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Tuesday 15 September 2009

Mardi 15 septembre 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 15 septembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
AMENDMENT ACT (GREENHOUSE GAS
EMISSIONS TRADING), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR
LA PROTECTION DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT
(ÉCHANGE DE DROITS D'ÉMISSION
DE GAZ À EFFET DE SERRE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 14, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 185, An Act to amend the Environmental Protection Act with respect to greenhouse gas emissions trading and other economic and financial instruments and market-based approaches / Projet de loi 185, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement en ce qui concerne l'échange de droits d'émission de gaz à effet de serre ainsi que d'autres instruments économiques et financiers et approches axées sur le marché.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I just remind members that the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke was speaking, and I believe he is expressing quite accurately the views of our side—

Mr. Mike Colle: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): My apologies on the rotation; the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke was the last speaker. The rotation moves to the NDP. The member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering there for a moment.

It is a pleasure to rise for the first time and to welcome everyone back from what might have been for some a summer vacation and what for many was working all summer. Welcome back to the chamber, at any rate.

This bill—I wish I could say it is a pleasure to talk about it. It's really not a pleasure to talk about it because there is not much of it. This bill is about a page and a half in length if you take away the preamble and the translation etc. Simply put, what the bill says is, "We don't

like greenhouse gas emissions." It's what I would call a primary prototypical example of greenwashing. This is a bill designed to send a little love letter out to the environmental community saying, "We like you." That's it. "We like you; we're not going to do anything, but we like you." "Don't you like us?" really is the inherent question there; "Won't you vote for us?"

The sad reality is that this is a state of crisis right now in the world. Right now in the world, we're looking at an environment that is going down, and going down quickly. It's interesting, because I remember as a teenager, what got me politically active in the very first place was the environment—way, way, way back then. I remember seeing a documentary, I think on CBC, about pollution. We didn't talk about greenhouse gas emissions back then, but it was simply pollution: the fact that species were becoming extinct, that humans were encroaching on green space, that by and large we were making our biosphere uninhabitable, and certainly we're rendering the globe uninhabitable for our grandchildren. I remember watching that documentary and thinking, I've got to do something about this. I was a teenager. I remember thinking, and many of my generation thought, should we have children? Should we even have children? Will the world last? Of course, we were also under the threat of the bomb back then—more about the nuclear issue later.

But, you know, certainly it was a call to action. And for me, as a teenager, I looked at the economic system in which we were embroiled, called capitalism, and I thought there's no way that this system, unchecked, will get us to the point we need to get to, that is, to an environmentally sustainable globe. Because it is inherent in capitalism and capitalist companies to grow—that's what they need to do. I was in business; I know this. You have to grow or you have to produce a profit. You have to churn out more consumables year to year to year. And so the world has gone. In the intervening decades, that's what's happening, and guess what? In the intervening decades, the world, in terms of the environment, has become less and less and less inhabitable.

So now, all of a sudden, it's hip to be an environmentalist. Now, all of a sudden, it's mainstream to be an environmentalist. But really when you look at what has actually been accomplished over those decades, one has to shake one's head and say, "Very, very little."

Where does the blame lie? Does the blame lie with those who have been denying that there has been a crisis? That's the right wing. The right wing just simply denies there's a crisis: "We'll do nothing; we don't need to do anything." That's not where the answer lies.

But does the answer really lie with the centre—let’s call it the dead centre—the dead centre that says, “We’ll make sounds as if we’re doing something, but we won’t do anything either. We’ll just make sounds as if we are.” That’s what this bill is. It sounds as if something’s going to happen, but we know nothing is, because, in fact, in measurable terms, the situation in Ontario is getting worse.

We know that greenhouse gas emissions under McGuinty’s reign have increased. They have not decreased; they have increased. So all the talk and all the nibbling around the edges of actual action, doing something, has led to this point. Greenhouse gas emissions are getting worse, urban sprawl is still occurring, and the McGuinty government is investing more in roads than they are in transportation. These are all provable facts. So again, we see in the last six years the increasing momentum of climate change both here and in the world.

Now, I listened with great interest to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke last night, who suggested that no matter what we do in Ontario, it will make about a 1% difference, so we shouldn’t really concern ourselves with this issue because, hey, it’s all about China and India, and until China and India come onboard, there’s not much we can do. To be frank, I can’t take that position either. That’s ridiculous. That sounds like and reminds me of Nixon. Remember the mutually assured destruction, going back a few years: “We have to arm ourselves because they’re arming themselves”? This leads to an arms race. But we’re in a pollution race right now, and somebody has to start stopping. Somebody has to start stopping greenhouse gas emissions, even if it’s only 1%, even if it’s only in Ontario. We have to do our bit, because if we don’t, it’s not going to help, and it’s going to hurt, whether it’s 1% or 10%.

And, yes, of course we have to act globally as well. There’s no question about it—which, I have to say, the federal government is not doing. We have to act globally as well to combat it, and that means taking on the challenge that is delivered to us from developing countries in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. But, you know, this is not going to do that either, clearly.

So we know, factually, there was a 4% rise in greenhouse gas emissions between 2006 and 2007, negating two years of gains. Trust me, it could have been worse. We could actually have a vibrant economy where manufacturers are actually manufacturing and where people are not being laid off daily. In that case, the greenhouse gas emissions would have been worse. That’s the kind of double bind we’re in now.

What else has the McGuinty government done or planned to do? One of the things that they’re planning to do, apart from investing in highways instead of transportation—greatly more money going into highways than into public transportation—is that they’re going to be putting about 400-plus diesel trains on rails running through our neighbourhoods in the greater Toronto area. We know that in Parkdale–High Park, because they’re going to be running through our neighbourhood. They’re

going to be running through Trinity–Spadina. They’re going to be running through York South–Weston. They’re going to be running through a number of our neighbourhoods—one of the most polluting acts a government could possibly engage in. Out of a hundred different cosmopolitan areas, only Bangladesh is investing in diesel trains the way we are in Ontario. We should be absolutely ashamed of that. The response to that is, “It gets them out of their cars.” Well, unfortunately, cars are less polluting than diesel trains. So, in fact, we’re looking at an increase of pollution through many of our GTA neighbourhoods because of the actions of the McGuinty government.

If you want more information, folks, on that, don’t trust me; check out the Clean Train Coalition and you’ll get all the facts and figures you want. Because if you live within breathing distance of the tracks, not only will your lungs and your children’s lungs and your health be affected, but your property values will too. We don’t want to live in a rail ghetto in Toronto, and we don’t want diesel trains. That’s something that is extremely active that this government is pursuing, and that definitely will increase greenhouse gas emissions, there’s no doubt, because the major increase in greenhouse gas emissions is from transportation in this province.

0910

It’s interesting, you know—it’s not an even field. Should we all do something about greenhouse gas emissions in our own lives? Absolutely. But when you look at who the major polluters are, you’re not looking at the cleaning lady who lives down on Jameson and takes public transit. No, by no means. This is a class-based issue. You are looking at wealthy Canadians who are by far the greatest polluters in this country and the greatest producers of greenhouse gas emissions. There’s no doubt.

Canadian economist Lars Osberg studied this and found that if not for the rising incomes of the richest Canadians and the increased consumption that has gone along with their grotesque wealth—and “grotesque” is a good adjective to use there—Canada would be on track to meet its Kyoto targets.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, that means those who are driving their Hummers to their mansions in Rosedale, even if George Smitherman is standing in one of those mansions and talking about retrofitting the windows. They are still polluting far and away greater amounts than the cleaning lady on Jameson who is taking public transportation; not to mention the CEOs of the oil companies; not to mention the tar sands; not to mention the fact that here in Ontario we still have Nanticoke, one of the greatest polluters in Canada, and it’s still going; not to mention that here in Ontario we are still using coal-fired plants and every year that this government comes back to sit in this House, we hear a new date as to when they’re going to be closed. I remember when I was first elected it was supposed to be 2007, then it was 2011, and now it’s 2014. The question is, how many children have contracted asthma as a result of this government’s

inaction since 2007 when those coal-fired plants were supposed to be—promised to be—closed?

This is all what's actually happening in Ontario, not what this bill says will happen in Ontario. What this bill says will happen, of course, has no backup. It simply says we don't like greenhouse gas emissions. It reminds me very much of the anti-poverty bill, the 25 in 5 that says we don't like poverty. That was a "We don't like poverty" bill, no plans as to how to combat that.

Here's a challenge. It will be interesting to see six months into that five-year span with the 25 in 5 program, if poverty rates have gone down—a challenge to the government, because I would bet anything they've gone up, not down. That's six months into the government's five-year program. And I'll bet anything that six months into this bill's passing, greenhouse gas emissions will have gone up too and that we'll still be polluting and polluting more.

It's not enough just to send a greeting card to a voting community. It's not enough just to send out a message, a symbol, that says we don't like greenhouse gas emissions. That message has gone out for over 50 years now and quite frankly the environmental community is not fooled. They see it for what it is. They see it as greenwashing, which is what it is. Just like the anti-poverty bill, it is an attempt to buy off a community with public relations instead of what that community is asking for—and that is action.

If this government were serious about acting on poverty there are a number of steps it could take, and it could take them immediately. One, raise the minimum wage over the poverty line. That would eliminate at least a million from poverty. Two, actually bring about housing instead of talking about it; actually build or retrofit the hundreds of thousands of housing units that we need; actually do something about daycare in this province, because we know women and children are the major sources of poverty figures in this province.

Those are actually concrete actions this government could take. It's not going to. It hasn't; it won't. All it will do is send out a flag, a PR symbol saying, "We want to do something. We think poverty is bad." Well, here we have an environmental equivalent: "We don't like pollution, we don't like greenhouse gas emissions, so we'll send out a signal—a PR gesture to that community saying, 'We don't like it. Yes, we'll do something.'" Everything—everything—is going to be left to regulation. Everything. I mean this is a bill of one and a half pages' length. If you look at similar efforts in the United States, as has been discussed in this House last night, you'll see 1,200 pages dealing with the same issue. Why? Because obviously, if you are going to deal with something like cap-and-trade systems to combat greenhouse gas emissions, you can't just say, "We don't like greenhouse gas emissions." You have to actually put into place some kind of system, some kind of cap-and-trade system. That's not in this bill. There's nothing about a system of cap and trade in this bill. Again, it's interesting, because the headlines are always, "McGuinty's going to do

something cap and trade." Of course, as members of the New Democratic Party we're in favour of something like a cap-and-trade system—but actually a cap-and-trade system, not a public relations gesture; not an opportunity to greenwash the environmental community by simply saying, "We may do something, we want to do something about greenhouse gas emissions but, sorry, not in this bill. Maybe someday down the line, maybe in committee, maybe in regulations we'll do something." That's what this bill says. That's all it says. It's sad; it truly is sad.

Let me give you some examples of what could happen here. Manitoba has this wonderful system where if you want to retrofit your house or if you want to put new windows on, you don't have to go out and spend \$8,000 to \$20,000 dollars of your own money that you don't have—because let's face it: Ontarians are in a recession. They don't have \$8,000 to \$20,000 to spend on retrofitting their house to make it greener. No, they will actually lend you the money, lend you the services, get the windows in, and then you pay them back in your energy savings. That becomes a revolving fund to help others do the same. Now, that makes sense.

What doesn't make sense is what we've now got in Ontario: a program where you shell out thousands of dollars, and after a great deal of red tape you maybe get some money back. That's the program we have right here. And that's only for homeowners. Then we're talking about tenants. Tenants, unfortunately, are caught between the proverbial rock and hard place in terms of the environment. Because tenants who pay their own heat, tenants who pay their own utilities, are dependent on their landlords actually doing something. So all those high-rise towers that have leaky windows in my riding and ridings across this province, all those tenants who pay their own heat, there's no incentive, absolutely none, for those landlords to retrofit their buildings at huge expense so that their tenants can save on their utility bills. Think about it. Think about how much wasted energy goes out the windows and doors of most of the rental units in this province.

We could go on. We could talk about urban sprawl. We could talk about the secret deal, for example—this was in the *Toronto Star*—that they said the developers made with the Liberal Party to spawn yet more urban sprawl north of the greenbelt in the Bradford-Barrie area. This brings to mind that when you want to understand politics—and it doesn't matter what jurisdiction you look at—you look at who pays. He who pays the piper calls the tune. Come on, we know the Liberal Party in Ontario is vastly funded by developers and the nuclear industry. And of course they want that money to keep rolling in so they can keep winning elections. They're going to have to dance to that piper's tune, and they are. They're making all the noises in the other direction—good camouflage—and then they're dancing to the developer's tune. That's clearly what's happening here.

This is not a problem for everyone, right? This is not a problem for everyone, in terms of producing greenhouse gas emissions. But it has overarchingly been industry, it's

been the government's policy to make everyone feel equally guilty about producing greenhouse gas emissions. I'm standing here as a New Democrat and saying, again, to use that woman who lives in one of the rental apartments down on Jameson and who goes on public transit because she can't afford a car, every day, who pays her utility bills despite the fact that she's leaking energy out the windows, it's not as much her fault as it is the fault of those opposite, as it is the fault of the developers, as it is the fault of all of those huge greenhouse gas emitters that we have, as it is the fault of the guy who drives his Hummer to his 4,500-square-foot house in Rosedale. First of all, let's understand who we're talking to and who we have to curb here and what we have to do to actually make a difference.

Let's end on a positive note. I only have a few minutes left. There are many things we have to do, and one of them is not to get people to pay to pollute. Any system that says if you've got money you get to pollute is a system that we don't want any part of, as the New Democratic Party. Because then the rich get to pollute and the poor get to, again, live in their leaky-windowed apartments on Jameson. So pay-to-pollute programs—we want none of it.

0920

What you need to do is you need finally to take some dramatic steps to stop greenhouse gas emissions. What does that mean? That means that we can't be cozying up to those folk who are destroying our planet. That means that we actually have to get energetic, that we have to get courageous, that we have to stand up to the piper who's paying for the tune and say, "We're not playing that tune anymore." If you're a developer and you're creating urban sprawl, you know what? That's going to be illegal. If you are a manufacturer, if you are a greenhouse gas emitter, if you're producing SUVs, if you're driving SUVs, you've got to stop that. That won't be allowed in our constituency, in our jurisdiction. You've got to stand up and actually make a difference. Because if you don't—thinking back to when I was a teenager and watched that first program on CBC on pollution—we won't make a difference in this generation.

One should sit down with an environmentalist and listen to the forecast about what's going to happen for our grandchildren and their great-grandchildren, because they are going to pay the price. We've seen the increasing tornadoes and storms; we've seen the increase of natural disasters all due to climate warming and to greenhouse gas emissions. We know the result. We know that we're just at the beginning of the end, so to speak. Do we really want to sit and change tables on the Titanic, folks? Or do we actually want to change the ship? We've got to change the ship here. I don't see anything in a one-and-a-half page bill, anything in a piece of greenwashing, anything that's really just an attempt to get votes from the environmental community that's going to change the direction of any ship, that's going to make any difference for any child any time soon in this province.

So, unfortunately, I'm not pleased to speak about this bill. What I'd like to see, instead of paper, is some action.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to respond to the member prior. I want to suggest a couple of things. One, we have a long way to go when it comes to bringing our environment in line to what the people of Ontario expect. It's true; we do have a long way to go. But, also, it's worthwhile acknowledging some of the steps even before the cap and trade that we're talking about today. It's not just one flick of a switch, that we'll go from one direction to the other, as some members would suggest. It is truly a long-term commitment, and I think we need to reflect on how we begin on the long-term commitment to try to achieve some of those goals.

Speaker, you're aware—you were here when the province brought in legislation to create a greenbelt, some 1.8 million acres of what we have around the largest populated area in Canada. It's there to help protect the environment. At the same time, we allow those 1.8 million acres to be used as part of establishing, for the agricultural industry, a stable framework so they know that not only are we protecting the environment by creating the greenbelt, but also providing sustainable farmland that we can have close to home so we don't have to truck produce or agricultural products for miles and miles. We're planting some 50 million trees by 2020. That's all part of the plan. I wish I had more time, but I just thought I'd point those couple of things out.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I listened with interest as my friend from Parkdale–High Park talked about this bill, and in many respects, reflected my own views on the bill. She went pretty far afield, talking about pollution from Hummers and leaky apartments on Jameson, but that notwithstanding, they have a place. But they're very, very far away from a bill that, in substance, doesn't have much more to it, in fact, less than the average private member's bill.

Cap and trade is a complex subject. It's something that on some level I'm sure that I and my party would be happy to support, but we have to have some elaboration. We don't see, in this bill, anything whatsoever to do with targets. We don't see anything to do with jurisdiction. The jurisdiction of Ontario alone does not regulate climate. In concert with Quebec, it doesn't regulate climate. Perhaps in concert with Canada, it begins to, but you've got a number of divergent groups; for example, less than a dozen states and provinces called the Western Climate Initiative—good idea, but, again, it doesn't regulate.

We don't know from this bill whether or not we are talking about handing out credits on a free-of-charge basis to people or companies who have, of necessity, to put carbon into the atmosphere. So is that free of charge or is that at auction? The whole mechanism by which cap and trade works is dependent upon a modified tax system that, by necessity, forces products created by companies that do put out carbon in large quantities—to charge more for those products, and that comes back to people

who purchase the products through the tax system, but we see no mechanism there either.

Let me be clear: I would support cap and trade on some level; I'm sure that my party would. We are not anti-environment, by any stretch of the imagination. We want to see something go through, but it's not simply for the children because the Minister of the Environment says so.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I listened to my colleague from Parkdale–High Park delineate a number of issues with this bill. I think she's quite correct that the greatest substance in this bill is its title. After that, it's pretty lean pickings. After that, one is left asking, "Where's the meat? Where's the substance?" This continues, I think, a tradition of the McGuinty government: Just put forward enough to get a headline and end it there. That is what we have here. Anything which will tell us where we're going to be five years down the road, 10 years down the road, 15 years down the road is absolutely missing.

What I do note, though, on the part of this government is that oftentimes when an industry shuts down in Ontario and 400 or 500 workers get put out of work, there are members of this government who will say, "This is good for the environment." It's the first time I've ever heard thousands of Ontarians losing their jobs being described by a government as good for the environment, but we actually have government members doing that. Paper mills shut down in northern Ontario and I hear members of this government say, "Oh, this is good for the environment."

Interjections: Name names.

Mr. Howard Hampton: When people lose their jobs, when you see electricity usage going down because paper mills are shutting down and steel mills are shutting down, that is not good news.

But I see I've touched a nerve with this government, and so I look forward to more debate on this in the days to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Rick Johnson: I appreciate the comments made earlier by the members from Parkdale–High Park, Thornhill and Kenora–Rainy River. This act, Bill 185, I believe is another responsible step on the road to a green economy. You combine this with the moves that our government has made on the Green Energy Act—businesses across Ontario are jumping in to invest now. In a perfect world, we could stand up and wave a magic wand and eliminate coal generation tomorrow, and we could find a way to dispose of nuclear waste tomorrow. But it involves us moving to a totally green economy, and this simply is not possible in today's world.

What we have, though, is the ability to take steps, responsible steps. There are businesses that are coming up in my area that are looking at solar generation. Part of the green schools act has allowed one company to move forward with a solar generation system that, put on the

roof of a school, can generate money for schools right away. They're jumping into the green schools act, which is a very positive system. We have a company, CARMA Industries, which is moving to my riding and putting in monitoring for schools so that they can control their energy use.

0930

Any smart business will go—in the cap-and-trade system, if you have to spend more money to be able to pollute, if I was running that business, I'd be looking tomorrow to make sure that I could cut back on my energy usage. This is a smart part of moving ahead in our economy.

This bill will stimulate businesses to move now. You combine that with the tax incentives that were in our last budget and it makes Ontario a great place to invest.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Parkdale–High Park has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and by the way, congratulations on your new role.

There are a lot of biblical passages about God, essentially, or the owner of land investing in a steward and telling that steward to look after and take care of the wealth. That's what we're asked to do here. We're asked to look after the wealth of the planet so that our children might inherit it. We don't need baby steps—I'm hearing a lot about, "Oh, well, this is a just a little baby step." What we need now, 40 or 50 years later, after we knew the problem existed, is quantum leaps; we need quantum leaps here. What we're getting is a one-and-a-half-page document that says nothing, that does nothing and that is a prime example of public relations. "Greenwashing" is the term: That's what this document does.

Let's be clear: I suggest that anybody watching this go and look at the bill themselves, and they'll have a good laugh over coffee in the morning. It's one and a half pages long. It says nothing and it does nothing, and that is the hallmark of the McGuinty Liberals. The hallmark of the McGuinty Liberals is to say a lot, do very, very little, and make it sound very, very good. That's what they're good at.

Here is a perfect example: a \$40,000 electric car that's being touted by the government—how many people in this economy can afford a \$40,000 electric car?—and at the same time putting over 400 diesel trains on the tracks, the only jurisdiction outside of Bangladesh, running through our neighbourhoods. If that isn't hypocrisy, I don't know what is. This bill is not going to address that.

Quite frankly, greenhouse gas emissions are up. Need we say more? Despite all the rhetoric, despite the paper, in this jurisdiction, in this province, the McGuinty government is failing on the environment and that stat proves it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm honoured to rise today and speak in support of Bill 185, our government's proposed Environmental Protection Amendment Act.

As this House heard yesterday from the Honourable John Gerretsen, Minister of the Environment, the climate change crisis is a battle that must be fought on many fronts. There are no quick fixes to this challenge, and Ontario is determined to be a leader in this fight. Bill 185 is a key piece of our strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create a successful low-carbon society. If passed, it would place us further along the path to meeting the progressive, ambitious reduction targets laid out in our climate change action plan.

I want to remind the members of this House that these are among the most aggressive greenhouse gas reduction targets in North America. They are 6% below 1990 levels by 2014—the Environmental Commissioner has confirmed we're well on our way towards meeting that particular goal—15% below 1990 levels by 2020, and 80% below 1990 by 2050. But what really is the true importance of these targets? Well, for me as a physician, of course the paramount concern is human health. We're well aware that climate change has led to catastrophic weather events, floods, tornadoes, storms and drought. These are all things that will take a toll on human health. But also locally, in Ontario, the Ontario Medical Association since 2000 has in fact been documenting the cost of illness from air pollution. This is premature death from smog, for which they have actually calculated the numbers. In 2008, it was estimated that some 9,500 premature deaths a year in Ontario were caused by smog. In my own region, York region, the number was some 590. I really want to commend the Ontario Medical Association for making this point over and over. Of course, this is part of what has informed our government's actions to close coal-fired generating plants, and we are on track for 2014.

The proposed act allows for the development of a harmonized cap-and-trade system for Ontario that would link to a broad North American system. To reiterate, we believe that cap and trade is a fair and effective approach that is both economically and environmentally sound.

We support the development of a system that has absolute caps declining over time. It's consistent with other North American trading systems for linking purposes and will result in real and significant greenhouse gas reductions.

The system would also give Ontario businesses and industry the opportunity to compete and succeed in the new low-carbon economy, and it would provide an economic incentive to achieve emissions reductions.

We know that Ontarians support our goal of sustainable prosperity. More and more, we are hearing that people do not believe the environment and the economy are trade-offs. My constituents in Oak Ridges–Markham tell me that the economic downturn does not affect their expectations of decisive government action on climate change. In fact, this last weekend at the Kettleby Fair, in the heart of the greenbelt, in beautiful King township, upon discussing my new assignment as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment, a very vocal advocacy group in my riding—shared by you, Madam

Speaker—the Concerned Citizens of King Township, reinforced this particular notion.

I think many members of the House will be familiar with a recent Canadian Press-Harris/Decima opinion poll that echoes these sentiments. Close to 67% of people surveyed put the environment and the economy on equal footing, saying that government should be prioritizing both.

I think it's wonderful that so many people in our country have come to this important understanding. It's also wonderful to hear, as I often do, of the various ways Ontarians from all walks of life are engaging to reduce their carbon footprint.

Our government's continued commitment to protecting the environment while building a green economy is right in step with where the future is leading. The framework contained in Bill 185 would allow us to build on the wide range of initiatives we have already undertaken in our fight against climate change, and a cap-and-trade system for Ontario is one of the most essential tools we need to get us where we need to go. Our collaborations with partners across Canada and across borders would inform the development of a broad North American approach.

I would urge all members of this House to review the discussion document, *Moving Forward: A Greenhouse Gas Cap-and-Trade System for Ontario*, that was released in June of this year along with Bill 185. It's very clear from this document that this government is considering all the policy issues and options that we've heard about since debate commenced yesterday.

The stakeholder comments that we have received are being reviewed very carefully to ensure that the system we develop would work for the province, is fair and equitable, and maximizes trade opportunities for Ontario businesses. We will continue to seek input from a broad range of stakeholders for these very reasons.

Cap and trade has many complexities and many details to plan out carefully, and it is our intention to do just that. But it is clear that Ontario is poised to play a vital and positive role in developing and implementing an effective system. Cap and trade presents us with incredible trading opportunities. Last year alone, the global carbon trading market was valued at approximately US\$125 billion. Jurisdictions around the world have already implemented carbon trading initiatives, including the European Union and the northeastern United States. Australia, New Zealand and Japan are developing their own cap-and-trade systems as well.

We know that one of cap and trade's greatest benefits is its ability to spur the kind of innovation that results in improved sustainable industrial processes. It can help act as a springboard for technological innovations that propel us into a low-carbon future.

Moving forward on developing a harmonized cap-and-trade approach, one that links to other systems, will position Ontario as a centre for expertise. We stand to be at the forefront of the green technology development that a broad North American cap-and-trade system would

depend on. A shift to a low-carbon economy means many business opportunities and the creation of a diverse range of new jobs. These are the green-collar jobs of tomorrow that will contribute to a green economic recovery for the province.

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Ontarians expect us to do all that we can to protect the environment, build healthy communities and participate in the emerging green economy. By passing Bill 185, we would take our place as a leading jurisdiction in the fight against climate change and in realizing the goals of Ontario's climate change action plan, and it will help us to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the emerging green economy.

Ontario has the talent, the drive and the innovative vision to put us on the cutting edge of cap-and-trade development and implementation. Adopting cap and trade will encourage all kinds of new investment in our province. It will boost our competitiveness and reposition us to succeed in the global market.

Our work with Quebec and other like-minded jurisdictions across Canada and the US will help us reach a unified stance on an optimum approach to cap and trade. This will ensure a prosperous, sustainable future for Ontarians. The transformation to a sustainable green economy requires assured action, and Bill 185 is a crucial building block.

We know that a new green economy for Ontario means investment opportunities, innovative developments in processes and products and thousands of new jobs right here in the province.

For all of these reasons, I encourage all members to support this important step in protecting Ontario's interests, creating good green jobs and meeting our emissions reduction targets. It will help us to secure the kind of future for Ontario we all want, a future where the health and well-being of our communities are put first; a future where superior environmental protection measures have been put in place; a future with a thriving, sustainable green economy. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member did talk a fair bit about maximizing trade opportunities and made reference to incredible trade opportunities, I think referring to trade in carbon credits. On this side of the House, there is a very real concern with respect to trade and a concern with respect to trade in other commodities beyond carbon dioxide credits: trade in steel, trade in cement, petroleum products, energy, oil and gas.

And, as Mr. McGuinty himself has indicated, Ontario now has a concern with respect to the damage that cap and trade would do to Ontario's manufactured products that we do wish to export and produce. Mr. McGuinty was in the media indicating his concern with respect to the musings of Mr. Harper with respect to implementing cap and trade and how that would damage the trade with respect to our manufactured goods vis-à-vis other provinces. That's just within the Dominion of Canada.

Taking a broader perspective, which this one-and-a-half-page piece of legislation does not do, we realize there are no guarantees with respect to international trade or global trade. If anything, the concern, once we ratchet down the controls on our manufactured goods, is we would come to realize, unless this bill is reaching out to countries like China and India, that we are going to be flooded with uncapped imports.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I listened with interest to my friend from Oak Ridges–Markham and what she described as the veritable Garden of Eden in Ontario. We want that, too. We want a cap-and-trade or cap-and-auction system, too, in the New Democratic Party. This bill doesn't deliver it. That's what this discussion and this debate is about. This bill is one and a half pages long. There's nothing in this bill to attest to what she's describing—nothing. This all sounds very wonderful. "Where is it?" is what we say. Where is it? Why isn't it in the bill? And if it's not in the bill six years into the McGuinty term of office here, why isn't it in the bill? I mean, surely six years later one could have expected something with a little bit more substance than a one-and-a-half-page greenwashing public relations exercise, which is what we've got here.

Now, in committee—and I would suggest to anybody out there in the environmental community who wants to write in that they should be deputing and writing in; my goodness, yes—certainly there's hope. There's always hope. There's hope that this bill will eventually be expanded to cover all of the things that she's described. There's hope that the greenhouse gas emissions will go down in Ontario. The reality is, however, that they are going up. The reality is, however, that we are building more roads. The reality is, however, that we have more urban sprawl. The reality is that we are going nuclear. And the reality is that this bill is one and a half pages long and it doesn't do any of the things that are reported by my friend from Oak Ridges–Markham.

So, we live in hope, absolutely. We certainly live in hope. Otherwise, none of us would be sitting in this Legislature. We live in hope that things will change, that things will get better and that we will live in a veritable Garden of Eden in Ontario, but unfortunately, it's not going to be through Bill 185.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions? The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and congratulations on your new assignment.

Like you, the member for Oak Ridges–Markham knows full well that the real battle for fighting expanded carbon footprints is in York Region, where there's been incredible pressure to pave all of York region and forget about the incredible environmental resource that it is. That's why I think one of the most significant things this government has done, one that's been opposed by many in the opposition, is the 1.8-million-acre greenbelt. It is

an incredible testament to the vision of the Premier. This greenbelt means that there are finally lines drawn, that you can't pave everything north of Steeles, and that there is very good science, very good planning and very good investment in sustaining our farmland in York region, but also our green space. The member from Oak Ridges–Markham knows that. That's why the second part of that is to push public transit into York region, and that's why I've always been shocked by the NDP not supporting the subway going into York region. The member from Thornhill knows we have to have the subway going into the north—

Mr. Peter Shurman: I do, but that has nothing to do with this bill.

Mr. Mike Colle: It reduces your carbon footprint. The member from Thornhill doesn't understand that if you want to reduce carbon, you have to have people getting out of cars and getting into public transit. The subway is run on clean electricity. The \$11 billion on new streetcar lines going across the GTA, the NDP opposed. This is what this bill is all about.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions? The member for Thornhill.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I listened with interest to my friend from Oak Ridges–Markham, and first of all I would like to congratulate her on her new role as parliamentary assistant in this particular area of the environment. She paints an absolutely glorious picture of what Ontario would look like if we passed this bill. If she knows something—and I presume she does—that hasn't been shared with the rest of us, I wish she would provide it, chapter and verse, in a bill that, as the member from Parkdale–High Park says, is a very scant few paragraphs and doesn't tell us anything about where this rosy future comes from.

I have in front of me a short paragraph that I would like to read into the record that comes from a document prepared some months ago by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce on the issue of cap and trade. It says, "A national cap-and-trade system would require the creation of new administrative and legal trading infrastructure, complete with new regulations and institutions to effectively enforce the system," including fines and sanctions, "and a national electronic registry for issuing, holding, transferring and cancelling permits."

That describes in a very few words the complexity that's involved in implementing a cap-and-trade system. You can't just do this at the provincial level by passing a bill that is as simplistic as this. You have to be more elaborate.

One has to presume, from looking at this bill, that we're talking about a fairly complex regulatory structure that we in the other parties have no way of knowing—in fact, I rather doubt that at this early juncture, you in the governing party really know—what the regulations are going to look like. We would look forward to that, but I can tell you that as this bill stands, it would be very, very hard to vote for it. Cap and trade, as I said earlier, on the face of it is a reasonable approach using monetary levers

to control climate, but this bill doesn't tell us anything about the how.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Oak Ridges–Markham has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to thank the members from Haldimand–Norfolk, Parkdale–High Park, Eglinton–Lawrence and Thornhill for their comments. As I always like to emphasize the positive, I am so glad that apparently all sides of the House do share a common vision and the recognition that cap and trade is extremely complex.

However, some of the comments did seem to perhaps not acknowledge our government's firm commitment to this type of vision and the actions that we've already taken. I just want to remind the members that in fact, in relation to our goal to eliminate coal by 2014, we recently announced the closure of two units at Nanticoke and two units at Lambton by October 2010. Comparing carbon dioxide emissions between 2003 and 2008, those emissions have been reduced by some 33%—very solid achievements.

If we want to look at what we've done with our new Green Energy Act, we know that we're going to attract new investment in renewable energy. We have made some substantial progress as it relates to wind turbines. When we formed government there were some 10 turbines in the province; now there are over 670. That's an 80-fold increase, and we have signed contracts for another 1,170 megawatts of wind products. Just in 2008, wind power generation increased by 37%. These are substantial achievements.

My friend from Eglinton–Lawrence alluded to the green transportation plans that we have—the \$11.5-billion investment in rapid transit for the greater Toronto area and Hamilton. These are documented initiatives of this government. The greenbelt, from which we both benefit, Madam Speaker, is another sterling piece of legislation achieved by this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I start, I'd like to congratulate you on your new responsibility. It's about time.

It's my pleasure to participate in today's debate on the cap-and-tax scheme. I listened closely yesterday to the member for Haldimand–Norfolk. I think he's doing a tremendous job as our environment critic in pointing out the flaws in the McGuinty government's approach to this global issue.

I have to say I was disappointed, upon our return to Queen's Park, that instead of debating the issues that Ontarians, especially in Sarnia–Lambton, are talking about the most, like the Dalton sales tax or eHealth, we find ourselves discussing Bill 185, the Environmental Protection Amendment Act. As my colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk so effectively said yesterday, the McGuinty team, when desperate for a headline, will grab a

green headline with ineffective, costly environmental legislation. In this case, this government has come forward with its local response to a worldwide issue.

Like him, I was also shocked when I saw Bill 185 and it was, as some other members have alluded to, just a page and a half long. By comparison, the most recent United States legislation, Bill HR 2454, the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009, came in at 1,200 pages, with at least one 309-page amendment. That would be something you would expect for a national and international response to a problem that literally millions of pages and electronic blogs have been written about and that requires a solution on a world stage to be effective.

To be clear, Bill 185 is cap-and-trade legislation aimed at reducing carbon emissions through setting emission limits for business and industry, with those businesses unable to meet those limits having to buy carbon dioxide credits from those who are emitting less. This bill is an extension of Stéphane Dion's Green Shift. Although it's not strictly the green tax of the Dion school, it is an extension of this. Basically, as costs are downloaded, it becomes an extension of the Green Shift in the form of an indirect tax or, in other words, a hidden tax, hence my references to a cap and tax.

My main concern with this legislation revolves around the inadequacy of a local provincial response to a global question and concern that makes this bill more or less pointless. Quite simply, if some of the main producers of carbon are not going to be involved in this cap-and-trade gambit—for example, China and India—how can the McGuinty government change the climate? And how do we compete with their imports? Some people have even referenced this program as the cap-and-trade jobs-to-China plan.

When you consider that China, at 1.3 billion people, is the largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world, you realize the true nature of the carbon question on a global scale. Encouragingly, India, at over a billion people and the fourth-largest emitter of planet-warming carbon dioxide, has recently announced a cap-and-trade plan of their own.

So here we are, in the dog days of a recession, when yet again government has seen fit to bring environmental issues to the centre stage, grabbing headlines really quickly but doing little else other than pulling the rug out from under our manufacturers that have struggled through this tailspin of an economy.

So again, today, we have the opportunity to debate Bill 185, the Environmental Protection Amendment Act. In some corners it is better known as the cap and trade or, more accurately, cap and tax.

I think the example about China that the member for Haldimand-Norfolk used yesterday bears looking at again. As the member referenced yesterday, if Ontario or North America has CO₂ costs and China does not, then CO₂ regs become a massive wealth transfer to China. More importantly, it will lead to higher CO₂ emissions globally as they shift production from relatively more

efficient North American plants to less efficient Chinese facilities.

Any thought that Ontario needs to lead on greenhouse gas regs and then the rest of the world will follow is naive. Consider the following: The People's Republic of China is the largest consumer of coal in the world and is about to become the largest user of coal-derived electricity, getting 1.95 trillion kilowatt hours per year, or 68.7%, of its electricity from coal, as of the year 2006, compared to almost two trillion kilowatt hours produced, or 49%, of the United States' power. Hydroelectric power in China supplied another 20% of China's needs in 2006.

With approximately 13% of the world's proven coal reserves, China has enough coal to sustain its economic growth for over a century or more, even though the demand for that coal is currently outpacing production.

China's coal mining industry is also one of the deadliest in the world. Coal production rose 8.1% in 2006 over the previous year, reaching 2.38 billion tonnes, and the nation's largest coal enterprises saw their profits exceed, in American dollars, \$8.75 billion.

If China is not onside, if China is not part of this carbon trading scheme, we are more or less spitting in the wind, especially if we think that hampering industries in our province and a couple of Great Lakes states is going to make any dent in the amount of carbon emissions being sent into the atmosphere.

In my riding of Sarnia-Lambton, the province recently announced that they were going to close two electrical generators at the Lambton generating station, with the loss of over 100 jobs—I hear the government side laughing—by 2010, with—

Mr. Peter Shurman: They think job losses are funny.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, they think job losses are funny. That's what I always want to know: What about the jobs? Everybody's talking about carbon trade, and cap and tax, but what about the real people, the lunch-bucket crowd who have to depend on these jobs every day to pay the bills?

The government would like us to think that they're striking a blow for clean air. I think they're wrong. They are doing this at a time when demand is down by over 20% and people are already losing their jobs. What happens when the economy does turn around and demand for electricity takes off? Where will we get that power then? They'd say, "Turbines." Well, I think that answer is still blowing in the wind; I don't think that has been proven yet.

In our airshed we have dozens of coal plants, mainly, in the United States, from the Ohio River valley, that aren't closing and in fact are being expanded. We are losing generation capacity in Ontario and we have nothing to replace it with. This is short-sighted on the part of this government and a decision they will come to regret.

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I do remain hopeful regarding ongoing Ontario Power Generation's plans to implement biomass for possible future energy production and employment at Lambton

and other sites. I will also work with the farmers and the OFA, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, to make sure that this offer from OPG is serious and not just something that will get their hopes up, and that won't end the way most issues in rural Ontario do: with the McGuinty government sticking it to them.

It's time for this government to look beyond this anything-but-coal narrow vision and consider the benefits that can be achieved through investment in new technology that keeps our air clean while ensuring a reliable and affordable power supply for the future. Instead of closing our coal-fired generators at Lambton and Nanticoke, they should be following the lead of the previous Progressive Conservative government in bringing in further clean coal technology so that they can continue to operate in an environmentally friendly way. This technology is already there. It is widely used throughout the world and further investments are being made by the United States government, but this government refuses to look at it.

As for cap and trade, United States-India relations are important, and United States-China-Canada relations are key. Let's hope it's not cap and trade jobs to China.

As the member from Haldimand-Norfolk reminded us yesterday, the United States imported \$337 billion of Chinese goods in 2008. According to the United States Department of Commerce, India exported about \$21 billion in goods to the US. But according to Bloomberg News, "Global warming policies being considered by the United States and Japan risk provoking trade barriers, Chinese and Indian officials said in interviews." And it's been argued that cap and trade is another form of trade protectionism: It is an excuse to place trade barriers and tariffs on imports from countries by calling their products environmentally dirty. No carrots here; these are sticks.

We are a trading nation, and we should be very cautious when we take steps that may be considered trade barriers to some. This is why we have to understand the many sides that need to be addressed in developing an effective cap-and-trade program—a program that must be accepted globally and be led at the national level.

Again, to quote the member from Haldimand-Norfolk, this is "a global problem," and we should not get too tied up in developing moot local cures that hamper our business owners while failing to address the expansiveness of the disease.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Mike Colle: I appreciate the comments from the member from Sarnia-Lambton. The only thing I find a bit confusing is that the member is praising the use of coal-fired generation in Ontario, yet he's slamming it in China, saying how awful it is and that they're so reliant on coal. So I just don't quite get the axiom, the connection there and the contradiction.

The interesting thing is, the Conservatives, up until very recently, were climate change deniers. You all saw Stephen Harper—all of them. They all said, "There's no such thing as climate change." They had a group of

scientists going around Canada saying that there's no such thing as climate change. So it's hard to take admonition from a Conservative, who up until very recently didn't even believe climate change existed.

The other thing is about China. Sure, there are some very scary things happening with the number of coal-fired generation plants that are being built there. It's something like two every couple of weeks, and that's worrisome. But then to say, "Well, the real problem is in China"—which is true in part. The real problem is that the real consumption of carbon, to an extraordinary amount, happens in the Western world. You don't find too many people in China living in 5,000-square-foot homes. They don't have air-conditioned homes in relatively cool climates. They don't drive around in SUVs all over the place. Their carbon footprint—the average Chinese or Indian citizen—is 100 times smaller than ours here in North America.

So we have to do our part—that's the point. We can't say, "Well, we, on a gross basis, don't consume that much carbon." We do. On a per capita basis, it's scary how much carbon we consume, how much energy we waste, and how much we're overhoused, overheated, over-air-conditioned and overtransported. We've got to maybe learn some lessons from the Indians and the Chinese.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: You know, it's interesting: We've got the Conservatives, who are saying we shouldn't do anything; we've got the Liberals saying, "We'll do something in the future." I think about, what is a horizon? A horizon is that imaginary line up ahead that, as you approach it, disappears completely. That's what we're dealing with when we're dealing with Liberal policies. And, of course, with the Conservatives, unless China or India acts, then there's no urgency to act for us.

The fact of the matter is the McGuinty government promised to close coal-firing plants by 2007. Then I think it was 2009, it was 2011, 2014. This is certainly an ever-disappearing horizon for coal-firing plants in this province. Although yes, true, China is building two new coal plants every three weeks, they're also making strides in China, unlike us here, to put some money and some serious effort into renewables.

McGuinty, again, talks about all of these wonderful things they've done. I come back to the simple, fundamental reality—and you compare this to some European jurisdictions where the reality is very different, where 20% to 30% of their power comes from renewables. Here, that is not the case. Here, greenhouse gases are up, urban sprawl continues, car traffic continues, and individual consumption and production of carbon is growing. Things are getting worse; they are not getting better in Ontario. We are laggards; we are not leaders. That is our current historic reality.

Do we need to do something? Absolutely, but not in the future, not in 2014; absolutely we need to do something right now. I think anybody who listens and who actually picks up this bill and sees it's one and a half

pages of nothing will know that this isn't action, and it's certainly not action now.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to take this opportunity to comment on some of the remarks being made in regard to the length of the bill. I think we need to understand that in Ontario we already have a lot of existing authority in the Environmental Protection Act and we only need amendments in specific areas, particularly around auctioning and linking to other systems, to carry out a greenhouse gas cap-and-trade program for Ontario. More specifically, the proposed amendments support the distribution of greenhouse gas allowances by auction, free of charge, or by other means. It more clearly sets out existing regulation-making powers with respect to establishing the scope of a cap-and-trade program; the creation, use, distribution and trading of allowances and offsets; establishing, monitoring and reporting requirements; and to support emission trading across jurisdictions. Apparently, to the opposition parties this does not sound like very much, but this is absolutely essential to move forward, and that's exactly what we're doing.

The discussion paper—I alluded to this earlier, *Moving Forward: A Greenhouse Gas Cap-and-Trade System for Ontario*—outlines in detail what we've been hearing, the considerations that need to be made and options for moving forward. We need to acknowledge that cap-and-trade systems are in fact emerging across North America, and in order to ensure our industries have broad access to trading with other jurisdictions, Ontario's cap-and-trade program and its design features need to be compatible. Other jurisdictions will expect that all participants in the trading system face similar requirements to ensure a level playing field and prevent their industries from being disadvantaged. This is all what Bill 185 does.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Peter Shurman: One of the fascinating things about this place, and one tends to forget when we're on summer recess, is that we can be looking at a bill that is actually fewer pages and fewer paragraphs than the average private member's bill, and we're recording thousands and thousands of words on the record, and that is germane to this debate because I'm not sure what we're debating. We're debating an idea that seems to exist in the minds of the Minister of the Environment and his parliamentary secretary, but beyond that not very much. And I also hear from some of my colleague members, particularly in the NDP, that the Conservative Party seems to be not in favour of anything. I said myself, as did my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton, that we're in favour of something but we have to be given some definition as to what that something is, and that's what this bill is lacking.

When I listened to my colleague from Sarnia-Lambton, I wrote down a phrase that he used. He said his main concern is "the inadequacy of a local provincial response to a global" problem, and he's absolutely right. This fits into an overall jigsaw puzzle that is worldwide.

At the very least, we should be talking North America and we're not. "This is, indeed, a global issue," he said, and Ontario's questionable response is whistling in the wind.

The member expressed concern about the fact that this, as it stands, looks like what he called a "cap-and-tax" regime as opposed to cap and trade. Cap and trade is about using the levers of the tax system to control greenhouse gas emissions, and that we accept. But unless and until we find out how that is applied to the businesses of Ontario so that they, at the corporate income tax level, as well as citizens at the personal income tax level, can benefit from the rebates of the costs incurred by buying products coming from companies that emit carbon under this regime, we can't vote for a bill like this. We barely understand it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Sarnia-Lambton has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to thank the members from Eglinton-Lawrence, Parkdale-High Park, Oak Ridges-Markham and Thornhill.

Yes, I was trying to point out in my remarks here that, as the member from Thornhill said, we're not against improvements in the environment, anything we can do to do that. What we were pointing out here is what we think are a number of issues in here that aren't addressed, and also the loss of jobs that are going to be created. It's more expensive for industry in this province to compete with their opposition and opponents that they do business with in the market.

Also, I'm reminded of the United States, where the great environmentalist—so-called—Al Gore lives in about a 10,000-square-foot home and flies around on a Learjet, yet he's supposed to be the leading environmentalist. Sometimes people's reputations aren't exactly what they are.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I can't believe you're slamming Al Gore.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Only Liberals would defend Gore.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm surprised that the government members are defending Al Gore. I've hit a sore spot. I've obviously hit a tender nerve over there that they're defending Al Gore.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Is Al Gore running here? Al Gore for Premier? Oh, boy. We've finally found a hero.

Mr. Robert Bailey: This may come as an inconvenient truth to the government members, but not everybody believes—

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I thought you guys had some principles.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Mr. Robert Bailey: As a famous wag said one time, you can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and respond to those remarks, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? Seeing none, and it being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

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

Hon. John Wilkinson: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I want to join my colleague the member from Hamilton Mountain in welcoming Rob Hattin to the Legislature today. He is the president of Edson Packaging Machinery and the chair of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters' Ontario division. Thank you so much for being here today, Rob.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'll take this opportunity, on behalf of the member from Mississauga South and page Jacob van Wassenaer to welcome his mother, Violet, to the Legislature today.

On behalf of the Minister of Culture and page Jacquelyn McLaurin, we'd like to welcome her mother, Joanne, her sister, Grace, and exchange student Adé Dewavrin, who are joining us today.

On behalf of the member from Guelph and page Kaitlin Wagner, we'd like to welcome her mother, Johanna, to the Legislature today.

On behalf of the member from Willowdale and Hafiz Kanji, we'd like to welcome his mother, Nevin, to the Legislature today. Welcome.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming this group of pages and allow them to assemble for introduction:

Connor Ahluwalia, Beaches–East York; Samaa Bandi, Markham–Unionville; Kingsong Chen, Ottawa West–Nepean; Chantelle Colangelo, Halton; Alyssa Cronin, Huron–Bruce; Ava Doner, Durham; Megan Fernandez, Pickering–Scarborough East; Robert Hamel-Smith Grassby, Etobicoke Centre; Carlos Fiel, Etobicoke–Lakeshore; David Hemphrey, Brampton–Springdale; Tony Huang, Kitchener–Waterloo; Hafiz Kanji, Willowdale; Nicole Lachapelle, Hamilton Mountain; Helen Lee, Parkdale–High Park; Jacquelyn McLaurin, Barrie; Elizabeth Stulen, Brant; Gordon Sun, Oak Ridges–Markham; Jacob van Wassenaer, Mississauga South; Kaitlin Wagner, Guelph; and Mauricie Summers, Toronto Centre.

Welcome, pages, and enjoy your session. Please reassume your positions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier—further questions about his summer of scandal. After the eHealth scandal, troubles resurfaced at Ontario Lottery and Gaming. A couple of years ago, on Dalton McGuinty's watch, we had OLG scandal number one. Then, this summer, the

Premier said he'd clear house. He severed the CEO and said he'd fight for taxpayers. Now, this summer, we have OLG scandal number two. And once again, the Premier has severed the CEO and said he's fighting for taxpayers.

Premier, your scandals are starting to have sequels. It's not the CEO, it's your ministers who are the head and have a responsibility. To which of your cabinet ministers do you extend most of the blame?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the questions coming from my colleague, but I hope at some point in time he will speak to jobs and the economy, an issue that weighs heavy on the minds of Ontario families. But if the opposition so chooses, then I will continue to speak to accountability issues.

We have a solid history of making the kinds of changes that improve our government's accountability for Ontarians, starting at the beginning, when we turned, under the ambit of the freedom-of-information legislation, organizations which had been excluded by the Conservative government—

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Like Hydro One.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Like Hydro One and OPG. We then gave the auditor additional powers so that he could look into our universities, schools and hospitals, something that the previous Conservative government had also refused to do. I think if you check the record, we have a long and distinguished record when it comes to improving accountability—

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

Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: As the Premier knows, you gave the last CEO some \$700,000 in severance. The latest one is suing for \$8 million. Premier, taxpayers are going to have to win the lottery just to pay for your mismanagement at the OLG. There have been five different CEOs at OLG under your watch—five different CEOs—but not a single minister for that agency is gone, not a single minister has suffered any consequence. In fact, some have been promoted. Would the Premier explain to this House why, after two successive scandals at the OLG, not a single minister has been held to account?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I understand my honourable colleague's partisan interest in this issue, but I think what Ontarians expect of us is that we will take all necessary steps to ensure that they have confidence in their gaming system. That's why we have made specific and, I believe, appropriate changes. For example, there is now a barcode on the back of your ticket, should you buy a lottery ticket. There are many scanners available at our retailers so they can check that for themselves. We also require that if you want to have your ticket checked by a retailer, you have to sign it first. And just yesterday, there was an announcement providing that if you are retailer, you cannot buy a ticket from your own particular agency; you have to go elsewhere to do it. These are all appropriate steps, I believe, to continue to maintain confidence in the people's gaming system.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, Premier, five CEOs have come and gone at OLG under your watch. Not a single McGuinty Liberal cabinet minister has paid any price whatsoever. Just like with your personal untendered contract with Sarah Kramer at eHealth, your hand-picked choice to solve the problems at OLG didn't last long. Just like with Sarah Kramer, Kelly McDougald was replaced under a cloud of scandal.

During his press conference, the Minister of Finance hinted at even more untendered contracts at OLG. Premier, was Kelly McDougald fired in part because of those untendered contracts, and when will you make them public?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague knows that we continue to make the appropriate changes to enhance accountability. We've turned our attention more recently to our 615 agencies, boards and commissions. We have decided that the rules that we inherited from the former Conservative government were inadequate, so we have strengthened those. He will know, for example, that we have now banned sole-source contracts for consultants; we've deemed those to be inappropriate. We're also requiring that the Integrity Commissioner review the expenses of our 22 biggest agencies, boards and commissions. That's a practice we've had in place for cabinet ministers, and we now believe that it would be appropriate to put that in place for our biggest agencies, boards and commissions. Finally, we are putting in place mandatory training on the issue of expenses for everybody in the OPS, as well as at our 22 biggest agencies, boards and commissions. We believe those are all positive steps forward.

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AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier about his summer of scandal, like the announcement of the PricewaterhouseCoopers review of eHealth.

The Premier's hastily arranged announcement about the new mandate for the Integrity Commissioner to review expenses of agencies seems more about crafting a political shield for Dalton McGuinty and his ministers to hide behind. We called the Integrity Commissioner's office about their new role, Premier, and here's what they told us: The only thing they've been told is that they'll be responsible for reviewing expenditures and that everything else is "up in the air," that they are still waiting for direction from the Premier's office, and the mandate is yet to be written.

Premier, since you obviously did not consult with the Integrity Commissioner, perhaps you can tell us how many more staff they are going to need in that office to do the job people rightly expect your cabinet ministers to do.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to say we've had very lengthy conversations with the Integrity Com-

missioner herself and received some very strong guidance. We expect to be introducing legislation very shortly, and I look forward to my honourable colleague's support on the matter of that legislation.

What we are doing, of course, is a very simple matter, but we think it's practical and it will prove to be effective. As it stands right now, all ministers are subject to having their expenses reviewed by the Integrity Commissioner. What we want to do is impose the same requirement on our 22 biggest agencies, boards and commissions at the senior executive level. It has worked well for our government, and I fully expect it will work well for our agencies, boards and commissions, and I'll look for my honourable colleague's support in this regard.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Again, the Premier obviously has no clue how many more staff will need to be hired at the Integrity Commissioner's office.

Let's further examine his so-called plan. Your plan, Premier, as it stands today—what there is of it—is to make a staff of nine in the Integrity Commissioner's office track expenses of what the Canadian Press estimates is some 80,000 agency employees. With one expense report per month, that is approximately one million expense reports to be examined per year by nine people.

Premier, your plan is simply not credible. The Integrity Commissioner's office is going to have to become massive—more people, more space, a new building. Premier, how much more will Ontario families have to pay because your cabinet ministers aren't up to the job?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure where my honourable colleague stands on this matter. Either he's in favour of more oversight or he's against more oversight.

Just to reassure Ontarians, we continue to have good conversations with the Integrity Commissioner. There are some issues associated with resources. We will make sure that the appropriate resources are in there. A line-man, for example, who's working at Hydro One is not permitted expenses, so it's not as if there are going to be tens of thousands of submissions on a monthly basis into the Integrity Commissioner's office. We're more focused at the executive level. We will continue to work with the Integrity Commissioner to make sure we put something forward that is practical, effective, affordable and enhances oversight.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, we simply disagree. Accountability doesn't lie with the Integrity Commissioner, accountability doesn't lie with the official opposition, accountability does not lie with the media. It rests with the Premier of this province and his cabinet ministers. It appears that the Premier has far more faith in the Integrity Commissioner than he does in his own ministers. What we learned in your summer of scandal is that your cabinet ministers are one sad, sorry lot when it comes to accountability for taxpayer dollars.

When will the Premier put a minister's head on the chopping block? Because I tell you, Premier, that will

send a signal awfully darned quick to the rest of that gang to clean up their act real fast.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We've taken a number of steps. Again, I understand that my honourable colleague has a decidedly partisan perspective on this, but I think what we have to keep first and foremost in our minds are the needs and the values of Ontarians. My colleague says he doesn't believe that the Integrity Commissioner ought to assume this responsibility, but he was part of the very government that installed the Integrity Commissioner in the first instance and required that the Integrity Commissioner overlook the expenses of cabinet ministers. We thought that was a good idea. We pushed for that particular approach. What we are going to do now is take it one step further and enlist the support of the Integrity Commissioner in helping us to deal with our 615 agencies, boards and commissions where there are tens of thousands of people working. We are in this together, we want to make sure that everybody understands the rules—there will be mandatory training—and yes, the Integrity Commissioner will play a role, but a very important role.

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Premier. In these tough times people want the government to focus on making life affordable and protecting jobs. Instead, this government's harmonized sales tax scheme will make life more expensive and stifle job growth. Yesterday the Premier claimed that the HST would, and I quote him, "create jobs." But a study sponsored by the chamber of commerce argues, "Sales tax reform will slow employment growth by between 10,000 and 40,000 jobs." How could this Premier have got it so very wrong?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I hate to break it to the NDP, but they have just got to get with it on this particular issue: 130 countries are there. Every single OECD country is there except the US. You can't get admitted to the European Union unless you are participating in a single value-added tax. Four other provinces are already there. When BC heard that Ontario was going there, they said they have to do it because they didn't want Ontario to get ahead. We have got to give our manufacturers in particular the same leg up they have in all those other countries. My friend deplures what has happened to manufacturing in the province of Ontario, but he is not prepared to do what it takes to put them on a level footing with their competitors around the world. We have got to give them that advantage so they can create those jobs and help us support our families. It is as simple as that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: Back to the Premier. What I'm not prepared for is tens of thousands of people in this province not having a job. At a time when people are desperate for jobs, the Premier's reckless sales tax scheme will slow employment growth. The report is quite detailed and you've had a chance now, I assume, to read

in it where the job growth won't be happening: 2,300 fewer jobs in manufacturing every year; 6,500 fewer professional jobs every year. Bear in mind that these statistics are from people who support the Premier's reckless scheme. Will the Premier reconsider his plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're moving ahead with this. I understand that my friend has a responsibility to point out shortcomings in government policy. We will do our very best each and every day on behalf of the people of Ontario. We do nothing perfectly, and he has got a responsibility to point out imperfections. But on this one he is wrong and we are right. There is an overwhelming consensus among economists and business people, and when it comes to this package of tax reforms, we even have the support of poverty groups and food banks. This is not an easy thing to do but it is the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do for our families, it's the right way to change the foundation of our economy, it's the right thing to do to ensure that we can create more jobs—not just for today but for tomorrow, for our kids—it's the right thing to do to ensure that we have the financial wherewithal to support our schools, our hospitals, our environmental protections and so on and so forth. It is not easy, but my friend knows in his heart of hearts that it is the right thing to do for Ontario.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: If I am wrong, then so is the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, because they are quite specific. If the Premier had read that report, he'd know that the HST will kill up to 40,000 new jobs each year, as they have detailed. He would know there will be 2,300 fewer jobs in manufacture, he would know there will be 2,600 fewer jobs in accommodation and the food service industry, and he would know that there will be 1,100 fewer construction jobs. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce was quite specific. How can the Premier possibly argue that the HST is good for ordinary Ontarians when it makes their life more expensive and makes it less likely that they're actually going to find a job?

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Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I've answered a number of these questions and I look forward to answering many more, but I think Ontarians can appreciate my resolve and my conviction that this is the right thing to do. But there is a question that remains unanswered: If the opposition is so absolutely committed to opposing the single sales tax in the province of Ontario, if they truly believe it will wreak havoc on families and businesses and our economic future, then why will they not commit to repealing it when it's put in place? I think I know the answer. The reason they will not commit to repealing it is because they know in their heart of hearts it's the right thing to do for our province and our future.

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Over the past while we've been hearing instance after

instance of untendered contracts being let out by OLG, eHealth, and the list goes on. You're saying that you're trying to deal with this. To us what it looks like is that you're really trying to deal with this after the facts. I've got a simple question: My leader asked you yesterday if you would release the untendered contracts to the public of Ontario. My question to you: Will you do so?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague knows that there is now a new rule in place. We've decided that the rule we inherited is inadequate and unacceptable and is not in keeping with modern public expectation when it comes to transparency and accountability, so we've got a new law in the books. It says that you cannot let out sole-source contracts to consultants. This is a step forward, and we think it's exactly the kind of thing that Ontarians want us to continue to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You know as well as I do that you're still going to have this problem at the end of the day. There are all kinds of situations where untendered contracts have gone out, and the public has no means to take a look at the details. Our research department has written to the various ministries and agencies asking for those untendered contracts. One of them here has some 300 pages of untendered contracts, and they want to bill us \$1,700 for us to get that information. We have another one with 500 pages of information on untendered contracts—\$700; and the list goes on. My question to you is simply this: The public has the right to know. Will you release this information and will you do so without charge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There is a freedom-of-information request process. My honourable colleague has access to that, as do the people of Ontario. I would be interested in learning, when he puts in those requests, how many reach back to their time in government, so that we might disclose the untendered contracts that were let at that particular time. What I can say is that we are changing the rules. Rules that were considered to be good enough for the NDP and the Conservative governments are no longer good enough for the people of Ontario. That's why we've changed them and we've banned those kinds of contracts.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Quite to the contrary, this is happening under your watch. You're the Premier. You're the one who's made the appointments to all of these various agencies. They're your people. So why will you not be held accountable for what was your own decision? I ask you again. You can come clear with this thing quite easily by making sure that the information is made public. We're asking you to release that information and do so forthwith, without charge. Why won't you do that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, just to recap in terms of the changes we've been making to enhance transparency and accountability: In addition to expanding the ambit of the freedom-of-information request to include Hydro One and OPG, giving the auditor more power to

look at, for the first time ever, universities, schools and hospitals, we abandoned those sole-source contracts. We are giving new authority to the Integrity Commissioner—we will embody that in legislation in a bill shortly to be introduced in this House; we're making training, when it comes to expense claims, mandatory; and we're going to require for the first time ever in Ontario that we post online the expenses of not only cabinet ministers and senior executives in the OPS but also senior executives in our biggest agencies, boards and commissions. Looking at that altogether, it is impossible not to conclude that we have truly enhanced transparency and accountability in the province of Ontario.

AGENCY SPENDING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is again for the Premier, and dealing with the expenses of the OLG board. The Minister of Finance is alleged to have ordered the former CEO to fire the chief financial officer and one other person of her choice. In her statement of claim, Kelly McDougald sets out that the minister says, and I quote, "Significant action representative of the accountability required."

Premier, why are the bureaucrats set to a different and higher standard of accountability than your own ministers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, we would have appreciated a question on jobs and the economy from that party, and we will continue to talk. But on the issue of the accountability, the steps that the Premier has announced and the legislation we will be bringing forward do in fact deal substantively with the challenges that have been faced across a number of organizations and across a number of governments.

I remember when I brought forward the legislation to provide freedom-of-information coverage to Hydro One and OPG, for instance. All of the important information that the public got as a result of that helped us to develop these. I would submit, with respect, that any statement of allegations that's made with respect to the circumstances at OLG is just that, and we will vigorously defend the taxpayers of Ontario in a court of law.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If he wants to start defending the taxpayers of this province, I'd say start with an apology and start by giving them their money back that you have mismanaged and misspent.

This is about a double standard of the Premier and his ministers, it's about accountability, and it's about really tackling the runaway spending that we've seen under this government.

I'm going to ask the Premier again, will he put an end to the double standard and will he take "significant action representative of the accountability required" of his ministers?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The only double standard is the way the Tories conducted themselves in office and

what they say now. The double standard is related to expenses on your watch at agencies like Hydro One and OPG and what we do now. The double standard is the degree of accountability that this government has brought forward over the last six years that was not only not adopted, but was outright rejected by that party in the past.

This government and our Premier have moved responsibly to enhance accountability for all Ontarians. We will be bringing forward legislation to implement those measures. We look forward to the opposition's support of that very important legislation, which provides much-enhanced accountability to taxpayers across Ontario.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Finance. A recommendation contained in the Financial Services Commission of Ontario's—FSCO's—five-year auto insurance plan review would slash insurance payouts for serious car crash injuries by 75%. This recommendation would lower the \$100,000 cap on non-catastrophic injuries to \$25,000. It would impoverish victims, push health care costs on to the taxpayer and enrich the insurance industry.

On June 4 in this very House, the minister said his response would take place by the end of June. It is now mid-September. Will the Minister of Finance stand in this House today and make it clear that he rejects that recommendation?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our government engaged in, I think, perhaps the most vigorous public consultation around the future of insurance premiums since a previous government decided not to make auto insurance a public corporation. That yielded enormous good advice from a range of quarters that we have spent the summer analyzing and, indeed, having further meetings on. It was our intention to bring forward recommendations by the end of June. We decided to take the summer and a little bit more time still to review all of the recommendations that we've had from a variety of stakeholders to ensure that we can continue to offer Ontarians the assurance that insurance premium rises will be kept modest. I'll remind the member opposite that premiums for auto insurance are still 4% below where they were when this government took office in 2003.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael Prue: If implemented, this would seriously damage the quality of rehabilitation services provided to accident victims in this province. To quote Dr. Peter Rumney, senior physician director of rehabilitation and complex continuing care at Bloorview Kids Rehab, "It is a huge step backwards. The proposed \$25,000 cap for rehab services for 'non-catastrophic' claims would, in most cases, be exhausted in three months."

When will this minister start listening to the experts and not the insurance companies and make it clear that this government will reject this mean-spirited recommendation by FSCO?

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Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, we have listened to the experts from across a variety of stakeholder groups, including those involved in the treatment of catastrophic accidents. I'll remind the member opposite that in fact auto insurance premiums are 4% lower today than they were when we took office some six years ago.

What we know is this: The reforms we brought forward way back in 2003 in Bill 5, which led to this decrease, that member and his party voted against. I'll remind him, when they were in office auto insurance premiums over five years went up 20%.

I am determined not to make the mistakes that member and his party made. I am determined to continue to protect consumers, and we will come forward with a package of amendments and reforms—

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

TAXATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: My question is to the Minister of Revenue. Minister, in the by-election to be held on Thursday of this week, comments made by the Conservatives have raised some concerns for me, for the people in that riding and for my constituents in western Mississauga.

Renters are hard-working people. They don't like to hear their important contributions to their community denigrated by fearmongering and they don't need to have their intelligence insulted.

The Conservatives have been telling voters that the single sales tax, a part of Ontario's comprehensive package of tax reform, is going to be applied to residential rental fees. People understand that rental fees are not currently charged any GST and that items that are not charged GST will not be charged the single sales tax. Will rental fees be subject to the single sales tax?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my colleague for the question. We are going to reform our tax system. We're going to drag it out of the 20th century, put it in the 21st century and create the jobs that we need for this province. We are not going to broach allegations based on misinformation. So that everyone in this House can be clear, there is no GST applied to rent and, as a result, when we harmonize our sales taxes, there will be no HST applied to rent.

Now, that said, it is important that we hear the whole story. It is true that there are some services that HST will apply to, and that's why it's so important that people across Ontario understand the other part of our reform package, how we're reforming the income tax system in this province. We know that businesses in the Atlantic provinces passed on the savings to their consumers in a highly competitive market. And in the province of Ontario, when it comes to rent, it is—

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: The Conservatives in Thursday's by-election piously claim that they're standing up for

low-income renters and seniors. That is, for the record, the very same Conservative Party that voted against the Residential Tenancies Act, which regulates rent increases, and this is the very same Conservative Party that voted against any investments in rent banks and affordable housing units.

Our province is better off for our investment in affordable housing and for maintaining our existing stock. All Ontarians will continue to benefit as well, despite the opposition of the Conservatives to building and maintaining affordable housing.

Minister, the opposition is saying that Ontario's comprehensive package is going to harm low-income renters and seniors. Would you care to comment on that?

Hon. John Wilkinson: Those who understand the 2009 budget that was presented in March by my colleague Minister Duncan understand that over the next three years, we'll be providing some \$15 billion worth of tax relief. What does that mean for renters? First of all, if a renter currently qualifies for the GST rebate, for example, that would provide a maximum of \$240 a year tax free. Our proposals will increase that by an additional \$260 a year, tax free, for every person in that household, whether adult or child—much more generous than the federal government.

As well, we're enhancing the property tax credit, particularly for seniors, and we have a series of tax credits that will make sure that people who can afford this the least will not bear the heavy load.

But it is important that we always remember that our number one priority here is to ensure that there are jobs in the 21st century in this province. There should be no doubt that we will—

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

AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, it appears the newest growth industry in the McGuinty government is the Integrity Commissioner sector.

Before the summer of scandal began, the Liberals were trying to tell us that the eHealth scandal was the exception to the rule. As we're seeing time and again, though, the message track keeps changing. Now the Minister of Finance tells us OLG expenditures are "just the tip of the iceberg." Can Minister Duncan tell us what he meant, or will we have to FOI that as well?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government and party are committed to the maximum accountability and transparency not only of the government and its ministers, but of its agencies, boards and commissions.

We have provided freedom of information to a range of institutions that your government, sir, did not want to do. In fact, you said you didn't want to do it; you opposed it.

We've taken steps over the course of the last several weeks to give greater accountability and greater trans-

parency to those agencies, boards and commissions, and I look forward to the support of that member and his colleagues for the legislation our government will bring forward to further enhance that accountability and transparency.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Well, I'll put this question to the minister: The FOI for OLG produced five binders and thousands of pages relating to the spending excesses of 40 executives. Liberal appointees travelled to California and Las Vegas to take limousine rides and eat steak and seafood paid for by the taxpayers. It's the minister's agency. When will he take responsibility and release all the information, including untendered consultant contracts?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We released the information with respect to expenses, and we will be releasing the information with respect to other aspects of FOIs that have been received, as I understand it, from a variety of sources with respect to OLG. That's what accountability and transparency is all about. That's why this government applied it to Hydro One and OPG. That's why the Premier took the steps that he did just yesterday to ensure still greater accountability and transparency.

I welcome your questions. I welcome your interest in that transparency and accountability and I particularly welcome the strong initiatives undertaken by our Premier and our government to further improve accountability and transparency for all agencies, boards and commissions in the province of Ontario.

TAXATION

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the minister responsible for seniors. Over this summer, I spent a lot of time meeting pensioners across this province. Wherever I went, I heard opposition to the government's harmonized sales tax grab. Seniors know they'll be hit especially hard. Most are on fixed incomes, but they'll be paying 8% more for some things like home heating and hydro, 8% more for something as simple as a visit to the hair salon, 8% more for a cup of coffee, 8% more for end-of-life planning.

How can this minister allow her government such callous disregard for the financial plight of Ontario's seniors?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I'm going to refer this question to the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Thank you to my colleague and thanks to the member for the question.

It's important that seniors understand that they have been hearing one side of the story. They've been hearing but one side of the story. On our side of the House, it's important for us to tell people the entire story.

I want to say to seniors, particularly, that we understand your concerns, and if you have an opportunity to see the budgetary measures that we have proposed, you

will see that we have taken special care to ensure that seniors on a fixed income, those who can afford a new consumption tax the least, will receive the greatest benefit, and that for many seniors, they will actually be put into a better position.

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Despite what my opponents are saying, we've decided on this side of the House that we must modernize our tax system to ensure that we have a vibrant economy that supports the services that seniors value the most—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Minister, your \$1,000 won't cut it for the next 40 years.

The minister ought to know that seniors are mobilizing against your government's tax grab. The Canadian Association of Retired Persons has launched a campaign against the HST. Thousands of Ontario seniors have already signed on, and they don't believe the minister's line that they'll be better off. They won't be. They know it. I know it. Everybody else knows it. The HST will cost seniors more each and every day for the rest of their lives. When will this minister finally withdraw it?

Hon. John Wilkinson: On this side of the House, we will modernize our tax system, and we will ensure that it is fair, particularly to seniors. That's why we've included so many permanent income tax cuts. I can say to seniors that on the first \$37,000 worth of their income, we are lowering it. I can say to seniors today who receive the GST rebate that that will be substantially enhanced. I can say to seniors who are tenants or own a house that we are more than doubling the Ontario property tax credit. All of those things will benefit seniors.

They will come, but understand that in the first year, this will be a year of transition. We have secured a historic agreement with the federal government to allow in that first year additional money to help seniors, and all of us in Ontario who qualify, get used to this new system. But that is a new system that we need to have so that we have a vibrant economy to support the public services that seniors care about the most: public health care.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is to the Minister of Finance. There have been a lot of reports, certainly reports from my riding of Peterborough, regarding the economy lately. Some economists have been suggesting they we are reaching or have just recently reached the low point. Jobs data has been positive for Ontario over the last few months. While large gains have not happened, there is a small trend developing. What is the outlook for Ontario at this point in providing an update of where we stand today?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I want to thank the member for asking the question about jobs and the economy, particularly a question that's important to unemployed Ontarians, who have experienced the worst of the global economic downturn.

There is no question that the last year has been difficult for economies around the world, and continues to be. We are beginning to see positive signs in the economy of real growth, but I remind the member from Peterborough that there tends to be a lag in job growth and government revenues when growth returns to the economy. There is some question as to how quickly that will return. What we do know is this: The policies we are pursuing with respect to tax reform, which will lower taxes for Ontarians, which will encourage investments in jobs, are the right policies to pursue, and I look forward to the member's supplementary to address the question of how to get this economy moving in more detail.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Leal: While there seems to be very little consensus, there's been talk about stimulus spending and how it has helped the economy: Have measures that we have put in place been effective? Have we done enough stimulus? And what other measures have we put in place—and I know this program has helped tremendously the citizens in my riding of Peterborough.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member for Peterborough is right: We have invested \$34 billion in short-term stimulus, including \$32.5 billion in infrastructure—almost 3% of our GDP, which was more than the amount recommended by the International Monetary Fund. These investments are extremely important. They've benefited Peterborough, and I congratulate the member for his good work on a range of projects that went into Peterborough. Without his insight and advice, we couldn't have made those important investments.

The times call on governments to take bold moves to ensure growth in the future. Our stimulus and infrastructure is about the short-term, the tax reform package—the right package to create jobs, to create investments, that economists like Hugh Mackenzie have applauded. These are the right policies to create jobs for our grandchildren and children, the right policies for a brighter future.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question is on jobs and the economy, and it is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, you are aware that the primary reason slot machines were allowed to be placed into Ontario racetracks was to enhance the racing industry, which in turn would improve agriculture and the economy of rural Ontario. Some 65,000 men and women work in the racing industry in Ontario.

Over the past three years, we have seen a decline in racing dates in Ontario. For example, this past January and February, no racing dates took place at Georgian Downs, but the slot machines remained open seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The horses still have to be fed and trained, and the stables have to be maintained.

Minister, will you commit today to reversing this reduction in racing dates policy and work to improve the racing industry and the economy of rural Ontario—which

of course, in fact, means jobs for farmers in rural Ontario?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. John Yakabuski: We ask for hay, and what do we get? Manure.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to withdraw that last comment, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I take it that it's a laughable matter for members of the Tory caucus.

We think that the income—and I appreciate the member's question—generated from the operation of slots into rural Ontario has been a successful and important program, and we will continue that.

We will continue to work with the horse racing industry. I've met with representatives of the industry as well as the riders and those in rural Ontario who benefit from this. We will continue to work with them to ensure that at this difficult time in the economy, at a time when revenues are down in many quarters, that this successful program continues to operate. I look forward to that member's input into this, and we'll continue to work with the industry on this very important program.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: First of all, I'm very disappointed that the Minister of Agriculture didn't answer this question.

We have now learned that the operators of Georgian Downs and Flamboro Downs have applied to the Ontario Racing Commission to have no racing dates for six months of the year and to reduce and condense the racing dates to 100 racing dates per year.

For example, Georgian Downs racing dates have been reduced from 130 days per year three years ago. Under the new application, they want to go to 100 racing dates. At the same time, Georgian Downs has increased the number of slot machines from 451 to 1,000. That was Ms. McDougald's last day on the job, I believe. Flamboro Downs racing dates have been reduced from 225 days per year to 100 racing dates under the new application.

Minister, these changes are having a very negative impact on the racing industry. Will you commit today to increasing the number of racing dates in proportion to the number of slot machines—

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

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We will continue to work with the industry to maximize the benefit to local communities, particularly the rural communities, from this important program. There is no question that revenues are under pressure. There is no question that horse racing has been under pressure for some years.

I think the member knows that there is no easy answer to the challenge there, but this government remains committed to working with the horse racing industry to ensure and help sustain that important component of income for Ontario's rural communities. We are committed to that, we continue to work with them, and we look forward to the member opposite's participation in that discussion.

TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Housing. Everyone knows that the HST will drive up rents; even, apparently, the Liberal candidate in St. Paul's. The Liberal candidate has promised to protect tenants from increases caused by the HST, but the McGuinty government contradicts him. Will the government commit to protecting tenants, or is their candidate making a promise he has absolutely no intention of keeping?

Hon. Jim Watson: Well, I was actually out in St. Paul's with Dr. Eric Hoskins, who is going to be an excellent member of provincial Parliament come this Thursday. Because the people out there are not being fooled by the misinformation of the NDP; they know full well that when the NDP were in power, the average rent increase over a five-year period was 27%, and under Premier McGuinty's government, the increase has been 14.4%. The highest increase by party in the last 20 years was the NDP at 6%.

1120

The people of St. Paul's are going to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I would really appreciate it if the honourable members on the government side wouldn't shout down their own ministers when those ministers are answering.

Supplementary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The Minister of Housing makes some very compelling reasons not to support the Liberal MP Bob Rae—we don't intend to—but he didn't answer the question. The government's HST scheme will hit tenants hard. The government's candidate is promising to protect tenants from rent increases, but the government refuses to make that commitment. The NDP candidate, Julian Heller, was ready to talk about this at two all-candidates debates this week. Your candidate didn't even bother to show up.

The minister can clear this up today. Will he commit that no tenants will face higher rents thanks to his HST scheme or not? Or will he admit that his candidate is making promises that he has absolutely no intention of keeping, as I asked?

Hon. Jim Watson: As I was going around the riding of St. Paul's, I noticed the signs for the NDP. They're so faded. This candidate has been recycled so many times in that riding that people are going to say enough—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I would say to members on all sides that I do recognize

that there is a by-election going on, and it would be nice to have that not debated in this chamber. We've seen questions from both sides of the House, so we can't accuse one side or another. There have been questions. I'm going to move on to a new question.

GREENBELT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. It's nearly five years ago that the Greenbelt Act was proclaimed into law. We all know it protects 1.8 million acres of green space all across the greater Golden Horseshoe. Since this time, the plan has received several awards of recognition, including the Canadian Institute of Planners award for planning excellence in 2007, and that was in the category of environmental planning. This distinction, along with countless others, is a testament to the forward-thinking and comprehensive nature of this act. In my riding of Oakville, many residents enjoy the recreation and the culinary offerings the greenbelt has to offer, so I'm extremely proud of the plan.

Minister, as you know, the Greenbelt Act requires a review of the plan every 10 years to determine whether it needs to be revised or updated. We're approaching the halfway point. Could you please update the House on the progress and the achievements of that greenbelt plan to date?

Hon. Jim Watson: I think all members of the Legislative Assembly should be very proud of the greenbelt and the legacy of the greenbelt. This February will mark the fifth anniversary of the greenbelt legislation protecting 1.8 million acres of green space in perpetuity.

The David Suzuki Foundation, for instance, has estimated that the greenbelt is providing approximately \$2.6 billion per year in ecological services and benefits, costs that would otherwise be carried by the taxpayers to clean water, scrub emissions going into the air and artificially pollinate crops.

We are committed to doing the 10-year review, but one thing is certain: Under the leadership of Premier McGuinty and this government, we will not be shrinking the greenbelt. The greenbelt is here to stay in perpetuity because it provides such great resources from an agricultural, economic and cultural point of view. We're very proud of the greenbelt and we encourage all members to support and promote the greenbelt in their communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's clear that the hard work of that ministry has paid off. The implementation of the greenbelt, I think by all accounts, has been extremely successful. However, the needs of this area, the greater Golden Horseshoe area, over the coming years are going to evolve as that region grows. As a result, the greenbelt plan is going to need to evolve as well. Municipalities need help as they plan for growth while at the same time they want to continue to protect and be a part of the greenbelt.

You've already mentioned, Minister, that your ministry is going to help municipalities bring their official plans into conformity with the greenbelt. I'd like to know what else you're going to do to ensure that both municipalities in our region and the greenbelt can continue to grow in a responsible manner.

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the honourable member, who is a great defender of environmental initiatives in his own community of Oakville.

Applause.

Hon. Jim Watson: He deserves that applause.

Before implementing any new infrastructure or adding to existing infrastructure, a public consultation and thorough environmental assessment would take place. These would ensure that social, environmental and economic impacts are minimized and that they serve the overall objectives of the greenbelt. The Greenbelt Act allows us to expand the area to protect land outside the existing greenbelt and ensure the best possible decision-making with regard to the land we protect. We'll thoroughly consult municipalities, the Greenbelt Council, ably headed by Dr. Robert Elgie, aboriginal communities and the public.

Further to this, the act does not allow for the total area of the greenbelt to be reduced. We've received two requests from municipalities to grow the greenbelt since 2007, and I look forward to working with those municipalities to protect Ontario's natural landscape.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of Government Services. Minister, private issuers of licences and vehicle registration offices employ 1,300 people and perform 90% of the vehicle-related transactions in Ontario. Your government is rapidly closing an estimated 65 to 70 of these small businesses that provide a vital service to Ontario. In many cases, you're terminating services provided efficiently by small business over the last 100 years. Local licensing offices in communities like Whitby, Peterborough, Lindsay, Pembroke, Hearst, Cochrane, Kapuskasing and many others will be closed. This summer, the member from Leeds-Grenville was first to alert his community to the closing of vehicle licensing offices in Brockville.

Minister, why are you rushing to terminate these successful small businesses in rural and small-town Ontario?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me thank the member for asking this question, and I also welcome him to his new role as well.

Let me tell you what we are really doing. We will continue to provide high-quality customer service to Ontarians by streamlining and modernizing the way we offer services. By December 2010, the Ontario government will provide one-stop shopping for expanded services such as health cards, drivers' licences and vehicle licence services, through ServiceOntario centres, under one roof. What will that do? Ninety-five per cent of all Ontarians will have access to expanded services within

10 kilometres. Over 18 months, access to health cards will expand from 27 OHIP offices to about 300 ServiceOntario centres. In rural communities—

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

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, you can use all the terms, “streamlining,” etc. It’s diminished services for the people of Ontario. Revelations about the spending at eHealth and OLG have shaken the public’s confidence in your government’s ability to spend taxpayers’ money wisely. Spending is so badly out of control that your multi-million dollar sales tax grab is another example of a failed plan.

Minister, is your commitment to cancel this scheme? Why would you not stand up today and say that you will take your time before you kill these small businesses in rural and small-town Ontario?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I used to be the Minister of Small Business, and I’m now into the new job, so I’m very much aware of the contribution that small businesses make to this province. But this is about improving service, and we are absolutely determined to do that. The facts will speak louder than what they are saying.

In rural communities right now, access to health card services will expand from two locations to 163 locations. In northern communities it will increase from six locations to 67 ServiceOntario centres. We are expanding services, and a private-issuer network is an integral part of what we are planning to do. Two thirds of all service centres in Ontario will still be private, and I will be the first one to say they provide outstanding service to Ontarians. We will continue to use their talent as we move forward.

1130

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: A follow-up question on the same issue to the same minister: In Kapuskasing, they were advised on July 23 that their particular office would be closed so services could be delivered through ServiceOntario. They don’t like it, but they’ve accepted the decision. The chamber of commerce of Kapuskasing tried to stop it; your government decided to continue. They’re not happy with it, but they’re accepting the decision

They’re asking you one simple thing—and I want a yes or no that you’re going to do it today. There are two employees who worked at the chamber of commerce who have been there for a number of years. They’re knowledgeable about the processes of issuing plates and licences. Will you ensure that those people get hired on by ServiceOntario and maintain their work?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member, as I did previously to the other member, for asking this question. The member is very much aware how we fill jobs within the Ontario public sector. We will encourage those employees to apply for all the jobs that will become available and we will look into their skills and talents and do whatever we can do to accommodate

them within the vacancies that will be available in northern Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Skills and talent? They’ve been doing it for the past 12 years. Don’t you think they know how to do the job? Do you really think they’re not able to do it with ServiceOntario? We’re asking for something simple. These people have worked for the chamber of commerce for a number of years. They’re knowledgeable about the process of what they need to do to issue plates to drivers across the Kapuskasing area. The chamber of commerce is asking you, “If you’re going to shut us down, at the very least offer the jobs to the people who did it rather than going to somebody new.”

I’m asking you very simply: Will you say yes? If you’re hiring additional people in the Kapuskasing office to do this work, hire the workers who worked at the chamber of commerce of Kapuskasing.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think I answered the question already. There’s a process to apply for government jobs. I will encourage these employees to apply for the government jobs. They will go through the process. If they have the right skills, talents and qualifications, along with the other people who will apply for the jobs, they will get hired. That’s the process that we go through. If we do anything else, then they will say, “This is what you are doing.” It doesn’t matter whatever we do—we want to make sure the process is followed.

ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. This government has been working very hard to improve the quality of life for First Nations and Metis communities across this province. Since your ministry was created in 2007, aboriginal economic development and sustainability has been a key priority. Funding First Nations economic development is one of the components of the \$3-billion First Nations gaming revenue-sharing agreement, as well as part of the \$30 million set aside for developing a framework for resource-benefits sharing. Creating opportunities for First Nation and Metis economic development is also a key component of the new relationship fund.

Minister, can you tell me what else this government is doing to support economic development for aboriginal people and communities in Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I understand how important economic development is to First Nation and Metis communities, and we all want to see them prosper. That’s why my ministry is working on a number of initiatives to increase and support increased aboriginal economic development across the province.

For example, we’re currently developing a provincial aboriginal economic development strategy in conjunction with First Nation and Metis leadership and organizations, a true partnership to support economic opportunities and sustainability for aboriginal people in Ontario. As part of

this strategy, this winter we'll be working with our aboriginal partners, Chiefs of Ontario and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to co-host the first-ever Ontario First Nations economic forum—the first time ever. This forum is designed to help First Nation people and communities find opportunities in economic development and sustainability.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Thank you for the answer, Minister. The McGuinty government is certainly moving forward on many fronts to improve the participation of First Nation and Metis communities in economic development initiatives. This September, our government announced two green energy programs that will help aboriginal people and communities participate in green energy projects. Minister, how will these programs help build economic sustainability in our aboriginal communities?

Hon. Brad Duguid: That is indeed a very good question and I thank the member for it. The McGuinty government is moving forward on many fronts to improve participation of First Nation and Metis communities in mining, forestry, green energy and other areas. This summer, we launched two new programs: the \$250-million aboriginal loan guarantee program and the aboriginal energy partnerships program. These programs will help First Nation and Metis communities interested in developing and owning renewable energy facilities.

I think we all on this side of the House understand the importance of economic development to First Nation and Metis communities. We look forward to hearing more innovative ideas on how First Nations and Metis communities can participate in and benefit from green energy projects.

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

The House recessed from 1136 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Reza Moridi: I am pleased to introduce my guests from Richmond L'Arche Daybreak in Richmond Hill, who are sitting in the members' gallery: Carl MacMillan, Kim Lageer, Darryl Dickson, Amanda Winnington-Ingram, Kara Tigchelaar, Lorenzo Sforza-Cesarini, Gordon Henry, Tom Krysiak and Francesca Lobner.

Mr. Dave Levac: I would like to ask for a moment while my colleague finds his seat in order to introduce the very special guest we have in the gallery today. Thank you for the indulgence, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): A nice Wayne Gretzky style of dragging the puck. The honourable member from Davenport.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had planned to make the introductory remarks of the Consul General of Mexico and members of the consulate in my remarks, if you don't mind. Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TOWNSHIP OF NORTH FRONTENAC

Mr. Randy Hillier: The township of North Frontenac is seeking and requesting the necessary legislation to create a single-tier municipality.

On August 27 this year, they sent a letter to the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In it, North Frontenac identified a lengthy list of legitimate grievances regarding the operation of Frontenac county and also the relationship between their township and the other municipalities that make up Frontenac county.

The creation of a new, single-tier municipality is the solution. The Premier once said, and promised, that he would support the amalgamation if that is what the people wanted. North Frontenac council has requested a binding referendum on this subject in next year's municipal election. I expect the Premier and his minister to uphold their words, respect local democracy and commit to this most reasonable request and referendum.

L'ARCHE DAYBREAK

Mr. Reza Moridi: In my role as the MPP for Richmond Hill, it is my privilege to have the opportunity to become familiar with organizations which are providing extraordinary services to their community. I recently enjoyed an inspiring visit to L'Arche Daybreak, which is located in the town of Richmond Hill.

Today, L'Arche has become one of the most innovative social movements in the world, with 135 communities in over 30 countries. Many of you know of Jean Vanier, the acclaimed Canadian who in 1964 founded the original L'Arche community in France.

Recognizing the need for such a community in Richmond Hill, Steven and Ann Newroth started L'Arche Daybreak in Richmond Hill in 1969. With that, the second L'Arche community was born. I am proud to introduce L'Arche Daybreak executive director Carl MacMillan, sitting in the members' gallery, who has joined us today in the Legislature.

L'Arche Daybreak is a dynamic example of how people of different intellectual capacities, social origins and culture can live and learn together.

As Jean Vanier stated, "The belief in the inner beauty of each and every human being is at the heart of all true education, and at the heart of being human."

I salute L'Arche Daybreak on their 40th anniversary.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. John Yakabuski: Since my election to the Legislature in 2003, one of the many things I've fought for was the issuing of health cards through driver's licence bureaus. The idea that seniors living in Whitney, for example, would have to get to Pembroke to have their

new health card issued was ridiculous. When the government recently announced that licence bureaus would now be able to issue them, I was pleased to say, "Yes, finally."

My sense of victory was short-lived. We found out that the Minister of Government Services went on to announce that he would be closing many of the privately operated licence offices. In my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the offices in Pembroke and Renfrew will be closed, effective early next year.

What was the minister thinking? He should be well aware that the most efficiently run licensing offices are privately operated. His plan would see a reduction in service, at a higher cost to taxpayers, from his government-run offices.

Auto dealers are livid that he would opt for this idea. Two hard-working entrepreneurs, Belinda Goddard and Garry Cotnam, met with me to let me know that the minister's action will result in their employees being left without work. They lose their jobs, and their communities get less service.

This is unacceptable. It is time that the minister rescind this closure plan and stop this attack on small-town Ontario.

LAKESIDE STEEL

Mr. Peter Kormos: I am grateful for the invitation I have received to attend the 100th anniversary celebration of Lakeside Steel in Welland on Wednesday. Regrettably, I can't be there because of course the Legislature is sitting.

Lakeside Steel—Page-Hersey—was built in 1909, located in Welland because amongst other things there, it is on the canal and you've got cheap electricity. That was the draw for Lakeside Steel—Page-Hersey—back in 1909.

I want to commend the management at Lakeside, who have done a very difficult job of keeping that company alive during very difficult times when the company has received little support from governments and indeed is the victim of the importation of cheap pipe.

Most importantly, while I commend the management, I want to applaud and express gratitude to the workers: skilled workers, hard-working people, members now of the CAW. Formerly, it was one of the old UE plants in Ontario. These workers work hard at a job that can still sometimes be dangerous. Over the course of that last 100 years, there have been generations of hard-working women and men at Page-Hersey, many of them new immigrants, many of them illiterate in their own language. Imagine how frightening it would be for them to come to Canada. But they worked hard. And unlike them, their kids, because of the hard work of their parents—and mind you, Page-Hersey and Lakeside provide jobs, but those workers provide profits. Because of that hard work, so many kids got to university who wouldn't have otherwise.

Congratulations to Lakeside and its employees.

HURON CENTRAL RAILWAY

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Earlier this summer, the Huron Central Railway announced that it would cease operations between Sault Ste. Marie and Espanola on August 15, and Espanola and Sudbury on October 15. This 300-kilometre railroad is a significant transportation asset. The railroad is a major carrier for Essar Steel, Algoma and Domtar Espanola, among other shippers.

On July 14, I attended a meeting with representatives of shippers, First Nations, municipalities and contractors, under the capable chair of Soo CAO Joe Fratesi. Out of that meeting, a small group was chosen to open a conversation with Huron Central.

An agreement was reached with Huron Central on an interim basis. The major shippers and the city of Sault Ste. Marie are assuming responsibility for a share of the package. I am pleased to report that the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. board has approved \$1.5 million for short-term funding to improve the infrastructure. This has been matched by the federal government.

The interim arrangement will keep Huron Central Railway operating until August 2010. Tomorrow, the large group will meet again to work out a long-term solution for rail service. I will continue to work with our partners to ensure a solution for this important transportation option.

1510

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to join the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, as well as the member from Timmins–James Bay, who have spoken on this very issue of the 300 offices of private issuers networks that provide an essential and effective service to the drivers and businesses in many communities in Ontario.

This is a concern amongst many communities over this government's forced and hasty plan to close about 70 offices. Offices in communities like Peterborough, Whitby, Lindsay, Brockville, Pembroke, Hearst, Cochrane, Kapuskasing, New Liskeard and many others are examples of these offices that are being threatened.

This secret scheme was unleashed during the summer when many citizens were not paying close attention to government business. In doing this, the government is acting without effective consultation with communities or explaining the motive or the cost to the taxpayers of Ontario. To my knowledge, the government has not sought advice from the private issuers networks that have successfully served their communities, in many cases, for a hundred years. In fact, many have said they were forced to sign a gag order as a condition to receive the information.

I would expect they would, at the very minimum, resume consultations with the people of Ontario. But really, the longest-range plan here should stop immediately, this forced plan of closing and harassing small-town and rural Ontario. This simply is not fair and I ask the minister to respond.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: We know that in order to compete with the likes of India and China, we need to give our students the proper skills and training that will ensure success in the 21st-century, knowledge-based economy. That is why we have introduced new programs to better engage high school students right across Ontario. We have already seen the success of this strategy with high school graduation rates increasing from 68% to 77% since 2003.

The aviation and aerospace specialist high skills majors highlighted last week is the latest initiative, and it allows students to customize their high school experience across a variety of subjects. I was proud to be at the unveiling last week in Hamilton with Minister Wynne, as well as with the director of education for the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, John Malloy, and the president and CEO of the John C. Munro Hamilton International Airport, Richard Korocil, announcing that students of Ancaster High School will be some of the first in the province to be offered this new major.

These specialized majors will allow students to pick courses that match their strengths, interests and career goals. We believe that engaging programs will prepare our students for future success, and we will continue to work hard to ensure all students reach their full potential.

MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: One hundred and ninety-nine years ago an important event took place in the history of mankind: The independence of Mexico began with a cry of patriotism that is now being repeated in every town and in fact in every village of Mexico. Tonight, the President of Mexico will repeat and re-enact this event by the great patriot Mr. Hidalgo, who began the fight for the independence of Mexico.

And as we today have hoisted the very important flag of an independent Mexico in front of this Legislature, we are of course reminded of the great tribulations, the great suffering and the great problems the Mexican people went through in terms of finding their own place in and for independence.

To celebrate this event, Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to introduce to you and to this House the consul general of Mexico and some of his staff, Mr. Carlos Pujalte, and I say to him in Spanish—

Applause.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: We're reminded of the Pan Am games when I'm thinking of the consul general and his staff, but I say to him in Spanish [*Remarks in Spanish*].

CANADIAN JEWISH CONGRESS

Mr. Mike Colle: In Hebrew, I say shalom to the executive of the Canadian Jewish Congress: President Mark Freiman, CEO Bernie Farber, national executive director Benjamin Shinewald, director of public affairs

and communications Jordan Kerbel, and from the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, director of public policy Stephen Adler. Our guests join us today to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Canadian Jewish Congress, one of Canada's iconic humanitarian advocacy organizations.

Founded in 1919, the Canadian Jewish Congress provides a united voice for the Canadian Jewish community and has since become a leading advocacy organization for the Jewish community across Canada. Throughout its history, the CJC has intervened in vital human rights and war crime trials, educated young students about the dangers of hatred and stereotypes through the Choose Your Voice campaign and advocated for an end to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur—in fact, we had a green ribbon campaign launched here in 2006 to symbolize the need to do something about the Darfur disaster.

The CJC remains focused on making Canada and the rest of the world a better place for all, ensuring that future generations will only be exposed to crimes against humanity by reading about it in their textbooks. It's no surprise that the Canadian government has officially designated the founding of the CJC as a significant historical event in Canada.

Please join me in saying mazel tov and congratulating the Canadian Jewish Congress on its 90 years of extraordinary work and advocacy, and join us all later in the dining room at 5:30 when the Premier and this Legislature mark this auspicious 90th anniversary. Mazel tov.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion regarding standing committees' membership.

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the following standing committees:

On the Standing Committee on Estimates, Mr. Bailey replaces Mr. Hudak, Mr. Brownell replaces Mr. Flynn, Mr. Craitor replaces Ms. Mangat and Mr. Ramal replaces Mr. Naqvi.

On the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, Ms. Albanese replaces Ms. Aggelonitis, Mr. Flynn replaces Mr. Lalonde and Mr. Shurman replaces Mr. Arnott.

On the Standing Committee on General Government, Ms. Broten replaces Mr. Brownell, Ms. Jaczek replaces Mrs. Jeffrey, Ms. Mangat replaces Mrs. Mitchell and Mr. Yakabuski replaces Mr. Bailey.

On the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, Ms. Albanese replaces Mr. Rinaldi, Mr. Hardeman replaces Mrs. Munro, Mr. Naqvi replaces Mr. Ramsay, Ms. Pendergast replaces Mrs. Sandals and Mr. Wilson replaces Mr. Martiniuk.

On the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, Mr. Chudleigh replaces Mr. Yakabuski.

On the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Brownell replaces Ms. Albanese, Mr. Johnson replaces Mr. Flynn and Mr. Ramal replaces Mr. Sergio.

On the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Mr. Arnott replaces Mr. Hardeman and Mr. Ramsay replaces Ms. Albanese.

On the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills, Mr. Craitor replaces Mr. Johnson.

Finally, on the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Ms. Aggelonitis replaces Ms. Broten, Mrs. Jeffrey replaces Ms. Jaczek, Ms. Jones replaces Mr. Shurman, Mr. Lalonde replaces Mr. Ramal and Mrs. Mitchell replaces Mr. Craitor.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Do the members desire the motion to be re-read?

All those in favour will say "aye."

Opposed will say "nay."

I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank Cathy Scott of Wasaga Beach for sending me these petitions.

"Whereas the hard-working residents in Simcoe–Grey do not want a harmonized sales tax (HST) that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for, to name just a few, gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable, Internet services for their homes, for house sales over \$400,000, fast food under \$4, electricity, newspapers, magazines, stamps, theatre admissions, footwear less than \$30, home renovations, gym fees, audio books for the blind, funeral services, snow-plowing, air-conditioning repairs, commercial property rentals, real estate commissions, dry cleaning, car washes, manicures, Energy Star appliances, vet bills, bus fares, golf fees, arena ice rentals, moving vans, grass cutting, furnace repairs, domestic air travel, train fares, tobacco, bicycles and legal services; and

"Whereas the blended sales tax will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

1520

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

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers."

I agree with that petition and I will sign it.

CANADIAN JEWISH CONGRESS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Canadian Jewish Congress was founded in 1919 and has become a leading advocacy organization for the Jewish community" worldwide;

"Whereas the Canadian Jewish Congress coordinated efforts to assist Jews in Eastern Europe after World War I;

"Whereas the Canadian Jewish Congress has delivered relief shipments to displaced persons' camps after World War II;

"Whereas the Canadian Jewish Congress has created and distributes the Choose Your Voice educational program" for "grades 6, 7 and 8," teaching people "about the dangers of hatred and stereotypes;

"Whereas the Canadian Jewish Congress has intervened in vital human rights and war crimes trials, educated young students about the dangers of hatred and stereotypes through the Choose Your Voice campaign...;

"Whereas the government of Canada has officially designated the founding of the CJC as a significant historical event in Canada;

"We, the undersigned, urge the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to honour and congratulate the Canadian Jewish Congress on 90 years of outstanding work and advocacy for the Jewish community and for all" Canadians.

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

TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas residents in Arnprior, Ontario, do not want Dalton McGuinty's new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over \$400,000; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under \$4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals' new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families, farmers, and low-income Ontarians;

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

"That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families."

I support this petition and affix my name to it, and I'll send it down with page Connor.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Leal: I received a petition today from Kathy Bruce, a fine resident of Streetsville, Ontario.

“Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition and will affix my name to it and give it to page Chantelle.

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the residents of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax (HST) that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

“Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to house sales over \$400,000; and

“Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for meals under \$4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

“Whereas the blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

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

“That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers.”

I have signed this, and we have many, many more to come.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I’d like especially to

thank the guys from the Rotary Club of Mississauga West, particularly Dave McCaskill, Pieter Kool and Krish Murti, for having gathered some of the signatures on it. It reads as follows:

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

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could better be performed in an off-site facility. An ambulatory surgery centre would greatly increase the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, reduce wait times for patients and free 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 2009-10 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this very important petition and to ask page Carlos to carry it for me.

SALES TAX

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

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

“Whereas the North American auto industry is having difficulty selling vehicles, and the province of Ontario has recently lost more than 300,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector alone; and

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

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

I’m pleased to sign and support this, and give it to one of the new pages here, Connor.

SALE OF DOMESTIC
WINES AND BEERS

Mr. Frank Klees: I have a petition addressed to the Legislature. It was presented to me by Mr. Kenneth Kim and Mr. John Yoon of the Ontario Korean Businessmen’s Association. I agreed to read it into the record. I did

advise them that I do not personally agree with the intent of the petition. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the province of Ontario restricts the sale of beer and wine to the LCBO, the Beer Store and a few winery retail stores;

“Whereas other provinces (notably Quebec) have been selling beer and wine in local convenience stores for many years without any harm to the well-being of the public;

“Whereas it is desirable to promote the sale of beer and wine in a convenient manner consistent with a contemporary society;

“Whereas it is essential to support local convenience stores for the survival of small businesses;

“Whereas it is obvious from the current market trends that the sales of wine and beer in convenience stores is not a question of ‘if’ but ‘when’;

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Liquor Control Act to permit the sale of beer and wine in local convenience stores to the public throughout the province and to do it now.”

I’m pleased to present this petition, notwithstanding that I don’t support it, to page Robert for presentation to the table.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition here to stop the exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers.

“Whereas a number of foreign worker and caregiver recruitment agencies have exploited vulnerable foreign workers; and

“Whereas foreign workers are subject to illegal fees and abuse at the hands of some of these unscrupulous recruiters; and

“Whereas the federal government in Ottawa has failed to protect foreign workers from these abuses; and

“Whereas, in Ontario, the former Conservative government deregulated and eliminated protection for foreign workers; and

“Whereas a great number of foreign workers and caregivers perform outstanding and difficult tasks on a daily basis in their work, with limited protection;

“We, the undersigned, support MPP Mike Colle’s bill, the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage into law.”

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

1530

PENSION PLANS

Mr. John O’Toole: It’s a pleasure to get the opportunity to read two petitions of many from my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas consumers rely on timely and accurate information from insurance companies and other finan-

cial institutions when they apply for access to locked-in pension funds; and

“Whereas the disclosure of wrong or incomplete information about pension fund access can have devastating consequences for the consumer; and

“Whereas the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) is currently limited in its power to enforce standards for the disclosure of information about access to pension funds;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to enact the necessary laws or regulations that will enable the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to hold financial institutions fully accountable for information they give clients about access to”—their—“pension funds.”

I’m pleased to endorse and sign and give this to new page Chantelle.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario regarding the western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre.

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

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

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

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

This is signed by a number of residents of the Mississauga area, including Wendy Johnson and Marion O’Sullivan.

TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition here from the people in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas residents in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke do not want the McGuinty Liberals’ new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals’ new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline, for

their hydro, cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over \$400,000; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals’ new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under \$4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals’ new sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

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

“That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario families.”

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it down with Carlos.

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I didn’t see anyone else up, Mr. Speaker, so I guess we’re the last of the line. I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the residents of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

“Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to house sales over \$400,000; and

“Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for meals under \$4, haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

“Whereas the blended sales tax grab will affect everyone in the province: seniors, students, families and low-income Ontarians;

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

“That the McGuinty Liberal government not increase taxes for Ontario consumers.”

I have signed this, Mr. Speaker, and will give it to Samaa and she will bring it down to you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE RENDEMENT DES ÉLÈVES ET LA GOUVERNANCE DES CONSEILS SCOLAIRES

Ms. Wynne moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 177, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to student achievement, school board governance and certain other matters / Projet de loi 177, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l’éducation en ce qui concerne le rendement des élèves, la gouvernance des conseils scolaires et d’autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Before I start my remarks, I would like to acknowledge Margot Trevelyan and Margaret Correia, from the ministry, who are in the gallery and have worked very hard on this bill, and Ken Thurston from my office. I’d also like to acknowledge in advance the member for Kitchener–Conestoga, who has been newly appointed as my parliamentary assistant, who will be speaking to the legislation later.

It gives me great pleasure to speak to Bill 177, and in fact Bill 177 follows up on Bill 78, legislation that was passed a little over three years ago, and I’ll return to that. As I think this House knows, our government is committed to higher levels of student achievement. It is in fact our top priority in education.

En même temps, nous savons que nos conseillères et conseillers scolaires et nos directrices et directeurs de l’éducation doivent assurer une bonne gouvernance pour appuyer l’amélioration du rendement des élèves.

I personally and our government generally has a great deal of respect for Ontario’s trustees and directors of education. We know that they work extremely hard every day to make the publicly funded education system in Ontario the very best that it can be and to make it work well. That’s why we introduced the Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act in May, in support of them in their important roles. That word “support” is important. I’m going to come back to that word over and over as I go through my remarks because that’s what this is about; it’s about support of the people who work in our education system. So I’m pleased to stand here in the Legislature for second reading of our governance legislation today.

The Education Act, as it now reads, outlines a long list of requirements and responsibilities, everything from putting up fences to buying milk. There’s a huge range of activities. However, the most important goal for Ontario parents, improving student achievement, is never mentioned, and I believe that most Ontarians would be stunned to know that in the Education Act of this province there is no mention of student achievement as a responsibility of school boards. So our goal is to change that, and we believe that we will have the support of the community and I hope the support of this House in making those changes. The proposed amendments to the Education Act, if passed, would make student achievement the number one priority for all school boards, and I’d like to provide some context as to why we want to make these changes.

Comme vous le savez, les conseils scolaires sont la pierre angulaire d’un solide système d’éducation financé par les fonds publics en Ontario.

In 1998, more than a decade ago, substantial changes were made to school board governance in Ontario. Since then, several major reports have called for a governance review to see and to make sure that the structures in place are operating as effectively as they should, because when relationships were changed to the structure of education in Ontario, it would make sense that we would look at those relationships to see if they were also adjusted. So we assembled the governance review committee to examine how well the current governance structure is serving Ontario's education system, and the committee's report found many strengths in the current system, but it also identified some areas for improvement, specifically that we clarify the mandate and the duties of school boards, and that has not been clear. I have served on a school board as a trustee since 1998, between 2000 and 2003, and I can tell you that those roles were not clearly defined.

Il s'agit, entre autres, de promouvoir le rendement et le bien-être des élèves, de leur offrir des programmes efficaces et appropriés et de veiller à ce que les ressources des conseils soient bien gérées.

The report also made a number of other recommendations, including clarifying the roles of trustees and directors of education, putting strategic plans into place for student outcomes. There were also recommendations for professional development for trustees and for people who are in those governance structures, and other supports for effective governance of boards.

1540

This legislation that I'm speaking to today was designed to address many of that committee's recommendations. At the same time, it demonstrates our government's high level of respect for trustees, school boards and directors of education. The proposed legislation would clarify what's expected from all of those people: from the chairs, from the trustees, from the directors of education and from school boards in general. It would also build on good governance practices and promote sound financial management by establishing audit committees and creating a provincial code of conduct for trustees. If we look at other jurisdictions across the country, we'll see that many of these pieces are in place. So, in some cases, we're actually playing catch-up in terms of what other jurisdictions have done.

Tous ces changements mettraient l'accent sur le fait que les conseils sont responsables du rendement des élèves et en feraient leur première priorité.

What I'd like to do is explain what this means for our partners in education in a little bit more detail. First of all, student achievement and fiscal management.

School board leadership place an important role in student learning, obviously, but it needs ongoing development to improve the ability of board leaders to act together to implement core priorities and to provide the necessary supports and environment for students' success. So we're proposing to amend the Education Act to clearly state that boards are responsible for promoting

student outcomes and student achievement, and this would be laid out in provincial interest regulations.

Another change would involve direction on handling school board resources effectively. This would include carefully developing the budget, managing assets in a responsible manner and allocating resources in a way that would support the board's multi-year strategic plan. It hasn't always been the case that we've had access to a multi-year plan. In effect, this bill would help ensure that board resources are managed wisely, effective education programs are delivered and students are encouraged to pursue their goals. As a result, all board expenses would align with board priorities, particularly in supporting student achievement. That alignment has been uneven, and I think that we need to make sure that there are mechanisms to ensure that kind of consistency.

Other amendments that we are introducing would highlight the important leadership role that board chairs have, and that would include conducting meetings according to the board's procedures and practices, acting as a spokesperson to the public on behalf of the board—which does happen much of the time now—and providing leadership to the board to keep focused on its strategic plan. I say, in the instance of the board chairs acting as spokespeople, many of these things do happen now, but what we want to do is we want to ensure that, in legislation, it's clear what those roles are.

Je devrais souligner que beaucoup de ces rôles et responsabilités font déjà partie de la pratique courante des conseils de toute la province, mais ils n'ont jamais été prescrits par la loi. So we're putting these into law.

As for trustees, we know that they play a valuable role in the education of our students. The amendments that we've proposed would strengthen the role of trustees by ensuring, among other things, that they participate in board meetings, consult with parents and students on the board's multi-year plan and bring concerns of parents, students and constituents of the board to the board's attention. This piece is extremely important because I think that although individual trustees may, much of the time, have an understanding of what their role is, it's not always clear to communities what the role of trustees is. One of the objectives, from my perspective, for introducing this legislation was that we would raise the discussion about the role of school boards, about the role of school trustees, and my hope is to encourage more interest in school board elections, for example, because if people don't know what the role of an elected official is, then it's very difficult to take an interest in that role. That's one of the things that we've been told by school boards and by trustees that they're interested in, and I've met with many of the school board associations on this.

Trustees, as a result of this legislation, would have to maintain their focus on student achievement, and we've already talked about that as being an important focus for the education system, including students' well-being, happiness and self-esteem. So I want to be clear, because I have a sense that there is a bit of a discussion that has begun out in the community about this, that we are not

narrowly defining student achievement, that we are making it very clear that student achievement and student well-being need to be looked at broadly and that that means that we're talking about students being engaged and being able to be prepared for the world beyond their high school years, because we recognize that there isn't just one factor that's going to prepare a student for those years beyond. That student achievement, as well as well-being, is extremely important to our measure of how the school system is doing.

C'est cette clarté que les conseillères et conseillers scolaires et le public ont demandée lors des consultations du comité pour l'examen de la gouvernance.

Another amendment would require trustees to uphold the implementation of a board resolution, a final resolution after it's passed, and to comply with the board's code of conduct.

Our proposed legislation is not meant to stifle dissenting voices; in fact, we support exactly the opposite. We believe that divergent views are part of a healthy discussion at the board table. We believe that they're necessary for exploring the various options available and considering the pros and cons involved in any issue that's being discussed.

However, once a board has made a final decision, trustees would be expected, as members of that board, to uphold the board's decisions. This was a recommendation of the governance review committee. Trustees could obviously explain to their constituents that they may not have supported the decision at the board table and they may continue to disagree, but that once the decision has been made, they should uphold that decision fully. I believe, and I think it would be supported by this House, that to do otherwise is neither helpful nor productive. It simply distracts members from moving forward. So we're not talking about stifling disagreement. What we're talking about is trying to create a cohesive movement forward once a decision has been made by a board.

I want to talk for a moment about directors of education. There are some specific amendments relevant to directors. Currently, beyond providing an annual report to the board and to the minister, directors of education have very few duties specified in legislation, and that has been articulated as a problem. We're proposing that directors be responsible for supporting the development of their board's multi-year plan, implementing and monitoring the plan, annually reviewing the plan and publicly reporting on how it's being implemented. I think that's something that communities can expect.

To further build on good governance practices, the legislation includes establishing audit committees and adopting a provincial code of conduct for trustees. Again, if we look at other jurisdictions, these things are in place in many other jurisdictions across the country.

The governance review committee also heard an overwhelming desire for such a code of conduct during its provincial consultations, and there was widespread support, in fact, among trustee groups and individual

trustee participants for such a code of conduct. That is consistent with what we had heard previously.

Un code de conduite établirait des normes de pratiques exemplaires et fournirait aux conseils les outils nécessaires pour réagir à tout comportement inapproprié.

Boards would have the flexibility to develop their own codes of conduct, which would include the provincial code as the core of that local code of conduct, plus any other provisions that the local boards wanted to include. This would allow boards to address concerns that had been raised in their communities, while maintaining the standards that had been set out in regulation.

I think that any discussion of publicly funded education has to include a discussion of the roles of trustees, directors and chairs, and of student achievement, but I think it also has to include a discussion of the role of parents, the critical role of parents in the education system. I know that all parties in this House have taken action to engage parents. We want to go one step further down that road. Feedback from parents is extremely important at whatever level we're talking about and continues to play an important role in our government's agenda. That's why we've proposed amendments to include provisions that each school board in the province have a parent involvement committee. This parent involvement committee would be a regional, board-wide committee and would draw on constituencies around the board. It would replace in legislation the Ontario Parent Council, which has not met since June 2004 and which was disbanded in December 2005.

As happened when school councils were put into legislation by a previous government, having legislation for these special committees would enhance their mandate and functions and ultimately increase their presence at the board level.

There are many boards that already have these parent involvement committees but it's not clear exactly what their roles are, and again there is an unevenness around the province. The reason we would like to put this into legislation is to create that common understanding of the role of these committees.

1550

We believe that it really is an opportunity to identify the real issues and barriers of parent engagement at the grassroots level. This is very important, from my perspective, that we have a body at the grassroots level that draws on the knowledge and the wisdom of school councils and parent populations to make recommendations at the board level. Then, at the ministry level, it would be my intention, if this legislation were to pass and there was a provincial move to have these parent involvement committees in place, to bring together representatives from these parent involvement committees on an annual basis to talk to them about the issues that they are hearing in each of their boards. That grassroots discussion is very important to me.

I believe that they allow for a broad spectrum of parents to provide advice to boards about their children's education, thereby improving student achievement,

because we know that if parents are involved, students do better.

Nous savons que les élèves réussissent mieux quand leurs parents participent à leur vie scolaire.

I believe that this approach to parent involvement would be a better way of making parent input timely and meaningful, and I look very much forward, if this legislation passes, to working with parent involvement committees.

I spoke a little bit earlier about audit committees, and this legislation would also introduce audit committees.

Beaucoup de conseils ont déjà des comités de vérification qui comptent des membres externes venant de la communauté, mais certains n'en ont pas.

Audit committees perform an important oversight function, obviously, and are designed to help boards adopt effective practices to support student achievement. They've also been identified by the governance review committee as an effective governance practice. It would mean that boards would be more accountable to their communities and it would create a transparency for student achievement expectations and reporting on students.

To help boards establish internal audit functions, our government is supporting an increased focus on financial transparency and accountability with \$2 million in 2009-10, and this funding will grow to \$5 million annually in subsequent years. So we recognize that there could be an additional cost that would be associated with that and we are prepared to put that money into the system.

I spoke earlier about the provincial interest regulations. These are the regulations that would flow out of this legislation. All partners in education have a role to play in enhancing student achievement and well-being, as I've already said, closing the gaps in student achievement between the kids who are achieving and the kids who aren't, and maintaining confidence in Ontario's publicly funded education system, and those remain at the core of our goals. That's why we passed Bill 78, which was the student performance bill, in the spring of 2006.

Le projet de loi a apporté des changements positifs à l'appui de l'éducation financée par les fonds publics.

It replaced teacher testing with increased supports for our new teachers, increased trustee honoraria and empowered student trustees.

The bill also authorized the government to set regulations in the provincial interest that clarify ministry and board responsibilities in a number of ways, including student achievement.

Bill 177 is the next logical step—which I think the sector knew was coming, because Bill 78 had already been passed in 2006—because it clarifies for boards, directors of education and school trustees their roles and duties to support higher student achievement and well-being, so it flows out of the work we did in Bill 78. If Bill 177 passes, the government would establish provincial interest regulations that will outline the supports and interventions to carry out their important work. I

come back to that word “supports” because it is about supporting boards to do the work that they need to do.

We have an enormous responsibility as government to ensure that the significant investments that we're making in education are paying off. We're making those investments, obviously, on behalf of the people of Ontario, and so it is critical that we have that relationship of accountability with school boards.

Nous savons que la grande majorité des conseils fonctionnent bien. Ils se gèrent efficacement et affichent une amélioration des résultats des élèves.

Beyond the supportive measures, and as I say, those are at the core of what we believe needs to be in place, we also have to deal with the rare instance where boards, despite ministry supports, are failing to make progress or have declining student results, or in some other way are not attending to the well-being of students in terms of achievement or other indicators. And I go back to my comments about that broad definition of achievement and well-being.

So we're interested in providing a continuum of supports for boards that are struggling and responding to such a board with a staged response of supportive and directive intervention. I really believe that the relationship between school boards and ministry should be one of support and not one of punishment. I have to say that when I was a school trustee there was a much more hostile relationship and there was a much more punitive tone in the dialogue between school boards and the ministry. That has changed and we want to make sure that what we do in this legislation makes it clear that we believe that that tone—that one of support, that one of encouragement and that one of shared responsibility for the achievement of our students—is the tone that stays in place. That's what this legislation is about.

The government will respond if a board over time has significant and persistent problems relating to student achievement, effective stewardship or good governance. The administration or supervision—I'm using the term that people might recognize—of a board is the last step in the proposed process of ministry response, and it would obviously not be taken in the absence of serious concern for the achievement and well-being of students.

As I say, there would be no suggestion in the public interest regulations that there would not be, before that happened, a series of actions that would be supportive and that there would be interventions that the board could work with the ministry on in an attempt to deal with the issues at hand. That I think would be of great assistance to boards.

Again, if we look at other provinces, there are varying degrees of ability of ministries and ministers to intervene and support, and so what we're trying to do is to create an Ontario situation that looks to other jurisdictions but creates an environment in Ontario that reflects what we believe that relationship should be, which is that supportive, collaborative one.

So we're consulting with the trustee associations, with the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, as well as

with all of the other stakeholders in education on the provisions that would be contained in the regulation. I know that there has been some concern about conversations that took place over the summer. There will be many other opportunities for people in the community to comment on both the public interest regs and on the legislation.

We'll also be considering the best means of ensuring that the process is positive and supportive, as I said, rather than punitive. We have to remember that when the relationship between the province and school boards was changed—and I think I've referred to that; it happened around 1998—and there was a different relationship established between school boards and the government, there was not the concomitant examination of the governance roles, and that's what we're trying to do.

We believe that everyone in the education sector needs to continue to work together in order for all of our kids, all of the students in our system, to reach their fullest potential. This legislation would help to clarify the role of many of the important players who need to have a focus on student achievement and who I know in their hearts do have a focus on student achievement and well-being, because when that happens all of our students will do better. When I visit our schools, I am so proud of what I see. And I'm proud not on behalf of me as a single minister in the government; I'm proud on behalf of all of us in Ontario because of the excellent system that we've been able to create. By any objective standard, and we can look at national tests, we can look at international tests and we can look at the fact that people come from around the world to visit Ontario to see how we provide programming for all of our students—by all of those measures, we are providing a rich learning environment for our students.

Il me fait également plaisir d'entendre les récits inspirants des membres du personnel enseignant, de la direction d'école et du personnel de soutien de toute la province.

Progress is being made everywhere and I am confident that this bill is going to take us even a step further.

Nous avons accompli beaucoup au cours des six dernières années.

1600

Across Ontario we've had more achievement in terms of graduation rates. We've seen test scores go up. We've seen students engaged in programs that were not available six years ago. When we brought in specialist high-skills majors, just for example, where students have an opportunity to get work experience that they can take out into the work world or into a post-secondary institution, whether it's in culinary arts or whether it's in aerospace—six years ago those programs did not exist. When we brought those in three years ago and there were 600 students who took part, now we have 20,000 students who are taking part in our specialist high-skills majors. We've got 36,000 more kids graduating from high school since 2003.

Those are the measures of success that I think we have to pay close attention to. Every one of those 36,000 kids

who has graduated from high school, who might not have graduated had we not put those programs in place, has a story about how they weren't engaged, how they weren't coming to school and how a teacher called them and said, "We haven't seen you for a while," and that child was re-engaged in the education system. They're going to have more opportunity and a better life because they had the opportunity to get their high school diploma, which is really a building block for anything that kids want to do later on.

We've done a lot. One of the major things we've done is we've changed the dialogue with folks who work in the education system.

Une des grandes réussites que nous avons eues en tant que gouvernement a été de rétablir des relations positives avec le secteur de l'éducation.

We've worked hard to create that environment. We've worked hard to keep that dialogue going between all of the folks who make our schools as wonderful as they are. Thanks to the hard work and collaboration throughout the education sector and all of the people on the ground, we've had, so far, six years of peace and stability, and we've got collective agreements in place that will mean we'll have eight consecutive years of peace and stability in our education system. That is no small feat, and it is no small feat because it allows our students, our education workers and everyone in the sector to focus on what's really important, and that is our kids.

À mon avis, ce qui ressort clairement de ces discussions est la valeur et la force de notre relation et la preuve de ce que nous pouvons accomplir ensemble.

Going forward, we're concentrating on continuing to build on the partnerships already established among the education partners in Ontario. We will not let go of those relationships. We are going to continue to have those discussions. We will, from time to time, have disagreements. We have had disagreements and we have worked through those disagreements because we have a solid, respectful and trusting relationship, so we will continue to build on that.

I'd just like to take one moment to share with the Legislature some quotes from some of our partners in education about this legislation. First, Madeleine Chevalier, who is chair of the governance review committee—she's a school board trustee and a former board chair. She says:

"I am confident that the proposed amendments to the Education Act will enhance the understanding of the roles and duties of all school boards and their ability to focus on student achievement and success, as well as provide them with better tools to achieve their goals. This can now be done while still respecting the culture and specificities of governance by individual school boards."

From Denis Chartrand, who's another member of the governance review committee but is a university professor, a former director of education and former chair of the Council of Directors of Education:

"I believe that the enhanced clarity in role descriptions and expectations will allow trustees and directors of

education to more effectively work together for the benefit of learners.”

Lastly, Carole Olsen, who’s the chair of the Canadian Education Association, agrees. She says:

“Effective school board governance practices are key to building our publicly funded education system. This legislation will more clearly define the role of trustees and school boards which will ultimately strengthen the governance structure for school boards in Ontario.”

Ce ne sont là que quelques témoignages, mais ils montrent clairement que notre gouvernement est sur la bonne voie. Nous continuerons à travailler avec tous nos partenaires en éducation pour renforcer la gouvernance des conseils scolaires et pour améliorer les rôles des conseillères et conseillers scolaires, des directrices et directeurs de l’éducation et de tous les membres des conseils dans l’intérêt de nos élèves.

This government is committed to continuing to improve the learning environment for our students, committed to improving the achievement of all of the students in the education system, and committed to working with all of the folks in our education sector who work so hard every day. They’re at the beginning of their school year. I know these are hectic weeks, but we are so very grateful for the work they do, and we offer them our continued support and partnership.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O’Toole: First of all, I’m going to say that I’m anticipating this afternoon a response from our critic, Ms. Witmer, the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, who is a parent, a former high school teacher, chair of a school board, educator of the year, as well as a former Minister of Education.

There’s much in this bill that is an outgrowth of comments made by other qualified individuals: the Rozanski report, the Auditor General’s report, as well as Norbert Hartmann, a former Deputy Minister of Education. All of these professional and qualified individuals almost insisted that the minister take these actions. And what are these actions? These actions are about command and control. They’re about the Ministry of Education, in regulation, taking over education.

One would ponder what the function is of some of these boards. Section 11 of the act is amended by adding the following: “The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations governing the roles, responsibilities, powers and duties of boards, directors of education and board members, including chairs of boards.” This is in response to Mr. Norbert Hartmann’s report on the spending of the Toronto public and separate boards.

Section 17.1: “The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations requiring boards to establish parent involvement committees and providing for the composition, mandate and functions of the committees.” This is clearly the minister’s mandate in regulation. When it says that the order in councils will be set by the minister, this is cabinet telling the school boards of Ontario what to do. They’ve actually given them as much

money as they possibly could, and yet they’re saying that there’s still no control by the ministry. She’s saying here today—and I think with the right intentions—that she’s taking control.

Now, I have no problem with that. I served as a trustee for two years. My wife was a teacher, now retired, and I have the greatest respect for public education. I think—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Comments and questions?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just want to tell the folks who are watching that I will be speaking for approximately one hour, and that’ll come soon, after the member from Kitchener–Waterloo speaks. I suspect it might last a whole half-hour; I don’t know. So join in, with your wine and whatever else you need to be able to watch this kind of program, in approximately an hour for my comments on the minister’s remarks, because I have nothing but negative news to talk about with respect to what this bill is all about. I’m going to be attacking the bill from beginning to end. Please tune in.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. Congratulations on your new role. You’ll do a phenomenal job.

I’m very pleased to speak about Bill 177. Just last week, my wife went back—she’s the vice-principal at St. Anne’s school in Peterborough. My two children, Braden and Shanae, are there in the French immersion program. They were very anxious to get back. In fact, my wife was actually back two weeks earlier because, as a vice-principal, she’s working very carefully with her principal, Ryan Brooks, planning for the opening of school next Tuesday to provide for that very positive learning environment that we have at St. Anne’s and, indeed, in the separate schools in the riding of Peterborough and the public schools that are part of the Kawartha-Pine Ridge school board.

It was interesting, the member for Durham mentioned his wife, a lovely person, an outstanding teacher, and a number of years ago, when she retired, I got to present her with her retirement certificate, which I signed as the member from Peterborough. It was a delightful occasion to honour Peg O’Toole and her outstanding contribution to education, despite the environment that she had to work in for a number of years.

The director of the separate school board in Peterborough, John Mackle, and his wife, Susan—John Mackle taught with the member from Eglinton–Lawrence at St. Michael’s, and indeed, this year, John and Susan are head of the United Way campaign in Peterborough, which kicks off this Thursday, September 17. I can’t be there, but my staff from the constituency office bought tickets.

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When I talked to my wife about Bill 177, she said, “This is the progressive kind of legislation that has made the framework for teaching in Ontario much better than

what it was from 1995 to 2003. It's a real joy now to be back in the classroom with this Minister of Education."

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Shurman: I may be the only person standing in the House today who is not related to a teacher, but I do know a number of school trustees, and I think that the school trustees that I know would not be terribly pleased.

The explanatory note here says, "The bill amends the Education Act to make various amendments relating to the governance of school boards. New provisions address boards' responsibilities for student achievement and effective stewardship of its resources and require boards to develop plans aimed at achieving these goals. The bill sets out duties of the chair of the board relating to the chair's conduct of meetings of the board, the chair's relations with the public and the director of education and other matters regarding the chair's leadership role, and the director of education is also given new duties regarding his or her supervisory role."

That's code, and the code is basically, "Command and control." It's code for "We're running the show at the ministry level." That's why I think that trustees would not be too pleased.

As we know, the voter rates, the turnout rates for votes, on school trustee elections are probably somewhere in the 15% to 25% range. Now that you're taking control at the ministry level to this extent, it strikes me as passing strange that you would expect the voter rates to even be that high.

The note goes on to say, "A new process is set out in the bill for dealing with alleged breaches of the code of conduct by members of the board. Various other minor or consequential changes are made regarding the powers and duties of the minister and of other persons involved in the administration of the education system."

To me, this bill effectively puts all school boards in the province on a form of notice, and that notice is that if they are not de facto being taken over, they may as well see themselves as under the stewardship of a supervisor, not at some time of a future choosing of the minister but from the get-go.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has two minutes to respond. Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the members for Durham, Trinity-Spadina, Peterborough and Thornhill for their comments.

The fact is that the governance review has been called for by the sector, by trustees, by the people who are in these roles, by directors, by the very people who have felt that since changes were made—we could have a debate about the changes that were made in 1998. I'm sure that the member for Kitchener-Waterloo will refer back to those changes.

The fact is, those changes were made and the fact is that there was no accompanying review of the governance structures, and that is what has been called for.

There isn't clarity in the system about who fits where, what the roles are, what the responsibilities are.

I'm glad that it's our government, that has a good relationship with the education sector, that works with the education sector, that doesn't use words like "command and control," because that's the screen that the party opposite puts on this kind of relationship—the words we use are "support" and "encouragement" and "nurturing" and "accountability" and "relationship."

The problem is that the party opposite laid a groundwork that, when we came into office, we had to undo. We had to undo the toxicity of that relationship. We've done that. Now it's time to go the next step and build in a public interest—I think everyone would agree, student achievement should be at the core of boards' work—because we are in government and we understand what the relationship between ministry and school boards should be. I'm just very glad that we are on that task and that it's not the other side that is there.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and congratulations to you. This is your first day in the chair, and we have no doubt you'll do an outstanding job.

I'm very pleased to be here on behalf of the PC caucus to speak to this bill, which is entitled the Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act, which has been brought forward by the Minister of Education, ostensibly to strengthen school board governance.

The minister has also admitted that this legislation addresses a number of long-standing recommendations concerning school board governance, and I would certainly agree that changes have been called for now for some time. In fact Rozanski, in his 2002 report, recommended that we do review the trustee governance, and this government regrettably has waited seven long years to get it done, and certainly there are some concerns, I would have to say, about what they have done. I think, for the minister to try to paint this as everybody being happy with the changes, that is not necessarily the case.

We've certainly heard from trustees and some others who do have real concerns about this legislation, the fact that it would lead to an erosion of autonomy for local trustees. I think we only have to look at the changes that were made for those who are in hospital boards and how many hospital boards, under this Liberal government, are being taken over by hospital supervisors. Then the Minister of Health goes out and maligns the CEO and the board chair in order to try to convince the local community that that board and that CEO haven't been doing their job. I certainly hope that this bill is not going to enable the Minister of Education, in this case, to go into communities and, again, take over boards but at the same time put down those people who have been trying to do their very best. Anyway, it is an attempt to deal with the issue of school board governance, an issue that does need to be addressed. The question is, does this address the situation as it should?

What it proposes to do: It does add some new provisions to the Education Act, and it does address very specifically the responsibility of boards for student achievement; also, that they would effectively look after the resources, and that they would develop plans aimed at achieving responsibility for student achievement and stewardship of their resources. The bill also sets out duties for the chair of the board, and that relates to the chair's conduct of meetings of the board, the chair's relations with the public, the director of education, and other matters related to the chair's leadership role. Having been the chair of a school board for five years in the region of Waterloo, I think it's always a good idea that some people who are chairs would specifically recognize and know what their job is.

The director of education in this legislation is also given new duties regarding his or her supervisory role. The bill also lists duties for the members of the board, the trustees, including their duties regarding their attendance, their participation in meetings of the board, their relations with parents, students and supporters, and their compliance with the board's code of conduct. There's also a new process here in the bill for dealing with alleged breaches of the code of conduct by members of the board, and there are various other changes made regarding the powers and the duties of the minister. This is where it gets to be, I think, a little questionable as to what is the real reason for this bill. It also talks about the powers and duties of other persons involved in the administration of the education system.

The bill also removes the board's ability to finance permanent improvements through the issues of debentures or other debt instruments.

A purpose provision is added to the act to indicate the purpose of a public education system.

So on the face of it, if you take a look at the amendments, you would probably say that, yes, these are amendments that obviously should be addressed. Most of them do concern governance. Some of them are looking to strengthen the accountability for the use of taxpayer money, which our party obviously believes in strongly after what we've seen as the lack of government oversight of agencies such as eHealth or at OLG. In fact, we've had the Minister of Health involved in both of those scandals. He was involved in the first OLG scandal, where he couldn't provide the necessary oversight; now he's involved with the eHealth scandal. Regrettably, what does this government do? They fire the individuals at the agency, but a minister is never, never asked to step down. What's happened to government accountability? This government is asking trustees to be accountable, and yet the Premier doesn't demand the same accountability of his ministers.

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So we do believe in and we do support the segments of this bill that strengthen accountability for the use of taxpayers' money. We just wish the government would assume the same accountability and also ensure that ministers recognize that that is their duty as well.

We certainly agree that student achievement needs to improve. We had some very disappointing results recently when the results of the testing came out. Here's an article on September 3 which says, "Grade 9 Math Scores Damning: Only 38% pass test and new numbers show kids falling further behind as they get older." It's very disappointing that that's happening. We're not seeing the student achievement.

It was our government that put in place the testing. We recognized that it was important that each child have the appropriate literacy and numeracy skills that were necessary, and we now find out that "more than 40,000 students," according to this article on August 26 by Louise Brown, "are still falling short of the mark in high school math."

We've recently heard as well from teachers and university professors who have indicated that our students are not prepared with the appropriate skills when they arrive at university, so we certainly have a lot of work to do. Here's another headline in the National Post which says, "Ontario Students Failing to Catch Up."

So there is a need for us to continue to focus on student achievement. We would support, certainly, initiatives that would encourage all of the partners to work together, and there are three partners in education. There are the parents, there are the students, and there are the teachers. It's important that all three of those partners work together in order that our students can achieve success, that they can develop self-confidence, and that they do graduate and are well prepared to take their place and be able to compete in the global economy. So we support the emphasis on student achievement.

This bill does speak to improving purchasing practices, which we would support; it speaks to improving spending patterns at school boards, which we support. If you can achieve some savings, then we could put that money back into resources to support our students as they move forward and attempt to be the best that they can be.

Now, local autonomy: That's what I think is of concern to many trustees in the province. What does this bill really do to local autonomy? Local autonomy has long been valued by school boards, and I would say to you that the majority of school boards in the province of Ontario have always done everything they possibly could to be good fiscal stewards. It is a long-standing tradition that they would be autonomous. I certainly understand that, and our party, I can tell you, does respect the autonomy of elected school board trustees, and we appreciate that they work with their teachers and their communities in order to develop programming and move forward with initiatives to support our students.

We have in this province a world-class education system, and we owe much of what we have in this province to those people who went before us. One of the most outstanding Premiers in this province, when it came to moving forward and developing this first-class education system, was Premier William Davis, and he continues to be recognized for what he has done, not only at the elementary and secondary school levels, but also the

community colleges. So we do strongly, strongly support the education system in the province, and we support any and every initiative to make it better.

But we do recognize, as this legislation is attempting to do, that you need to put in place some checks and balances. Certainly some of the amendments are good; others we question. One of the concerns about this legislation is the fact that this bill really is an unknown to some extent, and the reason is, we have the bill, but what is going to determine the direction of this bill, the powers of the minister and the government, are the regulations, and we are not going to know about the power of the minister, of the government, or taking away of any local autonomy from trustees until such time as the bill passes. I think it's that part of this bill that is causing a tremendous amount of concern, because although it's supposed to better define job descriptions for trustees and school boards, and set student achievement at school boards, we really don't know how that's going to happen until the regulations are developed.

I just want to point out that not everybody is happy about this bill, and there are some rumblings throughout the trustee community about the bill. I would say to you that the phone calls and the e-mails that we've been receiving, and some of my colleagues have been receiving, have certainly increased as we have reached today because, as somebody said, "If this bill passes, I'm afraid my job as a trustee becomes meaningless. Yes, they're telling me that this is going to be my role, but I really feel that the Minister of Education is going to be in charge." Another says, "It's dangerous. It says this is going to be a fundamental, substantial shift in the relationship between the ministry and school boards in the province." So there is concern.

Other trustees say, "This clearly is going to make us servants of the province." That's what happened to hospital trustees in the province of Ontario. When this government established the LHINs, the local health integration networks, the hospital boards and the hospital board members now are dictated to and told by the LHINs how much money they're going to have and what's going to happen within their own local hospitals. They have lost local autonomy, and if they don't dance to the tune of the piper—the chair and the members of the boards of the LHINs—we know what happens: supervisors are sent in. I guess the same concern now is one that is shared by trustees, as to what the impact of this bill could be. So they're not so sure that it's all about clarifying job descriptions. They do know that certainly from what they've seen so far, it gives the government the opportunity to take steps to step in and to take over school boards if they show persistent problems relating to student achievement, effective stewardship and good governance. How is somebody going to determine that?

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They're quite concerned about that because, as I say, without the regulations here, they know that they could be punished. They're not sure for what they could be

punished. And do you know what? I would say to you that some of them—and OPSBA has been quoted as saying that the tone of the discussion paper is "punitive" and some of the language is "particularly offensive." I think that's important because this bill was very quietly introduced. I think the government tried to keep it under the radar. Now I think people are recognizing that certainly the bill is going to give more power to the minister than they had originally determined. Nobody is quite sure about how the regulations are going to determine the powers and also what could happen to the boards. Trustees are going to have to try to set standards, measures, enforcements etc. They're going to have to be responsible for student achievement, but we don't know what the guidelines are and how any of that is going to be measured.

I think it's important to get that on the record because not everybody supports this bill. In fact, I got a call from a school board chair this week, out of the blue, and he was very, very concerned about the bill. He hadn't thought about it for a couple of months, but suddenly he, like so many others, suddenly realized that this bill, which could have great consequences for local school board autonomy, was being introduced. He was concerned about the new powers that it was going to give to the minister and the government and the fact that a supervisor could come in and take over.

When a supervisor comes in, I think it's important to note that basically the local community no longer has a voice. Having been a school board trustee myself, I think what I always valued was the relationship you had with communities. We set up the parent councils in order to allow more input into local school decision-making. We hope that this bill isn't going to eliminate the local autonomy for parents, teachers and trustees.

If you take a look at this legislation, I think the government decided to hastily introduce it because of what happened at the Catholic school board here in town. Certainly the trustees and their expenses were coming under increasing public scrutiny. In fact, between January 8, 2008, and February 19, 2008, there were 14 articles regarding personal expenses charged to board accounts that appeared in the press, and consequently Norbert Hartmann was asked by the minister to step in. He did prepare a report that was entitled *Enhancing Public Trust and Confidence*, because in the city of Toronto the board had lost the confidence of the public. The report was completed on May 6 and I think it is a good report.

This report really wasn't discussed much by the government during the first reading of Bill 177, and I think I'd like to share some of what Mr. Hartmann did find. He concluded that the "cost of governance at the Toronto Catholic District School Board is among the highest in the province," and that costs had grown substantially since 2003. That happens to coincide, by the way, with the election of the Liberal government. Mr. Hartmann indicated that a significant portion of the growth in governance costs was a result of discretionary expenditures that trustees had provided for themselves since 2003. Mr. Hartmann's report specifically states:

“The pattern of expenses that trustees claim and the board services available indicate that trustees:

“—provide themselves benefits and services that are not permitted by the Education Act;

“—incur expenses unrelated to their responsibilities as board members; and

“—exercise powers to allocate funds that are not provided in legislation.”

He also went on to say that “trustees do not always acquire goods and services in the most cost-efficient and effective manner possible,” and that “significant improvements in the reporting of expenditures are required.”

Mr. Hartmann made 20 recommendations in order to ensure that the policies and practices at the Toronto Catholic District School Board represented an appropriate and transparent approach to the provision of services and reimbursement of trustee expenses. It recommended that the Ministry of Education should look at additional ways of improving oversight and transparency.

I think it's important that we recognize that the bill we have here, obviously, in some respects, came out of Mr. Hartmann's report. I think it's also important to recognize that you cannot paint all trustees throughout the province of Ontario with the same brush. We know that, for the most part, trustees do attempt and do handle taxpayer money with fiscal prudence.

Hartmann's analysis wasn't the first time that education governance had been recommended for review. If you go back to 2002, we had set up the committee under Dr. Mordechai Rozanski, who said, in light of the introduction of the student-focused funding formula and the loss of taxing authority by school boards, that there was a need for a thorough review of school governance. In that, he meant that the roles and responsibilities of all partners in education, including the government, school boards, teachers, school councils and community groups needed to be more clearly articulated so that each partner and the public understood them. We're finally getting to that now, and it was certainly our intention to have moved forward with Dr. Rozanski's recommendation.

So we have Dr. Rozanski from 2002 and Norbert Hartmann from 2008, which called for a review of governance, but something else happened. In 2005-06, the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario conducted a value-for-money audit of several school boards in the province of Ontario, and it was released in December 2006. It was the very first value-for-money audit conducted in Ontario's history. It was to assess the purchasing policies and procedures in place at selected boards to ensure that they were adequate, that the goods and services were acquired economically and in accordance with sound business practices. That audit by the Auditor General, the value-for-money audit, looked at not only supplies and services and the acquisition of those supplies and services, it also examined the expenditures for equipment, contracted services, minor capital projects, and—and I think this is an important one—purchasing cards for school board employees.

The Auditor General's report stated:

“To better ensure that goods and services are acquired with due regard to economy and that effective purchasing practices are followed consistently throughout the board, school boards should:

“—ensure that the purchasing department is consulted on all major purchases;

“—ensure that all goods and services are acquired competitively in accordance with board policies....”

The AG's report noted instances of “significant purchases exceeding \$100,000, where boards invited a small number of suppliers to bid instead of using a publicly advertised process. This unnecessarily limited their options....

“For example, for a \$450,000 paving contract, the board invited only three potential suppliers, gave them only five days to respond, and only received two bids....

“In 2001, another board issued an RFP for custodial supplies. The resulting contract was to expire in August 2004. In 2004, purchases under this contract”—as you can well imagine—“exceeded \$300,000. The term of the agreement was extended to August 31, 2006, without obtaining competitive bids. However, purchases in 2006 included certain custodial supplies that were not part of the 2001 RFP. The board was unable to confirm whether it was receiving any discounts on the items not in the original purchase order.” You can see all was not well at these boards when the AG did his audit.

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He goes on to state, “To help ensure that only valid school board expenditures,” like travel and meals, “are charged to purchasing cards, school boards should enforce the requirements that proper detailed receipts be submitted to support all card purchases and that managers follow up on any unusual expenditures.” At one board in particular, the AG noted a number of questionable transactions relating to meal expenses incurred by senior staff at the board, and the AG determined that some senior staff charged expensive meals, and, although it was required by board policy, rarely submitted detailed receipts to support meal charges. The staff submitted only credit card chits.

The following examples illustrate some of the concerns that the Auditor General had regarding meals charged by certain senior board staff. We're going back to a period in 2003 to 2005, when some senior staff charged meal expenses totalling approximately \$6,000 at a local restaurant. There were no detailed receipts ever submitted for any of the meals. We have another example of several senior board employees attending a three-day conference in Toronto and on consecutive nights charging expensive dinners to their purchase cards. On the first night, five staff charged \$114 each for dinner, at a total cost of \$571. On the following night, six staff—most were also from the first night—charged \$172 for each dinner, at a total cost of \$1,036, which also covered the cost of two other guests. Detailed receipts were not provided for these meals. One employee who attended

both dinners charged a total of \$400 in meal expenses over the three days.

In comparison, the Auditor General noted that the two senior board staff from another board that was audited only claimed a total of \$125 each for meals over three days while attending the same conference.

You can see the spending that goes on unchecked, so if there's anything in this bill that would deal with that issue, obviously we support it. But maybe the reason the government passed this bill is that they were concerned as to what happened at eHealth, they were concerned about OLG, and maybe they were concerned that we would raise this as an issue as well and would ask them if they had taken any action to get the spending under control.

You know what goes on here. You've got one cardholder at a dinner showing that \$85 went to alcohol. You have another dinner charge for seven superintendents for \$369, including \$100 for alcohol, even though the board's policies prohibited claims for alcohol expenditures, and the list goes on and on.

It talks about contractors here, their reliance on contractors, the renewal of service contracts without tendering. You can see that in many instances, because there wasn't tendering, public taxes are going out to these contractors that are above and beyond what would be appropriate, and there would be no value for money for the taxpayers. For example, a contractor that was awarded service contracts for various electrical and other services was paid a total of \$1.1 million between March 2004 and January 1, 2006. These contracts were based on generic RFQs rather than a competitive process. In one case, a contractor was awarded a contract for the installation and replacement of glass and was paid a total of \$748,000. Again, only one other contractor was invited to bid.

You can see that the tendering process here at some of these boards was certainly inappropriate, and the board tended to go back to the people who they had been buying from in the past. That's just inappropriate when you're dealing with taxpayer money.

That auditor's report in 2006 certainly was an indication to the Ministry of Education there were some serious problems that needed to be addressed and that all school boards in the province needed to get their house in order.

I want to hesitate here and emphasize that we're only speaking about a couple of boards. The minister obviously needed to do what she could to improve the framework for procurement and expenditure management and provide the necessary oversight—which we know has been lacking when it comes to ministers of the McGuinty government.

The Auditor General's report was released in 2006. Then, of course, we had the whole scenario of excessive spending at the Toronto Catholic school board. The only reason we discovered any of what was going on there was because of the information that was found in newspaper articles that appeared in the press between January

8, 2008, and February 19, 2008, which questioned the expenses submitted by the TCDSB trustees. Of course, it was after that, when media coverage was pretty impressive when it came to detailing the expenses and questioning how this could have happened, that the McGuinty government finally assembled a governance review committee to examine how well the current governance structure is serving Ontario's education system. That's almost three years after the Auditor General's report was published.

There is some disappointment, I know, amongst the public—which does expect this government to be prudent in their use of taxpayer money—that action wasn't taken earlier. There's disappointment that oversight wasn't provided earlier and guidance on appropriate spending wasn't provided earlier by the government. The red flags had been up since 2006, and the government really didn't start to treat this information or this whole issue seriously until the media started to write about it.

I'm going to conclude by saying thank you to school boards and thank you to trustees. I enjoyed being a trustee on a school board. I think for the most part, school boards and trustees take their jobs very seriously. I would say to you most of them do behave in a prudent and fiscally responsible manner. There now are going to be some new guidelines put in place. Roles supposedly are going to be clarified. But I guess the question remains: What is going to happen to boards of education when the regulations come forward? Will they merely become—as in some respect hospital board members have become—people without much autonomy or much power?

I think Norbert Hartmann said this: "Trust and confidence are the currency of political institutions. Where citizens believe that their representatives are acting in the best interest of constituents, and are convinced that they are doing so in an effective ... manner, respect for, and confidence in, elected officials is high. Where these traits are absent, public cynicism and distrust of politicians is the norm.

"Few items have as much power to affect the public's perception of elected officials as the manner in which they deal with the funds entrusted to them. Where politicians are perceived to be using the public purse inappropriately or to further their personal or political interests, public trust and confidence are eroded.

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"High standards for anyone responsible for public funds are crucial to ensure trust and confidence. They are even more critical for politicians since, in most cases, they are their own governing authority."

I hope that this bill will achieve some of its objectives. I hope that this isn't merely a charade to attempt to give more power to the Minister of Education and this government. And I hope that this government will remember these words about accountability because certainly if we take a look at the eHealth scandal, where we've seen individuals relieved of their responsibilities but the minister not assuming any accountability or responsibility whatsoever, if we take a look at OLG where the

government now twice has had a scandal and the same Minister of Health was involved in the first and I guess the oversight the second time wasn't—despite the fact they knew they had problems, they didn't provide any better oversight.

This bill certainly has some merits, but I hope it's going to be accompanied by regulations that will allow trustees to continue to do their job without having the Minister of Education step in at every turn, and I hope that local communities will continue to be able to communicate with their local trustees who are elected in order to ensure that the programming and activities within that school board reflect the interests of that community.

That concludes my remarks, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Johnson: I'd like to thank the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for her comments. The primary goal of society is to pass on the knowledge of past generations to the next. I believe that the vast majority of Ontario's trustees recognize that their primary objective is student achievement.

Now, I was elected as a trustee in 1997 and served for 12 years. The year I was elected was the year that the previous government restructured education. I watched and worked with trustees and boards across the province as they struggled to define their roles in an environment where the previous government had stripped over \$1 billion out of the education budgets, and then they wondered why some boards had difficulty balancing their books. I believe they called it “creating a crisis in education.” The member from Kitchener–Waterloo played a huge role in that government.

Before my term as a trustee was ended this past March by the by-election, I was honoured to be the co-chair of the school board governance review committee. I heard from trustees, parents and directors of education. I heard their concerns and recommendations at the meetings that I was able to attend. I am very pleased to see that many of the issues that were raised are in this bill.

School board trustees fulfill a very important role in our communities. They ensure that our province's children are prepared for the future. They ensure that the knowledge of past generations are passed on to the next generations. I believe that school boards are probably the most accountable and open level of government that we have today. It's a local grassroots form of government.

We've heard from people all over the province that this is what needs to be done. Trustees have struggled with their roles over the past few years. This is going to provide clarity. Not everyone will agree with this, but I think the vast majority understand the purpose of what the government's trying to do.

I'm pleased to see the efforts being made for accountability. I always felt as a trustee that I was accountable to my community for student achievement. This legislation will clarify and reinforce this accountability and help school boards serve their communities' needs. I believe this bill is the right place at the right time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: From this afternoon's presentation, we know Dr. Rozanski called for a review of school governance, and I appreciate the analysis here this afternoon by the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. We know this bill is following 2006 legislation that allows the Ministry of Education to intervene if a school board cannot balance the books, and that's fine in many cases. But this bill, as I understand it, allows the Ontario government to take over if the students aren't doing well. I'm really not sure what's going to be left for school board trustees to do, let alone teachers and principals within the system. I suggest what we're seeing here is a central command usurping what's left of school board authority, and it smacks of top-down micromanaging, in my view. I do question, as a former high school teacher, just where teachers' responsibilities lie as far as the success of your students.

The bill does cite a number of reasons for doing this, for this kind of intervention: For example, “If 40% or more of the board's schools fall within the bottom 20% of the schools in the province based on EQAO scores”—the Education Equality and Accountability Office scores—and another reason, “If 40% or more of a board's schools have 35% or more students that earned less than eight credits in grade 9, and if 40% or more of the board's schools have 35% or more students that earned less than eight credits in grade 10.” Now, isn't that for the board and the teachers to fix?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Dave Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to comment on those of the member opposite. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo indeed has a strong history and a body of contribution in this place, and also in her own community, that I admire and respect. What I did see in her past has been a strong contribution in education, so that's one thing you don't take away from somebody, and I for one, and I know the members in this place, respect that in her work.

She did point out some attributes of the bill that she said she clearly believes her party is going to be supportive of, and voiced some concern over unanswered questions, I think is the best way she tried to characterize it.

The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock's experience as co-chair is also to be recognized, and thanked for his work as a trustee, and the voice that was being heard that seems to be forgotten here is that there is a consensus that this work needs to be done.

I do have a problem with the member's characterization, and I liken it to the rooster taking credit for the sun shining or rising, of the previous government's actions in education. I noticed that she didn't say the words “Mike Harris,” she didn't say the words “John Snobelen” and she didn't say the words “Dave Johnson” very often in her discussions, but she did invoke somebody that I too respect immensely for his contribution in

education, and that is Bill Davis, lauded around the world for the amount of work he has done in education.

Again, the member was very selective of the comments she made. Some of the credit she took in terms of the respect for trustees was—I have to be careful of how I use my language—making sure that the trustees were highly respected, when all along they said they weren't all that important and wanted to take some of their pay away and they weren't really all that happy. So anyway, good job, member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: I value the contribution that this member brings to this debate and found the comments interesting and enlightening. The concerns about the bill are indeed legitimate, and I for the life of me don't understand how this government, these Liberals, can be so arrogant as to stand there and insist that they're right. Dalton McGuinty did it just a few hours ago. Liberals are right. Everybody else, everybody—It's the biggest conspiracy that the world has ever witnessed. Liberals are right and everybody's wrong, even a whole lot of folks who sit on these opposition benches with a whole lot of life experience, professional experience and parliamentary and governmental experience.

1700

I'm looking forward to the NDP education critic, Rosario Marchese, the member from Trinity–Spadina, who is going to be up in a minute or so. I suspect he will use the full hour that is allowed him as lead speaker for the New Democrats to point out the very, very serious flaws in this legislation, to make the observation, I suspect, that there is far more here than the government would have us believe, and to draw our attention and folks' attention to the fact that there's a whole lot in this bill that undermines publicly elected trustees, that neuters them. Wait till you hear what he's got to say. I've sat down with Rosie Marchese and looked at those sections of the bill, and for the life of me, he's right. So let's pay close attention here. We're going to get an education of our own as Rosario Marchese addresses this specific piece of legislation, albeit flawed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes in which to give a response.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I want to thank the members for Haldimand–Norfolk, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, Brant and Welland for their comments.

We're talking about Bill 177. As I've indicated, we strongly believe in accountability and respect for taxpayers' money. We also believe in student achievement, and we recognize that there is much more to do.

But again, we are concerned about the impact of the regulations. We are concerned that this could reduce the autonomy of local trustees, and as a result there would be little opportunity for parents and people in local communities to provide any input whatsoever, if we are going to have control of school board education by the Minister of Education in Toronto.

I just want to end with this. I got this e-mail from someone who is in education and has been a teacher. The

person says, "I've been concerned for a few years that, thanks to the overly hands-on Minister of Education, the role and local authority of elected trustees has been eroded. As I followed the accommodation reviews in my area for our local newspaper, it became clear to me that our trustees played a bit role in the whole process. I fear trustees are slowly being co-opted to simply parrot the government initiatives and are very much less flexible in their discussion, decision-making, and even accessing their communities and opening up communication with other education partners."

I think what has happened is that those who at first had no fear of or trepidation about the bill now suspect there's more to it than meets the eye.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to welcome the citizens of Ontario who are watching this political forum. We're on live, and it's Tuesday, 5 o'clock in the evening.

I wish I could say some kind things to the minister today, but I don't have one kind word to say to this government, to this minister, with respect to this bill.

Yesterday I thanked her for intervening in the grandfathering of the Arrowsmith program that the Catholic board here in Toronto was providing. I thanked her for intervening. I know she intervened because Mr. Hartmann left and the new supervisor came in and he was quoted in the papers as saying he wasn't going to change that decision that had been made by Mr. Hartmann. So it's clear that the minister had intervened to bring back this program that helped a lot of students who have special education needs. It's always refreshing to see a government minister decide that a program should be brought back, at least for those who are in it.

I am hoping that there will be many other parents, not just in the Catholic board but in the other public system in Ontario, who will say that we should be supporting innovative, imaginative ways of reaching students where our original techniques are not working. I am urging those parents who have kids in the Arrowsmith programs not to give up the fight to defend the program that works for their children and to continue to defend a program that will work for other children who may need that service once this grandfathering of that program is gone. I thanked the minister for that yesterday, but I have no kind words for this bill whatsoever.

There are two parts in which I will analyze this bill: One, to actually review and comment on the basis of my dissecting of the bill, which I will do in a few moments, and the next part will be to read for the record statements made by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association in response to the consultation on provincial interest regulations, an association that Rick Johnson from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock knows all too well, given that he was the former chair of that illustrious organization. I will quote from that paper as well, as a way of reinforcing the arguments that I am going to make, which, it appears, are in full agreement with the former association that Monsieur Rick Johnson used to

lead at one point. When I get to it, I will remind the minister that it has been an association very friendly to this government and to this minister, and they have not too many kind words to say, either.

I will begin by reminding people who are watching, hopefully trustees, hopefully parents, that trustees are elected members. They're politicians who are elected to the board. They knock on doors, as we do. They're not appointed by the government, they're not appointed by this minister; they actually have to go door to door, knock on doors and solicit support to be elected. It's a serious job. The current minister knows it because she made reference to the fact that she was a trustee from 2000 to 2003. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo made reference to the fact that she was a trustee. I was a trustee—I admit a bias—from 1982 to 1990, and I draw on that experience as a way of saying what this bill does diminishes them in a way that even the Tories could not do. I will make reference to that in a brief second.

But trustees are elected. They should have some responsibilities that are not purely and completely defined by the government. What this bill does is to define their role, to constrain what they can do, what they can say. It's a shameful piece of legislation. It is an utterly shameful piece of legislation, and I hope to find stronger words as I go in the next 45 minutes to an hour to be able to decry elements of this bill, the content of this bill in its entirety. It will hurt those elected politicians, and I will say by the end of it that under these conditions and under what is given in this bill, what is written in this bill, it is no longer important to run for school trustee and it is no longer important to knock on doors and get elected given the way this bill circumscribes their role.

I remind you that Mike Harris, in spite of the kind words the member from Kitchener–Waterloo had for the role and responsibilities of the trustees and her praise of school trustees, and her government from 1995 to the year 2000 and beyond were very unkind to school trustees. You will recall that that government decided that politicians—trustees, that is—were too political, and the way to diminish their role was to make sure that they earned a salary that ascertained a diminishment of their role. Where the Toronto board used to make \$45,000 at one point, and trustees in other boards would make \$25,000, \$30,000, \$35,000 or more, their salaries were reduced from that level to an equal dollar amount of \$5,000 per trustee, making sure that no trustee could ever do that job full-time, as I did, having quit as a school-teacher to do that on a full-time basis, and as so many of our trustees of the Toronto board did on a full-time basis, with very little income from any other source. It made it impossible for people earning \$5,000 to be able to do that job full-time.

1710

And I argued, as many others argued, that being a trustee was just as important as being a city councillor. Trustees are elected. Education is as important as what a city councillor does. And yes, there is politics in education. Mike Harris, when he decimated the boards of

education, when he went after school trustees, did a very political thing and depoliticized to the extent possible anything the trustees did and made sure that only the politics of the provincial Tories at the time mattered, that the politics of school trustees had no relevance, should have no relevance in education except for the role that the provincial politicians played in diminishing what school trustees did.

I will remind those watching that the Mike Harris regime sent in supervisors in three boards, in the same way that this minister has done, that the McGuinty government has done. And when they take over boards, it's for political reasons and nothing else. When Mike Harris took over the Toronto board, of which Kathleen used to be a member, they did so because the Toronto board trustees refused to balance the budget by cutting all essential programs. Mike Harris sent in a supervisor to do the dirty deed. When this government, this minister, sent in a supervisor at the Peel-Dufferin Catholic board, it was done for the very same reasons: They refused to cut. They refused to make the \$16-million cuts in programs to balance their budget. And it's for that reason, for that political reason, that they decided to take over that board—in the same way that Mike Harris did it. There is absolutely no difference in the way these two governments have acted in this regard.

So when the member from Kitchener–Waterloo says that they're going to be able to take boards, please, you did it, they did it, and this bill is going to make it even easier to do. In fact, it doesn't even define under what circumstances they're going to do it, but I can tell you, if they've done it so far, this bill will make it easier.

The member from Kitchener–Waterloo talks about micromanaging and the centralization of power. Harris centralized all education financing in a way that effectively made trustees useless. Trustees used to have the power by the mere fact that they were able to raise local levies. And yes, to be sure, some boards had more money than others. The Toronto board did because we had access to commercial property taxes and residential, and that allowed us to raise more money; this is true. We had different needs as inner-city schools, this is equally true, but we had a greater ability to raise more money than some other boards. But whatever the circumstances, trustees had the ability through that local levy to be able to make decisions locally. They no longer can do that. Mike Harris took that away, and the Liberal government has kept that regime in place, which effectively leaves complete control in the hands of the provincial government. All control now is not local but here at Queen's Park, in the hands of this minister, in the hands of this government—any government.

It's not good, it is absolutely not good that boards have no local control any longer. We elect school trustees, but they have no power to effect any change whatsoever. The only power trustees have is, which cuts are we going to make at the end of the year, when we have to balance our budgets? That's all they do now. All they do now is to decide which cuts they're going to

make in order to be able to balance their budgets. That's it; that is absolutely it. It's amusing because the previous government, like the current government, says that whenever there's a problem, a dispute, they say—the minister says it; I hear it all the time—“This is not our problem. You have to go to the boards. Trustees are given the money. Go back to the boards and get what you need from them.” There is no extra money. There is no money.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Five billion dollars.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: What boards now do is steal money from one pocket to fix another problem in another pocket. That's all they do, is just move money around. Gerard Kennedy, the former minister, gave money for ESL and, with a nudge and a wink, that money was used to balance the budget. Yet, you've got schools in the northern part of Toronto where 45% of the kids come from other countries and they have no ESL programs. And the government and the minister, I heard her say just a moment ago, get \$5 billion, and yet every year they have deficits and they have to balance their budgets. What it means is—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Five billion new dollars; five billion more dollars.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Listen to the minister, they're getting 5 billion more new dollars. So with all these billions of dollars, how is it that boards cannot somehow balance their budgets?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: They can. They all have.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And when the minister says that they can and they all have, they do, and they do it by cutting programs. The supervisor of this minister, Mr. Hartmann, cut the Arrowsmith program, which served 60,000 students and served them well, because it was a special way to reach a student so that he or she is not trapped in that learning difficulty forever. But, given the creativity of that program, Monsieur Brown—I know you're interested in what I'm saying—kids were learning, and that Mr. Hartmann, the supervisor of this government—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I thought it was reinstated.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Can't hear you, Mike.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I thought it was reinstated and we're doing it.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: He thought it was reinstated and we're doing it?

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And what Mr. Hartmann was doing, in order to balance the budget, was cutting essential programs—programs that the trustees were not willing to cut. So the minister says that there's \$5 billion, Mike Brown says that they restored the program, that's great. Why is it that they're having a problem balancing the books? If these \$5 billion are all there, surely we shouldn't be having these problems, and why would we be cutting reading recovery programs?

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Dave Levac, you're a former principal: the reading recovery program in Dufferin-Peel

Catholic board—reading recovery programs that help kids in the early years so as to be able to read well, catch up and do well and stay well. That's what supervisors do: They cut essential programs out of those budgets. So well resourced are these school boards that they're cutting programs. How could that be? They must be wasting that money, and I'm going to get to that in the bill.

I'm going to start by getting into what this bill does. Let me see if there's a page number here; page 1.

“Purpose of education

“(2) The purpose of education is to provide students with the opportunity to realize their potential and develop into highly skilled, knowledgeable, caring citizens who contribute to their society.”

Okay. I thought that's what schools were doing, but if the minister feels he needs to restate it because it's not there, God bless, now it's in the books. But he makes it appear as if somehow the educational systems that we have, our boards, are not doing this, and that's all they have been doing. That's all that they have been doing, but if the minister wants to add it, that's fine. The next one:

“Partners in education sector

“(3) All partners in the education sector have a role to play in enhancing student achievement and well-being, closing gaps in student achievement and maintaining confidence in the province's publicly funded education system.”

1720

I don't know who the partners are, and I don't know who it includes; the minister hasn't defined it, but I'm sure at some point they will. I'm assuming that the caretakers in our school system have a role to play, that secretaries have a role to play. I'm assuming everybody has a role to play. I don't know how they do that or what resources the minister is giving to these partners to make sure that we enhance student achievement, but let's look at it. Let's see whether the bill speaks to this in any way, because I argue, based on the reading of my bill, that nowhere does it talk about how the partners are going to get help to close the gap in student achievement. I don't know what that means.

The minister made reference to it when she spoke about closing the gap between those who are doing well and those who are not doing well. I asked myself, what does closing the gap mean and how is the minister going to fix that? Because there is no clarity on how that is going to be done. Closing the gap means, in my mind, that student marks are going to have to go up, because that's all the minister talks about. The minister and this Premier say that student achievement is going up based on the EQAO test scores, and that's all they ever say.

So if closing the gap means making sure student achievement increases, I've got to tell you I'm worried, because the worry that I have expressed over the many years with this government is that closing the gap means that they will manufacture, however cleverly done, a way to make sure that student marks go up all of the time and every year, and they've done it every year. The EQAO

test scores go up every year because the government makes sure that they happen.

Now, she will talk about how all the extra teachers have done it. No, no. The minister can say what she wants, but I'm telling you, at the high school level, OSSTF, which has done a study of their members, says that 40% of their teachers complain that they are pressured by their principals to give higher scores, whether they deserve it or not. They are pressured to overlook the fact that assignments are late. If an assignment is late, it doesn't matter. If they need to do the test all over, they can do that, no problemo. If they're late and never show up to class, it's not a problem. There is a whole long list of things that the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation points out by way of their talking to their members that shows that teachers are being pressured by principals, who are being pressured by superintendents, who are being pressured by directors, who are being pressured by this minister to achieve the marks she wants—it could have been a he, but at this moment it's a she. They are manufacturing a result. If that's what student achievement, test scores and the focus on the test and that mark is all about, we're not doing very well by students.

So closing the gap means, for me, finding better, more clever ways to make sure marks go up, no matter how you do it. And if at the elementary level we have to get markers who mark up instead of down, we will make that happen. Markers have to sign confidentiality agreements. They can't speak about why it is they do the job the way they do it. They can't speak. Why not? I often say, "Why can't we let the markers tell us how they're doing their job?" Why? Why does this government force them to sign a confidentiality agreement? I'll tell you why: Because they are being told what to do, how to do it and how to mark those papers.

Mr. Dave Levac: Who killed Kennedy?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Dave Levac, you make me smile, and that's okay. That's okay, because I know what you're getting at. The member from Brant is saying that it's a conspiracy theory, and it's very clever of him. Come on.

I've talked to a number of markers, and they're actually willing to speak on the record. They're actually willing to go public because they're not marking any more and they're willing to go public. I can't wait for a journalist to say, "I'm going to cover that story." We're waiting.

There's judgment in terms of how you mark some of those passages and some of those papers. It's not objective; it's a subjective way of marking some of those opinion areas of the test. It's not like, "Oh, here it is and we mark it in a standard way." You're not going to get the same answer in the same way all the time. But markers are always told, "Mark up, not down." And there's vague ways of marking, so that if you just hit the areas that they want you to look at, even tangentially, you get marks. They made the test easier; they made the multiple test easier. They allowed for the test to be taken

for as long as is necessary rather than for a limited time. They've done all sorts of things, and they continue to find better and more creative ways to make sure the marks go up. Yet when they get into university, students are doing as badly as they've always done. Marks are going up, yet students get into university and still can't do what the marks show that they should be doing. If marks are up, those students should be doing better. And yet they're not doing any better except that the mark is up.

If you want to close the gap, you've got to talk about socioeconomic factors that come into play. You've got to talk about mental health. There are problems that are affecting our kids that go beyond an ability of a teacher to be able to solve. And the government and the minister do not speak to those areas. Closing the gap? Unless you close the gap in terms of our social differences, you're not going to be able to achieve the closing of that gap. And Dave Levac, the member from Brant, knows this. He knows this. And the minister knows this, because she's more intelligent than she lets on sometimes. She knows it. How do you solve the poverty question? If a young man, a young girl comes to school and they're hungry every day, they're not going to learn very well. That is a socioeconomic issue. Many kids come hungry, and we don't have programs for kids all over Ontario, as we should. Some boards do it better than others based on their ability to raise money. This government provides little by way of that fund that should help kids to have a nutritious program in the morning. What are we doing about hunger? What are we doing about poverty? What are we doing about those who come to school who have parents who are addicted, either to drugs or alcohol, and they bring that social problem into the school? What are we doing about that?

Unless you deal with that, you can't close that gap. Because an educator can only do what he or she can but cannot solve the social and economic problems that are brought into the school system that impinge on learning. But this government is saying in this bill that they will do that, that they will close the gap, and that if some of them consistently do not close that gap, we're going to take them over. That's what this bill does. I'm going to get to that; I have time. That's what this minister is saying. There's nothing in this bill that speaks to the disparity of social and economic conditions that kids come from that bring problems into the classroom. Poverty is one of them, and mental illness is another. And the fact that if they're living in poor social conditions and they're poor and the parents are struggling, one parent is working, means they don't have the time to spend with their children so they can have better attention, so their kids can do better in school. They don't have that luxury that middle-class, professional parents have to be able to pass that on as part of that cultural capital that allows kids to do better in school. How do you close the gap when teachers are expected to be everything for everyone and solve every problem that comes into the school system? There's nothing in this bill that speaks to that. Where are

the resources so boards can do better at solving those socioeconomic problems and the socioeconomic differences? They're not here.

Page 2: "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations governing the roles, responsibilities, powers and duties of boards, directors of education and board members, including chairs of boards." What's left? What's left to be done? Why is the trustee here? The minister is saying, "We're going to create, through regulations, everything governing their role, responsibilities, powers and duties." Why do you force them to get elected, for God's sake? Why don't you just appoint them and then tell them, "Okay, boys and girls, this is what you've got to do"? Why don't you do that?

1730

You've taken every possible power that a trustee, a board has to define their role and to express their political power—this particular section takes that power away. It makes trustees utterly useless and meaningless—utterly, in my mind. And she, as a school trustee, ought to know that. Because I know it. That's the way I feel it, and if I feel it this way, it can't be because I'm in opposition. It's because, as a school trustee, I know what this section might do, would do, does to trustees now and in the future.

Page 4, "Every board shall ... promote student outcomes specified in regulations." Remember, promoting student outcomes means doing well in the EQAO test scores. That's what it means. Nothing else. It's not about the whole child, as OPSBA will express in a little while when I get there. It's not about the whole child. The minister knows this because she has read their critique, so she knows it. She says, "Oh, it's not about test scores. It's about other things," which are unclear, but it's not about the whole child. There's no reference here about the whole child. It's about student outcomes and student outcomes are about test scores.

It continues by saying, "Ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources." What do boards do? This line suggests that boards and trustees, individually and collectively, are not ensuring effective stewardship of their resources, meaning they're profligate, meaning they're wasting the money, meaning they're stealing the money, putting it in their pockets or somewhere else. That's what this means.

We're not talking about the economic fiasco that was created in the US, but shared by many in the capitalist world here in Canada, Europe and beyond, where these people were so greedy to make a few bucks, were so happy to make the deals that gave them more money until, in the end, the economic system in the US collapsed for a year and a half or two and it's going last a lot longer. Talk about how one wastes money or takes money and then, in the end, leaves a whole lot of people across the world poor and impoverished as a result of it.

We're not talking about taking that kind of money away from people in the system. We're talking about school trustees, for God's sake. We're talking about the indiscretions of the Catholic school board trustees—some

of them at least. We're not talking WorldCom scams. We're not talking about the taking away of billions of dollars—we're talking billions.

So, please, it's not like boards have money and trustees have money that they have access to that they steal, that's impoverishing school boards. Please. It's not like the Hydro One scandals or the eHealth scandals, which pale in comparison. Come on. Here you have the minister saying, "We have to ensure that boards use effectively the money that is given to them."

"Deliver effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils." Okay. Isn't that what they're doing? What the heck are they doing? What else would they be doing? It may be stating the obvious, one might say, but, please, that's what they've been doing. That's their role. There's more. Please, let me go on.

"Monitor the performance of the board's director of education." Okay. Maybe it's self-evident to me and maybe the minister feels she needs to write that down. Okay, so they're going to monitor the performance of the director. Maybe some boards aren't doing it. I don't know.

Then, "Annually review the plans referred to in clause (e)," and that is to develop multi-year plans. I've got no problem with multi-year plans. I only wish the government did multi-year plans for boards so they could be assured that they're going to get steady, predictable amounts of dollars every year so they can do their job. But that's fine. If we require boards to have a multi-year plan, but we don't require the government to have a multi-year plan, it doesn't matter, I suppose; does it? If the government doesn't have a plan, does it matter? Of course, it matters. This government is saying trustees have to have multi-year plans, but the government is not held accountable to the same levels that the trustees and boards are—

Mr. Peter Kormos: And what about the stewardship of tax dollars?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Well, let's get to that. I'm going to get to that.

"(3) Every board shall ensure that the plans referred to in clause (1)(e) include measures respecting the allocation of resources to improve student outcomes that fall below the outcomes specified in regulations made under section 11.1."

I repeat, all that is about making sure test scores go up, and it is doesn't matter how you do it. That's what that is about. When you hear that language, that's what that is about

"Effective stewardship"—it's on the next page. I can't believe how many times the minister makes reference to it.

"(5) Every board shall,

(a) effectively use the resources entrusted to it," which suggests that the resources, the ample resources, given by this minister to these boards have not been effectively dealt with, that that money entrusted to them has somehow been wasted, let out of the barn somehow, just thrown out.

“(b) use the resources”—again she repeats—“entrusted to it for the purposes of delivering effective and appropriate education”—as opposed to doing what? What are trustees doing? They’re using resources so as to not deliver effective and appropriate programs? If that’s the case, who are they, where are they and what have they been doing? Give me some examples so I could feel good about the fact that this is here.

What this is doing is saying trustees are bad, in the same way that Mike Harris did, that trustees can’t be entrusted with the money that this government has been piling on boards, and that somehow they’re wasting it and they’re not managing the resources entrusted to them in a manner that upholds public confidence.

Please, why is it in here? Why isn’t Rick Johnson from Haliburton–Kawartha upset about references to these things? Why isn’t he angry? I’ve got to tell you, in about half an hour he’s going to stand up and do two minutes and say, “This bill is great. This is really good. I’ve been a trustee. This is really good.” How could he not be upset?

Mr. Dave Levac: So he’s got to think like you.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, Rick Johnson from Haliburton–Kawartha has to tell us that the board where he was a trustee somehow was mismanaging the money, that the money entrusted to him was wasted, thrown away. He’s got to tell me that, because he would know; he was a trustee too. We’ll see. We’ll see what he says in a couple of minutes.

Mr. Peter Kormos: The next one is a good one, coming from these guys.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The next one, on page 6, part VI—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Subparagraph (5)(c)—coming from these guys?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I did say it: “(c) manage the resources entrusted to it in a manner that upholds public confidence.” I did say it.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Coming from these guys—can you believe it?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That’s right. It’s all about the image you want to portray. The government is okay, right? Funds that they gather from the taxpayers are dealt with responsibly, managed responsibly, as we’ve seen from the eHealth scandal that we have been pursuing for a while, lately the Ontario lottery agency and so on and so on. So I’m sure the government feels good about the way they’re managing their resources, the way they’re supervising all of the agencies that they are responsible for. If that’s the example, you’re saying, “My god, are we ever in trouble.” I hear you. I hear you.

Page 6, member from Haliburton–Kawartha: “Conduct of members of school boards.” This is a good one, for any of the trustees who are watching or any of you who were trustees before. Here’s what it says:

“A member of a board shall,

“(a) attend and participate in meetings....” Well, what do trustees do?

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Exactly. So maybe the minister says, “We should state the obvious,” but I find it laughable that somehow you’ve got elected trustees who don’t attend and participate in meetings. Maybe they just get elected and they don’t attend and they stay at home. And maybe when they’re in the meetings they just sit there and—I don’t know—just listen to what the others have to say. Maybe that’s true; I don’t know.

Mr. Peter Kormos: You mean like government caucus members in committee.

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Mr. Rosario Marchese: Like some of the government members who have nothing to say here from time to time. It’s clear to me, even though some of you don’t speak in this Legislature, that you speak outside of this place, that you’ve got a role to play, that you talk, that you attend meetings. I’m assuming you do, that most of you backbenchers do the same. It’s not just the ministers who do the work, right? You guys do the dirty legwork too, right? Of course you do. But how could you write this down, in terms of the code, that you should “attend and participate in meetings”? It’s demeaning. It’s humiliating. It’s embarrassing to even put it down in writing.

And then it says, “Consult with parents.” As opposed to what? You get elected, you go to board meetings, you’ve got to go to school events where you’re talking to parents, and you don’t consult? That means you get elected as a school trustee and you say, “No, sorry, it’s none of my business. I’m not here to consult with you or to listen to you.” It’s embarrassing, Rick. Come on. I hope you’re going to speak to this.

There’s more: “Bring concerns of parents, students and supporters of the board to the attention of the board.” What else would you be doing? Listen to parents and stay mute and have nothing to say when you go to the board? What else would you be doing, Rick? Please, help me out.

I just wonder if there’s anywhere in this bill where it says, “Trustees have the power to come and speak to the minister should there be a problem with education financing or anything of that sort.” I’m looking for any reference in the bill to trustees having the power to say, “My goodness, we don’t have enough monies for special education to help all these kids who have special education needs,” where they’re empowered and enabled to come and speak to the minister and say publicly, “We’ve got a problem here. There isn’t enough money.” Can the trustees say that? It’s not written here that they can. It’s all about making sure that if there’s a problem that he or she hears about, he or she brings it back to the board and that’s it. But if there’s a problem vis-à-vis the government or the minister, it doesn’t say that it’s okay and acceptable; that it suggests is forbidden.

It continues by saying, “Support the implementation of any board resolution after it is passed by the board.” Rick, did you support every resolution passed at your board?

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You did? What a good boy he was.

Mr. Rick Johnson: I was the chair.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Were you always the chair?

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And before you were just a regular trustee, right? Okay.

The point is that there are times when we disagree with the decisions made by a board. This “Conduct of members” says, “Support the implementation,” not, “You have the liberty to be able to say what you like if you disagree.” It says, “You will support the implementation of any board resolution after it’s passed by the board.” It’s lunacy. You are elected trustees, elected by people to be able to agree or disagree with a trustee, a colleague, and/or a chair of that board, and/or the board. This code of conduct says, “You will agree and you will support.” You will shut up, in other words. It doesn’t quite say “shut up,” but that’s what it says: “You will support it.”

“Refrain from interfering in the day-to-day management of the board by its officers and staff.” Well, why are you an elected trustee? If I’m elected as a school trustee to deal with education matters, do I or do I not have the power to be able to go into a school, talk to the principal and say, “Here’s a problem that’s been related to me by a parent. We’ve got to talk about it and we’ve got to find a solution to this problem”? This says that they can’t interfere in the day-to-day management of the board.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Go home and stay away.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Effectively, “Go home.” But I thought you were elected by people. I thought you had some power. Why do we elect them if we’re telling them that they can’t say or do anything? They’ve got to be muzzled, stay muzzled, and then they can’t interfere at all with anything they think should be brought to the attention of a principal or superintendent. Otherwise, it’s deemed to be interference.

“Maintain focus on student achievement and well-being.” Well, what the heck is that? Minister, what the heck is that? “Maintain focus on student achievement”—what is that? “Okay, your program: You’ve got to maintain focus on student achievement. Don’t think about anything else. There are no politics in education other than student achievement. Stay focused.” We should have tapes for school trustees, elected board members—“Stay focused. Stay focused”—and at the board meetings, make sure the chair of the board says, “You’ve got to stay focused. The bill says so.”

Do you see how embarrassing this is? It’s humiliating. It diminishes the role of school trustees; I’m telling you. The reason why I’m referring to the bill is so that you get a good idea of what’s in it. Otherwise you’ll just say, “Oh, it’s just Marchese. You know how he is.” It’s in your bill.

Then it finally says, “Comply with the board’s code of conduct”—“comply.” Do you understand that, Rick? It’s “comply.” You have no right to disagree. You have no right to dissent. You have no right to publicly disagree or dissent. You will comply. Am I reading it wrong, Rick? You let me know.

So remember, Mike Harris centralized education financing. This government is centralizing the rest of what remains of any modicum of power that trustees may have had. It simply takes them over completely. They are subjugated; subject to the minister. They are puppets of the minister. They’re there at the behest of government or whatever it is this minister says. It’s humiliating.

That’s why I’m expecting the trustees of this province to fight back in some way, show some courage, I hope. Don’t take this lying down. It wouldn’t look good on any of you to do that. I’m hoping, as indeed I have by way of what I have received as responses to an article that I have written, “The Beginning of the End for School Boards”—if the reaction to the two-pager that I wrote is any sign of things to come, I am hoping you’re going to hear from them, and I’m hoping you’re going to have a little fight on your hands.

Next, page 7. My God, there’s so much, and so little time.

“The minister may make regulations providing for a code of conduct for board members, including but not limited to regulations ... respecting the rules that may be adopted under subsection... respecting the powers...” It’s more of the same in terms of the minister having more and more powers, if needed, to regulate whatever it is they need to regulate, right there in that section.

Then it says, in subsection (3):

“A board may adopt additional rules as part of its code of conduct for its members and in that case the code of conduct as supplemented by the additional rules applies to the board and its members.” And then it says—oh, no. There’s so much more. “A member of a board who has reasonable grounds to believe that a member of the board has breached the board’s code of conduct may bring the alleged breach to the attention of the board.” It’s encouraging the snitch component of the trustee.

I’ll reread it, Jeff, because you may not have heard it: “A member of a board who has reasonable grounds to believe that a member of the board has breached the board’s code of conduct may bring the alleged breach to the attention of the board.” Rick, it’s encouraging fellow trustees to snitch on the others.

Mr. Peter Kormos: It’s the rat clause.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It is a rat clause, isn’t it? It’s the snitch clause. It’s embarrassing. It’s humiliating. How could some of you not see it? I know you haven’t read the bill, but you’ve got to read the bill once I’ve spelled out the problems with it, because you’re going to feel as embarrassed as I am by it.

“If the board determines under subsection (2) that the member has breached the board’s code of conduct, the board may impose one or more of the following sanctions”—if you breached it, here’s what they can do, the board chairs and the like:

“1. Censure the member.” “Nasty little boy. You shouldn’t have done that,” in a mild sort of way, or harsh, depending on the breach.

“2. Reduction of the honorarium payable to the member under section 91.” And you know how well paid

they are, right? Now they're earning up to \$25,000 or something, so cutting the honorarium could really hurt. It's all they've got. It's all they make. And if you breach some rule that the board, through its additional code of conduct, can impose and introduce, you're going to be penalized. It also says:

"3. Barring the member from attending all or part of a meeting of the board or a meeting of a committee of the board.

"4. Barring the member from sitting on one or more of the committees of the board...."

Do you understand what I'm saying, member from Peterborough, member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock? This is embarrassing. This is treating trustees like they were children. Surely you MPPs that are listening to this are saying, "Gee, I didn't read the bill. Now I should read it because Marchese has spelled it out, and it doesn't look good." You know what I mean.

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Page 8—no, we'll move on. I could go to page 8 but I'm not going to do that.

On page 10 it says, "Every district school board shall establish an audit committee." Again, this seems very useful, but do you remember the promise McGuinty made, through Gerard Kennedy, that we were going to have a standing committee to review education financing on an annual basis? Because that's what standing committees do. Do you remember that, Jeff? The Liberal government gave up that promise. It no longer wants oversight, transparency, the ability for people to participate and say, "Hey, by the way, Madam Minister, where is the money going?" How come we don't have an audit committee in the way that was recommended by McGuinty and Gerard Kennedy at the time so that we could review where the money is going in education?

Why is it that we audit boards? We should audit the minister and the ministry in terms of where the money is going, because that's where the money comes from. It, or a portion of it, doesn't come from the boards and the public taxpayer, from property taxes, anymore. It comes from the government, through the minister. Real transparency has to happen at the provincial level, because now it's centralized. Trustees have no power anymore to raise money. They just move money around based on their own local needs and their own local problems and their own local pressures. That's all they do. The only power they've got is to move money around based on the pressures from their community. So while I agree there should be an audit committee, you understand that real transparency has got to happen at the provincial level. Otherwise it's useless. It's nice and convenient to blame the trustees, as if to suggest the problems are at the board level, because we give, as the minister said, \$5 billion. This \$5 billion should have solved all of the problems.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: More, more.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: More, yes. The MPPs are even happy to help me by saying "More, more, more," without realizing how comical it is.

The point is that the government promised to change the funding formula, and they never did. There is no transparency in that regard. If the government and if my friend the minister want to set up that standing committee on education finance, she has the power to do so, so that I and others could go to that committee and talk about where your money is going.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I know, Dave, you want me to relax. But it's so hard; I've got so much to say.

And then there's another snitch clause on page 14, at the end of the bill—

Mr. Dave Levac: Whistle-blower.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yeah, well, snitch, rat: "(f) Immediately upon discovery"—here we're talking about the directors of the board—"bring to the attention of the board any act or omission by the board that in the opinion of the director of education may result in or has resulted in a contravention of this act or any policy, guideline or regulation made under this act; and

"(g) If a board does not respond in a satisfactory manner to an act or omission brought to its attention under clause (f), advise the minister...." A snitch clause.

No trustee is asked to advise the minister, to tell the minister, "Oh, we've got a problem here in terms of education financing of a whole lot of things like special education," or the fact that parents are raising \$600 million out of their own pocket, close to \$1 billion out of their own pocket. Now, under a Liberal regime, when this government is saying they're giving \$5 billion more for education, parents every year are raising more and more money out of their own pockets, and student fees at the high school level are going up every year under a Liberal regime. Mike Brown smiles at my comments. That's what's happening under a Liberal regime. It's tough, and it's not going to get better.

Under this bill, these trustees are diminished to the point of disappearing. They have no power. Any discretion, any flexibility, any power they might have had or would have liked to have is gone. That's why I say I'm now of the opinion that we don't need trustees to be elected anymore, not since Mike Harris took the financial power away for local financing and not since the introduction of this bill that takes any discretion or power trustees might have had.

I'm going to go quickly to the comments made by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, because the minister was glowing about a few comments made by a few trustees. She was commending so many people who think this is great, and I don't know who they are. Other than the few quotes I heard, I don't know who they are, but we'll hear more of it in the hearings, to be sure.

"Ontario Public School Boards' Association Response to Consultation on Provincial Interest Regulations:

"It is important to note that a great deal of member board input on discussion areas that are relevant to student achievement had already been compiled by OPSBA through internal regional consultations held earlier this year as part of the ministry's governance review. In those

meetings, trustees dealt specifically with key question areas in the earlier governance review committee (GRC) consultation that focused on student achievement and board accountability.... However, the specificity of the directions and detailed elements contained in the ministry's current consultation documents go significantly beyond what our member boards considered in the governance review committee discussions, and a great deal of what follows speaks to this departure from expectations.

This is OPSBA. It's the biggest board we have in Ontario. Rick would know how important they are.

"With regard to the timing of the consultation process, OPSBA has advised the ministry both orally and in writing that any consultation is confined to the summer months when schools are closed and no school board meetings are scheduled, means school board members who are so closely affected by the content of the consultation have very little opportunity to contribute. This also applies to key staff members.... The current consultation period began in July and the deadline for response is August 31.

"It is important to note here that a parallel approach in the form of Bill 177 which is not expected to receive second reading until fall"—which we're doing now—"2009 contains related draft provisions concerning the duties of school boards.... Indeed, the ministry's introductory comments in its consultation paper intertwines the two processes and the question areas in the paper anticipate the passage into law of Bill 177. Because of this, OPSBA finds a certain element of prematurity in posing detailed questions based on legislation that has yet to be passed. It also leads to confusion.

"Consultation Paper—General Response:

"Overall, in responding to content of this paper, we do not take issue with the prime importance of a focus on students and their success, nor board accountability, nor transparent reporting to parents, community and the Ontario public. In fact, these are key values for us and the cornerstones of our commitment to an excellent system of public education," which I was saying earlier is what trustees have been committed to forever.

"Our association has recently reaffirmed as a priority the need to actively promote services and conditions that support meeting the needs of the whole child—social, emotional, psychological, physical and intellectual—since well-being in all these areas has a significant impact on a child's success. This is recognized in the United Kingdom. It is notable that the UK Select Committee on Children, Schools and Families has raised concerns about how the results of standardized testing are overused and inappropriately used...."

It's good to quote this from OPSBA because that's what this government has been doing the last six or seven years they've been here.

"We remain unconvinced by the government's assumption that one set of national tests can serve a range of purposes in the national, local, institutional and individual levels.

"We recommend that the government sets out clearly the purposes of national testing in order of priority and, for each purpose, gives an accurate assessment of the fitness of the relevant test instrument for that purpose, taking into account the issues of validity and reliability.

"We believe that the system is now out of balance in the sense that the drive to meet government-set targets has too often become the goal rather than the means to the end of providing the best possible education for our children," which, as I have said in my remarks, is what this government is all about. It's about the test scores. That's all they care about, and this is what the UK is saying in response to it.

"It is our understanding that the UK government has backed away from a punitive, top-down, narrow numbers-driven model for assessing school success," something that Kathleen Wynne, the minister, is still committed to.

"Despite the references to the ministry's intention to provide supports to boards to improve student outcomes, it is difficult to ignore that the overall tone of the consultation document is punitive and appears focused on the path to ministry supervision of a board. This does not reflect the supportive relationship that has been built up between the ministry and school boards over that last six years," Rick.

"Some of the language in the introduction section is particularly offensive. For example, 'Boards of trustees become distracted by day-to-day issues which take their focus off the long term.'" I can understand that trustees would be offended by such a remark. That was in the consultation paper that, presumably, the minister supported. "This is a patronizing statement that paints an unfair and negative picture of all school boards.

"The consultation paper addresses in detail what would be required of school boards and has little to say about the corresponding responsibilities of the Ministry of Education or the government. For instance, not listed as issues that have considerable impact on a school board's scope to focus on student achievement are: frequently changing provincial education policies, the number of policies issued, overcentralization, an over-emphasis on specific absolute outcome aspects of EQAO, delays in a comprehensive approach to education funding, the labour relations climate and an element of micromanagement by the province which is reinforced by the detailed elements contained in this consultation paper."

Minister, this condemns that report. It condemns your approach to this issue.

It says more:

"In OPSBA's input to the GRC, our members placed considerable emphasis on the need for school boards, the ministry and the government overall to focus on the whole child. The consultation paper refers to 'student outcomes,' 'effective stewardship' and 'student well-being' but, beyond a brief definition, doesn't explore these further. In discussing well-being there is no reference to the significant issue of mental health ... socio-

economic and other demographic factors in a school's or a school board's catchment area...."

There's more that they say, and I have no time to continue to say it. But OPSBA is dead-on in their criticism of where the government was going.

I am telling you this is a bad piece of legislation. This is a serious diminishment of the role of school trustees. I am expecting that any reasonable-minded trustee who wants to do a good job, for which he or she is elected, should fight this bill, and fight it aggressively and strongly.

I'm urging parents who are following this debate, with whom trustees work: You are affected by this. If you don't have effective trustees, your voice and your role are

diminished and lost. This is about parents as much as it is about trustees. If trustees are not actively engaged and cannot criticize the government and have codes that prevent them from saying what they want to say, the role of parents is diminished. Please come to committee. Come and depute. Come tell the government what you think. Call us and tell us what you think about this bill. We're available to talk to you. I hope you will do that. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being past six of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1803.

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Mitchell, Carol (LIB) Moridi, Reza (LIB) Munro, Julia (PC)	Huron–Bruce Richmond Hill York–Simcoe	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire 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 Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier / Vice-premier ministre Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
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 Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
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	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	
Vacant	St. Paul's	

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

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Garfield Dunlop
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Robert Bailey
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
Jim Brownell, Kim Craitor
Bob Delaney, Garfield Dunlop
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Khalil Ramal
Clerks / Greffiers: William Short (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

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

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Laura Albanese, Wayne Arthurs
Toby Barrett, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Pat Hoy, Leeanna Pendergast
Michael Prue, Peter Shurman
Charles Sousa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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

Chair / Président: David Oraziotti
Laurel C. Broten, Helena Jaczek
Kuldip Kular, Amrit Mangat
Rosario Marchese, Bill Mauro
David Oraziotti, Joyce Savoline
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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

Chair / Président: Vacant
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Laura Albanese, Michael A. Brown
Howard Hampton, Ernie Hardeman
Rick Johnson, Lisa MacLeod
Yasir Naqvi, Leeanna Pendergast
Jim Wilson
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

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

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Ted Chudleigh
Christine Elliott, Peter Kormos
Jeff Leal, Dave Levac
Reza Moridi, Lou Rinaldi
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Bas Balkissoon, Jim Brownell
Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Norm Miller, Khalil Ramal
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

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

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jerry J. Ouellette
Ted Arnott, France Gélinas
Phil McNeely, Jerry J. Ouellette
David Ramsay, Liz Sandals
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craitor, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Clerks / Greffiers: Trevor Day (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

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

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Sophia Aggelonitis, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Linda Jeffrey
Sylvia Jones, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Carol Mitchell, Shafiq Qaadri
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions / Comité
spécial de la santé mentale et des dépendances**

Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Bas Balkissoon, Christine Elliott
Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
Jeff Leal, Liz Sandals
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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