oakville's transportation system by providing \$386 million toward improvements to key highways, invested in innovation—\$1 million to Oakville-based Petro Sep for further research to help reduce industrial emissions across the globe—and has invested in the skills of our people—\$86 million in the region for school expansion and renewal projects. These are some of the ways in which this government, through the leadership of this member, has—

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: There are a variety of opinions out there, Minister. I've also heard from some people that now perhaps is not the time that we should be focusing on things like child poverty or expanding social housing or investing in our health care system. Instead, some argue that economic challenges demand across-the-board cost-cutting measures like the ones the Conservatives propose. We saw the effects of this in previous governments—it resulted in cuts in nursing, to social services and our teachers—and the devastating impact that that had on this province.

Minister, do you believe across-the-board cost cutting is a right strategy for Ontario's economy at this time?

Hon. Michael Bryant: No, I do not. In fact, the government is of the view that we ought to be making investments. We ought to be, in addition to making the investments that I listed directly in Oakville, making investments in social programs to preserve social programs. It's not only from an economic perspective part of the jurisdictional advantage of Ontario, but in fact, of course, it is the McGuinty government's mandate to provide these services to Ontario. That's demonstrated through the commitment to support social services, including the increase to the Ontario child benefit this July from \$600 to a maximum of \$1,100 per child per

year; creating jobs and stimulating the economy through investment and social and affordable housing; and funding for renovation and repair to create 23,000 short-term jobs over the course of the program. This is this government's approach. It is an investment in people and skills and businesses. It is investment that will see jobs grow—

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Two of us are standing. One of us is out of order, and it's not me.

New question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is again for the Premier. Just moments ago, this House sat in special ceremony to receive our restored and transformed mace. The Premier spoke and acknowledged our parliamentary traditions and history. It's ironic that the Premier would take time to recognize one parliamentary tradition when at the same time he is wantonly breaching another, that being the convention of budget secrecy.

Yesterday, the Premier himself consciously and deliberately broke that convention when he announced the amount the government promises to spend on infrastructure over the next two years. How can the Premier on one hand pay lip service to one parliamentary tradition when, through his political strategy to leak the budget in advance, he's thrown another parliamentary convention out that front window?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to reassure all members of this House. There is a secret fear that motivates my good friend here, and that is whether or not he is going to have to bear witness to the presentation of this budget outside this hallowed chamber. That will not happen. I want to provide him with that reassurance.

I'm convinced that if there was a real concern on the part of my colleague with respect to whether or not we are in breach of anything, he would raise this matter directly with you, Speaker, and allow you to speak to this very issue. We will make announcements before the budget, through the budget, and then subsequent to the budget as well. These all represent government initiatives, matters of important public policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I say again, the issue here is not the merit of any program or promise; it is the historic convention of parliamentary secrecy. It's not that long ago that this place was in an unholy uproar because some budget documents were retrieved from a garbage can, which triggered a police investigation, and your party called for the Treasurer's resignation. It's not that long ago that in the House of Commons in Ottawa, after budget information was broadcast on Global News, the House was called into an emergency session that same night to read the budget, such was the importance of the convention of budgetary secrecy. Now, they tell us it's

okay to leak the budget to the media and select audiences over a period of weeks, in an effort to spin and manipulate the media and manage the news.

I ask the Premier the same question that he refused to answer yesterday: Will he commit to this House that there will be no further breaches of budgetary secrecy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I see the matter differently. These are important government initiatives that we announce before budgets. Some of them are announced through the budget, particularly insofar as tax measures are concerned; those are specifically reserved to budgets. And there are all kinds of announcements made subsequent to budgets. Some of those stem from the budget itself. But they're all important matters of government policy.

We think it's important for Ontarians to know what we are going to do when it comes to investing in further infrastructure. We want to stimulate this economy. We want to create some 300,000 jobs. We want to continue to build schools and hospitals, roads and bridges—those kinds of things—sometimes in partnership with the federal government, so that we can provide a little bit of hope for jobs that will come to Ontarians right now. That was the subject of the most recent announcement that we made.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, you would know by now that Kapuskasing was hit with some terrible news on Monday. Tembec announced the temporary closure of six weeks of both its sawmill and its paper mill, putting over 500 people out of work.

My question is a very simple one on behalf of the community: What specific plans do you have to ensure that these temporary layoffs don't become permanent? What are you going to do in order to safeguard that mill?

1120

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I thank the member for the question. Obviously, I'm as distressed as he is over the fact that we have a significant crisis in the forest industry. The global market has virtually plummeted. Not only have we dealt with two years of just phenomenal decrease in the demand for the products, but the last year, these last few months in particular, has been devastating.

I received the news. This is a shutdown. It's the same shutdown that has happened with another plant in Manitoba. I'm pleased to be able to report, though—and I think it's important for the member to hear and understand—that the efforts of our employees, combined with positive actions taken by the province of Ontario to reduce the effective price of electricity, have helped to improve the cost position of newsprint mills significantly. Such positive actions have been and will continue to be an integral part of the competitive position of this site. So we assume that this site will continue. What we have is an interim shutdown.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, you're missing the point. There are things you can do in order to avert this type of shutdown. We know that part of the problem that Tembec is facing is that many of the customers who buy the high-quality products that are made, as far as paper, in Kapuskasing are unable to get the credit and they're asking Tembec to secure the credit to the customers.

You've got this prosperity fund that you set up within your ministry. You have two particular funds: One is the forest sector prosperity fund, of which you have almost \$90 million that's unused, and you've got the loan guarantee program, with almost \$300 million that's unused. What I'm asking you to do is specifically this: Are you prepared to allow these particular programs to secure the credit for the customers so that they can buy the products, so that this mill can continue to operate, make money and give people jobs?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Most of the products are sold to the United States, and I believe this member is asking us to supply credit to companies in the United States. I don't believe that's part of our understanding.

There's no question that we have a significant challenge. In January of this year, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer went Web-only. That means they're not printing. In February of this year, Denver's Rocky Mountain News went under. This is just a constant reminder of the challenges facing this industry. We will continue to work with Tembec, as we have with every other mill in the sector, to provide the support that we can. They simply do not have the market. The market is not there. Where we can, we will continue to do everything we can to support this industry. We have in the past and we will continue to do so in the future.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Labour. February 28 was the 10th annual international Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day, and many people and advocates on behalf of workers across Ontario had a session to educate workers on how they can prevent this issue. Minister, I know that last week you did some health and safety blitzes to create awareness in many people across the province of Ontario. Can you tell us what you are doing in order to educate people across Ontario to prevent repetitive strain injury, or, as you prefer within your ministry, MSDs, musculoskeletal disorders?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for London-Fanshawe for his advocacy and his work, both for his constituents and for all injured workers across this great province of Ontario. Yes, during the month of April the Ministry of Labour inspectors will enhance their field activity when it comes to musculoskeletal disorders. This is part of our program Safe At Work Ontario, and these blitzes take a proactive approach, a preventive approach to working with our partners, our employers, our employees, trade unions etc. We let them know that we're going to come in and check for certain things. In this case it's going to be around MSDs. That will be the focus.

We also will be targeting some specific industries: the construction industry, mining, health care sectors and other high-risk potential producers of MSDs. However, MSDs, we all know, are really—

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Minister. I know that repetitive strain injury takes a toll on our workforce and on financial institutions of the province of Ontario. According to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, from 2003 to 2007 they cost the board \$640 million. Besides that, we lost almost six million days of work.

Minister, can you tell us what kinds of tools you are using in your ministry in order to prevent this repetitive injury from happening, to maintain the stability of the workplace and save the workers from being injured?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again, I thank the member for the question. The only way that we are going to achieve our targets of reducing lost-time injury rates, or all injuries, in Ontario is by working in partnership with our health and safety associations, with the WSIB, with our employers and with our joint health and safety committees.

In regard to MSD prevention, we've got a number of tools that will help our employers achieve the targets that we want, and those are some prevention guidelines accompanied by a resource manual, a toolbox and an MSD prevention resource website. So there are many different tools that can help our partners, help those employers bring forward those best practices into their workplaces.

I've had the opportunity to tour a number of companies that are doing this. They have seen a significant reduction and, at the end of this, less injury and a lot of cost savings—

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

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, at your recent press conference regarding the Green Energy Act, you were asked by members of the media how much the proposed act would add to the average electricity bill, to which you responded that it would only amount to 1% per year.

Minister, now that you've released the per-kilowatt-hour rates you're willing to pay under your feed-in tariff program, rates as high as 80.2 cents per kilowatt hour, what will the true increase be for Ontario families on their electricity bill?

Hon. George Smitherman: I anticipated a question of that form from the honourable member. When we did release the proposal, or I should say the Ontario Power Authority did—their proposed rates for the feed-in tariff—the member has chosen to focus in on certainly the highest rate, which is for a very small-scale rooftop solar which is designed to get many people in the province of Ontario, hopefully as many as 100,000, involved in being generators of electricity.

This would amount to about 1%, which is very clearly stated—1% of the overall energy supply mix met by that very, very expensive form of electricity generation. It's in keeping with the answer that I gave on the day that we presented the Green Energy Act. We anticipate, over three years, from 2010 to 2012, the first approximately \$5 billion of incremental investment, and over time, we expect that the Green Energy Act will contribute 1% per year to the growth of electricity costs for Ontarians, with opportunities for them to use less electricity as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I think that everybody in this province supports and believes that we need to do a better job of promoting renewable, emission-free energy. But it's also the responsibility of the government to be straightforward with the facts. When a minister talks about investing billions and billions of dollars—\$5 billion in transmission, up to 80.2 cents per kilowatt hour for feed-in tariff rates—and there are other rates, at the 44-cent level, 19 cents per kilowatt hour for wind. At those rates, all of that is being put back to the base rate-payers of the hydro bill.

Will you not come clean to the people of Ontario and state clearly that your belief and position that it will mean 1% to the hydro bill is simply a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts?

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Sorry; I withdraw it.

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

Hon. George Smitherman: There are a couple of things that I think are pretty important here. Firstly, it's wonderful to see the endorsement of the Green Energy Act and the principle of renewable energy. As the honourable member said, pretty much everybody—I think he said everybody in Ontario supports and believes that there should be more renewable energy. I think that's a good start. I appreciate the support from the honourable member.

I think one of the things that's important is that the Green Energy Act is about, on the one hand, creating the opportunity for more renewable energy, and on the other, providing people in their homes, businesses and institutions the opportunity to go about their lives and use less electricity and energy. This obviously balances off on the issue of cost.

1130

I would say to the honourable member that he really could do just a little bit better research. I have spoken about a \$5-billion investment, and I've been quite clear in saying that just about half of that will be focused on transmission and distribution. The honourable member, in his question, turned that into \$5 billion for transmission. I think it would be very beneficial if he took the offer that I've given him. Let's sit down and talk about this more so that I can show this on a—

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

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Real estate values in today's economic climate are decreasing daily, but homes were unfairly and arbitrarily valued 15 months ago, some in the city of Toronto, as much as 45% higher, some in your own riding.

What is the government's plan for assisting people to cope with tax increases that could force some from their homes and are forcing many businesses into bankruptcy?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: As the honourable member is well aware—as a former mayor himself, he understands that an increase in property assessment does not necessarily equate to an increase in property tax, point number one. But secondly, the other point that we're quite proud of that the Minister of Finance brought in his budget is an increase to a property-tax grant program for senior citizens, to allow senior citizens to stay in their homes longer. Regrettably, the NDP voted against that budget and subsequently voted against the senior citizens throughout the province of Ontario.

One of the things that we've tried to do over the course of our term of government is to take pressure off the property taxpayer and bring it back to where it rightfully should be, at the provincial level, through a series of uploading initiatives that I would be very pleased to elaborate on in my supplementary, as a result of signing the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: Every day people are being forced from their homes, and every day businesses are forced to pay increasing amounts of taxes, even when they're not profitable. The minister knows full well that this is the case.

This Legislature has heard from many thousands of people across Ontario who know that the province's assessment system is broken and is beyond repair. They know this government can do the right thing, and we are asking you to support the NDP's freeze-till-sale plan.

Why won't this government help people to stay in their homes, especially now? And why won't they support businesses to prosper in Ontario and support the freeze-till-sale assessment plan?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me just reiterate some of the things that we've done to bring property tax relief, not just to the people of Toronto but throughout the province of Ontario. In the city of Toronto, since 2003, total ongoing funding that has been sent up until now is \$368.9 million on an annual basis, and, in addition, \$496 million in one-time funding, for a grand total, since the McGuinty government came to office, of \$865 million to the taxpayers and the city of Toronto.

Mayor David Miller, upon signing the historic agreement between AMO, the city of Toronto and the province of Ontario, said, "Today's announcement shows very clearly that this provincial government has both

listened and acted in response to the needs of our communities. The provincial government came to the table, worked closely with us, and got the principles right. We have set forward on a new course."

I'm very proud of that agreement, and I urge the honourable member to—

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

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Pat Hoy: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. The global recession is affecting everyone. Communities both large and small in this province are being affected by shrinking profits, job cuts and plant closures. Farmers have been struggling with low market prices and high input costs. Small businesses and manufacturing companies are cutting back their payrolls and closing down in some instances.

Funding for infrastructure is needed to create jobs in the short term and enhance productivity in the long term. The health of our economy in rural Ontario is essential to bringing back growth to the rest of the province. Farmers and small-town Ontarians need to know that their government is on their side.

Can the minister speak about the unique challenges that rural Ontarians face and describe what our government is doing to protect and create jobs in rural communities across the province?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Our government has been there for rural communities and for farmers, and we will continue to be there. I think that we have some very concrete examples: \$1.2 billion since 2003 to support farm incomes; \$56 million over the next four years for a buy-Ontario strategy; and in the 2008 budget, we also have set aside \$30 million for rural economic development as well as \$30 million over the next four years for infrastructure.

These are investments that our agriculture and rural partners have told us they need, and we have met that for them. We have been there and we will continue to be there for rural Ontario and farmers in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period having ended, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am very pleased to introduce three very important guests today. I'd like to introduce Richie Mehta from my riding of Mississauga–Streetsville and his mom and his brother, who are here visiting Queen's Park and about whom I will be making a member's statement shortly.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery Ms. Fawzia Rauofi of the National Assembly of Afghanistan. She is accompanied by her husband, Mr. Roshan, her sister-in-law Ms. Hafiza

Khadem, and by the vice-consul of the Consulate General of Afghanistan at Toronto, Ms. Mashal Sidiqi.

I had the opportunity to meet with them just prior, and it was one of the most rewarding meetings I've ever had to get the perspective of a politician from Afghanistan of what it's like on the ground there. I want to say thank you very much for that opportunity, and I would ask all members to please welcome our guests to the Speaker's gallery today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ASSISTANCE TO THE DISABLED

Mr. Ted Arnott: Disabled Ontarians have so much to contribute to this province, but in many cases they need the help of attendant services to fulfill their full potential. That's why so many Ontarians have written to me recently to express their appreciation that this Legislature, with the backing of the Ontario Community Support Association, passed my resolution calling upon the provincial government to add attendant services to the provincial wait times strategy and to allocate funding according to how many individuals actually require services.

Debbie Black, a constituent of mine, got the ball rolling when she visited my office last summer. She told me about wait times of up to 10 years for attendant services, and I found that to be absolutely unacceptable. And so should we all. I want to express my sincere thanks to Debbie for her advocacy on this crucial issue.

As well, Lori Payne and others at the Ontario Community Support Association also deserve our thanks for their good work. Lori collected petitions with hundreds of signatures, which I was pleased to present yesterday before this Legislature.

I hope that the government will follow through on the overwhelming support for my resolution both inside and outside this House. In this Thursday's provincial budget, I hope the government will give this important and urgent health care priority the attention it deserves.

ONTARIO CONFEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATIONS

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I would like to welcome members of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, or OCUFA, to Queen's Park. They're here with us today. This organization represents 24 faculty associations and over 15,000 university faculty and academic librarians in Ontario. Their mandate is to maintain and enhance the quality of higher education in Ontario.

They have recently released a report as part of their Quality Matters campaign, and the report has confirmed what we have known for a long time in Ontario: over-subscribed courses without enough seats for students, larger classes, classes folded into other classes when a

faculty member retires, fewer full-time faculty, less student-faculty interaction, fewer labs and individualized assignments. They are here today at Queen's Park to offer solutions to these serious threats to quality education.

With us today is Professor Brian E. Brown, president of OCUFA and the faculty association of the University of Windsor. They are hosting their reception this evening here at Queen's Park from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in room 230. They would like a lot of us to go, and I'm urging many government members and the other opposition members to join them this evening.

DOMINIC AGOSTINO

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Five years ago today, Dominic Agostino, a dear friend to many and former MPP for Hamilton East, tragically passed away. Whether you knew Dominic as a colleague or a friend, his infectious energy was matched only by his dedication to public service. Today, Dominic's legacy lives on both within this House and his community of Hamilton.

In this House, we remember a strong leader who believed intensely in the reason we are all here today: to improve the lives of those both within our communities and across this great province. His unrelenting passion for Hamilton and Ontario made Dominic a spirited and highly valued member of this Legislature. Within Hamilton and among Hamiltonians, Dominic's legacy is cherished and celebrated.

On November 5, 2008, Dominic was inducted posthumously into Hamilton's Gallery of Distinction. With this, he joined 150 other inspiring individuals who have made a significant contribution to the great city of Hamilton.

Five years ago, we were fortunate to have Dominic with us in this chamber; now we are fortunate to have his story and his spirit, one we can share with future Hamiltonians, Ontarians and parliamentarians. We miss him.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'd like to pay tribute to the estimated 9,000 Ontarians who will be receiving Ontario Volunteer Service Awards this year. They represent more than five million citizens who volunteer in their communities.

When I think of volunteers who are making a difference in Ontario, I think of people like my constituent John Schoonderbeek of Mitchell Corners. He was among just nine individuals from across Canada recognized with the Clean World Award for Pitch-In Canada last year. These awards were signed by Governor General Michaëlle Jean, who is an honorary patron to Pitch-In Canada.

John is an outstanding steward of the environment who walks seven kilometres each day picking up litter and debris he finds along the roadside. His personal commitment to the environment started on Earth Day about 15 years ago. John Schoonderbeek also received

the Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship, presented by the Ontario Minister of Citizenship, Mike Colle, in 2007. John's effort as a volunteer includes helping seniors in his community so that they can stay in their homes longer. Mr. Schoonderbeek is the kind of dedicated volunteer who works hard each day to make his community a better place to live.

I'm proud to say that approximately 100 volunteers from Durham were recognized at local award ceremonies last year. Many worked 25, 30, 40—for example, Brenton Rickard, who has served in the Newcastle Lions Club for over 60 years.

At a time when our communities are working hard to ensure the future of our local hospitals, it's interesting to note that dozens of the volunteers honoured in my riding work within the hospital and the community care group. This demonstrates the importance we place on health care close to home.

Volunteers do not work for recognition, but they do deserve our thanks. That is why I'm speaking today: to thank them personally for the work that they do in our community to make it better for all Ontarians.

RICHIE MEHTA

Mr. Bob Delaney: I rise today to celebrate the recent success of a critically acclaimed film director from Mississauga—Streetsville who is here today. Richie Mehta is joined by his mother, Neeta Tandon, and his brother, Kurran Mehta. I'd like members to welcome them.

Richie Mehta recently directed his first feature film, *Amal*, which tells the tale of an Indian rickshaw driver who inherits an eccentric billionaire's fortune. *Amal* debuted at the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival. Accolades for both Richie and the film have snowballed ever since. *Amal* has won more than 25 international awards, and it was recently nominated for six Genie Awards, including best picture and best director.

Richie attended John Fraser Secondary School and the University of Toronto's art and art history and cinema studies programs. He completed his postgraduate studies at Sheridan College's advanced film and television program in Toronto. He attended the first Berlinale Talent Campus in the 2002 Berlin film festival. He studied under the guidance of directors such as Wim Wenders and has been mentored by directors such as Shekhar Kapur and Brian De Palma.

Richie Mehta is an outstanding ambassador for our cultural industries here in Ontario. As his star continues to rise, remember, you heard about him here first. Congratulations, Richie Mehta, the pride of western Mississauga.

1510

DOROTHY JANE NEEDLES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This morning I had the pleasure of presenting an award to Dorothy Jane Needles. She is the deserving recipient of an Ontario Heritage Trust award for her contributions toward cultural heritage in her

community of Mono, in the beautiful riding of Dufferin—Caledon.

As we know, heritage preservation must be embraced by the people it touches most. These are the people who live in our communities and join with their neighbours to protect buildings, natural heritage sites and cultural artifacts. They are the storytellers. They understand local history and pass it on from generation to generation. They give us an understanding of who we are and where we come from. It is important that communities show their appreciation to their volunteers who assume leadership roles in preserving our community's heritage.

Dorothy Jane Needles is a leader and well deserving of the honour she received this morning. She has recognized the importance of heritage and leadership and makes outstanding contributions to our community.

It is always a pleasure to be able to recognize those who make contributions to our community and within it. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many other volunteers who make my riding of Dufferin—Caledon the vibrant cultural and historic community it is today.

PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION

Mr. Mike Colle: On March 10, I was joined by Premier Dalton McGuinty, Minister Kathleen Wynne and Minister John Milloy at Sir Sandford Fleming Academy in my riding, and together we announced the first-year results of the Pathways to Education program hosted at the New Heights Community Health Centre in my riding. The Pathways program provides academic tutoring, mentoring, counselling and financial support to students who are at risk of dropping out of school.

The first-year results were tremendous. I'm proud to say that the students from Lawrence Heights are leading the pack with the highest rates of success. I was fortunate enough to meet the students enrolled in the Pathways program at Sir Sandford Fleming, students like Naima Mayany, Jameel Dawkins, Mohammed Adan, Naseem Ali, Lammi Hassan, Cassandra Cormier, Malala Hakimi, Fatima Sufi, Issa Mohammed and many more. These are extremely bright students, many of whom will be the first generation in their families to graduate high school and continue on to post-secondary education.

I would like to thank the Premier and the ministers who attended. I'd also like to thank the director of the Pathways program in Lawrence Heights, Owen Christopher Hinds, and the program administrator, Rebecca Houwer, who, along with their colleagues, are committed to helping our students succeed.

To Principal Arnold Witt, Vice-Principal Reiko Fuentes, and the staff and students of Sir Sandford Fleming, I want to thank them all and say, great success. May you go on to do bigger and better things as a result of Pathways.

KYLE MAYHEW

Mr. Phil McNeely: It is my pleasure to rise in the Legislature today to recognize an Olympian from my

riding of Ottawa–Orléans: Kyle Mayhew. At 22, Kyle has been skating for 10 years with the Ottawa Blades Special Olympics figure skating program, and is a member of Skate Canada, eastern Ontario. He qualified for Team Canada by winning a gold medal for level 2 men at the 2008 National Winter Games and was selected to compete at the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Boise, Idaho, this February.

The eight-day competition brought together an estimated 3,000 athletes from 85 countries to compete in seven winter sports, including figure skating. At the games, Kyle's training and dedication to his sport paid off in full, with Kyle taking home a silver medal in figure skating. Congratulations to Kyle for all his success.

I would also like to recognize Kyle's support team, who have helped him achieve such success. Anne Marie Bergeron, a long-time volunteer and advocate for Special Olympics figure skating, worked diligently to develop Kyle's winning figure skating routine that awed the judges. Cathy Skinner of the Gloucester Skating Club is Kyle's coach and was instrumental in keeping Kyle focused and ready for great success.

Once again, congratulations and best of luck to Kyle during his ongoing training.

SCOTT VERNELLI

Mr. David Oraziotti: I rise in the House today to comment on a tragic event that has taken the lives of four young men and to express my condolences to the families who have been affected by the deaths of four soldiers killed in Afghanistan during this past week.

One of those soldiers killed in the most recent attack was from my riding of Sault Ste. Marie. Master Corporal Scott Vernelli, 28 years old, was with the 3rd battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment and he was based at CFB Petawawa. We all owe Corporal Vernelli and the men and women like him who lost their lives while on duty a debt of gratitude because they made the ultimate sacrifice.

The tragic loss of Corporal Vernelli from Sault Ste. Marie saddens our entire community. I offer my sincere condolences to his wife, Marcie, her daughter, Olivia, and to the entire Vernelli family. We have lost a soldier, husband and father who truly loved his job and dedicated his life to the service of our country.

Everyone expects that when their husband, wife, son or daughter goes to work, they'll come home, but this tragic event is a constant reminder of the countless dangers faced by our soldiers each day in Afghanistan.

In a day and age when our access to information through media inundates us with lawlessness and the conflict in many parts of the world, we are reminded of the vital role our soldiers fulfill in combating terrorism, building democracy and serving all of us.

The immeasurable sorrow felt by the Vernelli family cannot be consoled by any words said today, so all I can humbly offer is our sincere gratitude for Corporal Vernelli's selfless commitment to his job and to his

country. Today I'd like to convey my appreciation for his efforts and the efforts of our entire military family for working to make the world a better place. Scott's efforts and contributions should be celebrated and remembered. We honour and thank these brave men and women who have served, and our thoughts and prayers are with their families.

I'd respectfully ask for a moment of silence for Master Corporal Vernelli.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask all members and our guests to join me in a moment of silence, please.

The House observed a moment's silence.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TRANSPARENCY IN PUBLIC MATTERS ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE DES QUESTIONS D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC

Mr. Craitor moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 159, An Act to require that meetings of provincial and municipal boards, commissions and other public bodies be open to the public / *Projet de loi 159, Loi exigeant que les réunions des commissions et conseils provinciaux et municipaux et d'autres organismes publics soient ouvertes au public.*

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Kim Craitor: The bill is designed to bring transparency to Ontario agencies, boards and commissions. It designates certain public bodies that receive financing or act on behalf of the government to give reasonable notice to the public of their meetings, of proposed additions to the meetings, and to ensure that meetings are open to the public. As well, it requires them to keep minutes of meetings and to publish them. Finally, the bill establishes a procedure by which a person who believes a designated public body has contravened or is about to contravene the bill may make a complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and it makes it an offence to fail to comply with an order from the privacy commissioner.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I rise in the House today to mark the 100th anniversary of the Ontario Provincial Police and to celebrate 100 years of service to the province by OPP officers both past and present.

As a northerner, I have a very special attachment to the OPP. In the early 1900s, it was these officers who maintained order in the rapid settlement of Ontario's northern frontier, including the mining and forestry communities that were springing up all over the north.

Every police officer who has worn the badge of the OPP, and every civilian employee or auxiliary member who has supported them, is a builder. They built a dedicated and diverse police service that is the envy of the world for how it meets the law enforcement challenges of the 21st century. The proof is highly visible, in black and white, along our highways, inside our communities, on our lakes and rivers and in the air.

1520

The OPP's first 100 years have been bookended by two exceptional individuals: Superintendent Joseph E. Rogers, whose leadership brought the OPP to life, and our current commissioner, Julian Fantino, who has set the stage for the next 100 years. Indeed, during its 100 years the OPP has been guided by leaders of great integrity and vision, among them Commissioner Eric Silk, who modernized the OPP in the 1960s, and Commissioner Gwen Boniface, the first female to hold this position. Together, these leaders have nurtured the OPP from a small force of approximately 50 members to one of the largest deployed police services in North America, with an international reputation for excellence in criminal investigations, traffic management and community policing.

This 100th anniversary provides a unique opportunity for the OPP to connect with the communities it serves by showcasing its accomplishments, both historical and present-day, at local detachments across Ontario. In early February, I participated in the launch of the commemorative patrol in Hearst. This was a 21-day tribute to how the OPP officers with dogs and sleds patrolled the north some 100 years ago. It was truly an historic event, extremely well attended by the people of Hearst and along the northern line.

Upcoming events include the opening of *Frontiers: A century of policing*, at the OPP Museum in Orillia this April, the launch of *Arresting Images*, a travelling exhibition of mug shots from the museum collection in May, and an OPP centenary tattoo in Oshawa this September. There will also be special OPP celebrations at major sporting and community events all year long.

But this anniversary is more than the chance for the OPP to strut its stuff; it is an opportunity for Ontarians to show their appreciation to the dedicated men and women who wear the uniform of one of the finest police services in the world, and I implore and encourage all Ontarians to go out and do so. It is also a fitting time to remember the 102 brave OPP officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty. Their names are forever etched on the Wall of Honour at OPP headquarters in Orillia as a tribute to their service and sacrifice.

I hope all members of the House will join me in sending best wishes to the approximately 9,600 uniformed and civilian members and the 900 auxiliary members of the Ontario Provincial Police as we celebrate 100 years of service excellence to the citizens of Ontario.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Hon. Michael Chan: I rise today to talk about a time-honoured tradition in the province, the Ontario Volunteer Service Award. This year, more than 9,000 Ontarians will be recognized in 46 Ontario Volunteer Service Award ceremonies in 35 communities across the province, from Windsor to Ottawa, from Dryden to Vittoria. It all begins this Wednesday, March 25, in Stratford and wraps up on June 30 in Kingston.

The Volunteer Service Award ceremonies are well received throughout the province. Ontario volunteers give so much to their communities. These awards are the way Ontarians give back to the volunteers, our way of saying thank you to thousands of everyday heroes who make our communities strong and vibrant places in which we live.

Last year I had the opportunity to attend a number of these ceremonies. I was amazed how humble these incredible, generous people were with the recognition given to them. Each volunteer is given a certificate and a pin indicating the number of years of continuous service they have given to the organization that nominated them. Pins are given out for five, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 40, 50 and even 60 years of service. Youth pins are also given out to young people who have given at least two years of community volunteer service with an organization. With the long-time volunteers, it is not uncommon to see them wearing pins received at previous ceremonies. They wear them with pride.

I know that many of my parliamentary colleagues will honour their constituents by attending these events. For those of you who have not had an opportunity to attend a ceremony or have not attended one in a little while, I strongly encourage you to do so this year.

While the Ontario Volunteer Service Award recognizes established volunteers, last year my ministry started a new program to encourage young people to pick up the tradition of volunteerism. During the National Volunteer Week, which is April 19 to 25, the second Change the World: Ontario Youth Volunteer Challenge will be in full swing. The goal is to have 10,000 young people between the ages of 14 and 18 volunteer during the week. The Ontario government is partnering with 20 volunteer centres across the province to deliver that challenge.

In addition, the Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers and the June Callwood Outstanding Achievement Awards for Voluntarism ceremonies will be held during National Volunteer Week.

As you can imagine, our plate is full to kick-start once again the wonderful Ontario Volunteer Awards ceremonies.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to respond to the comments made by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services on the 100th anniversary of the

OPP. I want to say, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, we're very proud of our history working with the OPP and we congratulate the OPP on this historic moment in their history, particularly Commissioner Julian Fantino, who is in charge of the OPP today, and President Karl Walsh of the Ontario Provincial Police Association, which looks after the approximately 9,000 people who work for the Ontario Provincial Police.

I just want to say also while I have the floor today—the minister mentioned a number of events going on. I think it's a really good time to promote an event that we're having this Saturday night up at Casino Rama. It's a fundraising gala. All the proceeds will go to the OPP Museum at the general headquarters. It's being put on by an organization that's about two years old now called the Friends of the OPP Museum. I know a number of you, including the Speaker, have presented silent auction gifts to me that we can present this Saturday night. People will bid on those, and all those proceeds will go to the OPP Museum in this historic year.

I wanted to also say that at this particular event this weekend, part of the entertainment being put on is the OPP Pipes and Drums, as well as Ms. Liz Hurtubise, who is the daughter of an officer who was actually shot and recovered in a terrible tragedy involving a gun shooting about 20 years ago. A bridge was named after his partner, another OPP officer, who died that night, Richard Verdecchia, whom we honoured this year as well.

The OPP has a rich history. I want to go back to talking about the museum for a moment. One of the things in the history of the OPP that I'm always excited to see when I walk into the museum, and something that I think is very unique, is the fact that Paul McCartney and the Beatles in their album—everybody here would remember the Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album. He actually wore an OPP badge on his shoulder, and that uniform is in the OPP Museum. Mind you, we don't move that thing around; it stays there.

In summary, I congratulate the OPP on a wonderful history, and I look forward to the next 100 years of the Ontario Provincial Police.

1530

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to thank the minister for speaking out in support of and thanking the many volunteers who work in Ontario. As he said, over 9,000 volunteers will receive awards this year. This represents over five million citizens who contribute to their community each year, some of whom, as I say, are being recognized.

When I think of volunteerism, I look at our own community, and I think of the initiative that was taken when we were government to encourage youth in Ontario to contribute in their communities with the voluntary 40 hours of community service while in high school. I think that's a good introduction for young people and for all of us—that when asked to volunteer or to commit to your

community, just say yes. It's a wonderful experience to give back to a community that we owe so much to.

That's really what I wanted to say, but I'd be remiss not to recognize my community.

Last night, for instance, there was an interclub meeting that I attended in my riding. That interclub represents all of the volunteer organizations—fraternal organizations as well as community service organizations—like Rotarians, Lions, Kinsmen, Legion club, the Knights of Columbus and others. These are all leaders in the community whom I see in many different roles. They serve on hospital foundations, they serve on hospital auxiliaries, they serve in volunteer parent groups, they serve as Scout and Cub leaders. That's what building strong communities is all about. I thank the minister and the government for taking the time to recognize that and say thank you.

These community awards, these pins that they get, are in themselves emblematic of time served, but more importantly, it is time to be thanked for giving back voluntarily to others.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention John Schoonderbeek, whom I spoke of earlier today, who was recognized by Governor General Michaëlle Jean for his work in making our environment cleaner and our community cleaner. John walks about seven kilometres each day picking up litter along roadsides, amongst other projects, and he's been doing that for 15 years, ever since Earth Day. He was asked to pitch in. He did. What it's led to is recognition but also thanks from our community for making it a cleaner and better place for everyone to live.

So it's a time to celebrate, but more importantly, to say thank you to all the volunteers in our community.

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

Mr. Peter Kormos: New Democrats are pleased to stand on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Ontario Provincial Police and join in congratulating them and thanking them for their service to this province.

Police officers in the Ontario Provincial Police in most of southern Ontario are seen most likely on our 400-series highways, highways that are becoming more and more difficult to police—denser and denser traffic—and indeed more and more dangerous to police. In fact, police officers have paid with their lives during the course of investigations of highway accidents on those very, very packed and dense highways.

In other parts of the province, though, OPP are the sole police officers in some of the most remote and isolated parts of Ontario, with special, additional pressures on them in terms of the policing that they're called upon to do.

We can't expect our police officers—hard-working, dedicated, disciplined women and men—to do this dangerous and increasingly complex job without giving them the tools and the resources they need to do it. New Democrats stand once again in this Legislature committing ourselves to ensuring that our police services,

Ontario Provincial Police in this instance, are adequately staffed and have the tools they need to perform the work that they're called upon to do.

I want to make a special note, because there was a regrettable time in this province's history when the Golden Helmets—you'll know who they are: OPP officers who do precision motorcycle riding. There was a tragic time in this province when a Liberal Premier disbanded the Golden Helmets and people across Ontario didn't have the benefit of seeing these precision motorcycle riders. I'm pleased to see that they're back in full force.

Two years ago, Johnny Clare, who owns Clare's Cycle and Sports down on Highway 20, one of the best Harley-Davidson dealerships in Ontario—and OPP officers know that—sponsored the OPP Golden Helmets coming down to Niagara. They started out in Pelham and did a procession through Pelham and down to the Welland airport, where they put on a show that was free to the public. The people in that region were so excited to see the Golden Helmets back in fine form and in full force. Of course, that was the prelude to the motorcycle show—mostly Harleys and custom-built bikes—that Johnny Clare sponsors in Pelham.

I've had far too many good experiences with OPP officers in my earlier career as a lawyer, and from time to time as I've met them on our highways we've had an opportunity to say hello and wish each other well.

We New Democrats certainly wish those brave, dedicated police officers and civilian staff the very best.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm pleased, along with the minister and the speaker for the opposition, to recognize the generous spirit, dedication and sacrifice shown by the tens of thousands—millions, in fact—of volunteers throughout Ontario.

There's no question that Ontarians willingly give of their time to make their communities better. They go out of their way. They take on tasks to make sure that our lives are improved. We know about the need for volunteers.

The role of volunteers is to enhance our lives, or should be to enhance our lives, but virtually every time the minister made this speech and each time I've had a chance to respond to him, the reality has been that more and more social services in this province, and critical tasks that should be taken on by government, have been pushed onto the shoulders of volunteers.

In this province, increasingly the provision of food, shelter, education, health care and other social services is taken on by volunteers who already have their plates full, who are already dealing with issues in their communities but know that things that have been abandoned by government can't be left abandoned and have to be addressed.

People at emergency shelters are volunteering there because there's not adequate housing built in this prov-

ince, and it should be built, and this provincial government is responsible for that. People are volunteering at food banks. Because this government hasn't put in place a high enough minimum wage, has not paid attention to our manufacturing infrastructure and does not have adequate levels of social assistance, people are hungry. Volunteers try to cover some of that gap through working in food banks.

People in Ontario are raising \$600 million a year for local public schools because the government of Ontario is not adequately funding our education system.

We should recognize the sacrifice of volunteers, we need to recognize their contributions, but I say to you, Speaker, and to all others who are listening to this or watching this that we should truly honour our volunteers by making sure they don't have to make up for the tasks the government has abandoned.

PETITIONS

ASSISTANCE TO THE DISABLED

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

"Whereas essential attendant services, critical community-based services that make it possible for Ontarians with physical disabilities to lead fulfilling lives, are extremely underfunded in the province of Ontario, and wait times for attendant services in Ontario have reached unprecedented crisis levels. Due to unmet need, the wait-lists for people with physical disabilities range from four to 10 years;

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

"To immediately address the crisis facing physically disabled Ontarians who are waiting four to 10 years for attendant services by adding attendant services to the provincial wait times strategy and by instituting individually based funding for all physically disabled persons requiring attendant care."

I of course support this petition and affix my signature as well.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and I definitely want to thank Krista Wilson of Kenning Hall Boulevard in Streetsville for having collected the signatures for me. The petition 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 ... capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

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

1540

MOTORCYCLE SAFETY

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly signed by constituents from all over my riding of Bruce-Grey and beyond. It’s to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas to impose a total ban on an activity or sport under the guise of protecting the public from injury as presented by MPP Helena Jaczek in Bill 117 to amend the Highway Traffic Act, section 38.1, ‘No person shall drive or operate a motorcycle on a highway if another person under the age of 14 years is a passenger on the motorcycle,’ would be an injustice to us, the people of Ontario; and

“Whereas the restrictive aspects of this proposal far outweigh the minor risks associated and confirmed by the annual Ministry of Transportation statistical safety reports, and further, there is no clear distinction that ‘motorcycle-related injuries’ apply to Ontario streets or highways, as stated in defence of Bill 117;

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

“Request that Bill 117 be rejected and not become law.”

I have signed this, and I’m going to give it to Sarah.

SALES TAX

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank Ward Bond, who’s the dealer principal of Blue Mountain Honda. It’s 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.”

I agree with this petition, and I’ve signed it.

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 2 of the interprovincial crossings environmental assessment study.”

I agree with this petition and send it to the table through page Emily.

SALES TAX

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition from Bickley Ford Sales Ltd. in Huntsville to do with the auto industry, and it reads:

“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 PST on the purchase of new cars and trucks would stimulate auto sales;

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

"That the government of Ontario implement a three-month PST tax holiday on new vehicle purchases and that the Ontario Minister of Finance include this PST holiday in the next provincial budget."

I support this petition, and I will give it to page Noel.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Rick Johnson: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I support this petition.

POLICE RECORDS CHECK

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition. It's rather long, but I'd like to read it in full because I'm only going to present it once.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, under current practice, police services across Ontario retain records of accompaniment to the hospital for mental health assessment. Accompaniment to the hospital is permitted under the Mental Health Act. Many employers, volunteer agencies and educational facilities request a police records check prior to hiring an applicant or allowing them to volunteer if they will be working with children, seniors or persons with disabilities. Most police services release Mental Health Act records as part of the police records check. In order to continue the application process, the applicant must disclose the record to the potential employer or forgo the position out of fear of further discrimination and the desire to keep health information confidential. The practice of releasing these records violates the privacy rights, as well as the human rights, of Ontarians with Mental Health Act records. We ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass legislation that would prohibit the disclosure of Mental Health Act records as part of the police records check process;

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

"The current practice of disclosing information regarding non-criminal contact with police pursuant to the Mental Health Act discriminates against Ontarians with both diagnosed and perceived mental health disabilities. We believe this information constitutes personal health information and as such should not be released as part of a police records check. Only criminal convictions for which a pardon has not been granted and records from the pardoned sex offender database should be released on a police records check.

"We petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass legislation which would protect the human rights of all Ontarians by prohibiting the disclosure of Mental Health Act records."

I am agreement and will sign my name thereto.

LUPUS

Mr. Kim Craiton: I want to thank Debi Duval from the Sudbury branch of Lupus Ontario for giving me this petition, and I'm proud to read it in. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

TUITION

Mr. Jim Wilson: I have a petition from the graduate association of the University of Windsor.

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

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

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students

in professional programs such as law or medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I’ve signed that petition. Thank you.

1550

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Jeff Leal: I’m pleased to present a petition today on behalf of Wayne Herlick from RR 2, Tavistock, Ontario.

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, has publicly stated that she ‘absolutely’ wants to help the beginning and new entrants to agriculture; and

“Whereas beginning and expanding farmers are going to be important in the coming decade, as a record number of producers are expected to leave the industry; and

“Whereas the safety net payments—i.e., Ontario cattle, hog and horticulture payments (OCHHP)—are based on historical averages, and many beginning and expanding farmers were not in business or just starting up in the period so named and thus do not have reflective historic allowable net sales (ANS); and

“Whereas beginning and expanding producers are likely at the greatest risk of being financially disadvantaged by poor market conditions and are being forced to exit agriculture because there is not a satisfactory safety net program or payment that meets their needs;

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

“To immediately adjust the safety net payments made via the OCHHP to include beginning and expanding farmers, and make a relief payment to the beginning and expanding farmers who have been missed or received

seriously disproportionate payments, thereby preventing beginning farmers from exiting the agriculture sector.”

I will put my signature on this and give it to page Mark.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is signed by residents in my riding and adjacent ridings. It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

“Whereas Petrolia’s retirement and nursing home communities are also dependent on” this hospital;

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

I agree with this petition and affix my signature and send it with Noel.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time available for petitions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

REGULATED HEALTH PROFESSIONS AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PROFESSIONS DE LA SANTÉ RÉGLEMENTÉES

Mr. McMeekin, on behalf of Mr. Caplan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 141, An Act to amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 141, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Debate?

Someone has to lead off from the government side. I recognize the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I’m sharing my time with the member from Scarborough–Rouge River, and I’ll sit down. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Scarborough–Rouge River.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I stand before the Legislature today to speak to the proposed amendments to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, or the RHPA.

Above all else, this amendment is about arming our health care professionals with the tools they need to further Ontario's patient safety agenda. If passed, this amendment will strengthen the safety and quality of care provided by all regulated health professions in this province. It would provide all health regulatory colleges with the tools they need to support their mandate.

Some background on how this proposed amendment came about will help explain why we've moved to amend this legislation. In Ontario, health professions are regulated by their own governing bodies or colleges. These colleges set the standards for the skills, knowledge and behaviour of their members. Doctors are regulated by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, or the CPSO. Currently, regulatory colleges like the CPSO have the authority, under the RHPA, to make regulations regarding the inspection of equipment, accounts, records and reports and facilities where their members practise, but they do not have the authority to observe their members directly while they are practising during these facility inspections.

All the members of this Legislature will recall the tragic case of a patient who died after undergoing cosmetic-type surgical procedures from a family physician who was not a certified plastic surgeon, but who held him- or herself out to the public as a cosmetic surgeon.

In an unrelated case, about a year later, the CPSO heard a complaint against a family physician who was performing cosmetic surgery, including liposuction and breast augmentation, under anaesthesia and without formal surgical training. At his hearing, the CPSO decided this doctor's practice would be subjected to unannounced inspections and he would be required to take a physician's review course.

Cases like these showed that substandard care provided by physicians has prompted the CPSO to request legislation that will provide greater protection to the public in high-risk procedures such as cosmetic surgery. The facilities that provide these services are not otherwise governed by existing legislation like the Public Hospitals Act or the Independent Health Facilities Act. In some circumstances, the safety of a facility and its equipment can only be determined by directly observing the work being done and the equipment in use. That's why the CPSO felt it was essential for it to have the authority to inspect facilities which provide surgery and anaesthesia in addition to being able to review the accounts, equipment and records of these facilities. Our government agreed that protecting the public was paramount. This has led us here to the introduction of an amendment to the RHPA.

You'll recall that Bill 141 was introduced on December 10, 2008. It proposed providing health regu-

latory colleges with the authority to make regulations that would allow them to directly observe their members in practice during facility inspections. On March 3, 2009, at the Standing Committee on Social Policy, the CPSO supported the bill, but the CPSO also recommended that, in order to better protect the public, the RHPA needed to be amended further to require members who were under investigation by the college to co-operate with the college investigator. On March 10, at the Standing Committee on Social Policy clause-by-clause review, the official opposition introduced a motion to amend the bill to the effect that the college investigators may make reasonable inquiries of any person, including members under investigation, and that members under investigation must co-operate fully with the investigators. This motion was adopted by the committee, and I would like to thank my colleagues from the Conservatives and the NDP, Ms. Witmer and Ms. Gélinas, for their co-operation in seeing that this bill went through committee in a speedy process.

So what does this bill under debate today do? It strengthens and supports our government's commitment to improved patient safety and quality of health care. It addresses all the gaps in the RHPA identified by the CPSO, gaps which limited the ability of all regulatory colleges to investigate unsafe practitioners and inspect the places where they practise, and affirms the previous decisions made by the Ontario courts. I'd like to acknowledge and thank our partner, the CPSO, for its leadership and commitment to improving patient safety.

This is but the latest in a series of initiatives by the McGuinty government designed to protect Ontario patients. Our government is turning expert advice into action. We now publicly report on eight patient safety indicators, including *C. difficile*, as part of a comprehensive plan to create an unprecedented level of transparency in our Ontario hospitals. Our government knows that when you track it, you can improve it. It's the same principle we used to lower our wait times. Last December, we began publicly reporting MRSA, VRE and HSMR rates, establishing Ontario as an international leader in patient safety. We will begin publicly reporting four additional patient safety indicators by April of this year.

1600

We are supporting front-line health care workers to help prevent the spread of infectious diseases. We created an award-winning provincial hand hygiene program because we know that the best way to prevent the spread of infection is by handwashing.

We created infection control resource teams. We funded 166 infection prevention and control practitioners in our hospitals across the province, and we support more effective antibiotic usage.

This legislation, if passed, is another step in our government's aggressive patient agenda. It is ultimately about arming our health care professionals with the tools they need to continue to deliver quality care in a very safe environment.

I urge all members of the Legislature to support this bill. Supporting this bill will help our province's health professionals' regulatory colleges in their continued effort to protect the public. We are proposing to amend the RHPA, the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991. That's why we're giving the colleges the power they need to do a better job.

I hope everyone supports this bill and allows it easy and quick passage so we can bring it into law.

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's always a pleasure for me to listen to the member from Scarborough–Rouge River and have the opportunity—when you follow his career, he was a very distinguished councillor in the old city of Scarborough. Then he took his interests to the newly amalgamated council in Toronto. If you look at his work, he was always interested in health care activities. I'm pleased that he's currently the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Indeed, he's been very involved in this bill, the health regulations act, to make sure that a number of our regulated health professions will now come under this new act.

It's something that I think will be supported by all corners of this House. We know that patient safety is paramount for us all, on all sides of this House, to make sure that when patients enter our 159 hospitals in Ontario, they have the opportunity to receive first-class care. This can be done. We enhance that care by making provisions under Bill 141 to make sure they get speedy passage in this House.

We know that C. difficile is something that's been reported on extensively in the media and we have a comprehensive plan, of course, to report it and to make sure that all our communities are well aware of activities that go on in the 159 publicly funded hospitals in the province of Ontario.

I do commend the member from Scarborough–Rouge River. He's been particularly active on this file. He will shepherd this piece of legislation, Bill 141, through the House. I know that, as he speaks throughout the GTA on this issue, he's a person that we all listen to very carefully, and he will continue to show leadership on this issue and many other issues in this House.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to both the Minister of Government Services and the member from Scarborough–Rouge River.

I must say to the Minister of Government Services that it was one of his finest speeches, and also one of his shortest ones. I was wondering what he was possibly going to contribute to this debate, and his contribution, of course, was to introduce his colleague and friend the member from Scarborough–Rouge River. So, yes, I commend him for the way he did it.

I think the member from Scarborough–Rouge River did indeed do a good job. He did present the government's position here. I think this perhaps will not be a

long debate, because my understanding is that members of all parties recognize the significance of the debate and the bill, the compromises that have been made by the government, opposition members, the colleges and everyone else who has been involved in it.

I just want to say to my colleague the member from Scarborough–Rouge River that I listened intently as well to my colleague from Peterborough, who talked about the debater's long interest in health care, even from the time of municipal days. I used to sit right next door, right next to the member from Scarborough–Rouge River, and I don't remember him talking about issues like that at Metro Hall. So I don't know where the member from Peterborough got this information, but perhaps he would convey it a little later or perhaps in the rebuttal my friend from Scarborough–Rouge River will stand and up and tell us how long he has had this interest. I know he has certainly had the interest since he has come to this Legislature and has become the parliamentary assistant responsible for this particular bill. But in the truth of the Legislature, I think we need to know this very important information.

So my comment is in fact a question for the member from Scarborough–Rouge River to outline his past and previous experience, particularly in municipal government, around this issue.

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

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's a pleasure to have a moment to say a few words on the bill before us, Bill 141, which is basically an amendment about arming our health care professionals with the tools they need to further Ontario's patient safety agenda.

I too had the opportunity to listen to the previous speakers. I know that we are basically in agreement on most of the items that have been put forward and that are going to be, hopefully, passed into law very soon.

I do know, though, that in my riding and in the riding of my colleague the member from Scarborough–Rouge River, we have a lot of new Canadians who come into Scarborough and oftentimes they may not know what the rules are in this country. I think what we're doing here is ensuring that those who are permitted to do work—let's say they're plastic surgeons or they work in a particular medical area—are properly regulated and that they can't get away with doing something they're not allowed to do. It's easy sometimes to try to fool someone or to try to say, "I'm a doctor." They may be a doctor, but they may not have a doctor's licence. There's quite a large difference.

We did the same thing with paralegals in Ontario a while back when we put in some regulations requiring them to be regulated because of the fact that some people were complaining about their services and weren't sure whether or not paralegals were authorized to do certain legal work, and also to have them disciplined, if need be.

It's an important amendment, and I think it's an important thing to do. Hopefully, it will help people, in both of our ridings and in all parts of Ontario. So I'm in support of it today.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to also follow in my colleague's steps. It's nice in the House when we can find out little tidbits about our fellow members that we weren't aware of. I appreciate the members from Peterborough and Rouge River for their indulgence. I'd also like to express my thanks for their experience in the medical field. I wasn't aware that they were so well informed, but I will keep that in mind when I have any medical questions in the future.

But in reference to the bill, I hate to once again ruin the party, but we'll be talking extensively on the bill. Of course, we will be supporting it, but we have some concerns. Like the good New Democrats that we are, we always try to look really deeply into these types of things, and we'll be coming up with some more questions for our friends across the road. I'm sure that, in their infinite wisdom, they will deal with it in committee someday—I hope. I know it's third reading now, but when we get our points across, I'd like to at least deal with them in committee. We don't get a chance to do that very often around here. So I'm hoping that any future medical bills they bring forward we'll be able to discuss in committee, to further our joint knowledge in the medical field.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. The member for Scarborough–Rouge River has two minutes to respond.

1610

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I just want to thank my colleagues from Peterborough, Beaches–East York, Scarborough Southwest and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for their comments.

Let me just clarify for my friend from Beaches–East York, whom I sat next to at the amalgamated city for five years, I believe. I've been in municipal politics for 17 years, and I spent 12 of those looking after the city's budgets. I can tell you, in dealing with a city budget, you deal extensively with public health and the medical officer. Beyond that, I spent five years as the chair of the audit committee of the amalgamated city—and I know everybody here knows my work on that—and we had many, many audits of the health department at the city. So I have a little bit of knowledge. I've been in the Ministry of Health for over a year now, and this, I believe, is the third bill at the Legislature that I've dealt with.

The government is bringing this bill forward because our main interest is patient safety. As a result of incidents in 2007, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario approached the government to see if we could strengthen legislation to give them additional powers to make sure that patients are protected when they use our health care facilities and when they use private physician facilities. Therefore, we brought forward this legislation in support of the college so that they could do a better job.

Again, I want to say to my colleagues in the Conservative Party and the NDP—Mrs. Witmer and Ms.

Gélinas, whom I worked with—thanks for their support in seeing that the piece of legislation got through committee very quickly. I hope it gets through this process very quickly and becomes law.

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

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very happy to rise today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party to respond at this third reading to the legislation entitled the Regulated Health Professions Amendment Act, 2008.

If this bill is passed, which I certainly assume it will be, given that there was all-party support, it will give Ontario's 23 health regulatory colleges new powers to conduct inspections in settings that are today unregulated. These changes would allow a college, such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, to directly observe a health professional's practice and watch a medical procedure being performed.

When this legislation was introduced last year, I indicated that this bill was an important first step in improving patient safety. Although this was a good bill when it was first introduced, it is now a much better bill as a result of consultation and public hearings. I believe that this legislation today is a prime example of how legislation can be improved when there is consultation with the public and with stakeholders. This is the result we have.

I want to thank everybody who has contributed to the process, including all of my colleagues in the Legislature, Mr. Balkissoon and his team, certainly Ms. Gélinas, the staff from the Ministry of Health, the colleges, the health care professionals who were here representing their professions, and of course the public who participated.

I want to just outline briefly how this legislation came about. Part of it is the result of a Toronto Star investigation over the past two years that documented “a regulatory black hole” surrounding Ontario's growing cosmetic surgery industry.

In September 2007, Krista Stryland, a Toronto real estate agent and a 32-year-old mother, walked into her doctor's office to undergo a very routine liposuction treatment. Tragically, she never came out. She died of cardiac arrest. According to court documents, Ms. Stryland had 23 incisions made in six body parts during one surgical session.

Sadly, this case is but one of several high-profile deaths which put a spotlight on cosmetic surgery. For example, in 2004, we had TV producer Micheline Charest die after undergoing a facelift and breast augmentation. In 2007, Olivia Goldsmith, author of the book *The First Wives Club*, also died while undergoing cosmetic surgery. And the list goes on.

While some Canadian provinces, notably Alberta and British Columbia, strictly regulate those who perform cosmetic surgery, Ontario has been somewhat slower to do so. In both of the western provinces, all surgeons and the surgical facilities must be licensed for each procedure they perform. As well, physicians in these provinces cannot advertise themselves as cosmetic surgeons without holding a surgical specialty.

In 2008, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario proposed regulatory changes that would prevent doctors here in Ontario from calling themselves cosmetic surgeons, a term applied to doctors who are not plastic surgeons and who perform procedures including facelifts, tummy tucks and liposuction.

According to the college's website, the college, "since April 2007 ... has undertaken a number of initiatives, in addition to the proposed regulations on out-of-hospital facilities and use of specialist titles that are intend to improve patient safety." These changes include: (1) passing a policy which requires doctors to report changes in their scope of practice; (2) producing an information fact sheet to provide to Ontarians with important information they should consider before deciding to have cosmetic procedures; and (3) asking all physicians who perform cosmetic procedures to give the CPSO information about their practice and their training to ensure that doctors are only practising in areas where they have the necessary knowledge, skill and training.

In September 2008, Ontario's Supreme Court ruled that the CPSO has the authority to force a health professional to submit to an interview and an observation by an investigator. A Globe and Mail article published on September 29 of that year states the court's decision "will push forward the stalled CPSO investigations of a handful of doctors, launched after" the death of Ms. Stryland. "With hundreds of family doctors performing cosmetic surgery in Ontario, the court's decision has set an important precedent...."

When this legislation was introduced, colleges like the CPSO had the following to say:

"Bill 141 is a good first step to improving patient safety at out-of-hospital facilities. However, ensuring the safety of patients in all settings across Ontario is of greater concern. This will require legislative amendments that will explicitly codify a college's investigatory powers to ensure that physicians are meeting expected standards of practice.

"Full patient safety requires that a good facilities inspection system be complemented by an effective investigation system to provide adequate oversight of the health professionals that work in health care facilities.

"These amendments are needed because the colleges are currently involved in litigation regarding the extent of their investigators' powers under the HPPC (i.e., requiring interviews and observing performance of procedures). The final outcome of this litigation will likely not be known for many months, if not years.

"While these legal challenges are contested at various level of the court, the tenor of the investigation's process is changing and some regulated health care professionals are taking a more adversarial stance. Colleges are facing difficulties in some serious investigations and this could compromise patient safety."

That brings us to where we are today.

Again, I want to commend the college for their continued and ongoing efforts to put Ontarians first and to protect patient safety.

1620

When this legislation was introduced last year, I indicated our party's interest in hearing the colleges' and the public's response. Of course, this bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy after second reading, and there were several points that were submitted in the form of written or oral submissions during committee.

Among the written submissions there was one from the College of Nurses. The CNO "does anticipate that this amendment, if enacted, may be a valuable regulatory tool for CNO in its investigative and quality assurance functions in the future.... In order to optimize the ability of colleges to draft enforceable regulations under this amendment, CNO suggests its amendment, to clarify beyond challenge, the investigatory powers that colleges possess in order to fully take advantage of the changes introduced by Bill 141."

The RNAO urges the immediate adoption of measures that would increase public safety. They said this is an issue for women's health and safety.

"In the interest of public safety, accountability and transparency, the RNAO welcomes this amendment that will provide for the direct observation of a member in practice."

However, the one group that obviously was the most interested in Bill 141 was the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario because, as I just indicated, many of their very important investigations had been put on hold due to the legal challenges to the college's investigatory powers. These included investigations into general practitioners who were performing invasive cosmetic surgical procedures—investigations that had arisen after patients had died. The powers being challenged were the college's powers to interview and observe physicians during investigations.

During committee proceedings, the college indicated that while these issues are before the court, it is possible for physicians who are involved in this litigation to continue practising surgery. The college indicated this could be a significant risk to the public. During the committee proceedings, the college requested that their powers of investigation be clarified. They requested that Bill 141 be amended to include HPPC amendments to codify the investigation powers of health colleges to ensure public safety. This is what the college said: "Interviews are an essential tool that must be made available to investigators to conduct a meaningful investigation. Interviews are a usual and accepted manner of evaluating medical knowledge and judgment. The medical chart tells only one part of the story; the remainder needs to come from explanations from the health care provider. Whether care is simply poorly charted or is in fact poorly provided can often be told from an interview."

In preparation for the committee hearing, the college researched the powers of investigation that were available to other regulators in Canada and Ontario, and they brought forward the example of the Ontario Veterinarians Act, which requires veterinarians to participate in

interviews with their college's investigators. They also took a look to see what else was out there. They requested that there be clarification regarding the power to observe its members.

According to the college, an example of when observation may be necessary includes cosmetic surgery performed by a general practitioner who has not undertaken a formal surgical residency program. The college then said:

"In certain limited cases, a college investigator will need to observe a member perform a procedure or technique.

"As surgery is a manual discipline, direct observation of the manual skills of the physician is important in order to thoroughly assess or examine the physician's surgical practice.

"A medical investigator will often be unable to draw any meaningful conclusion unless he/she is able to observe the member perform the procedure. It is through direct observation that an investigator can best assess the level of skill, knowledge and judgment of a surgeon."

So, we listened to what the college had to say. We all understood, all three parties, that there was a need to make a very substantial amendment to the legislation. Both my colleague from Nickel Belt and I put forward basically the same substantial amendment in order to codify the observation and investigation powers of Ontario's 23 health colleges. I'm pleased to report that that amendment received all-party support.

I want to add my sincere appreciation to all of the participants in all three parties. I think that this committee was first and foremost concerned about the safety and lives of people in the province of Ontario. I believe that the amendment that was added to the legislation did and will further protect the health and safety of people in this province. I think that as a result of taking the time to listen to the colleges and listen to the public, and agreeing that there was a need for improvement, this bill today will save lives in the future. I thank those who participated.

I now encourage the government to move very swiftly to enact this legislation. Once this legislation has received royal assent, Ontario's regulatory colleges can begin to implement regulations which define their powers of investigation. Obviously, that's going to be critically important as we move forward.

Thank you to everyone who had a part in making sure that this legislation could be the best possible to protect the lives of people in the province.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: The member from—Kitchener–Waterloo?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Righto.

Mr. Michael Prue: Righto. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo always speaks quite eloquently on matters, particularly matters involving medicine and medical professions and health. I guess that's from her long experience, and her experience sitting on the other

side of the House and as the minister. It's always a pleasure to listen to what she has to say, in a sane and balanced way. I think that today she said the same.

I want to commend her for the process that she went through, as well as my colleague France Gélinas, who unfortunately is not able to be here today, for the input they have had in order to come to an all-party resolution.

It is wonderful, to me. This is one of the rare, wonderful occasions when all three parties can come together on a consensus, when they can listen rationally to the amendments that are put forward both by government and by opposition members and come to a conclusion that is of great benefit. This is one of those rare bills—and I've been here now seven and a half years—that seems to come together. I wish that we could bring more bills together in such a fashion, and I wish that we could have more collegial discussions like we're having here today, where all parties come to a realization that what happens in this place matters a great deal to the people of this province and a great deal to the college and to the people who have fought so long and so hard to get proper regulations around this industry.

Again, I commend the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for the part she had to play, and I commend as well all the members of this House, on the committee and those who are here today, for giving this bill an opportunity, and giving an opportunity for everyone to be heard, both in committee and here today, so that we can come to a bill that will have unanimous approval of the House and for the people across this province.

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

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I, too, am pleased to rise today to make a few comments with regard to the debate that was added to here by the member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

I agree with her, as do I agree with the member for Beaches–East York, that this is a pleasure, that the committee—the opposition and the government members of that committee—were able to work together to produce what will be, I think, a good and effective piece of legislation. It's kind of interesting that we, as a government, do get criticized often for not accepting opposition amendments. I, too, have been around here for a few years—through three governments, actually—and that seems to be a fault that many governments have been criticized for, that they don't listen to some good amendments in the opposition. It's a pleasure that we've done so this time. It's also interesting to me that, one by one, we all seem to agree that that's the way this place should function, and yet when we get together collectively, we don't seem to quite be able to work it out that way.

1630

Certainly, this piece of legislation is one that protects the health and the health care of the residents of the province of Ontario. For that reason alone, it's a good piece of legislation and a timely one.

It would seem that we have to have these regulations in place from time to time, notwithstanding the fact that

we talk about red tape and being overregulated. There are certain areas where government has a place to make regulations and to see that those regulations are carried out so that the benefit is accrued to all the residents of the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's also my pleasure to join with colleagues from all sides of the House in, first of all, congratulating the College of Physicians and Surgeons for coming forward with this important piece of legislation, and the government for adopting the legislation and sending it to committee.

I want to thank our colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo for her tremendous contribution. She was an excellent health minister—which the government of the day doesn't often acknowledge when Mrs. Witmer gets up to ask questions or make comments—for this province and did us all proud in terms of improving the health care system.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Compared to some other ones, eh?

Mr. Jim Wilson: She was my successor, I say to the member for Essex, and she did a far better job than I would ever do.

She was also Deputy Premier during those years and represented us very, very well—many times, a very non-partisan role—in terms of getting out to the people of Ontario. I remember her coming to my riding as education minister and visiting schools, and she was very well received.

Now she's doing a great job as health critic and deputy leader of Her Majesty's official opposition.

Again, congratulations to all in terms of bringing this particular law up to standard to improve the standards and enforcement abilities.

Mrs. Witmer, of course, had a wonderful amendment that was absolutely crucial. It's one of the questions that's before the courts with respect to the regulatory colleges, in particular the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and that was to codify the observational and investigative powers of the regulatory colleges.

Of course, what we're referring to here, mainly what made it in the media, are the cosmetic surgery incidents that did result in the death, I remember, of Krista Stryland, who was only 32 years old. She died after undergoing cosmetic surgery.

Congratulations to all. It's nice that we could work together on this one.

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

Mr. Mike Colle: I would like to thank the member from Kitchener-Waterloo for her insightful comments on a subject she knows a great deal about.

I just want to remind people out there that the reason why this bill, Bill 141, is being introduced is because, as the member from Simcoe-Grey, the former Minister of Health himself, said, there was a series of very unfortunate incidents that occurred as a result of cosmetic

surgeries. One in particular that he mentioned ended up in a young woman dying. That's because there wasn't the ability for the College of Physicians and Surgeons to have that oversight over their professional members. The college has asked for this oversight so they can ensure that the doctors who are performing this very, very complex surgery can be overseen and can ensure they have the qualifications to undertake these sophisticated operations.

Sometimes we forget—I'm sure the two members opposite, being former Ministers of Health, know full well—the incredible scale and scope of medical procedures that are taking place across this province. I think it's 400 hospitals, 24/7 they're operating around the clock in every corner of this province, and so many medical doctors and nurse practitioners and, you know, the surgeries that are taking place as we speak just down the street here on University Avenue. We expect, as the public, that these doctors will be qualified and the procedures will be followed properly.

Thankfully, we have the College of Physicians and Surgeons; we have the Regulated Health Professions Act, where there is oversight. It's something that we really sometimes take for granted, but thankfully over the years this kind of oversight has been built up in Ontario's health system, and I think it really offers protection for many patients who are in critical need of medical procedures.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the deputy leader of the official opposition to reply.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to thank the member from Eglinton. The member is right. There are, on a daily basis, obviously many surgeries occurring in province of Ontario, and the ones that we're talking about are usually done out of the hospital and oftentimes by individuals who haven't been totally qualified. So, as a result of this, we do hope that individuals in this province who are undergoing these procedures will now have the protection that they deserve, and these expanded powers should allow for that to happen.

I want to thank the member from Simcoe-Grey. Despite what he might have said, he was the Minister of Health before me, and I can assure you he left me some very big shoes to fill, and he's been great in helping with this health file throughout our years in opposition—which I hope and I know are going to come to an end in 2011.

I want to thank the member from Beaches-East York, again, a very respected colleague, a person who has made a great contribution in this House since his arrival; and, of course, my friend from Essex. I always appreciate his kind comments and the participation and support he offers to members in this House, as well as his leadership.

I'm just grateful that all three parties came together, recognized the need to protect the public, as our 23 colleges have an obligation to do, and that we have hopefully been able to put forward a bill that will quickly

be passed in order that the public can be well protected in the future.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I seek unanimous consent to hold down the lead. My colleague France Gélinas, the member from Nickel Belt, has been called out of town to a funeral. May we have that consent?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the leadoff speech for the New Democrats. Agreed? Agreed.

I'll return to the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I rise to talk about Bill 141. Bill 141 tells us something about how legislation and government responses to stakeholder-identified changes should and can work. In the case of Bill 141, we have an example of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario responding to an issue that affects their members as well as the well-being of Ontarians. The college knows their profession best; they understand what needs to be done in order to move with the changes in the profession and to serve its members and patients the best way they can. Bill 141 is a product of co-operation and listening to those who know the issue best. The New Democrats have been happy to support Bill 141. We understand that it is an important step forward to ensure patient safety in our province.

However, we are saddened that the co-operation and listening that took place in Ontario needs a place to turn when something goes wrong. We need a neutral third party oversight. The existing Ombudsman can take on this role; in fact, his office is already receiving some complaints of services and facilities. He does not have jurisdiction over that. How hard would it be for the government to have listened to the Ombudsman to make the stakeholders who have been calling for this for years—New Democrats have introduced multiple private members' bills that would have provided the necessary oversight, yet the government does not want to move in that direction.

1640

Home care: Ontario's home care system is, unfortunately, another example of too little done to protect the safety and well-being of those who rely on the health care service. Last winter, there was some reason to think that the missteps into a privatized, competitive bidding model of home care were ending. After months of vocal protests by angry Hamilton residents, furious that the two non-profit home care providers with a lengthy history of servicing our community were driven out of business by the competitive bidding process, the now former Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, George Smitherman, put a temporary end to the competitive bidding, and we were happy about that.

Here, stakeholders and experts in the field were speaking out and telling the government that change had to happen. These experts know that competitive bidding

disrupts the continuity of care for patients and creates a work environment of low wages and no job security for caregivers. It is a system that pads the pockets of for-profit private companies, while robbing our most vulnerable community members of the care they desperately need.

We see today, as Red Cross home care workers hit the picket line in Sudbury, where this system of competitive bidding leads. The 3,000 Red Cross workers do not want to strike; they would rather be providing for their clients. However, they have no choice. Their situation is a result of a broken system, one that prioritizes profit over quality; a system which allows a home care worker to work a 10-hour day but only be paid for seven hours—the other three hours are travel time and therefore unpaid; a system which places home care workers in a state of precarious and underpaid employment; a system which functions only through the exploitation of its workers and which leaves clients sorely underserved.

Yet in spite of all the evidence and outcry against a for-profit competitive bidding model for home care, the McGuinty government quietly announced the renewal of this inherently flawed process in December of last year. We know that the competitive bidding model has decimated not-for-profit home care providers. It has compromised the quality of care provided to Ontarians and seriously undervalued and undercompensated those dedicated to providing home care.

For-profit home care services divert public dollars away from patient care and into the pockets of for-profit companies. On the other hand, we know that home care services help keep people independent longer, they are an economical way of keeping our seniors healthier and they reduce the need for more expensive health care services. If the government wants a reliable home care system, one that is capable of providing for our most vulnerable, the province could have had the courage to listen to those who know the situation best and put an end to competitive bidding once and for all.

Delisting medicare services: In the last five years, we have watched vital health care services become delisted. This includes chiropractic services, optometry and physiotherapy. Health care professionals know that in the long run, inadequate access to those services will result in a much higher cost to the health care system. It simply makes no sense to force Ontarians to pay for these important health care services out of their own pockets.

An example: Think of an elderly person; let's call her Maureen. Maureen falls and breaks her hip. She receives an operation that is successful and after surgery is told that physiotherapy is required. Now that the physio has been delisted, the only place to get access covered by OHIP is in the hospital. The hospital waiting list is 400 people long—not uncommon in Ontario. Maureen faces the choice of paying out of her pocket if she is able to—break into her limited savings—or wait for months for treatment. Unable to pay out of her pocket, Maureen must wait to receive the physiotherapy from her doctor which he ordered. By the time Maureen is seen by her

local physiotherapist, she has been living with acute pain for months and will now require extensive rehabilitation rather than straightforward physiotherapy. In this scenario, Maureen is lucky: She does not fall again or get readmitted to the hospital; she does not become a casualty of the bare-bones health care system.

Delisting services does not save money; it shifts the burden to the individual, and it shifts the burden to other parts of the health care system. Experts know that the last round of delisting resulted in more visits to doctors and hospitals. Delisting fails our public health care system, and it risks costing all of us more, as people end up in acute situations because they cannot access the preventive or appropriate care they need.

It seems that the government may be headed down this path again; we hope not in Hamilton, because we already put 1,500 people into a banquet centre. Mr. Smitherman sought to change that and reverse that decision at the time. We hope we're not headed down that way again, because the people of Hamilton once again will come out in force against this.

Last week, when asked about the potential of delisting, Minister Caplan could not reassure Ontarians that this was not on the agenda for the budget. In the first couple of months of 2009, more than 100,000 Ontarians lost their jobs. These people and their families are hurting. They are relying on the social safety net to be there for them in these times that are troubling. Instead of this government destabilizing the pillars of our system, has the government not learned from its past mistakes? Will it continue, unwisely, actions which destabilize our universal quality of health care? I hope not.

Long-term-care and retirement homes: Long-term-care and retirement homes desperately need facilities for our rapidly aging population, and they have fared no better under the McGuinty government. Ontarians have watched as the contracts for long-term-care facilities are handed to private corporations.

If the communities of Kingston, Windsor and Guelph are any lesson, it is that these profit-driven companies are not willing to risk their bottom line to provide the services Ontarians need. It was from these communities that a private company withdrew when the economic situation took a turn for the worse, and what will happen to these beds now? Our LTC facilities are suffering because of the lack of investment.

Although 3.5 hours of daily care is set as a minimum requirement for adequate care, the government is still falling short of meeting the desired number of hours, and without the needed investments in new staff, nurses and personal support workers, any improvement to these facilities will come up against an obvious ceiling.

Retirement homes have become a crutch for the easing of the crisis of alternative level of care—ALC—patients who now occupy approximately 20% of our province's hospital beds. As patients, many of these seniors who end up in hospital cannot return home but do not have an acute health care need. Many of these people are finding themselves in retirement homes.

Although many of the Ontario retirement homes are excellent facilities, the problem remains that retirement homes are not regulated health facilities. They are a residential accommodation that lacks regulation and obligations to provide a minimum level of health support. The government has been urged by many stakeholders, the New Democrats and health care workers to regulate these retirement homes in order to protect the safety of patients and the elderly in our province. Regulation is needed in order to ensure that seniors do not become a casualty of a system that cannot properly provide for them. Regulation is needed to ensure that the care needed is received.

Nurses: I can safely say that my family is trying to add to the system a little bit. My youngest daughter is taking her nursing, and now she's going to move on to be a nurse practitioner, so hopefully she can help some of the people of our province.

Nurses are the backbone of our health care system. They are the only 24/7 bedside professionals in our hospitals. It is nurses who work tirelessly, day in and day out, on the front lines, providing the best quality of care to our Ontario families.

The McGuinty government promised to hire 9,000 more nurses and 2,500 personal support workers. These promised workers were supposed to work in our province's LTC facilities and other health facilities now feeling the crunch because of staffing shortages. Yet, in the latest fall economic statement, the health minister said that the promise would have to wait a little, that this promise was going to be postponed, and no firm date has been given about when we may see it fulfilled. Minister Caplan has hinted that this promise would sit on the shelf until after the next election in 2012 or 2013.

Our province has learned the hard way that when you cut nurses and nursing hours, patient care suffers. New Democrats know that even in hard economic times, balancing hospital budgets cannot be made on the backs of nurses. We are calling on the government yet again to listen to what those who know best are saying: to follow through on their promise to hire the 9,000 nurses.

Dental care: The McGuinty government promised to spend \$135 million over three years to create a dental care system for low-income Ontarians. To date, only \$10 million of this has been spent to expand an already existing program. This government has had no problem patting themselves on the back for making the original promise, but the government seems to think that they have no obligation to follow through on the promises they made.

Experts like the Ontario Dental Association and the Association of Ontario Health Centres have repeatedly urged the government to implement a preventive dental program that will serve not only the most acute cases but also prevent the tragedy of poor dental health to happen in the first place.

An average of 30,000 Ontarians are facing job losses each month, and for many of these people this also means the loss of their benefits. Dental costs are high and

become hard to justify when you have to make a choice between your teeth and feeding your children. Is this the kind of choice that the government wants Ontarians to make? Will the government be listening to the stakeholders any time soon and follow through on their promise to the dental system that will serve low-income Ontarians?

In conclusion, we see that there is unfortunately a very long list of actions this government has taken that are counter to the best interests of Ontario's patients, a health care system that leaves people vulnerable. We see that the McGuinty government rarely acts in the best interests of the patients or takes action on the recommendations offered by the experts in the various health fields. We see that the success of Bill 141 is more of an exception rather than a rule; that is, the government could learn a lot from the process of this bill and apply it to other realms of the health care system. If the McGuinty government had the good sense of bringing Bill 141 forward, then they can also bring forward the necessary changes to the Ombuds-

man oversight, home care, delisting medical services, long-term-care and retirement homes, nursing staff, and to the dental care program.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: I move the adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? The debate is adjourned.

Third reading debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Orders of the day.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow, March 25, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1652.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

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

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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
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Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Brotten, Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
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Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development / Ministre du Développement économique
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
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Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craiton, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	

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

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

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Garfield Dunlop, Kevin Daniel Flynn
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Norm Miller, Mario Sergio
Peter Tabuns
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David Zimmer
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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
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Rick Johnson, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Yasir Naqvi, Michael Prue
Tony Ruprecht, Mario Sergio
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Laurel C. Broten, Kim Craitor
Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo
Helena Jaczek, Shafiq Qaadri
Khalil Ramal, Peter Shurman
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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

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spécial de la santé mentale et des dépendances**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Bas Balkissoon, Christine Elliott
Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
Jeff Leal, Liz Sandals
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