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Tuesday 24 November 2009

Mardi 24 novembre 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 24 November 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 24 novembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 19, 2009, on the motion for time allocation of Bill 210, An Act to protect foreign nationals employed as live-in caregivers and in other prescribed employment and to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 210, Loi visant à protéger les étrangers employés comme aides familiaux et dans d'autres emplois prescrits et modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: So we have another time allocation motion before the House; this on Bill 210. We've seen in recent weeks that with every bill this government brings in, it brings in time allocation. And now we see the McGuinty Liberals pushing forward bills that aren't even in committee. They haven't even had any debate whatsoever. We've had first reading, we're in second reading, we haven't been to committee yet and now we have time allocation.

This Liberal government is going to be punished for its disregard and arrogance with the public. The public will not accept and stand for complete disregard for democratic processes and traditions. These actions by the Liberals are ill-conceived. They are arrogant and unacceptable in a truly democratic jurisdiction.

Bill 210 has deep-seated flaws. Time and time again, we have gotten up in this House, and so have the NDP, to point out that allowing warrantless entry into people's homes is a travesty; it is completely without regard for our constitutional protections. This bill, should it be passed in its present form, will undoubtedly be ruled unconstitutional at the first court case. But we've seen that these Liberals don't care about the Constitution. We saw that with their stunt driving law. Two courts have now ruled that it's unconstitutional, and they don't care. They don't care.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: So you don't care?

Mr. Randy Hillier: The member from Sudbury is interjecting. He thinks that disregarding the Constitution

is acceptable, in his view. I'm sure the people of Sudbury don't agree with their member.

Regardless, they don't care about the Constitution; they don't care about protecting people's rights and freedoms. Bill 210 is just one more example.

Again, these things would come out through the committee process; they would come out through a debate. But the Liberals are not interested in debate. They're not interested in hearing what somebody else has to say. Their grand wizard has spoken and laid out the legislation. They don't care.

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Hillier: That's right, the grand wizard from Ottawa—I believe that's his riding—has let everybody know that this is the way it will be.

This government is creating legislation that is not helping anybody. It's not helping the residents and the citizens and the taxpayers of this province. They're only concerned about creating legislation that sounds good, that gives them a sound bite and a little headline—a little picture, a photo op in the paper. That's what really motivates and drives this Liberal government and their agenda—a sound bite and a headline—as long as it doesn't get past 20 seconds or so, because after that they're completely inept at discussing and debating anything.

They're concerned about talking points, not about justice, not about the Constitution—talking points. They're also concerned to make sure they have good deals, sweetheart deals for their friends and fundraising buddies. We've seen that often enough in the last number of months through the summer of scandal and into the winter of discontent that will be upon the Liberals shortly: sweetheart deals for their fundraising buddies. And they're not concerned about the ramifications for the actual foreign live-in workers.

What is going to happen to these people if this legislation does pass? We should be having our arms open, encouraging and embracing those foreign live-in workers to come to this country, and this legislation will have the typical unintended consequences that come from not having discussion and debate on a bill. We will see—and we've talked to many people involved in that industry—that it just won't happen. A lot fewer foreign live-in workers will be able to get to our province and start that journey to landed immigrant and resident; that's without a doubt.

On this side of the House, we believe we should protect those who cannot protect themselves, and we know that that happens by having regard for our Constitution,

not having disregard for it. Foreign live-in caregivers are such a group.

I welcome the opportunity to bring this bill to committee to debate it, understand the full ramifications of it, and amend and modify it where necessary. We welcome the opportunity to create and assist with that legislation, which would then stand the test of time, unlike their other bills that, as soon as they come before the courts, are ruled unconstitutional.

But we all know how things go with this McGuinty Liberal majority. Everybody else's voices are unheard. Everybody else's concerns are unimportant. Everybody else is shouted down while they ram through their legislation, their agenda of talking points and sound bites—and time allocation. Stakeholders have been ignored, and consultations are really not consultations; they're pre-determined facades.

0910

We all know what happens with a Liberal consultation: They come in with a decision, and then they bring in a few people to make it appear that there was some discussion. We saw it with Bill 173 and Bill 191. We've seen it with every bill this Liberal government brings in. Of course, we see it with the Premier's—the wizard's—grand proposal of the HST: no discussions, no public hearings, no debates, just ram it through. That's what they are doing with the HST. All the concerns that are raised—unimportant; it's unimportant what everybody else's concerns are. This pattern will hold true. If it does hold true, all the flaws are unimportant, all the problems.

I would like to just speak to that with the HST. Here we are; this Liberal government is delegating its jurisdiction to the federal government, delegating our responsibilities, our jurisdiction to the federal government, which is going to handcuff and bind future governments in Ontario as far as policy and jurisdiction.

I would like the members on the other side to just think what you're going to do when you handcuff future governments. Again, this is really a constitutional discussion with the HST, and I would say that the Liberal government has no regard for constitutional divisions of power—

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Hillier: —no constitutional regard, and we've seen this on and on—

Interjections.

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

All right, the member may continue.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again, a disregard for—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I ask the minister to come to order.

Continue.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Some ministers have a lack of culture as well, and consideration; a lack of regard for our Constitution, delegating our authorities to other levels of government.

I would ask every Liberal member in this House, have you ever read any history? Go back and read about a

Premier in this province, Oliver Mowat. Go back and read what he did. Go back and understand what the role of government is. Understand the importance of our Constitution and the importance of divisions of jurisdiction. It's not just a laughing and joking matter, as members from Sudbury and other ministers may think. This is an important—

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Speaker—withdraw?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'll withdraw.

One thing is for sure: This government that was elected six years ago is not the same government we have today. It is rotting from the inside out. It is full of disregard and contempt for the constituents and residents of this province, without regard whatsoever for public hearings, significant and real discussion and debate. Once again, this bill has deep flaws, and the government refuses to acknowledge that those flaws exist. Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil. That's what they're all about.

It will be interesting to see what happens, how the Liberal government acts in committee, as we've seen them so often in the past silent and mute, without any interest for actually listening to stakeholders and constituents. That's where we should be actually getting some amendments. But I have no belief, no confidence that this Liberal government cares whatsoever about anything anybody else has to say.

This government has not considered what will happen to this industry of legitimate foreign live-in caregivers, the agencies, and the hundreds and thousands of people who help them come to our country every year. Essentially, that industry will be made illegal by Bill 210. That whole industry will die and wither on the vine like so many other industries in this province under the Liberal government—wither and die away. They have no regard for our economic base, either. They have no regard for our Constitution. They have no regard for the consequences to our economy. Just move forward; move forward.

Earlier this month, my office met with a group of legitimate nanny agencies. They said to me, "We have been in business for over 20 years. We are not criminals. Why does this bill treat us as criminals?" It's because the Liberals—because of their callousness and their disregard for anybody but their talking points and sound bites.

This government will treat all but its own narrow group of Liberal friends with callousness—pure and simple; everybody else is unimportant. The origin of this bill was nannygate, with a Liberal member from the federal House, Ruby Dhalla. This government ignores the real problems out there but criminalizes a legitimate industry. It's terrible that this Liberal government really has no regard for its actions.

Because of this callousness, they will force tax after tax on this province. There will be bad legislation upon bad legislation. They completely ignore the wishes of the residents and taxpayers of this province—people who are being devastated by their actions and their legislation. Ultimately, their callousness will destroy, and has destroyed, their party's credibility. It is time for this government to wake up and realize that just like this bill,

they have flaws. It's time for them to realize that they do not have all the answers and that their perceptions are not the only perceptions. It's time for them to begin listening to people. It's time for them to fix their legislation before they bring it in and enact it. This is what this House is for.

The failure to have public hearings on the HST illustrates this total and absolute corruption of process and disregard for our Constitution and our laws. This Liberal government has no credibility whatsoever.

It is pointless to discuss these things with a government that is deaf to concerns. I move for adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Hillier has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 0919 to 0949.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Hillier has moved adjournment of the debate.

Those in favour will please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 6; the nays are 42.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Ad-dington has the floor.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It must be wearing on the Liberal benches to have to always bark the orders and not be involved in real tangible discussion and debate. I thought I might demonstrate to the House how the Liberal back-benchers involve themselves in debate. For the next few minutes, I'm going to show the people of Ontario and the members of the Liberal Party how Liberals engage in debate.

First, they put their hands to their ears, because they don't want any outside stimulus interfering with the party line. This is an important first step for all Liberals: Keep their hands to their ears and don't allow anyone or anything to penetrate the talking points that they've been handed. This is very, very important. No Liberal can be nominated unless they can do this for at least a full parliamentary session. That's the first stage for a Liberal to engage in debate.

But the next step, of course, is to engage in the discussion. For a Liberal to engage in a fulsome discussion about important subjects of the day, their next step is to put their hand over their mouth. The silence of the lambs is often referred to.

After listening to their talking points and their lack of discussion about things like the HST, it's also important that we should demonstrate how Liberals enunciate their knowledge of the Constitution. It's much like the previous one. They like to demonstrate their knowledge and expand on their knowledge about their constitutional

obligations like this. Another little silence of the youse I guess. Youse all be quiet over there; you are part of the Liberal Party.

But what's also important, of course, is the Liberal perception of reality. The Liberal perception of reality, of course, is handed down to them by their supreme leader, and it goes like this: They have to close their eyes to all others. The grand wizard has—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just a moment. I just ask the member to find alternative, to withdraw that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

Interjection: The grand pooh-bah.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Maybe "grand pooh-bah" would be better.

But that's the essence of a Liberal member in this House. That is the essence. That is the complete Liberal—deaf, dumb and blind to everything and anything other than what their leader has told them. There's an old adage about ignorance is bliss, and I know everybody is blissful on the other side of this House.

But really, when you get back to your ridings on—December 22, I guess, is when you're going to be getting back there. The Liberals have really thought that this discussion and debate is so worthy that we'll extend the sitting to December 22. Listen, I look forward to this. I look forward to being down here and having this Liberal Party in front of the media and the public every day so that they can demonstrate just how willing they are to engage in discussion and debate.

Interjection: They're going to serve us a turkey dinner.

Interjection: They're the Christmas turkeys.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The Christmas turkeys will be out. They might be a little bit late, but they will be out this year.

This extended period of time affords you guys all the opportunity to engage in more of this debate, as I just demonstrated, and show your residents—your constituents—just what you're doing down here and how important what you're doing is, that it needs you to grab into their pockets, deeper and deeper, and take another \$3 billion out of their pockets. That's what it is: \$3 billion in extra tax and extra revenue for this government, who, as they're doing this and this and this, have spending out of control. This Liberal government is growing the bureaucracy, growing their agencies, growing government at twice the rate of inflation—greater than twice the rate of inflation. They have a significant spending problem.

I want you to get back into your ridings on December 22 and tell your residents how you just love spending their money. You love spending it so much that you're going to put another tax on them so you can continue to do it. For two more years—not quite two more years—you're going to be on a spending spree and you're going to be taking and taking and taking more money from hard-working, productive people in this province so you can keep your habits intact. But there will be a day—the day of reckoning is coming. On October 11, people will

pass judgment on you because you have not had the courage to get out and actually talk to people and hear their concerns. The pooh-bah has spoken. He has told you that public hearings are not an important part of democracy. Democracy is unimportant to those fellas on the Liberal side, as long as their leader has told them what to say and do and what to listen to.

Anyway, this whole Liberal government is really showing to the people of this province what a facade they are. There's some window dressing but there's no substance behind the facade. The facade is made up of those talking points; the facade is made up of those headlines and bullets, the slogans. I remember once talking to an individual, and he said, "Be careful of those who think in bullets and talk in slogans." I didn't realize it at the time, but he was talking about the Liberal Party: "Be careful of those guys. There's no substance to them. There's nothing inside, just a facade that's hollow."

Interjection: Empty.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Democracy is empty within them.

I really do call on this Liberal government and the backbenchers to stand up, take ownership and show regard for those people who elected you, those people who went out and cast ballots for you. Show them that there was a reason for it, that you're going to deliver value to them, that you're actually going to listen to them and that their concerns are of significance and importance to you. Go out and do that. Show all those residents, show all those constituents—show them, demonstrate to them that you are indeed an elected representative and not part of the "Youse be quiet" crowd of the McGuinty Liberals. Will you do that?

Go out during the break, the Christmas recess, even though it's going to be a little bit shorter. It's only going to be from December 22 now until the middle of February. Go out there and listen and engage in real discussion, engage in real debate. Show those constituents that you are something different. Show them that there's cause to have some belief and confidence in democracy in this province, and that you're just not a bunch of puppets on a string, bringing in time allocation motions when there is a real subject of interest.

1000

Show them that you have, and demonstrate that you have, knowledge of our Constitution. That would be a novel thing for this Liberal government to do: actually demonstrate that they understand what a constitution is and that they understand that we, in this province, have a role that was crafted through debate—real debate—back in 1867; a division of powers, a division of authority, and checks and balances to ensure that this great country, this Confederation, would run and operate in a sound, peaceful and secure fashion with regard for the freedoms and rights of the people of this country. Go out there and show them. Read a couple of books during that break between the times when you're pondering how you're going to get out of a public meeting to discuss the HST. Read up a little bit.

As I mentioned earlier, there was a Liberal Premier in this province, back in its early days: Oliver Mowat. He was a Liberal Premier. He fought with the federal government over constitutional jurisdiction on four different occasions. His name was Oliver Mowat. He took those cases to the Privy Council in London, which was our highest court at that time, and he won each and every time because he understood his job and understood the Constitution. He was opposed to Sir John A. Macdonald, another one who understood the Constitution. But Oliver Mowat stood up for this province, stood up for the people of this province and was successful.

We don't see those sorts of people in the Liberal government now: people who will actually stand on principles, stand on knowledge. No, we see them standing on talking points, we see them standing on slogans, we see them hiding behind headlines. That's what we see of this Liberal government: hiding behind headlines. It's an unfortunate time when the people of this province, who have placed their faith and confidence in elected representatives, cannot count on them to actually listen to them. It is an atrocious abrogation of authority.

I know that members on the Liberal side view themselves as politicians first, and they are politicians. They're also legislators. They are legislators first. They're supposed to be legislators first and politicians second. "Legislators" means that you understand legislation, that you understand the law, that it's not just a game of deaf, dumb and blind and who plays the good spin from the Liberal side. The debates in this House on these important bills have diminished with time. They have diminished since this Liberal government has grasped second-term rot and has no direction.

But I should also add that there is another element to being a Liberal backbencher and a Liberal member. Although they don't engage in discussion and debate, they don't have a whole lot of knowledge about constitutional responsibilities and their reality is, of course, skewed, they are very friendly when it comes to fundraisers. They have a lot of friends over there that they like to listen to—maybe not a lot. But they're good at fundraising.

They really, really treat these fellows well, exceptionally well, have them come and become involved with their agencies, boards and commissions, become chairmen and vice-chairmen, get nice per diems and nice expense accounts. We saw that through eHealth; that's the other one where the Liberal government has refused to allow the people fired from eHealth to come before the public accounts committee, right? They refuse to allow this. That's another part of the Liberal "Put your hands over your ears and eyes. Don't allow those who do know what happened to testify before a committee of this House."

I hope you all have a good, good Christmas when you get home December 23. I know we will. It will be interesting to see what's under the Christmas tree for all those Liberal consultants and fundraisers this year. I'm sure the Liberal Christmas tree will be stacked high and they will actually be able to buy a lot more with this extra

\$3 billion they are taking out of people's pockets, another \$3 billion to buy presents for their friends and their consultants.

I'd love to be a fly on the wall at some of these Liberal meetings they've held. We've heard the Premier talk about his meetings, how they've gone out there and they've had all these discussions. But if you really want to engage in discussion, the Premier has got the answer for everybody.

What did the Premier say this week? "If you really want to get engaged for the public, if you really want to get involved and participate in discussion of the important things of this government, phone up talk radio." That's what he said. "Phone up talk radio. Don't bother talking to my backbench. That's just a waste of time. Call up talk radio and then you'll get some interesting discussion. Talking to my backbench, well, that's just useless. Phone up CFRA in Ottawa, phone up CFRB and get involved in some real good discussion with somebody who actually wants to listen, because the Liberal Party doesn't want to listen. Why should we do that? We'll get on there and do our talking points after. Lowell Green, he likes to listen; Bill Carroll, he likes to listen. But Liberals—pardon me."

Even the Premier has shown and demonstrated to everybody in this province that it is a waste of time to talk to his party, an absolute waste of time. I'm sure as the Premier escalates and enunciates his commitment to democracy, the next time somebody asks him about discussing and debating topics he will say, "If you really want to get involved in democracy and discuss and debate things, send a tweet to the twits." That's what he'll say. "Get on Twitter. That's where your real discussion is, right? You don't even have to wait to dial up and phone a radio show. Just get on your little BlackBerry and send a tweet to the twits, and that's all that's required, right? That's democracy." He'll probably say, "I don't even know if they know how to operate those twits or tweeters, or whatever they're called, but send it to them anyway, for all the good it's going to do."

I'm going to say that this Liberal government—I have empathy for you on the backbench. I do. It must be an absolute burden and fearsome to go back to the riding and say, "Well, phone up talk radio. That's what the boss said. Don't bother calling me at the constituency office. Just phone talk radio. That's what the boss said, you know, and I have to do what the boss said." That's the Liberal way.

It must be an absolute burden on you ladies and gentlemen that you go back and you know you've done and accomplished nothing. You've done and accomplished nothing in your time here. That would drive me to distraction. It would probably put me into a depression mode if I knew that nothing that I did was ever—that you didn't do anything. Well, maybe you listened to talk radio and saw what people had to say. Or maybe I turned on the BlackBerry and saw what tweets were coming in today. But I really do have empathy and I do feel for the burden that people in the Liberal Party must carry.

But there is a saying that I think you should all take with you: The truth will set you free. Speak truthfully. Speak honestly. Stand up and show the people in your ridings that you are a representative, that you are a legislator, that you're not just a political seal or a political lamb, that you actually have some substance there for him and that you actually can provide value someday if you just stand up and do it. It will set you free and you'll feel better for it. Part of the best Christmas present that you guys will get this year is that advice: Stand up and show people who you really are. Show them that you're not just marching to the tune of the pooh-bah, that your residents don't have to call talk radio to get a message to you, that you will actually invite them in and talk to them and listen; and hear their concerns about this massive tax contract grab that you're doing, how it's going to harm people when you take \$3 billion more out of their pockets.

Wouldn't it be a blessing for you guys and girls on the other side to actually invite people in, hear their stories and share their reality with them? Understand what you are doing and that maybe the grand pooh-bah's way is not the only way. Maybe there is another way. That way is called being honest. That way is shown by listening to people. It's demonstrated by opening yourselves up to other perceptions and engaging in that fulsome discussion, not just a time allocation motion and a tax grab. Tax grabs and time allocations: The two hallmarks, the stock and trade, of this Liberal government are time allocation and tax grabs. Time allocations and tax grabs—stock and trade of this Liberal Party.

There really is little value in discussing anything with these fellas until they get that Christmas spirit and listen to that Christmas advice.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The time being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I am pleased to introduce the family of our page Christopher Dabner from Burlington today. We have with us Katie and Pat Dabner, and Tony Dabner, Christopher's uncle. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Today is Advocis Day at Queen's Park yet again. We have over 60 members from the Financial Advisors Association of Canada who have come to meet with all of us, all MPPs from all three parties.

Joining us today in question period is Kris Birchard, who is the chair of the board of Advocis; Greg Pollock, the president and CEO of Advocis; Roger McMillan, the chair of the Ontario committee of Advocis; and my good friend Terry Zive. Welcome to Queen's Park. Welcome to question period.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to introduce to the House the former mayor of Hearst, the former member

for Cochrane North and, I think, the best Minister of Northern Development and Mines the province has ever seen: René Fontaine. Welcome, René.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'd like to welcome two financial advisers and friends from Ottawa who are here today on behalf of Advocis. We have David McGruer of Dundee Wealth and Geoff Carter of Freedom 55. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I would like to welcome three folks from the Hastings-Prince Edward cancer society unit—they're in the west members' gallery—Jeff Brace, Stirling Johnson and Heather Gray. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to introduce a regional director of the Canadian Cancer Society from Sudbury, Connie Innes, who is with us today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to welcome all the people who are here today with the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario division, for their educate your MPP day.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Joining us in the members' west gallery, on behalf of page Vanessa Van Decker, are her mother, Maureen Madigan, and family friend Cavallena Cawthray. Welcome.

TAXATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On Thursday, November 19, the member for Leeds–Grenville, Mr. Runciman, raised a point of privilege relating to the consideration of Bill 218. I thank the member for providing me with written notice of his point of privilege, as required by the standing orders. Having read his submission carefully and listened to his arguments and those put by the government House leader, Ms. Smith, and the member for Timmins–James Bay, Mr. Bisson, I am now prepared to rule.

As the member for Leeds–Grenville stated, privilege deals with the specific ability of individual members, and the House as a collective, to carry out their parliamentary duties.

In the House of Commons Procedure and Practice, chapter 3, the rights and immunities of individual members, and the rights of the House as a collective, are clearly set out as follows:

Members' individual privileges include:

- freedom of speech;
- freedom from arrest in civil actions;
- exemption from jury duty;
- exemption from attendance as witnesses;
- freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation.

As a collective, the privileges of the House include:

- the power to discipline its members;
- the regulation of its own internal affairs;
- the authority to maintain the attendance and service of its members;
- the right to institute inquiries and to call witnesses and demand papers;

- the right to administer oaths to witnesses;
- the right to publish papers containing defamatory material.

In order for a finding that a prima facie case of privilege has been made out, the Speaker must be satisfied that sufficient support exists for the proposition that one of these heads of privilege has been breached.

In his point of privilege, the member for Leeds–Grenville argued that the members individually, and the House collectively, have been obstructed in the performance of parliamentary duties and functions for two reasons: first, that Bill 218 contains provisions that allow for the government to enter into an agreement that will be binding beyond the next general election, and second, that the government is refusing to allow for full public hearings on Bill 218.

Let me first deal with the issue of a long-term agreement between one government and another. This is not an unusual occurrence. Indeed, the free trade agreement comes immediately to mind. In that case, the government of Canada signed a long-term agreement with the government of the United States. Governments have in fact signed agreements with private interests that are binding in the long term. As the government House leader suggested, the 407 contract is a case in point.

In the case at hand, the government of Ontario and the government of Canada have entered into an agreement to harmonize the provincial retail sales tax with the national goods and services tax. The machinery required to do this is provided for in the amendments to the Ontario Retail Sales Tax Act, set out in schedule R of the bill. While the fulfillment of this bilateral agreement is dependent upon passage by Ontario and the federal Parliament of the necessary legislation, it is the agreement itself that contains commitments about the duration of the accord, not the bill.

The Retail Sales Tax Act could again come before the House for further amendment at a future time in another session of Parliament, including even the complete repeal of any changes made at this time as a result of Bill 218. There is nothing in the bill itself that prohibits a future government from proposing alterations to the Retail Sales Tax Act or renegotiating an existing extraparliamentary agreement. While doing so might constitute an abrogation of the agreement and could carry political or legal consequences, this is not something that is of procedural consequence to this Legislature.

The member for Leeds–Grenville may be of the opinion that the terms of the particular agreement are an affront to democracy. However, the fact that he holds this opinion does not make it a matter of privilege. The heads of our privilege, which I just enumerated, are quite specific. Nothing about our current circumstances offends any of those heads. Members are debating the bill; no one has been obstructed from doing so. The key point is that this Legislature is being presented with a specific proposal and has the opportunity and the power to grant or deny it.

As to the second point the member makes, being the asserted refusal of the government to allow public hear-

ings on the HST legislation in communities across Ontario, I have before me no evidence that this is the case. Indeed, the bill has yet to pass second reading, and as yet no referral or terms of referral have been made.

However, even if there were such evidence, under the rules of this House, the government has the ability to put to the House a motion that allocates time for each stage of the consideration of a bill. The House, in turn, has the ability to pass or defeat such a motion.

While there could very well be certain provisions contained in a time allocation motion that might make it out of order, the allotment of more or less time to committee consideration of a bill would not likely be one of them. Indeed, we have many examples of little or no time being allotted to committee consideration of a bill by way of a time allocation motion properly put, debated and decided by this House.

There is no head of privilege that dictates the extent to which public hearings must be held, as long as they are determined within the rules of this House.

For these reasons, I cannot find that a prima facie case of privilege has been made out.

The member further indicated that if I am unable to find a prima facie case of privilege, he would then argue that a contempt of the House has occurred. Once again, on the same grounds, I see no support for that conclusion.

I thank all members for their submissions on the matter.

The member for Nepean–Carleton has given me notice of her intention to raise a point of privilege. Her point relates to the applicability of provisions of the Taxpayer Protection Act to Bill 218, an Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts.

I am prepared to rule on the matter without hearing further from the member for Nepean–Carleton, as standing order 21(d) permits me to do.

There is substantial precedent, and universal support, for the notion that the Speaker does not have the authority to deal with legal or quasi-legal issues and will not deal with requests for an interpretation of the law.

From a procedural perspective, Bill 218 is properly before the House at the present time, and whether there are any legal issues of the nature the member raises would need to be decided by the courts. The question is not one for the Speaker to decide.

The member has therefore not made out a prima facie case of privilege.

1040

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. On November 9, your government, behind closed doors, signed something called the comprehensive integrated

tax coordination agreement, or CITCA. On page 69 of this HST agreement that your government signed, it says you locked the province into your HST grab for a “period of five years from the implementation date.” Premier, what in the world gives you the moral authority to lock the province into your greedy tax grab until 2015?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to begin by welcoming the leader of the official opposition back to the Legislature.

If the honourable member is asking us whether we are absolutely committed to this initiative, whether we are determined to cut taxes for Ontarians effective January 1, whether we are determined to take 90,000 Ontarians off the income tax rolls effective January 1 and whether we’re prepared to move ahead and create 600,000 more jobs for Ontarians, the answer from this government is yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: No, I’ve been very clear and the Premier so far has refused to answer questions about this CITCA deal—these details he has tried to bury since signing the agreement on November 9.

Premier, you have no mandate to bring in this record sales tax grab. Premier, you campaigned against tax increases and now are bringing a \$3-billion sales tax grab on the backs of Ontario families and retirees. You’re refusing to consult the taxpayers who will have to foot the bill and now we find out that you’re trying to lock the province in until 2015.

Premier, correct me if I’m wrong, but doesn’t page 69 say that no further exemptions can be made until after July 1, 2015?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, if my honourable colleague is questioning our commitment to move ahead with this package of tax reforms, then he’s wasting time. I think the real question that weighs heavily on the minds of Ontarians is: If my honourable colleague is so adamantly opposed to our package of tax reform, then why won’t he, at a minimum, send a letter to the Minister of Finance in the federal government asking him to put a stop to the HST? Why will he, more importantly, not stand up in this Legislature and say that, should he earn the privilege of serving Ontarians as their Premier, he will put a stop to the HST immediately?

He won’t say that. He won’t send that letter because he believes in the HST. He believes in our plan.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

The honourable members will come to order. The member from Willowdale will come to order.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Sadly, after six years in office, Dalton McGuinty is increasingly out of touch with middle-class families and retirees in the province of Ontario. In answering a very direct question about his backroom deal that tries to lock the province in till 2015, this Premier is increasingly slippery in his responses to the official opposition.

Here's the bonus—and tell me if I'm wrong, Premier. On page 69 of your agreement, you negotiated a \$4.3-billion poison pill that would punish any government that tries to break your CITCA deal. Premier, you have no moral authority for this sales tax grab. You seem to be afraid of full public consultations, and now we find out about your backroom deal.

Premier, you really have only one way to proceed. Will you hold full, province-wide public hearings in Kitchener, London, Sarnia, North Bay and Ottawa? Will you do the right thing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Education. The member from Renfrew.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think Ontarians would be interested in knowing why the leader of the official opposition is not in fact prepared to repeal the HST. It's because he understands that while it's in place in 130 other countries and four of the provinces, at no time and in no way have any of those jurisdictions repealed it.

He knows that it's a plan to create 600,000 more jobs, and he's without a plan of his own when it comes to creating 600,000 more jobs for Ontarians. He knows it's a plan that's going to cut taxes for Ontarians and for our businesses so that they can grow stronger, especially our manufacturing sector. He also knows that there are so many different economists on both sides of the spectrum, business groups and poverty groups that have built a very strong consensus around the need for us to find a way to move forward and embrace our future. He knows that the position he adopts right now is one of clinging to the past. He knows that the responsibility of leadership is to build a bright and promising future. He knows, more than anything else, this is—

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

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier. Premier, three straight questions on your backroom CITCA deal, and three times you slipped off the hook from answering those direct questions.

Another question: Just two days ago your member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex held a public consultation on the HST, Dalton McGuinty style. To attend her so-called consultation with the Minister of Revenue, guests had to cut a cheque for \$50 to her Liberal Party riding association.

Premier, why is it that the public has to pay the Ontario Liberal Party before you'll listen to their views about your greedy sales tax grab?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again I want to—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague knows—

Interjections.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague may not know that so far, in government, we have together hosted over 160 different opportunities to meet with Ontarians, as distinct from fundraisers. We do fundraisers, and so do the opposition. But there have been 160, and more, opportunities that we put in place to meet with Ontarians, to consult with them and hear from them on this.

One of the questions that comes back to us time and time again is, if the official opposition remains so very much opposed to the HST, then why won't they commit to repealing it? I can't answer that question for Ontarians, but I'm sure that my honourable colleague would want to do that right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, the Premier says they've had 106—

Interjections.

Interjection: Who's the government? Are we the government or are you?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They don't know.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Nepean will please come to order, and the member from Halton.

Please continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, you claim you've had 106 public hearings. That must have done wonders for Liberal Party coffers if they're charging 50 bucks a head.

I want to ask you, what has happened to Dalton McGuinty after six years in the Premier's chair? First you tell Ontario families that if they don't like your HST sales tax grab, they should call talk radio or hang around the water cooler. Now we find out option two: Make a donation to the Ontario Liberal Party and then you can have your say.

Premier, I'll ask you again: Why do your so-called consultations require a donation to the Ontario Liberal Party?

1050

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That's just silly; I can't think of a more apt word.

I want to bring to the attention of my colleague something he has been saying in the last few months, even: "To be clear, I believe that there's little sense in allowing two separate governments to apply two separate sets of taxes and policies and to collect two separate groups of sales taxes." He also said, "In the manufacturing sector, the problem with the PST is it cascades, so every step along the way there's a tax on tax on tax, which raises the cost of goods and particularly punishes exporters. So we understand how [a harmonized sales tax] can help the economy."

Again, we're wondering: If he's so adamantly opposed to this particular initiative of the HST, why did he support it just until recently and why does he refuse to repeal it?

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: That tells you a lot about what happened to Dalton McGuinty after six years in office. Premier, your gut reaction—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Yesterday was such a good question period. It was quiet.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Transportation is not being helpful.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: You can tell a lot about what's happened to Dalton McGuinty after six years in office. Premier, quite frankly, you should have gotten up on your feet and said that what the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex did was wrong. It's wrong to charge \$50 to have a consultation on the HST. It's wrong to fill your Liberal Party coffers with your so-called consultations, and it's wrong that the Premier doesn't have the courage to call for full public hearings across the province of Ontario, because I don't believe that Ontario families and retirees should have to cut a cheque to the Ontario Liberal Party to have their say about this greedy tax grab.

I'll ask you again, Premier: Will you have full, open and free public consultations for families across the province of Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It has been said that if the facts are on your side, then you argue the facts; if the law is on your side, then you argue the law; but if neither are on your side, then you holler. The official opposition has been doing a lot of hollering lately, and I can understand why.

Speaker, I want to bring to your attention that the honourable Leader of the Opposition held public meetings in North Bay, London, Nepean and Markham and charged \$25 on every occasion for people to attend.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will come to order. Minister of Transportation, Minister of Finance and Minister of Municipal Affairs.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The Premier likes to pretend that the HST is already a done deal. Despite widespread opposition from Ontario families, the Premier has said he wants the HST bill rammed through the Legislature before Christmas. But he alone cannot bring in the HST; he needs his friends in Ottawa to pass legislation to make the HST possible. Why is the Premier plowing ahead with this bill, refusing to hold province-wide public hearings when it hasn't even passed the minority Parliament in Ottawa?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I thank my honourable colleague for the question, and I want to remind her, as well, of why it's so important for us to work together and move forward with this package of tax reforms.

There's a lot of mythology and fiction connected with this particular initiative, but I think the facts, as I like to say, are not unimportant. Here are a few facts: Our plan represents the biggest tax cut ever in the history of our province: we're cutting personal income taxes for 93% of Ontarians, effective January 1; we're taking 90,000 low-income Ontarians off the tax roll; we're cutting business taxes to make our businesses stronger, but especially the manufacturing sector; and finally, it's important to understand that our tax reforms are going to cost the government \$3.4 billion during our first four years, but we think it's very worthwhile investment in creating jobs for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, here's a fact for the Premier: Even senior members of the federal Liberal Party are clearly uncomfortable with the HST, and Conservative MPs are scrambling as fast as they can to get away from it. Their constituents have all told them that they don't want to pay more to get a haircut or to fill up the gas tank just to fund another corporate tax giveaway. Will the Premier today tell Ontarians what he plans to do if the Parliament actually rejects the HST?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm confident that the government of Canada will respect the wishes of the people of Ontario as expressed through their duly elected provincial legislature. I have confidence in that.

Rather than speculate on that, let's talk about the facts: 140 countries and four provinces have already adopted the HST or a VAT, and nobody has ever reversed it, including the NDP in Nova Scotia. They're not going to reverse it, because it works; it strengthens the economy. Here's another fact: When they brought the HST into the Maritimes, it led to a 12% increase in business investment, which we think is very important. Here's another fact: Economists from the right and the left endorse our plan—I wish my honourable colleague would acknowledge that. As well, poverty groups and business groups have endorsed our plan. It's a solid plan, and we are looking to moving forward with it.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, one of the things this Premier should do, as Premier of this province, is acknowledge that the people have a right to tell him what they think about this in public hearings. I'll tell you what they're telling the people of this House: that now is not the time to ask them to pay 8% more on their hydro, on their home heating, on their gasoline and even on their Christmas trees. They're telling the members of Parliament the same thing, and it looks like MPs are actually listening. Why doesn't the Premier do the same and apply the brakes to this tax that nobody wants?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I haven't heard from a single Ontarian who is not eager for us to put in place a plan to create 600,000 more jobs—not one. I haven't heard from an Ontarian, either, who would not be interested in any kind of a plan, positive or otherwise, but at least a plan of some kind, either coming from the NDP or the Conservatives, that would create jobs.

We know what they are against. We know that they find security in clinging to a past that is not going to come back to us, but they don't have a plan to build a stronger Ontario for the future. We do. We've got a plan that's going to create 600,000 jobs over the course of the next 10 years. It's a plan that's going to lead to \$47 billion more in investment in new businesses, and it's going to increase our incomes by up to 9%. We think it's a solid plan; it's a plan worthy of the ambitions of the people of Ontario. We're going to move forward with it on their behalf.

1100

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. The McGuinty Liberal tax scheme is simply unfair, and people want the government to hear that. Marion Calvert tells us this: "It's not fair when the economy is slow and people are out of work."

This tax scheme hasn't even passed the federal Parliament. The government can actually take some time to listen to the people of this province. Why won't the Premier do just that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The individual referenced by my honourable colleague talks about work, and that is what this package of tax reforms is fundamentally all about. It's about creating 600,000 more jobs—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The member from Peterborough will come to order, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): And the members from Lanark and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound as well—and Simcoe North. I can keep going. I'll just stand here. I'm quite happy to stand here. The pages will be a little delayed for their lunch. But it is getting a little difficult to hear, and I would just ask all the members to be respectful of one another and respectful of our guests who we have in the gallery.

Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think that it is only too easy for us in this rarefied atmosphere here at Queen's Park to lose sight of the concerns on the front lines of Ontario. I know that my honourable colleague has in fact come into contact with families that have experienced job loss. She has in fact travelled through communities, whether in the north or southern Ontario, which have been the subjects of terrible devastation as a result of the global recession. She knows that the single most important thing that we can do is put in place a plan to create jobs. That's what this plan is all about: It's about building a bright future for the people of Ontario by creating 600,000 more jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Anybody can buy a study, the way this government did, to put numbers together that are simply not corroborated by anybody else on earth.

But I think what this Premier needs to know is that across Ontario, people feel like this tax is being imposed on them, imposed by Dalton McGuinty and imposed by Stephen Harper, and they haven't even been asked their opinion.

Sandra Dawson of Port Dover says this: "How can a single mother who takes pride in making ends meet on her own without government funding and striving to get ahead believe the McGuinty government is considering her best interests when contemplating the implementation of the harmonized tax?"

Instead of telling people what to think, why doesn't this government, why doesn't this Premier at least take the time to listen to what people want?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I am pleased to get the question on behalf of that particular individual, who I believe is a single mum. Let me tell you about some of the things that we're doing to help Ontarians. In addition to cutting taxes for 93% of Ontarians, 2.9 million families and individuals are going to get our new annual, permanent tax credit—\$260 per person. There are also transition payments that we have in place. For the typical family, it's \$1,000; for the typical individual, it's \$300.

Beyond that, taxes will not change for 83% of consumer purchases, notwithstanding the bleak picture that my honourable colleague continues to paint. We have been very deliberate in ensuring that we are fair to Ontarians, but particularly to those in the low-income levels so that they in fact come out ahead as a result of our package of tax reforms.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Before the last election, this Premier denounced the policies of the federal Conservatives. He said that harmonization may be Harper's agenda, but it wasn't his.

Sally Stewart writes this: "I can't afford any more taxes. We are in a recession as well and taking a hit... We work on a budget each month and I can tell you it is not a budget that allows a lot of the extras."

My question again to this Premier: Will he open his ears and agree to hearings today so that he can hear the concerns, the opinions and the worries of the people of this province who are about to get whacked with a huge tax increase?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to tell my honourable colleague that we gave a tremendous amount of thought before we decided to move ahead with this package of tax reforms. It is a dramatic departure from the past, admittedly; it represents a dramatic series of tax cuts for people and for our businesses; and it brings in a harmonized sales tax. We heard from economists on both sides of the spectrum. We heard from business groups, poverty groups and the like. We listened long and hard to all of those groups and individuals. In the end, we decided to do this because we honestly believe it is the right thing for us to do. It is the best thing we can do to strengthen this province, to secure a bright future for our kids and, most importantly, to create 600,000 more jobs. You talk

to families, you talk to businesses, you talk to Ontarians generally: It's about jobs, jobs, jobs. That's what this plan is all about: 600,000 more jobs.

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: My question is to the Premier.
Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek would best be seated in his own seat if he's going to be interjecting. The member from Peterborough will come to order as well.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will come to order, and if he continues—I am extending a warning to the member from Hamilton East.

The member from Cambridge.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: Premier, do your so-called HST consultations with Liberals such as Maria Van Bommel offer seniors' discounts?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member knows that we refer to members by their riding names.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'll repeat the question. Do your so-called HST consultations with Liberals such as the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex offer seniors' discounts?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is something that we have sadly come to expect now of the official opposition. I think, as I like to say, the facts are not unimportant. There is a distinction between a fundraiser—we host fundraisers and they host fundraisers. Those are not dirty things; those are important things to support a strong democracy. Above and beyond that, we have in fact collectively hosted over 160 separate meetings with various groups right across the province, open to the public, in order to engage Ontarians in a conversation about our package of tax reforms, including the HST. My honourable colleagues opposite know that. I just wish they would admit it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: Premier, while you've been consulting with everyone who would slip the Liberal Party a \$50 donation—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I will ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I withdraw it.

Premier, 86% of seniors who belong to the Canadian Association of Retired Persons said they want province-wide public hearings. Most of these taxpayers live on fixed incomes. Many won't benefit from an income tax cut. They don't have \$50 to buy access to Liberal members.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment, please.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I withdraw.

Will you hold committee hearings in Brantford, Guelph, London, Kitchener, Peterborough, Ottawa, and Cornwall and let seniors make their views known free of charge?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I get the sense there's some kind of a theme emerging here. The official opposition is nothing if not creative, and they enjoy trafficking in fictions.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I stand up; the Legislature goes silent. I sit down; the opposition raises the tone. I would just remind the members again that we have always accepted some interjection in this place, but I do want to be able to hear both the question and the answer.

Premier?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This is a final warning for the member from Lanark.

1110

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: With respect to seniors, we were particularly concerned about the impact of our tax reforms on seniors. They will disproportionately benefit from our personal income tax cut, from our new annual tax credit of \$260 per person. They will also benefit from the expansion of our property tax credit, which is something my honourable colleagues opposite voted against. But as I say, we've been very mindful of the needs of our seniors as we move forward and we are very confident that in fact seniors in the middle- and low-income brackets are overwhelmingly going to come out ahead as a result of our tax changes.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My questions is to the Premier. Twenty years after a federal resolution to end child poverty, Campaign 2000 reports today that one in nine children in Ontario is growing up in poverty; 120,000 children rely on prepackaged and processed food from food banks; and families on social assistance struggle to get by on incomes \$5,600 below the poverty line. After six years in government, this is in fact the McGuinty government legacy.

We must surmise that the Premier is satisfied with the current levels of child and family poverty in Ontario. Is the Premier satisfied?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have a chance to speak in this Legislature. First I want to thank Campaign 2000 for their report and their continued advocacy on behalf of the too many children who live in poverty.

Campaign 2000 has been a key partner for us as we have developed our poverty reduction strategy. I had the opportunity to meet with them last week; I met with Jacquie Maund and her Campaign 2000 colleagues to

discuss their report. At its heart, what their report demonstrates is that Ontario is moving in the right direction to support Ontario's children and youth living in poverty. That's why we developed the poverty reduction strategy and focused on kids in the first place, setting an ambitious target of reducing child poverty by 25% in five years.

The report tells us we're on the right pathway. Yes, there is more to do. I look forward to continuing the work that my predecessor, Minister Matthews—

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

Mr. Michael Prue: The McGuinty government likes to talk big on poverty, but its real attitude is that poor families can wait—wait a year for a social assistance review that has never happened, wait two years for a low-income dental program that isn't happening, wait three years for an affordable housing strategy that isn't happening and wait five years for a 25% reduction in child poverty that you're never going to meet. Why is this government content to let struggling families languish in poverty when it gives profitable corporations tax cuts right away?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: It's unfortunate that the member opposite didn't take the time to read the report wherein the writers wrote, "In December of last year, the Ontario government fulfilled an election promise and took the significant step of setting out a poverty reduction strategy for Ontario with a target to reduce the rate of child poverty by 25%...."

"With all-party approval of the Poverty Reduction Act in May, tackling poverty is now a permanent part of government business."

And in that vein, we accelerated the Ontario child benefit from \$600 per child to \$1,100 two years ahead of schedule in the 2009 budget. That is making a significant difference for Ontario families. We invested \$200 million to implement full-day early learning in September 2010 and \$300 million the following year.

Every single day, we take steps forward to make sure that we will reach our target, a historic target that—

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

ANTI-SMOKING PROGRAMS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Promotion de la santé. Today, the Canadian Cancer Society is here at Queen's Park to lobby politicians. In June, the society and other partners in the fight against tobacco raised concerns over \$17 million in cuts to smoke-free Ontario and the Ministry of Health Promotion's move to an integrated model to fight tobacco. The minister's response to their concerns was: "There may not be evidence to support integration, but we're going to do it anyway and we may be able to tackle tobacco from this perspective." Why, on an issue so important to the health of Ontarians, is the Minister of Health Promotion cutting an evidence-based program that is working,

that is producing results, and gambling on a bargain-basement program that she says herself is not supported by evidence?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member opposite for her question. Our government is certainly committed to our Smoke-Free Ontario Act and the smoke-free Ontario agenda.

The Smoke-Free Ontario Act is one of the most comprehensive pieces of legislation that we have in North America. Under that legislation, we have numerous initiatives that are aimed at targeting young people, to prevent them from starting to smoke and to help them quit smoking. We are committed to helping people to quit because we recognize that smoking is an addiction. That is why we have cessation programs and a number of other different programs aimed at getting people to quit smoking, raising awareness and educating people about the dangers—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The government can be committed in many different ways, but when you move from an evidence-based program that is providing results to one that is not evidence-based, I question that judgment.

Next week will mark the one-year anniversary of Bill 124, the ban on sale of single-wrapped, candy-flavoured cigarillos that are so popular among youth. The Canadian Cancer Society was ecstatic last December when this bill passed. It received royal assent. But today, people in Ontario with a buck in their pocket can buy those cigarillos because the McGuinty government has not acted upon this law.

Minister, if you wait for the federal government to take action, these products will remain on store shelves well into the summer of 2011. You are planting the seeds to kill more Ontarians. Why is the Minister of Health Promotion so afraid to take action on cigarillos?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: First of all, I would like to remind the member opposite that since this ministry was created, we have invested approximately \$37 million in programs to prevent children and youth from starting to smoke. We have also banned the display of tobacco products throughout the province that can induce children to smoke. The government has supported this amendment to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to restrict the sale of flavoured cigarillos, and I would like to thank our member from Brant, who was instrumental in getting this bill passed as well.

It is our goal to move forward and promote a smoke-free Ontario. We intend to move forward and continue to work with our young people to encourage them not to smoke and to raise awareness in this province about the dangers of smoking. We will continue as a government—

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

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Last week I had the

opportunity to read an article in the Ottawa Sun regarding an issue that is brewing in the Lanark Highlands. The MPP and MP from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington have issued a referendum ballot to many residents in the area over a water and sewer issue in the riding. From what I gathered in this article, this is a dispute over how to proceed and how best to address the needs in the communities involved.

My question relates to the topic of referendums on municipal issues. Many residents in my riding have been asking how an issue can be voted on through a referendum, and what the procedure is. With municipal elections set to start in the new year, what is the procedure to have a referendum question on a ballot?

Hon. Jim Watson: I thank the member for the question. I too read the article and was disappointed that a member of the opposition, along with a federal MP, would actually go out and interfere in a municipal issue in Lanark Highlands. The rules are very clear for a municipal referendum. It has to be instituted by the municipality or by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, must be a “yes” or “no” question, and is presumed to bind council.

The so-called referendum in question doesn’t even address the issue of secrecy. In fact, the MPP and the member of Parliament on their ballot have said clearly, “Please leave your name and address at the bottom of the ballot.” What kind of a referendum is that?

The local municipal leaders have unanimously condemned the interference on the part of the MPP from Lanark and the federal member of Parliament. I tell them: Stay out of the business of those municipalities who are doing good work for the people of Lanark county.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I appreciate that clarification on that sham. It’s useful and will be helpful to me in explaining the issue to residents of my riding in the coming year.

There is more and more talk of the coming municipal election, the first since our government was re-elected in 2007. You’ve been the Minister of Municipal Affairs for two years, doing an outstanding job at a time of significant upheaval and uncertainty, as we have all tried to steer through a global economic crisis. Municipalities have struggled like many other sectors to meet the needs of their communities. They are looking for a partner, a good partner—a partner that works with them. As you know, it’s just not about financial support; it’s about meeting their needs.

I have heard the minister talk before in this House about the positive relationship our government has with municipalities, and not doing in municipalities the way the former government did. What are the concrete steps you have taken to strengthen this relationship?

Hon. Jim Watson: I’m proud of the work we’ve done. We consult with the municipalities, we don’t surprise them like the previous government, and we’ve uploaded a number of costs from the local property tax base to the province. By the time that the uploads take place, for in-

stance, in Lanark county, that county will save close to \$4 million.

I continue to be concerned about inappropriate behaviour on the part of the member from Lanark. Warden Paul Dulmage said of the ballot, “The ballot is ill-conceived and doesn’t address the questions adequately. The issue is about safe drinking water, public health and economic development.”

In a letter to the Leader of the Opposition, Warden Dulmage further stated, “Lanark county council was shocked and appalled that an elected representative, Mr. Randy Hillier ... would attempt to undermine the local municipal democratic process and decision.”

And the Perth—

Interjections.

Hon. Jim Watson: The mayor of Perth said that he had “great concern” about the interference of the member from Lanark—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That’s a personal attack that you allowed to occur.

Mr. Tim Hudak: A personal attack on a member, Speaker—they called for a point of order on that.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. Why did Rita Burak, the new eHealth CEO, seek legal advice about whether evidence of what she called “inappropriate practices” should be turned over to the OPP?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What I would like to do is talk about eHealth, because I think it’s very, very important that we all acknowledge how critically important eHealth is to the future of our health care system in Ontario. We’re moving forward, as quickly as we can, in a responsible way to bring Ontario to the e-health world that we need to embrace.

We are having some very important experiences through the H1N1 vaccination process, where we are seeing first-hand that doctors who have electronic medical records are able to immediately identify those patients in their roster who are eligible for the first phase of the sequencing program. We saw how eHealth really did make our health care system stronger. It supported people through this pandemic. That’s just one example of many that demonstrate how important eHealth is to the future of our health care system.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again, I would address my question to the Premier. This is a serious issue that requires an actual answer.

According to Ms. Burak, the legal advice she received was that “there was not a sufficient case” to turn over evidence to the OPP. For weeks you’ve been saying the auditor saw no evidence of fraud or criminal activity, but

Ms. Burak found something that she was so convinced was evidence that she got a legal opinion.

Premier, since you've scrapped the public accounts hearings and are blocking a public inquiry, we can only ask you: Why wasn't the evidence turned over to the OPP?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Rather than engage in speculation, I think it's important to reflect on the progress we have made on eHealth and, more importantly, where we're going to go in the future.

We've got thousands of Ontarians now who are engaged in a pilot program for ePrescribing. This is a critically important component of our eHealth strategy where the physician directly connects with the pharmacist without giving a paper prescription order to the patient. We know that that is a safer process. We know that it cuts down on fraud. That's the kind of example of things we have to continue to move forward on.

We have a drug profile viewer in all of our emergency rooms so that emergency room physicians can instantly see what drugs a patient is receiving. That is another example of a safer, better health care system, and we're committed to—

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

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. The HST is creating a stir in the Premier's own hometown. Ottawa realtors say that the HST will add \$1,449 to the cost of purchasing a home. Local home builders agree, saying the HST will have a negative impact on everything from home buying to home renovations. But, in an added twist, the head of the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association says that he was told there would be no HST a mere three weeks before it was announced.

My question is very simple: Why would he have been told that, and by whom?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank the leader of the third party for the question. When it comes to the real estate industry, I've had a great opportunity to speak with members of the Ontario Real Estate Association and members in my own riding. I remind them that if you're a part of any type of activity where it's going to attract an increase of 8%, for each and every one of those businesses, their cost of business is going down.

It's so important, I say to the members of the opposition, that we make sure consumers understand that the cost of business is going down, let alone that they're getting their personal income tax cuts. People are getting those starting on January 1, if we're able to pass our bill. I look forward to voting for it.

It's important for people to understand the nature of our tax reforms, that the cost of business is going down some \$5.3 billion. It's important that consumers understand that, that they go to those businesses and say,

"Listen, I understand about the tax, but where's my share of your cost savings?"

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, I'm sure the Ottawa Real Estate Board and the Ontario Real Estate Association reminded this minister about the important role of the real estate industry in economic improvement in this province. I'm sure he didn't listen, though.

Clearly, Ottawa residents and business owners want a say in this Premier's unfair tax scheme. They realize that the HST will make life more expensive for families and present one more obstacle for businesses that are struggling to overcome this recession.

Ottawa residents and business owners agree that the HST is the wrong tax at the wrong time. Why is this Premier muzzling them by refusing harmonized sales tax public hearings in Ottawa?

Hon. John Wilkinson: There is no time to wait to create 600,000 more jobs in the province of Ontario. I say to our friends, and particularly those in real estate, that there are two markets. There is a market where your clients are coming to you because they have to sell their house, because they're being foreclosed, because they've lost their jobs; and there's a market where people are selling their houses because they're building wealth, because they're moving ahead. The most important thing we can do in this province is to give hope to the people who've lost their jobs that there will be a future. That's why I say to the friends in the real estate industry that it is important for us to have the fundamentals in this province correct. It is to have the creation of new wealth, the creation of new jobs. I say to them that that is what has built this province.

They have made a valuable contribution and will continue to make a valuable contribution, but we will make sure that the economic climate in this province is a positive one, where there are people buying houses because they want to, not because they have to.

1130

TAXATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Revenue. Minister, recent news very much reflects the behaviour of the official opposition. Yesterday's *Belleville Intelligencer* ran an article entitled "Hudak Not Our HST Saviour." The article states—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm just going to remind the member of a ruling that I made previously on a couple of statements: Whether you're making allegations either directly or indirectly against a member or a group of members, I just ask that you be cautious in the phrasing of your question.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Yes. My apologies, Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition "in the next provincial election, just because he is flapping his gums about how horrible the HST"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw that comment.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I withdraw the comment.

Ontarians need to know that their leaders take this debate seriously—

Interjections.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdrawn.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: The federal Conservatives encouraged Ontario to harmonize tax through a commitment of \$4.3 billion. What will the \$4.3 billion mean for Ontarians?

Hon. John Wilkinson: Out of respect to the Chair, I do want to remind the people of Ontario that they can go onto the Internet to yesterday's Belleville Intelligencer and they'll see a quite interesting article about the position of the members opposite.

It's important to remember that we've told people that we would not have proceeded with the harmonization of our sales tax, and our massive tax reform and cuts, if it had not been for the historic decision made by Prime Minister Harper and Minister Flaherty to transfer some \$4.3 billion to the province of Ontario so that we can take that money in the first year, that year of transition, and put it right into the pockets of consumers. That really had been the historic logjam. That is the reason that the province of Ontario had not been able to move forward. But because we were able to reach that decision, set aside partisan differences and understand what is important— to create 600,000 more jobs in Ontario, \$47 billion—

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

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Yesterday's National Post stated that "Small businesses ... should generally benefit from the change from a two-tax system," and yesterday's Windsor Star and Ottawa Citizen stated that the "harmonized sales tax set to be introduced by the McGuinty government next June could rapidly improve the province's economic standing."

The HST has the support of groups ranging from leaders in business such as Telus and Bell Canada and is also supported by poverty advocates such as the Daily Bread Food Bank because it will benefit low-income earners and create jobs.

This is a very serious issue dealing with the economic future of Ontario. Minister, whom should Ontarians believe: those who are operating on the ground or those who treat this debate as a joke?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I would give an example: Just recently, GE Canada decided to make an investment of some \$100 million in the great city of Peterborough. The CEO of GE Canada, Elyse Allan, said that because of the improvement in the business climate right here in Ontario—because of the actions we are taking—her company, which could have invested anywhere in the world, decided to make their largest reinvestment, I think, in the history of their company in Peterborough. That means

jobs; jobs to the people in Peterborough. That's exactly why we are doing this.

It is important for people to understand that under our tax reform package, because of the harmonization of our sales tax, we are permanently cutting income taxes for people and for business. For every dollar that we save for businesses, there are \$2 of tax cuts for people, and it's going to start on January 1. It's going to start on January 1 because those of us on this side of the House are going to vote in favour of that—

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

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. How is it that you're giving \$200,000 to the people of the Philippines for disaster relief but you haven't given a nickel to those who suffered through the F2 tornado in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: My ministry has responsibility for the Ontario disaster relief assistance program, also known as ODRAP. The rules have been in place for several decades, including when the honourable member's party was in power. We're following the same rules and criteria for every municipality. Some municipalities, in fact, have benefited from ODRAP because they fit the criteria and others did not.

We sympathize, obviously, with all of those individuals who lost property. Sadly, there was one life that was lost, but we have been there on the ground with my colleagues from the Ministry of Natural Resources to do what we can to help as the government of Ontario. Certain municipalities, regrettably, did not fit into the criteria, and that is why that particular municipality did not benefit.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Premier, recently apple grower Tom Ferri said in the Blue Mountains Courier-Herald, "It feels like a slow boat to China, here... there's been a lot of talk, but no cheques rolling in or hint of that happening."

So I ask you: How can the Premier justify acting so quickly to provide aid to another country when he hasn't even begun to help the people in his own backyard?

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me just remind the honourable member again that the program in place has certain criteria that have to be met. We look at the ability of a particular municipality to pay for some of the costs. Let me just tell you about some of the jurisdictions where we have been able to help.

Randy Hope, the mayor of Chatham-Kent said, "That is why we declared a state of ... emergency. I am very pleased that the province of Ontario has recognized the extent of the damage."

Haldimand county Councillor Lorne Boyko said, "Of course they didn't promise anything but they were ... interested in hearing what happened here and they were

extremely helpful with outlining the process involved in applying for ODRAP.”

The mayor of Oliver Paipoonge, in northern Ontario, in the Timmins Daily Press said, “Many of our municipalities were very hurt ... the province came through so quickly this time...”

We are always on the ground working with our municipal partners. We do what we can with the limited resources we have. I can assure the honourable member, if he has suggestions on how to change the criteria—

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

PUBLIC INQUIRY LEGISLATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Finance. A distinguished group of legal counsel and researchers for past public inquiries delivered a stinging critique of the proposed changes to the Public Inquiries Act. They argued eloquently that the government’s proposed changes so profoundly compromise the independence of a public inquiry that it would be very difficult to attract a sitting judge to act as a commissioner.

Why is this government gutting the Public Inquiries Act? What is it that you’re trying to hide?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Thank you very much for the question. We’re doing the opposite, actually. What we’re trying to make sure of is that the Public Inquiries Act can support inquiries that will deliver the answers to questions that the people of Ontario need on very important issues while fully supporting the independence of the judiciary, within the time needs and within the monetary requirements of the province of Ontario.

There are some who have weighed in with some concerns, and we’re taking a look at those concerns and will continue to take a look at those concerns. At the end of the day, we want to make sure that we have a strengthened approach, not a weakened approach. We believe we have it right, but we’re going to keep taking a look at the suggestions that are made by others.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: At the heart of the legal counsels’ criticism of the proposed changes are provisions that would allow the government to interfere with the commission after the commission has been appointed. These provisions allow the government to terminate an appointed commissioner, revise a commission’s mandate and arbitrarily make any other changes it wants after the commission’s work is under way. In fact, it’s the legal counsels’ view that these changes would effectively end the tradition of public inquiries that has served the people of this province so well over so many years.

So I repeat: Why is this government making these anti-democratic changes to the Public Inquiries Act? What is it that you’re trying to hide?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: With respect, I take a different position from that outlined by the member. Most of the comments by counsel and others don’t use such colourful language. At the end of the day, we want an

independent process. The courts have confirmed that governments always have the right—always have the right—to put an end to an inquiry. It is rarely used. All we’ve done in this act is actually make that transparent by putting it in the act, by confirming what’s already there.

Again, we very much respect the comments being made by the former commission counsel and others. We’re taking a look at those. At the end of the day, we want a strengthened process. We need to deliver the answers the people of Ontario need and to be respectful of the taxpayers’ money.

1140

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. There’s no excuse to drink and drive. While most Ontarians obey the rules, this message, it seems, has not reached everyone. This behaviour is unacceptable and it’s a concern I hear often from the residents in my riding of Mississauga South.

Recently, I hosted a reception for Smart Serve here at Queen’s Park. They’re an organization developed to promote and provide information about safe alcohol service, both at work and at home.

It’s important to have awareness organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving, and Smart Serve working alongside our governments. These groups help educate the public on the consequences of drinking and driving, and how to prevent it.

What is the Ministry of Transportation doing to help reduce the instances of drinking and driving in Ontario?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much. Excellent question. I applaud the efforts of our safety partners, and that includes MADD Canada, OCCID and our enforcement agencies. They all work very hard to keep drunk drivers off our roads.

As you know, Ontario’s roads are the safest in North America. We continue to work hard to keep them that way. For example, this past year we have seen significant increases in spot checks across the province, due to the doubling of our funding to the RIDE program.

That being said, there’s always more that can be done, and that is why MTO staff are continuously reviewing current policies, monitoring other jurisdictions and working with our safety partners to determine the best ways to keep Ontario’s roads safe.

I look forward to being able to discuss some of these efforts in the supplementary questions, but I can tell you that our partners that we have out there have been indispensable in terms of providing us with good advice and strong—

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

Mr. Charles Sousa: Each year in Ontario, statistics show that drinking-and-driving collisions are the cause of almost one quarter of all traffic fatalities. The behaviour

of drinking and driving, especially that of repeat offenders, is a learned behaviour. Concerned residents in my riding and, I'm sure, people all across Ontario want to see this behaviour stopped before it begins.

In his first answer, the minister mentioned other initiatives that the government is moving forward with to keep our roads safe. Can the minister tell this House what he's doing to combat drinking and driving on Ontario roads?

Hon. James J. Bradley: We have among the toughest drinking-and-driving sanctions, I think, in all of North America, and that's thanks to the support of all members of this House.

New measures are already in place to seize and forfeit the vehicles of repeat drunk drivers. Effective on May 1, 2009, drivers caught with a blood-alcohol concentration between 0.05 and 0.08, the "warn" range, face longer suspensions of drivers' licences and additional sanctions: for the first instance, three days; for a second instance, seven days and the requirement to take a remedial alcohol education program; and for a third instance, 30 days, the requirement to take a remedial alcohol treatment program, as well as having an ignition interlock condition on their licence for six months.

Both education and prevention are key to the reduction of drinking and driving. That's why in this House we also unanimously passed supportive legislation that requires zero blood alcohol—

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

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question was for the Minister of Children and Youth Services but I will ask the Premier. The parting gift that the now Minister of Health left for children's aid societies across Ontario was a \$67-million cut to their budgets.

Dufferin Child and Family Services have had their budget cut by 17.1%. Peel Children's Aid Society will be forced to cut 24 front-line workers. Durham Children's Aid Society have said they would need to cut 63 jobs to balance their budget. Halton is faced with cutting 34 front-line workers. The York Region Children's Aid Society has already laid off 16 front-line workers—and more are expected.

Premier, what's it going to take for your minister to accept her responsibility to protect Ontario's most vulnerable children?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to speak to this question. It's a very important issue.

One of arguably the greatest responsibilities we share is that, through our children's aid societies, when we take children into care, we are effectively acting as their mothers and fathers. I'm not sure there's a greater responsibility any of us might take on during the course of our lives than to act as a parent.

I think it's very fair to say that we have dramatically increased funding levels for our children's aid societies during the course of the past six years. What we want to do now is, through our sustainability commission, work

with the children's aid societies to ensure that we have effective and efficient use of that funding. That work will begin very, very shortly.

Funding had been rising far faster than case volume. It's important to understand that since 2003, funding is up over 29% and children in care up less than 1%.

We believe that all of that money—every one of those dollars—is well invested. We want to make sure, through our sustainability commission, that we're getting the best value.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I just want to, upon reflection, refer back to an exchange of questions between the member from Peterborough and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Upon reflection—and this is one of the challenges of a loud chamber and of trying to hear every word—I'm of the opinion that there was a personal attack directed at another member of this Legislature, and I would just ask the honourable member to withdraw his comments, please. I'm specifically asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Jim Watson: I was quoting a letter, and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm just asking that you withdraw the comments.

Hon. Jim Watson: If it was inappropriate, I withdraw the quote from the county warden.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I need an unequivocal withdrawal.

Hon. Jim Watson: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Whitby–Oshawa has given her notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Health: the reason why evidence of inappropriate practices at eHealth was not turned over to the OPP. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Cambridge has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Premier concerning consultations regarding the proposed new HST. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 3 this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1147 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Greg Sorbara: It is my pleasure to welcome this afternoon to this House the family of the late Sheila James about whom I will say a little bit more during members' statements. Her husband, Wayde Preston; daughters, Georgina and Ellen Preston; her parents, Bill

and June James; her parents-in-law, Maurice and Donna Preston; her siblings and all the people who are here today to listen to a few words of tribute in honour of Sheila—we welcome you all to this Legislature.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

JOSEPH BRANT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today to make a statement regarding the pending approval of the proposal for redevelopment of the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital in Burlington.

I want to thank my colleague Christine Elliott, PC critic, for asking questions on this issue to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the deputy minister on November 3 in the Standing Committee on Estimates on my behalf.

Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital hasn't seen any major restructuring changes since the 1970s. That's almost 40 years of stagnant physical change to the hospital. It is critical that the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital proposal move more quickly to approval of their expansion and renewal plans.

Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital was one of the hardest hit by the C. difficile bacterium in the spring and summer of 2008. Included in this renewal of the hospital is an increase of private rooms from 15% to 80%, which will meet the ministry's new design guidelines for infectious disease control.

The request has never been approved. So here we are now, in 2009, six years later, and we still don't have an imminent approval of these plans. I will continue to stand and call for the approval of Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital's restructuring proposal. You know, after waiting 40 years for changes to our hospital, surely the people of Burlington should not have to wait any longer.

RODNEY WATSON

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: On October 19, Iraq war veteran Rodney Watson announced that he had been living in sanctuary at Vancouver's First United Church for a month. Rodney remains there today. The 31-year-old is in a self-imposed prison because he was facing deportation to military custody in the United States, despite Canada's Parliament having voted against such deportations.

After completing his first tour of duty in Iraq in 2006, Rodney made the decision that he could not, in good conscience, go back. As Rodney's own words explained, he continues to be disturbed by his participation in this unsanctioned war. Rodney, who is of African-American descent, found the racism of his fellow soldiers unacceptable, whether directed at him or foreign non-combatants.

I speak of Rodney's situation today because most of the US Iraq war resisters who are in Canada and have spoken out publicly live in my riding. Twice, the

majority of federal members of Parliament have voted on the initiative of Toronto MP Olivia Chow to direct the government to immediately stop deporting US Iraq war resisters and to create a program to facilitate their staying here in Canada.

I urge all members of this assembly to speak with the members of Parliament who represent your ridings in Ottawa and ask them to oppose the deportation of Rodney Watson and other US Iraq war resisters.

Minister Chan, I urge you to write to your federal counterpart, Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, to let him know that the majority of Ontarians, 63%, want US Iraq war resisters to be welcomed as permanent residents.

SHEILA JAMES

Mr. Greg Sorbara: I rise today to pay honour to a woman who has had a profound and permanent impact on many of us in this House and on the public life of our province.

Sheila James was a truly great spirit: a mother, a wife, a partner, a daughter, a sister, a public affairs professional and a brilliant adviser to cabinet ministers and political candidates as well as two Premiers. Sadly, Sheila died last August.

I am also pleased and honoured to announce the establishment of the Sheila James memorial fund through Equal Voice. This is a fund that will advance some of Sheila's greatest passions and interests and support initiatives to promote the election of women to public office across the province and across the country.

Sheila amazed me. Her intelligence was extraordinary. Her analytical skills were unsurpassed. She was a brilliant force for good. She always spoke truth to power, and she had an incredible sense of humour and a deep love for life and family.

Today we pay tribute to the many varied accomplishments in her life and to the fine work that the fund will do to honour her.

We offer her family—her husband, Wayde, and daughters Georgina and Ellen—and all of her admirers our enduring affection and support. We will remember her fondly.

SHEILA JAMES

Mr. John O'Toole: It's an honour to add a few words of tribute to the late Sheila James.

I must admit here that I did not know Sheila James, but I certainly heard of her. Her parents, Bill and June James, live in my riding of Durham, as do Sheila's parents-in-law, Maurice and Donna Preston, her brother-in-law, Marty Preston, and sister-in-law, Paddy Grayhurst. They are with Sheila's husband, Wayde Preston, and daughters Georgina and Ellen in the gallery, as Greg Sorbara said.

Sheila James is cherished as a mother, wife, partner, daughter, sister, colleague and friend. Her life was devoted to making a difference through excellence as a

communications professional. As has been said, she served with Premier David Peterson and Premier Dalton McGuinty, with obvious success.

Toronto Star columnist Jim Coyle said, in a tribute published yesterday, that we “give the world three things.

“We give it our labour.... We give it our example.... Most of all, we give it our children—the greatest expression of faith and hope there is.”

Sheila James’s parents and family have every reason to be proud, and I know they are. The life of Sheila James will continue to lead and inspire others, and we thank the James and Preston families for their devotion to community and service.

GRK FASTENERS

Mr. Bill Mauro: Twenty years ago, Uli Walther and his family came to Canada and resided in Thunder Bay–Atikokan, my riding, out on Rosslyn Road, and established their business, called GRK Fasteners. They have about 38 employees there and about another 27 in the United States, marketing their product, which is a patented technology. Currently, about 400 million units of that technology come through Thunder Bay. Through the great work of that company and the great product that they patented, they’re poised for huge growth, to see that double to almost 800 million units. Their patented screw technology is very much in demand.

But here’s the rub: They may have to leave Thunder Bay. The federal government began by applying an 8% tariff on this company and then, with almost no notice, they increased it to 170%, as the company brings in supplies from suppliers around the world.

Aerospace, auto and recreation are exempted, but for some reason, using SIMA, the Special Import Measures Act, as the legislative authority, the CBSA, the Canadian Border Services Agency, has decided to slam this family-owned and -run business in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

CITT, the Canadian International Trade Tribunal, has heard the appeal from this company. We’re hoping that they’ll pay attention. They will be ruling soon on this. We need the feds to be aware of this unfair application and ensure that they’re doing all that they can to ensure that this Ontario-based company gets to continue to stay in Ontario, in Thunder Bay, and continue to employ people.

1510

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I would like to take a moment to recognize the excellent work that the current Minister of Transportation has done on the extension project of Highway 410 to Highway 10 in Brampton. This project, started under Premier Ernie Eves, helps me to get back home to Bognor much faster. Highway 10 is now a four-lane road to Orangeville.

However, I would like to remind the current Minister of Transportation that he cannot stop now. He needs to

keep going north of Orangeville to Owen Sound. With the winter approaching, it won’t be enough for the minister to simply tell my constituents that they need to be prepared, stay alert and drive according to road and weather conditions.

As he is no doubt aware, improvements to the stretch of Highway 26 between Woodford and Meaford have been in the works for years. But I wonder if the minister realizes that it has been 18 long years since I was promised improvements to the treacherous Bayview Hill area on Highway 26. I hope it won’t be another 18 years before something is done.

We also need to see roadwork done on Highway 6 from Durham to Tobermory. This is an especially treacherous stretch of highway to drive on in the wintertime. I know I speak for all my constituents when I call on the current Minister of Transportation to get going with road improvements in that neck of the woods.

The road remains a two-lane highway for its full length up to Tobermory. Highway 6 spans 110 kilometres on the Bruce Peninsula. That’s a lot of communities counting on you, Minister, to get the job done like you did for the people of Brampton and Orangeville.

NORWOOD FALL FAIR

Mr. Jeff Leal: I rise today to speak about an event that I look forward to attending every year, the Norwood fair. Like many other fall fairs, it is attended by thousands of guests each year, because it offers those attending the opportunity to experience rural life and celebrate our rural communities.

This year, I had the pleasure of talking about two talented young people, Ms. Christina Crowley and Mr. Kyle Rivington. Both had the distinct honour of competing in the European Young Breeders Competition in Battice, Belgium. Ms. Crowley and Mr. Rivington were chosen because of their success in previous Holstein Canada, 4-H and EBI competitions. Mr. Rivington, aged 23, took top honours, as well as Overall Top Individual for the show, and Ms. Crowley, aged 22, was fifth overall and won the Grand Champion Showperson award. The competition involved not only showing their cattle but answering questions from judges.

These two young people gained valuable experience in the agricultural sector and made friendships with their European colleagues. These friendships led to a decision to remain in Europe and visit some Holstein herds in Italy. They then made their way to Paris and to Buckingham Palace before travelling to Rome.

Their love for the agricultural community will see these young people evolve into successful adults. They are an example of the value of supporting rural youth in our agricultural programs. Congratulations to Ms. Crowley and Mr. Rivington for a job well done.

HOLODOMOR

Mr. Dave Levac: Yesterday marked the 76th anniversary of Holodomor and the start of Holodomor Education

Week. I had the opportunity to address the opening of Holodomor Education Week yesterday in Toronto. I want to thank Minister Michael Chan for affording me the honour of presenting a memorial plaque on his behalf to the Ukrainian community, and the Premier for allowing me to bring words of greeting from him on behalf of all Ontarians.

A great many Ontarians have no personal experience of forced famine or tyranny and no way of knowing the anguish and chaos that plagued a dictator's time in power. Some, unfortunately, do. Holodomor Education Week is enormously important for those too far removed or too young to understand or even feel Holodomor's significance. Ten million people were starved to death by Stalin.

This is why commemorating Holodomor through the efforts of Ukrainian Canadians and the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, and through acts of this House, is so very important for us to relive and understand history.

By joining and working together, the very first ever tri-sponsored private member's bill reached royal assent on April 23, 2009. We made history. For the first time in Canadian history, it was a tri-sponsored bill.

I want to thank MPPs Cheri DiNovo, Frank Klees, Ernie Hardeman, Gerry Martiniuk, Minister Laurel Broten, Minister Donna Cansfield, MPP Khalil Ramal, Minister Chan, Minister Fonseca, and you, Speaker, for your support for this very important day.

I say today, never again. Ukraine remembers; the world acknowledges. Dyakuju.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Joe Dickson: Along with millions of Ontarians, I'm looking forward to the 2015 Pan Am Games, which will be hosted here in Ontario. These games are expected to inject billions into Ontario's economy and create 15,000 new jobs.

To house the 10,000 athletes and officials who will come to compete in the Pan Am Games, new housing development will be built in Toronto. The much-needed new affordable housing will be with us long after the games for all regions.

In my area of Durham region, four municipalities, including Ajax, Pickering, Whitby and Oshawa, will all host competitions. Even better, my four communities will not incur any capital costs.

Some of the events to be held in Durham region are indoor shooting at the Ajax Community Centre; modern pentathlon, held at the Pickering Horse Centre; outdoor shooting at the Oshawa Skeet and Gun Club; boxing at Oshawa's General Motors Centre; wheelchair basketball at a new build, Abilities Centre, set for completion in 2014; boccia at Durham College in Oshawa; wheelchair tennis at the Iroquois sports park in Whitby; and softball at the Lakefront West Park in Oshawa.

We were fortunate to have a number of key people—including David Peterson, bid chair; Jagoda Pike, CEO; Premier Dalton McGuinty; Health Promotion Minister

Margarett Best; and others—at the bid opening, and we congratulate everyone on their success.

VISITOR

Mr. Bill Mauro: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: If I could just introduce, in the members' east gallery, Mike Skube, down here for Advocis Day. He wasn't here a little bit earlier.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That was not a point of order.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Mr. Hoskins assumes ballot item number 56 and Mr. Sorbara assumes ballot item number 79.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the November 24, 2009, report of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. David Oraziotti: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

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): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1518 to 1523.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Orazietti has moved the Standing Committee on General Government report regarding Bill 185. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Jeffrey, Linda	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Kular, Kuldip	Orazietti, David
Arthurs, Wayne	Kwinter, Monte	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Phillips, Gerry
Bisson, Gilles	Leal, Jeff	Qaadri, Shafiq
Broten, Laurel C.	Levac, Dave	Ramal, Khalil
Chan, Michael	Marchese, Rosario	Ramsay, David
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Rinaldi, Lou
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Ruprecht, Tony
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Smith, Monique
Dhillon, Vic	Meilleur, Madeleine	Sousa, Charles
Dickson, Joe	Miller, Paul	Van Bommel, Maria
Gravelle, Michael	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Hoskins, Eric	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Jaczek, Helena	Moridi, Reza	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

Nays

Barrett, Toby	Miller, Norm	Runciman, Robert W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Murdoch, Bill	Shurman, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Wilson, Jim
Martiniuk, Gerry	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 44; the nays are 12.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

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

“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 ... haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships”—not newspapers anymore; the Star bought them off—“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 also and will send it with Connor.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

“Whereas we currently have no psychiatric emergency service at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay ...;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to support the creation of a psychiatric emergency service in emergency at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario.”

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Jim Wilson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas several paramedics in Simcoe county had their pensions affected when paramedic services were transferred to the county of Simcoe, as their pensions were not transferred with them from” the hospitals of Ontario pension plan and the OPSEU trust “to OMERS, meaning they will receive significantly reduced pensions because their transfer did not recognize their years of continuous service; and

“Whereas when these paramedics started with their new employer, the county of Simcoe, their past pensionable years were not recognized because of existing pension legislation; and

“Whereas the government’s own Expert Commission on Pensions has recommended that the government move swiftly to address this issue; and

“Whereas the government should recognize this issue as a technicality and not penalize hard-working paramedics;

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

“That the Minister of Finance support Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson’s resolution that calls upon the government to address this issue immediately and ensure that any legislation or regulation allows paramedics in Simcoe county who were affected by the divestment of paramedic services in the 1990s and beyond to transfer their pensions to OMERS from” the hospitals of Ontario pension plan or the OPSEU trust pension plan.

I obviously agree with this petition and I’m signing it.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the good people of Sudbury and it’s about requesting a PET scan. It goes as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service ...; and

“Whereas by October 2009, insured PET scans will be performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table with page Karen.

1530

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition in support of proclaiming April Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario. I join my colleague the honourable Antonio Ruprecht in this petition.

“Whereas Canadians of Hispanic origin have made outstanding contributions in the building of this great province; and

“Whereas the Hispanic population is among the fastest-growing communities in Ontario; and

“Whereas the Hispanic population in Ontario represents 23 countries across the world, such as Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador ... Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela; and

“Whereas Hispanic Heritage Month would give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in various cultural and educational activities that would strengthen our diversity; and

“Whereas the proclamation of April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario is an opportunity to recognize and learn about the contributions Canadians of Hispanic heritage have made to Canada and to the world in music, art, literature, films, economics, science and medicine;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming April of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario.”

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

SALE OF DOMESTIC WINES AND BEERS

Mr. Toby Barrett: One thousand, seven hundred and fifty-two signatures have arrived on petitions from the OKBA, Ontario Korean Businessmen’s Association, titled “Say Yes to Beer and Wine Sales in Convenience Stores.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the province of Ontario restricts the sale of beer and wine to the LCBO, a few winery retail stores and the Beer Store, and the three large beer companies are owned by multinationals;

“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 sale 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 sign the petition.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The subject of this petition is, “Stop the Exploitation of Foreign Workers,” and it’s actually in support of Bill 160, whose author is Michael Colle—the caregiver and worker protection act. It reads as follows—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Can you just read it?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, this is true. I’ve got it right here; it’s right on here.

“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 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 Mr. Michael Colle’s bill, the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage into law.”

Since I agree with this petition, of course I’m delighted to sign it.

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition provided to me by George and Julianne Lehmann, which reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes once again on Canada Day 2010 with his new combined GST, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty’s new 13% combined GST will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as: coffee,

newspapers and magazines, gas at the pumps, home heating oil and electricity, postage stamps, haircuts, dry cleaning, home renovations, veterinary care, arena ice and soccer field rentals, Internet fees, theatre admissions, massage therapy, funerals, condo fees, courier fees, fast food sold for under \$4—that has been changed, but after the election they'll change it again—“bus fares, golf green fees, gym fees, snowplowing, bicycles, taxi fares, train fares, domestic air travel, accountant and legal services, and real estate commissions;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

“That the Dalton McGuinty government recognize Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses.”

As I agree with it, I affix my name thereto.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition asking for fairness for Ontario workers.

“Whereas the federal government's employment insurance surplus now stands at \$54 billion; and

“Whereas over 75% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

“Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

“Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets \$4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus not qualifying for many retraining programs;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end the discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario's unemployed workers.”

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

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: “Whereas the hard-working residents in Simcoe county 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 and Internet services for their homes, 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, snowplowing, air conditioning repairs, commercial property rentals, real estate commissions, dry cleaning, car washes, manicures, Energy Star appliances, veterinarian 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;

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

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

I will sign that petition.

RAIL LINE CONSTRUCTION

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The subject of this petition is the West Diamond joint venture project. It reads as follows:

“To the Ontario Legislature and the Minister of Transportation.

“Whereas GO Transit's West Diamond project is using a method of pile installation that is ill-suited to an urban environment and causing undue disruption and harm to residents in neighbourhoods on both sides of the railroad tracks;

“Whereas there are other methods of installing piles that would cause minimal disruption and no harm to residents or property;

“Whereas the actions of GO Transit have been inadequate to mitigate the human and property concerns experienced by residents;

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

Stop “the current method of pile installation used in the West Diamond project immediately and engage in a consultation with the community residents to find a mutually agreed upon method that ends the damage to our homes, our quality of life and our physical health.”

I'm giving this petition to page Nickolas.

YOUTH ACTION ALLIANCE

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

“Whereas the Minister of Health Promotion is planning on cancelling funding for the Youth Action Alliance program without looking at its effectiveness in rural Ontario; and

“Whereas the Youth Action Alliance has mobilized youth in the Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound area around health issues of importance, including the dangers of smoking, second-hand smoke and illegal cigarettes; and

“Whereas the Youth Action Alliance program is an opportunity for youth in the area to build leadership skills and make valuable contributions to their communities;

“We, the undersigned, ask the Minister of Health Promotion to look at each Youth Action Alliance program on an individual basis and see if it is working effectively and making a difference in its local community; and

“To continue funding those that are working effectively.”

I've signed it and I'm going to send it down with Robyn.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, I have one more petition today, and I beg your indulgence to read it. It's addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services. It reads as follows:

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

"Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

"Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature..., be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information, such as SIN and loan account numbers.

"(2) Should a consumer reporting agency discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the affected consumer.

1540

"(3) The consumer reporting agency shall only report credit inquiry records resulting from actual applications for credit or increase of credit except in a report given to the consumer.

"(4) The consumer reporting agency shall investigate disputed information within 30 days and correct, supplement or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate."

Since this petition is given to me by the Consumer Federation of Canada, I'm glad to sign this as well.

TUITION

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

"Whereas international students pay three to four times more for the same education, and domestic students in professional programs such as law and medicine pay as much tuition as \$20,000 per year; and

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

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

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

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

"—reduces tuition and ancillary fees annually for students;

"—converts a portion of every student loan into a grant; and

"—increases per-student funding above the national average."

I will sign this petition.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm simply looking for some clarification on a ruling made by one of your colleagues in the chair yesterday when a point of order was raised by the member of Oxford dealing with written questions and the requirement under the standing orders in terms of response times.

The member made the point that there had been an interim answer without any specific timeline, and I'm looking for clarification from the Chair regarding this if in the future we are faced with similar situations. There is an interim response made. It's not complied with in terms of the 24 sitting days. How does the order apply in situations like that, where an interim answer or a response has been made? How does the Chair respond when a member stands up on a point of order similar to the one that the member from Oxford stood on yesterday?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member for the point of order—and it is a point of order. You raise a good point. I hope it's an issue that the House leaders would be prepared to look at, and perhaps even submit it to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, because according to the standing orders, the filing of that interim answer complies with the 24 days.

I can see your point, that you could just file an interim answer and you are technically in compliance with the standing orders. Unfortunately, it is not an issue that I can rule upon. But I do think it is something worthy of consideration by the House leaders because this is an issue in which it would not matter who is sitting on the government side; this could be an issue. I would be concerned that it could be used in a manner that could delay getting a response to an honourable member.

I will follow up from this with a letter to the House leaders and would encourage the House leaders to have that discussion. Unfortunately, I do not have the ability to

myself send something to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, but perhaps the House leaders would give that consideration, and I thank you for that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On that point of order—

Mr. John Yakabuski: On that point of order, Speaker: In cases like that, could we then refer to the minister in question as the “minister of interim affairs”?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That is not a point of order, and I did clarify the ruling that was provided by the Chair yesterday. But I do agree that it is an issue that I trust the members will take a serious look at.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO TAX PLAN FOR MORE JOBS AND GROWTH ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LE PLAN FISCAL DE L'ONTARIO POUR ACCROÎTRE L'EMPLOI ET LA CROISSANCE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 23, 2009, on the amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 218, An Act to implement 2009 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 218, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2009 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to resume debate on Bill 218, which is the bill that implements the Dalton sales tax, the HST that we are receiving so many e-mails and so much information from our constituents about.

To be very clear, Mr. Speaker, the reason that the bells have been ringing around the Legislature is because we, as the opposition, are pushing the government to hold public consultations on Bill 218 so that the people of the province can be heard around the province in places like North Bay and London and eastern Ontario and northern Ontario, in Thunder Bay, Owen Sound—

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: Collingwood.

Mr. Norm Miller:—Collingwood, all those people who want to be heard.

Recently in Huntsville we had Cyndee Todgham Cherniak, who is a lawyer; she's counsel for international trade law, business law and tax law. She spoke to the Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce. That was reported on in the Huntsville Forester, and I can tell you that there were more questions raised from her detailed presentation on the way the McGuinty government is implementing the HST than there were answers. That is all the more reason why we need to have public consultations around the province.

In the short time I have available, I would like to get on the record the comments of a reasonable-sized

business, a medium-sized business, that has written to the Premier with their concerns about the HST. They write:

“As a mid-sized company employing 50-plus employees, I would like to voice my displeasure with your government's idea of implementing the HST tax. During a time when it is hard enough to keep our businesses afloat and staff employed, why would you add another tax? Our company is in the service industry; currently we charge GST on our product to our clients and no PST applies as it is a service. Your proposed tax would now add another 8% to the total package that we sell. I have three questions to ask you below:

“If you were one of the owners of the company how would you deal with the additional 8% tax that you now have to add in? Oh, and let's also remember that much of your business that has confirmed after July 2010 has bought a package that did not include the additional 8% tax that it was exempt from before. (Remember we are a service industry: tourism.)”

The following are the questions put to the Premier:

“(1) Would you pass this increase on to the client? Remember that most countries are going through an economic recession and are therefore very price-sensitive. In fact most of our clients are not looking for a price increase, but rather a price decrease. What would you do? How do you discount now when you are faced with another 8% you didn't plan on? How do you remain competitive?”

“(2) Would you absorb the 8%? Seems like an easy thing to do, but wait; we have just gone through a year of low margins and little to no profit. Is this a popular decision with the shareholders of the company? Also, don't forget that you have to pay both federal and provincial corporate tax on your profits. Can you meet cash flow demands and still absorb an additional 8%? Guess we go through another year where we can't spend dollars on technology upgrades, develop new products etc.

Question three for the Premier: “Do you decide that we can't pass it on to the client in an economy that is already bleeding, and to ask the shareholders to go through another year with little at the end of the year would be damaging as well. How long can you keep their attention when the bottom line is slowly but surely disappearing? Do you decide to do what we will do and lay off staff and cut back spending, so that we can be competitive and profitable at the end of the day? Sounds like the right plan to me, but I worry about customer service. I don't want to see that drop off, or we may lose clients next year. Sure is a tough decision!

“You see, Mr. Premier, these are grown-up decisions that we must make every day in our sector. If we overspend, we have to find cost savings somewhere, unlike the government. If it overspends as a result of incompetence or poor planning, it simply adds a tax. Don't forget, though, that your clients are the taxpayers. Eventually, if you keep passing off increases and operating costs to them, they will decide to shop somewhere else for bargains and you and many of your colleagues will be out of work.

“Mr. Premier, I invite you or your finance minister to come to our Toronto office and live a day in the real world of business—you know, the world where you take risks every day, the world where you actually have to be innovative and creative enough to produce something that people will want to buy. But remember, if you are too expensive or the quality of your service is not up to the standard that is expected by your client, you may have to reduce costs, let staff go or possibly even close your doors. It really isn’t a complicated formula: We are accountable to ourselves, our clients, our staff and our shareholders. If we work hard, try to anticipate sales and costs of sales, and put a good plan in place, we might have a good year.

“I know you realize that business creates jobs and creates wealth, which in turn through taxes creates revenue to run government, educate our kids, pay for hospitals etc. The rest of the world is trying to dig itself out of a major recession; businesses fail daily. All we ask is that government (your government) get out of the way and quit making it difficult for us to be successful. You know full well that we can’t all be public sector employees; someone has to produce in order to feed that sector. Start listening to the people that feed the province and the country!”

It is businesses like this that want to be heard around this province, and that is why the PC Party and leader Tim Hudak are asking for public consultations around this province. That’s why we’re trying to slow down passage of this legislation that the government is trying to ram through and time-allocate so they don’t have to listen to the people. That’s why I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mr. Miller has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1553 to 1623.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): All those in favour, please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 15; the nays are 41.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: We tried on that one; it was close.

I’d like to share my remaining time with the member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I appreciate the opportunity to join debate today. As you know, under the leadership of Tim Hudak and the stewardship of our good friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka, our finance critic, the Progressive Conservative caucus, has opposed this piece of legislation. Not only have we opposed this piece of legis-

lation, but we also believe there need to be public hearings on this HST \$3-billion tax grab.

Until the Liberals call public consultation into this piece of legislation, I’m going to have to call for adjournment of debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. MacLeod has called for adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1625 to 1655.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. MacLeod has moved adjournment of the debate.

Will all those in favour please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 14; the nays are 38.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member for—yes, a point of order, the member from Hamilton East.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, Mr. Wilson brought forward Bill 225 for first reading. Normally, all parties vote for first reading in the House. However, I’m a steelworker, and like everyone else knows—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me.

Mr. Paul Miller: —I would never support a bill that would force workers back to work.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me.

Mr. Paul Miller: I stood in error in favour of the bill; I intended to vote against first reading. I would like to correct the record. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It’s a pleasure to be able to speak once again to the HST legislation, as we did yesterday with our opposition motion calling for further public debate into the HST legislation and this 8% tax grab.

There are six concerns that we have on the legislation.

Obviously, under the HST, Ontario will relinquish some of its powers, Constitution-granted taxation powers, to the whims of future federal governments.

We’re also concerned that under the HST it is likely that tax-included pricing, or hidden taxation, will come to Ontario because of an obscure law that Jean Chrétien brought in in 1997.

There’s also no evidence that harmonized sales taxes work at either the provincial or national level anywhere else in the world, despite what the minister tells us.

We also are concerned that there will be hidden costs for Ontario businesses due to compliance; whether that’s their accounting fees or their legal fees or any other

advice that they may need, there will be hidden costs for Ontario businesses.

We also feel they will not in some cases be able to reduce their base prices after the implementation of the HST despite the fact that the government continually tells Ontarians they are going to see lower prices. We don't believe that at all, because it is going to be an 8% tax grab, a \$3-billion tax grab, on the middle class and the seniors in this province.

And finally, the most important and I think significant point that the government continually forgets to tell Ontarians when they're talking about the HST is that it will be impossible to repeal. They have locked us in for five years. The next government is going to have to deal with this legislation, and that, to me, is not fair. Not only is that not fair; there are massive penalties. Ontarians will be forced to pay \$4.3 billion back from the bribes that they are going to give out after they force this legislation through the Ontario Legislature. And I'm going to tell you, Madam Chair, Ontarians don't want that. They don't want to cede their constitutional powers; they don't want to cede their ability to have direct taxes. And because they will not call public debate, I have no other option in the Ontario Legislature today than to call for adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. MacLeod has called for adjournment of the House.

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

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1700 to 1730.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. MacLeod has moved adjournment of the House.

All those in favour, please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 12; the nays are 40.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity, and I wish they would hold public hearings and a public inquiry—

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: A number of members have spoken, so I don't know to whom to address it; it could be the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I've got a question for you; I know the member from Leeds gets upset when I ask these questions. I know that, and I apologize to him. But I have this question. The Harper federal government has reduced the GST by not 1% but 2%—you know that—and I think they're proud of it. My sense is they like value-added taxes.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's called keeping a promise.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But that's my sense; I could be wrong.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You've been wrong before.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I don't know about that.

If the Tories federally cut the GST by 2%, you would think they would want the provincial government not to do anything that goes in the direction they don't want anybody else to go. Yet, member from Parry Sound, they've given the Liberals \$4.3 billion to do this.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Shame on them.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That's what I want you to say, Bill: "Shame on them." Say that.

They've given the Liberals \$4.3 billion to harmonize and add an additional tax on 70% of goods and services.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: We're not the government; we're the provincial Tories.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That's what I want you to say. Don't get upset. I want you to stand up proudly to denounce the federal Tories. Denounce them. Denounce Jim Flaherty and say he's absolutely wrong. That's what I want you to say.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Please, answer that for me.

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I would like to make reference to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka's leadoff, although it took us a long time to get there—I actually had 90 minutes to contemplate it on a one-hour speech.

I want to make a point, though. For at least part of his time he spoke about the implications for corporate business. I want to draw attention to an article, from the November 19 National Post that I identified yesterday during my time, about a Mr. Lorne Janes from Newfoundland, who is the owner of Continental Marble of Canada Ltd., and his comments about when a harmonized tax was put in place in Newfoundland. I'll quote from the article:

"The harmonized tax also meant Mr. Janes no longer had to pay taxes on inputs ranging from machinery that cut pieces of marble and granite to buffing cloths that gave finished countertops a nice shine.

"The money saved helped Mr. Janes lower the price on his products to help him compete with low-cost Asian imports."

"It is one less irritant that I don't have to deal with," Mr. Janes says. "Instead I can focus more on being competitive and maintaining jobs."

So from the standpoint of those who are in the real world, that's exactly what's happening.

I have only about 35 seconds. I'm hoping, in the range of debate we have on this matter over time, that I will have the opportunity to introduce a little more formally the comments of the Leader of the Opposition in our December 4, 2008, Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs pre-budget consultations, in which he asked one more question of Dr. Jack Mintz. Dr. Mintz was the expert witness that the official opposition chose to have attend those pre-budget hearings. I look forward

to the opportunity of putting on the record the question by Mr. Hudak and Dr. Mintz's response.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. The member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's rather sad to see the Liberal backbenchers defending this. I don't know how they're doing it in their ridings, because certainly they're not listening to the people who put them in this place a few years ago.

If you look at Dalton McGuinty's record in 2003, when he said, "No tax hikes," and brought in the biggest single tax increase in the history of this province; if you look at 2007, when he said, "I'm not going to cut your taxes, but I won't increase your taxes"—and now he's bringing in the biggest single sales tax increase in the history of this province.

You know, we're seeing the polls change dramatically for the first time since 2003. That's because people are starting to understand what this Liberal government is all about. We have a Premier who, six years ago, was a different person. He is now living in a tax-subsidized mansion in Toronto. He has gotten away from the people who really matter in this province.

I was in a Santa Claus parade on Saturday. I had an elderly lady come up to me and say, "Mr. Runciman, I'm living on \$14,000 a year. How am I going to survive with this new tax?" We're talking about seniors. We're talking about people on fixed incomes. We're talking about the working poor. That's who you're hurting. That's who you're out of touch with, and that's who you're refusing to talk to by eliminating the whole possibility of public hearings across this province.

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

Mr. Dave Levac: The hyperbole that starts to flow on an ongoing basis inside of the House is just that: It's inside of the House. The unfortunate circumstance that we find ourselves in is the accusation of another member claiming they know what's going on in the ridings of the members who are representing the government. Unfortunately, what's happening, what the members opposite are continuing to say, is quite demeaning to the place itself, because what it does say is that they're making an accusation that the members are not representing their ridings—far from the reality of what's really happening.

It's unfortunate that we hear what's happening on an ongoing basis, and the bluster, the chest-beating, the gnashing of teeth and the ripping of garments are not being responded to.

The hundreds of e-mails I have received have received a personal response, and every time a person asks for a meeting, if I can get it in within the time period that I am allowed, I give them the meetings that they want. What's rather interesting about it, which is a big side of the denial from the members of the other side, is that when you do spend some time with them to explain the entire budget, not the half budget that is the easy fix, the easy tax grab mentality, but once we do spend some time, what happens is that they come back and say, "Well, we

never heard that. Oh, you mean to tell me that that's what it really translates to?" What they eventually start to say is, "I'm beginning to understand what it is that you are trying to accomplish." For us to land on the ground running when the economy starts to move up, the new reality tells them, "Yes, I understand what has to happen in the province of Ontario for us to make progress." It's really unfortunate that they try to play inside politics, the inside baseball game. I look forward to the day when the people will—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Nepean–Carleton has two minutes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Some 78% of Ontarians are saying right now that you have it wrong and you're not standing up for them in your own riding, and that's the fact. You can bluster all you like and talk about the half-truths, but the reality is that Ontarians on all sides of the political equation oppose this blatant \$3-billion tax grab, and they want us to stand up for them and they want us to speak for them.

1740

I'm going to remind our colleagues opposite of a quote from a retired police officer who was in the gallery a couple of weeks ago with the public sector retirees' union. He said, "In the policing field, we call this legalized theft." That's what the public in Ontario are talking about when they talk about your \$3-billion tax grab: legalized theft.

I want to thank the member from Trinity–Spadina, the member from Leeds–Grenville, the member from Pickering–Scarborough East and the member for Brant. But the reality is that until we put this piece of legislation out to the public to adequately talk about the impacts of the legislation, everything the members opposite in the government benches, particularly in the government backbenches, are talking about is just a number of speaking points that don't mean much. The people deserve to have their voice heard on this legislation. We're going to stand here and we're going to continue to call for public discussion and public debate and public hearings, because that's what the people want. They want to tell the government that when they're on a fixed income, they can't afford 8% more on their home heating, nor can they afford 8% more on their gas, nor can they afford 8% more on their veterinary fees. They can't afford you.

You have disintegrated this wonderful province, the economy that we once had, 100,000 times over. You have just really taken us to a new level of lows, and that is a shame. You have taken this province from first to worst in economic growth, and the only time you'll be happy is when you pick every—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, I would like unanimous consent to stand down the lead by my friend from Beaches–East York.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is it agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you very much. You're all so kind.

Interjection: Anything for the NDP.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But I'm just going to attack the federal Conservatives, if that's okay with you.

First of all, I want to say hello to Greg, who is a regular watcher of this program. Greg, hello. And, Greg, say hello to Nicole as well, your daughter. She used to be a page around here, and she was a happy page, happy to be here. She learned a lot. And she might vote for us in the end; you never know. You've got to do your best.

Welcome to this political forum. It's 20 to 6, and I've got a full 20 minutes. I was worried about not getting my full time, because I have been itching to get at this bill for quite some time. I am so opposed to this bill. You just don't know how strongly I oppose it, and I'm going to do my best to express myself as much as I can. I'm going to attack the Premier; I'm going to attack all the Liberals on this. I'm going to attack everybody, pretty well. And I'm going to start with Harper.

As you know, Harper cut the GST by 2%. And I thought, "If the Tories oppose the GST and they cut it by 2%, they're not going to collaborate with any provincial government that wants to increase GST, PST—or at least, in this case, the PST—on items where you have a GST." I said to myself, "He's not going to do that." And lo and behold, Jim Flaherty, the finance minister, meets with McGuinty, or at least the finance minister of Ontario, and they concoct a deal together in the backrooms. They get together, they talk about it, they strike a deal, a memorandum, and the federal Conservative Party gives them \$4.3 billion. That's a whole heap of money to give away. Why would you give that kind of money away if you're opposed to these kinds of taxes: the GST federally, the PST provincially?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: What's the answer, Rosie?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to get to that.

So the question is, why would they do it?

Interjection: Why?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Because politically it's smart to cut the GST and politically it's smart to allow the Liberals provincially to increase the PST. This way, the provincial government finds a way to raise money that they desperately need, therefore not having to go cap in hand to the federal Tories and say, "Please, we need some money. We need more money." The Conservatives don't want to say, "No, we can't help you anymore"—although they will—"because, we've got our own deficit to deal with." But they have allowed the provincial government to go ahead and use a tool that they normally support, that they won't get any flak for—but that the Liberals will raise the money they need to be able to provide for all the provincial programs, and it's done. All it costs them is \$4.3 billion. It's not a bad deal, but it's a lot of money.

The provincial Liberal government, of course, is going to take that money and dole it out to people and make them feel happy for the next year. It's almost like a nice Christmas present, really. Some people are going to get

up to \$1,000. Individuals will get \$300. It's one-time—the \$1,000 is three times over the course of a year starting this coming June, but it will be one-time money and it's gone; \$4.3 billion gone.

How do you find money like that? Where do you get money like that? The government has a huge deficit at the federal level—\$55 billion or so, and it's going to increase, by the way—yet they've been able to find \$4.3 billion to give away to the Liberal government to be able to increase the PST on 70% of the goods and services. I don't get it. I just don't get it.

Then you've got McGuinty saying in opposition, or at least even a couple of years ago, "We're not going to do this." He even said, "We're not going to decrease corporate taxes." He said that. He said, "It's okay for Tories to do that, but not for Liberals." And then he announces that he not only is going to introduce the harmonized tax but he's going to reduce corporate taxes as well.

Mr. Jeff Leal: And personal taxes.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And personal income taxes, yes.

A number of Liberal friends are asking me: Why? Why would they do that? And I say to myself—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: So it's all about tax reduction? Is that what it is?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I say to the Minister of Consumer Services, who is my friend Ted, there is always a reason, and the reasons don't hold up. They do not hold up. They are cutting corporate taxes to the tune of about \$6 billion when you include small business in there as well. But the bigger corporations are getting \$4 billion in tax giveaways—something McGuinty was never going to do because he's a good Liberal. Not him. Neither Chrétien nor Martin—he wasn't going to give it away, but in 1993 they decided, "Things changed." McGuinty says, "Things are different." Things change. All of a sudden, a modern world hits them. The old world is just too old and you need to come into the new world.

For the last 15 years, we have been giving away money to the corporations. For the last 15 years—federally and provincially, under Tories and Liberals. It doesn't matter which one it is, whether they are provincial or federal; it doesn't matter. We've been giving away tax money to the corporations for the last 15 years, all under the name of, "We've got to do it to create jobs."

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Boys, lower your voices. Boys. Madam Speaker, tell them to lower their voices.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Keep the conversations down or take them outside.

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I don't think they heard you, actually.

So for 15 years, they've been cutting corporate taxes. And if that is the case, you would think we would have loads of jobs in this country, that we wouldn't have anything to worry about. And every year and in every election, Liberals and Tories keep cutting corporate taxes a little more, and this time McGuinty says, "We're in the

new order, the new world. We've got to cut some more corporate taxes because we need to create jobs." He actually believes it. McGuinty actually believes it. It hasn't worked for 15 years. We're going to give \$4 billion more—accumulated, it's \$5 billion or \$6 billion—and he actually believes it's going to create more jobs. It hasn't worked for the last 15 years, but when McGuinty does it, it's going to work.

What oracle is he consulting? Do you understand? The Greeks used to consult oracles 2,000 years ago, and these days McGuinty is consulting new fairies, because there are a whole lot of fairies. They come under different names. This fairy comes under the name of Mintz. He wrote a report where he says, "With this harmonized tax, the combined effect of harmonizing PST and GST, we're going to create 600,000 jobs."

1750

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And Mike Brown believes it, like the fairy that he's consulted. They all believe it: the rump folks, the ministers, McGuinty. They've all consulted Mintz, and Mintz has given his stamp of approval. Yes, it's 600,000 jobs—

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's 590,000.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: —give or take a couple. I remember Mulroney saying that with the free trade agreement—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We have conversations going on that need to be taken elsewhere if they're not going to be quieter.

You may continue.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I remember Mulroney when he introduced the free trade agreement. I used to love his mellifluous voice—he had a nice deep voice. He would often say of the North American free trade agreement that, "If we introduce it, the country will be prosperous." I wish I could do it the way he did it, because he actually meant it, and you could feel it in his voice when he said it: "We're going to be a country of prosperity and"—he used another word; I forget it. It's 17 years ago or 20 years ago. But you actually believed the guy. Even if you were a New Democrat, you'd say, "Maybe I believe him," because of his mellifluous voice—with honey in it, right?

Interjection: He was great, wasn't he?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes, I thought he was. Of course, none of the jobs came to be.

Mr. Jeff Leal: He was on CFRB one day and said that thousands of jobs had been coming in—on Peter Shurman's show.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yes. Exactly. Like the member from Peterborough says—he's over here.

Interjection: Is that where he sits now?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, it doesn't matter.

The McGuinty government says, "We're going to create 600,000 jobs," and all the rump over here and all the other guys and women over there—they're all guys

today—they actually believe it. But it's not possible. Any magician can put numbers together, and this—

Interjection: What's the solution?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's not a solution. The issue is, Dr. Mintz—he probably has a doctorate—writes in a report, "600,000 jobs," and they believe it. And if they don't believe it, they have to pretend to believe it.

You used to have oracles 2,000 years ago. It was just a plain little trick—a mask in the hole and people would consult, and sometimes there would be a voice on the other side telling them things. They actually believed it. And 2,000 years later, you've got Liberals believing in the same fairies. It's like Casper exists. They're all looking for Casper, and they seem to find him everywhere, in every corner of Queen's Park. I don't believe it. I don't know how any sane, reasonable-minded, intelligent-minded Liberal could believe that. I don't know how any reasonable-minded constituent, citizen—yes, taxpayer—believes that. If they said it was 6,000 jobs, you'd say, "Okay, maybe it's true—6,000. It's probably possible." But 600,000? Almost a million jobs as a result of doing this? How is that possible? It isn't possible. It is manufactured. It is mendacious—but the Clerk knows what that word means. You have to be careful. Some clerks don't know all the vocabulary that's in the dictionary. It's manufactured. It's invented. It's not real. A whole lot of people are going to get whacked, and it's the middle class that's going to get whacked.

This is a flat tax, and normally, left-leaning Liberals—although I have been desperately seeking them out of late in the last year or two. Often I would say, "Could any left-leaning Liberals stand up?" No one stands up. They're not here. Normally, left-leaning Liberals oppose flat taxes. They do. Tories love them, all Tories, although provincially, this time they don't like them. That's fine. Today, they don't like them, but that's fine. I understand. If they get into power, I think they're going to love them. I suspect they're going to love them, because it will be a change of heart. But today, in opposition, they don't like them. I understand.

But this harmonized tax, the combination of PST and GST into one, which now includes 70% of new goods and services, i.e., gasoline, home heating, vitamins, funeral services, veterinary services—the list is long. You're going to tack on another 8% on those services that the middle class is going to have to support on their heavy shoulders.

It is a flat tax. Why is it a flat tax? Because it means someone earning \$30,000 and someone earning \$200,000 are going to pay the same 8%. There's no progressiveness attached to it. You understand what I mean, "progressive." It is an equal tax that everybody pays, and I argue that if I make \$110,000 or \$120,000 and someone makes \$30,000, I should be paying a little more tax than the person making \$30,000.

You've got the Premier standing up saying, "We are reducing progressive income taxes"—proudly he says this—"to 93% of the population."

Interjection: Good news.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Income taxes are progressive because they are based on ability to pay. McGuinty and the Liberals—the former reeve and mayor here is telling me that he's proud to have cut progressive taxes and equally proud to have introduced a non-progressive flat tax that he calls progressive. I don't get it. I don't get it.

Now, I believe the McGuinty who was a lawyer is a reasonable-minded person. I really do believe that, because you'd think if he's a lawyer, he's got to have some intelligence. You'd think that, right? I don't know whether he actually believes it or doesn't believe it, knows or doesn't know, whether he pretends to know. I don't really know what he knows. But any reasonable-minded person, including the Premier, would know that this is a flat tax and it's not progressive at all.

Liberals provincially and Liberals federally—Tories federally and Liberals provincially—they all love to eliminate progressive income taxes. They all love it. Not only that, but Liberals provincially and Tories federally love to cut corporate taxes. When you do that, who's going to pay the bills? It's not provincial MPPs who earn a good salary. It's a middle class who live from day to day in precarious positions where they don't know from day to day whether they are going to have a full-time job. They won't know. Most of them are living—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Mr. Reeve, former reeve, most of them are living on part-time wages. Most of the new jobs are part-time; they're not full-time. The middle-class jobs, once unionized manufacturing jobs, have disappeared. We have virtually lost, in the last three to four years, close to 370,000 jobs in this province alone in manufacturing—good-paying jobs, unionized. They're gone. McGuinty says they're gone. You've got a middle class that's disappearing, and you are left with precarious work, and very part-time.

Pensions are disappearing—federal level, provincial level. Corporations and governments are saying, “You know, it's really tough to hold on to these defined packages, defined-contribution plans, really tough. You've got to give up something.” All the workers, whether they're unionized or not, are being asked to take less because of the mistakes that financial systems have made in the US, in Europe and here in Canada.

In the US, the parasitical financial organizations caused the disasters, and then McGuinty, and Harper at the federal level, give away billions of dollars in corporate tax cuts to the very institutions that have caused the collapse of our economic system. And then they say to unionized workers and non-unionized workers, “Sorry; we can't afford your pensions any more. Sorry; the private sector workers have taken a hit, and now you've got to take a hit.” We keep giving money away to big corporations who don't need it, and then we clobber them with a harmonized tax and we say, “That's okay. You've got to get on board. This is the best way to create 600,000 jobs.” Nobody believes it, not if you have a brain. If you have a brain, you don't believe it unless you're a Liberal.

Interjections.

1800

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Sorry. I didn't mean to offend.

We need hearings. McGuinty and all you Liberals, you fine Liberals, even the left-leaning ones, are so proud of this. You were so proud to be in the modern age, to bring reforms to the modern world. If you're so proud, strongly defend it through public hearings. Go out and tell them how much you love this plan, that you think it's good. Go out and attack Jim Flaherty and tell him he's wrong for doing this. We've got to attack them. The federal Conservatives are bad; you know that. You've got to attack them.

Be proud. Don't be shy. Don't hold back. Don't just have a day or two and end the discussion. If you believe in it, you're proud. Hold your chests up really high—right?—and take it out and do the debates. That's what I think is needed. We need to hear from the citizens and taxpayers of Ontario so that we can hear what they have to say, so that you can hear what they have to say. And if they agree with you, fine; if the majority agrees with you, that's fine. That's the way it works. And if they don't, then you will have listened to them. That's the least you could do.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Whitby–Oshawa has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Health. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes. Begin.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: This morning I asked the Minister of Health a very specific question regarding some very serious concerns brought up during committee hearings on eHealth, and this morning the minister completely denied the people of Ontario an answer. When asked why Rita Burak sought legal advice about whether evidence of what she calls “inappropriate practices” should be turned over to the OPP, the minister refused to answer.

For weeks, the Premier and the minister have been saying that the auditor saw no evidence of fraud or criminal activity in eHealth, but Ms. Burak found something that she was so convinced was evidence that she got a legal opinion. We asked for the report received regarding these practices during public accounts, but as of today we have yet to see it.

The minister, instead of answering my question this morning, went on to discuss the forward-moving focus

that the government has now taken with respect to eHealth. But I must ask, how does one move forward with good direction without first reviewing and analyzing the missteps of the past? The answer is, you don't.

John C. Maxwell, an author who has made the New York Times bestseller list and regularly speaks with Fortune 500 companies and international government leaders about success in leadership, has something to say about moving forward after making a mistake. In fact, he's written a book on it, *Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success*. According to this book, the McGuinty government has completed four out of the five steps to failure following a mistake.

I'd like to take a moment to review those steps with my colleagues still here in the House.

(1) They're angry, taking frustration out on others. With less than a year since the eHealth scandal was made public, the McGuinty government has been able to secure the departures, resignations and termination of many high-ranking officials, all whom have taken the fall for what was said to be direct orders from certain government members.

(2) They cover up mistakes. I don't think this stage requires any further explanation.

(3) They speed up, try to leave troubles behind by working harder and faster, but without changing direction. I believe the very issue we're discussing here today is a perfect example of this. In response to my question, the minister said, "We're moving forward, as quickly as we can, in a responsible way to bring Ontario to the e-health world that we need to embrace." This, instead of answering my question regarding a very important issue that was addressed both in the auditor's report and in public accounts. I'm sorry, but there's no moving forward without addressing the missteps of the past, and at least that, I would say, would be the response of a responsible government in the first place.

(4) They back up, obfuscating at first and then backing up to cover up.

Finally, this model dictates that step number 5 is that they give up. We have not seen this government engage in step 5 yet. However, they're doing a fantastic job at the other four.

I'd like to take just a few moments to remind this House of a statement made by Premier McGuinty in the House during his days of opposition:

"In fact, a public inquiry process keeps the politics out. When there is a public inquiry, politicians can't fiddle with its work. They can't edit out embarrassing mistakes or manipulate witness lists, for example. Most importantly, they discount or dismiss the findings of a public inquiry at their peril.

"Public inquiries give us facts on what happened in the past, and they give us valuable recommendations for the future. They give the public the answers that they desire and to which I believe they are entitled."

These words—never more true. A public inquiry—never more needed. Reading through that quote only does one thing to me: It shows me that Mr. McGuinty is

nothing but an empty shell of what he used to be. He used to believe in transparency and accountability, and now all he cares about is preventing information from coming out before the public. The Liberals have shut down public accounts, denied the public an inquiry, and now they're refusing to answer our questions in the House. Madam Speaker, I know you feel the same way. We take our jobs in this House very seriously. My job is to hold this government to account, asking the questions that the people of Ontario want us to ask. And by not answering my questions, the Minister of Health is not only not doing her job, but she's also preventing me from doing mine. That is why I was unsatisfied with what went on this morning during question period. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to this matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Huron—Bruce has five minutes to respond.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I certainly am very pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I want to speak first with regard to the question on the legal opinion. Following the release of the Auditor General's special report on Ontario's electronic health records initiative dated October 7, 2009, eHealth Ontario's board of directors sought independent legal advice regarding the awarding of the \$737,000 contract as described on page 12 of the auditor's report. The board felt this extra degree of due diligence was important from a governance perspective, and the legal opinion clearly states, "In our opinion, the facts set out in the Auditor General's report do not provide evidence of a criminal offence."

I wanted to speak to that specifically and then I wanted to talk about moving forward, because we certainly understand how important e-health is to the people of Ontario and how it's such an important part of moving our health care system forward. Ontarians also expect that their tax dollars be properly invested, and so do we. We want to ensure that every single dime we invest in the health care system goes toward improving patient care. We've taken these concerns very seriously and we've taken swift action to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are used prudently. That is why we asked the Auditor General to report on his own review as quickly as possible. That's also why we have implemented new procurement rules across the board in the Ontario government. We've curtailed unnecessary expense claims with additional mechanisms for accountability and transparency.

Our investments in electronic health records are significant and they're helping us make real progress in our health care. They will ultimately result in better patient care, more efficient health care services and delivery for all of Ontario.

It's important that we keep moving forward on our e-health agenda. We're not alone in this desire. I want to quote from the president of the Ontario Medical Association: "This is a grand task and one that requires a long-term commitment. The expectations are both promising and exciting, and it is imperative the government and physicians get on with the job of getting every patient in Ontario an electronic medical record." We're committed

to this goal and to ensuring that the money that we spend on eHealth is devoted to initiatives that will strengthen and modernize the province's health care system.

1810

We have had accomplishments, and I want to speak to those. Since 2008, 80,000 Ontarians are in a pilot project for ePrescribing, and that will help save lives. Since 2005, more than four million Ontarians are already participating in the electronic medical records program run in partnership by the province and the Ontario Medical Association. More than one million children have electronic health records as well.

All Ontario hospitals have gone filmless and are now using digital diagnostic scans, which will ultimately allow for scans to be shared all across the province. The drug profile viewer provides authorized health care providers in Ontario's 245 public hospitals with drug claim histories for 2.3 million recipients of the Ontario drug benefit, and it operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The integrated public health information system is used by all of our 36 public health units for reportable infectious disease surveillance and management, and we certainly have heard a lot about this system in the press recently because it was used extensively to respond to the H1N1 pandemic.

The Ontario Telemedicine Network helps patients in remote areas get medical consultations via video conferencing, with over 70,000 teleconferencing events taking place annually.

And there's more. The Ontario lab information system provides electronic access to patients' lab results, regardless of where they are performed in Ontario. This system contains over 50% of Ontario's lab test results.

Unfortunately, Speaker, I have run out of time, but I do thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond today.

TAXATION

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Cambridge has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Premier. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: My question today arose out of a fundraiser, and that fundraiser was, I understand, held by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. The fundraiser advertised that the Minister of Revenue—who is the mouthpiece, if I may use that word, to sell the GST to the public—would be there, and the charge for coming to the event was \$50.

One of my duties is being the critic for seniors. When we're dealing with seniors, we're also dealing with people with fixed incomes, working families who work for minimum wage or close thereto. We've got to understand that the harmonized tax is the most regressive tax a modern society can impose upon its citizens. It became very popular in Europe because in Europe many coun-

tries had great difficulties collecting income taxes. They're somewhat more corrupt than we are, and an easy way of collecting taxes is, of course, a tax on goods and services. It can be traced more easily and enforced. It has become popular in Europe, and we have adopted it.

Unfortunately, as I mentioned, it's terribly regressive. What does that mean? Our income tax started some decades ago because of the First World War. It was to pay for the First World War. Unfortunately, when the war was over, the tax continued, and that was a progressive income tax. Those who had a larger income paid more. Not only do they pay more because they make more, they pay on a higher marginal rate, which is really fair. It ends up with a distribution of income. This government really no longer believes in the income tax and the redistribution of funds so that the wealthy, who can afford it, share some of their wealth with those—the working poor, the seniors and people on fixed incomes. This government is going to take the tack of adopting a very regressive tax on most services that we do not pay tax on at present.

One of my first questions to the Premier was that if these consultations with the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex are to take place, would they offer seniors' discounts? We have a tradition of offering seniors' discounts; why not for the opportunity to meet the minister in charge of imposing this tax? There are so many people who want to speak. They want to speak to the Premier; they want to speak to the ministers of this government and they want to voice their concern and outrage with this tax. They recall that in 2003, this Premier signed a written pledge not to increase taxes in Ontario, and one of the first things he did when he got into office after 2003 was to increase taxes by a massive health tax. Similarly, in the 2007 election his famous quotation was, "I will not lower taxes, but I will not raise them either." Again, here we are with the biggest tax grab, next to the health tax, that this province has seen: a \$3-billion tax grab that they claim is not happening, and I did not receive an adequate answer—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane has up to five minutes.

Mr. David Ramsay: Where do I start? I think I should start with defending the honour of my colleague the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, because she was basically attacked for doing what we all do in this democratic system, and that is that we have to raise funds to keep the democratic system going because we face, every four years, elections, and elections, whether we like that or not, take money. All of us have fundraisers, of course, every year, and maybe more often, depending who you are, but we all have to do that. The first thing we do is thank all those people who attend and thank them for supporting the democratic process that we have in this country. We're very fortunate to have such a process in this country.

It's interesting to note, because most of us would have a guest speaker, that the member charged \$50 for her fundraiser. I think most of us in the House would say that

that is quite a modest price. In fact, last night the opposition House leader held a fundraiser here in Toronto for \$250. He used a registered lobbyist for religious schools, and that's fine if he wants to do that. But it's a little bit of a difference.

We have had 160 town hall meetings with the public organizations right across the province, from rotary clubs to seniors' teas and ratepayers' associations, and the list goes on. I do notice that when the leader of the official opposition has a town hall meeting—he has a series of regional town hall meetings. Here's an application, I see, for November 21 in the southwest region, and this is a town hall meeting. But he charges \$25 for the town hall meeting. So if you want to come and talk to him, it costs \$25. That's not a fundraiser. I find that kind of ironic.

I would say to the members that part of the genius of this parliamentary system that we have is that from time to time we can certainly agree to disagree. I have to say to you that I would have more respect for your position on this, because it's certainly your right to disagree with this, if you were to stand up and say that if you were to ever obtain power in the province, you would then be consistent with what you're saying today and you would

then eliminate this particular initiative. But you don't say that, and that tells me that you really are supportive of this and you're just playing political games.

I think, in your heart, and I know, deep down in your soul, you know how courageous our Premier is in doing the right thing. As politically risky as it is, because we know there's lots of opposition to it, Premier McGuinty knows that this is the right thing to do for our families in order to build an economy. We've got so many people out of work today. When we reset this economy, it's not going to be like it was before. We can't go back to the old Ontario, as much as we loved that and prospered in it. It takes bold leadership to make those dramatic and bold changes to make that revolution happen, to make sure that Ontario again will be the number one jurisdiction in this country. That is going to happen with this. It will take time, but it takes courage to do it, and I fully support our Premier in making that happen.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1821.

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