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Wednesday 25 November 2009

Mercredi 25 novembre 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO LABOUR
MOBILITY ACT, 2009
LOI ONTARIENNE DE 2009
SUR LA MOBILITÉ
DE LA MAIN-D'OEUVRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 18, 2009, on the motion for second reading of Bill 175, An Act to enhance labour mobility between Ontario and other Canadian provinces and territories / Projet de loi 175, Loi visant à accroître la mobilité de la main-d'oeuvre entre l'Ontario et les autres provinces et les territoires du Canada.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always a pleasure to have the opportunity to stand in this place and bring some reflection on legislation that is before us. In my last 10 or 14 years here, I've seen these labour mobility bills brought forward in various forms, one or another. I remember the one brought forward when Jim Flaherty was the Minister of Labour. The bill was called the Fairness is a Two-Way Street Act. It was primarily dealing with the province of Quebec and their inability to have a reasoned relationship.

We often see in the economy itself, where there are different labour standards between the provinces—

Mr. Dave Levac: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I normally try not to interrupt speeches, and I apologize, but I'd just ask a question about rotation and time left on a speech. If I'm not mistaken, there was some time left by a previous speaker, which would have then moved to a rotation?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member from Brant for his point of order. It is a mea culpa on my part. I should have asked the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who had four minutes left, if he was going to continue his debate. If he chose not to, I then would have moved on to the NDP, to recognize

them in the rotation, and then it would have come around.

So I'm going to start all over again. We're dealing with Bill 175. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would love to relinquish time to speak in this Legislature, but I can tell you that I would likely be getting letters.

Hon. Jim Watson: Letters to thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, there could be letters of thanks; there's no question about that. But there would also be letters asking me why I did not choose to use the entire time allotted to me to speak to this piece of legislation.

We're talking about Bill 175, which is the labour mobility bill. A mea culpa on my part too: Because it was actually last week when we last spoke on this bill, I quite frankly wasn't aware that I still had some time left on this bill.

Mr. Dave Levac: Don't criticize your whip.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, I never would; I'm criticizing myself. I wasn't aware that I had time left on this bill.

It is an opportunity for me again to highlight that the general principle of this bill, which is to allow people to carry their credentials from one jurisdiction to another, is something we generally support. I've listened to Minister Milloy give his dissertation on the reasoning behind the bill. As my friend Mr. O'Toole from Durham began to say—and I'm quite sure he will repeat when his time in the rotation comes up—this is another attempt at trying to put some symmetry into the expectations from one jurisdiction to another.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Transportation is asking me if he has read the bill. I would certainly say to the minister that I don't know if he's had time to read the bill, but maybe he's got some time to write a bill that might get those driver's licence people back to work here in the province of Ontario. Every day I'm getting calls and letters in my office wondering why they're not able to get their drivers' licences—students who are worried about a job next summer and require a full licence.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I'm sure the member will be able to answer those letters, but he should be debating the bill that's on the floor, Bill 175.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Bill 175 is about the ability to work where you choose by having your credentials

recognized, and the ability to get a job in this province, quite frankly, can be affected by your right to a driver's licence that for every other reason you're qualified to have. You're old enough, you've passed the written test, you've filled the time, with respect to the jurisdictional need, to be able to apply for that full licence, but you can't do it because you can't get a test. This is an issue that is haunting people in my riding. Students have come to my office and said, "I have a job available next summer, but I will not be able to take that job if I don't have my G licence." Quite frankly, if you want to talk about labour mobility, what about our students? What about our kids?

Have I moved adjournment on this, and of the House?

I just had a quick question for the table, Mr. Speaker, and they have answered that question for me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The Speaker knew that too.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I bet the Speaker knew that too. Sometimes we forget about these things, because this is a busy place at the best of times.

0910

I do hope that as the government is working on bringing this bill—as I say, in principle we support Bill 175—they are diligently working as well to ensure that all those people who could qualify for a job will be able to get that job. What are we going to do about the backlog? We're going to have to bring in some special-circumstance people to cover that backlog. What is it now? I think it's 5,000 a day, or something, or 4,000 a day—the backlog; probably half a million are going to be shortly waiting for those kinds of things. Gosh, I just feel for those families that are depending upon that ability to have that driver's licence, and I hope that the government will recognize that and do something about that as they're working on this bill on labour mobility. It is a good idea to recognize the credentials of people from one jurisdiction to another. So we hope that in the fullness of time, they'll be able to deal with both of those issues. I thank you very much for the opportunity.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm going to get a chance in a few minutes to express some of my views on this bill. I think that when the member says that labour mobility between various provinces is a good thing, I would agree on the surface. The problem is, you'd better have the same standards, because as you know here in Ontario, we have an apprenticeship training system that has a pretty high standard as compared to other provinces; to say that we're going to allow tradespeople to come in to work in the province utilizing their particular credentials from their province that may have a lesser standard in Ontario I don't think serves the contractor well. I don't think it serves, quite frankly, the issue of the consumer well, either. I'll have a chance to speak to that a little bit later.

I think what we should be trying to do is follow the model of the European Union. It seems that Canada and North America are locked in; whenever we want to talk

about how we're able to bring down trade barriers, we seem to always try to rush to the bottom end. I'm not saying for a second that this is what the government is, on the surface, attempting to do, but the effect is the same. What we should be saying is that if we want to lessen trade barriers between provinces, we should have a model similar to the European common union which says, "All right, let's establish what the standard is going to be between the provinces and let's work to that standard." Hopefully, what you end up doing is taking the best of the various provinces and putting it into one standard that people can live with; in the end, if you are going to bring down these trade barriers, it's important that you respect the training that has been established in provinces like Ontario, that has been around for years, and develop the training programs that we have for various tradespeople such as electricians, welders, mechanics, millwrights, tool and die people and others, because Ontario is known as a jurisdiction in Canada with some of the best standards when it comes to training tradespeople. After all, if they can train a guy like me, they can train anybody.

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

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to enter the debate on Bill 175, and I want to focus on one example about why this bill is important to a riding like Huron-Bruce. The example that I want to use is, a doctor who is already certified in Alberta wants to move to Ontario. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario will accept and certify the doctor without requiring him or her to undertake any additional training, experience, examinations or assessments. So what does that mean to a riding like Huron-Bruce? I can tell you that one of the challenges that we have faced in doctor recruitment is ensuring that the certification remains intact when they come into the province. Quite frankly, doctors have found it very difficult for the recertification, and they have struggled to understand why.

So we see a bill like Bill 175 coming forward and starting to eliminate the barriers—that will give the ability for rural communities to have a greater pool of doctors to work from within that are certified, licensed and trained by a university in Canada or internationally. If they were licensed in another province, this gives them the mobility to come in.

We recognize that there has been a significant amount of work by health care professionals in addressing the barriers to allow for greater capacity, and certainly that has been very well received in rural communities such as mine in the riding of Huron-Bruce. But this is the further work and understanding of the ability of labour to move around that strengthens our province. That is, quite frankly, why I will be supporting Bill 175.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

Mr. John O'Toole: I would like to compliment the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. He brought up a very practical example, that is, the DriveTest issue,

of a standard that we have here. I hope they are compliant with the standards in other jurisdictions and recognize other jurisdictions. If that's the case, why don't drivers in Ontario go to another province and do their AZ licence, or whatever it is, and come in here?

But there are two other real-life examples that have been brought to my attention where our standards are much higher in Ontario than in other jurisdictions. One would be the chartered accountants of Ontario. The CAs have the full right of public audits in Ontario. In other provinces, that is not the case. CAs, CGAs, CMAs and other people with an accounting designation have the right to do the public audit, which complies.

What the members on the other side, on the government side, are saying does not stand. In fact, they're not completely revealing what is happening. Under this, the labour mobility code contains the following exemptions: the rules against imposing material, additional training, experience and examination. An Ontario-regulated authority is not prohibited from imposing on the applicant any requirement that is identified on the website of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. What are you hiding here? This isn't complete mobility inter-jurisdictionally.

A good example, another fine example, would be opticians. For opticians in some provinces, it's one year or less of training. An optician in Ontario has four years of training at the university level. Which standard should apply? I would expect that ours would be a higher standard in Ontario.

Is this really about lowering standards in Ontario? Crowding out Ontario students who are diligent in their studies, apprenticeships or trades? We have standards; it's called the red seal program in the trades.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaking from a trades and crafts perspective, I would say that the solution to this problem would be national regulations and certification for tradespersons. What's happening is that, for years, people have been allowed to go from province to province. The only thing you had to do, for example, if you were a welder in Ontario and wanted to weld in Alberta, was write an inter-provincial ticket to show that you were certified to do it, even though our standards were higher. That was removed a few years ago. You now have the red seal program, so you can go from province to province.

Where the problem is—it's not a problem; actually, it's good—is that local union or non-union places have what they call work under permit. So if you're from out of province, they make sure their guys in their union are working first and then people from other provinces can work under permit through those locals. That's always been in place.

Twenty years ago, I could have worked in Labrador City as a tradesperson. What you have to do is nationalize the trades, you have to make sure an electrician in Nova Scotia is as qualified as an electrician in BC, and then you won't have a problem. If every province has

different standards and Ontario's is the highest, and you are opening the floodgates and bringing in less-qualified people into Ontario to work, then I've got a problem with that. I would assume that the people of Ontario would want the best.

Every province, for that matter, would want the best-trained people they can get. As long as they meet the requirements of Ontario under our training programs and our expectations, then it shouldn't be a problem.

But I think they're complicating the issue here; they're opening the floodgates for less-qualified people and people to come in here who—let's face it, in the States there were doctors who went up there who were from—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank the members for Timmins–James Bay, Huron–Bruce, Durham, and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for their comments. I think the members have raised very, very pertinent and important points with regard to the equality of qualifications nationwide.

0920

I would hope that the government is ensuring that those are part of the legislative body of this bill, and if not, through regulation, that we are not accepting people of less-qualified training standards to occupy positions in trades here in Ontario, having been qualified somewhere else where the standards are lower. We understand that, and it's a very good point raised by members of the third party.

In no way, shape or form should this or any other piece of legislation lead to a lessening of standards with regard to the quality of work expected by tradespeople in this province. The public has a legitimate expectation of a standard of quality of work that we currently adhere to. There should be nothing we do, as a legislative body, that would water that down or dilute it in any way, because then the public would lose confidence in the very trades they have confidence in today.

Speaking of trades, we could do our trades and the people who are prospective members of those trades a real service by changing the apprenticeship ratios here in the province of Ontario to something less than the absolutely restrictive way they are adhered to today, so that we could actually qualify more young people here in Ontario to participate in those trades.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm glad to get time to weigh in on the debate on Bill 175. I just want to say up front that New Democrats don't oppose the idea of being able to find ways to allow trade to happen between provinces in an easier way, and the mobility of workers east to west. We obviously don't oppose that. I think the question for us as social democrats becomes, how you go about doing that?

I said a little bit earlier, in response to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, that what I see this bill doing is following the trusted old model we've used in North America, whenever it comes to lowering trade

barriers, of rushing to the lowest common denominator. If you look back at our negotiations around free trade and NAFTA, our federal and provincial governments, along with the Americans, and the Mexicans in that case, negotiated free trade agreements that supposedly were for the betterment of the Ontario economy and the Canadian economy. I would argue that that turned out to be a bit of a fiasco—not a bit of a fiasco, but a large one. My point to this debate is that we negotiated those agreements not bringing everybody to a better standard but allowing a move to the lower standard.

For example, with our NAFTA agreements, you have to compete against Mexico. For many of our manufacturers, higher training levels, higher skill levels in their plants, better health and safety conditions etc. have turned out to be a detriment, and those particular plants have moved to Mexico. Why? Because they don't have to follow those standards under NAFTA. You can take your plant and move it from Woodstock, Ontario, to Tijuana, Mexico, and produce the same goods you used to produce here in Ontario and sell them back into the Canadian economy, knowing that workers are not protected when it comes to a collective agreement, knowing there are no health and safety laws, knowing that the environment is not being protected in the way it should be etc.

My point is, why have we in North America become so fixated on trying to negotiate trade agreements that basically rush us to the lowest common denominator? There are other models out there that are more successful. If you look at the European Union, it has been quite successful. It has not been without its problems. As we know, a lot of the citizens of various original signatories to the EU—countries like France and Germany and others—were opposed. They were afraid of what it would mean to their national economies. But what they did in order to alleviate those concerns was to say, "Rather than have people join the EU and have everybody rush to the lowest standard within the European Union, let's make it a condition before you can become a member of the EU that you meet the higher standards."

So countries like France and Germany and others that have very strong environmental standards, very strong labour standards, very strong standards when it comes to training etc., were able to set the condition so that if you are Portugal entering the EU, or Greece or Turkey trying to get into the EU, you have to meet those standards, which are quite better than what you have in your own country. As a result of that, I think everybody has benefited.

Workers in countries like France and Germany have not seen the out-migration to the degree that we have seen here in North America—jobs to a lower-wage economy. Some of that has still happened, but not to the same degree that we see here in North America. More importantly, for the workers of those countries and the communities in those countries that are joining the EU, they have seen an increase in their standards, on the environmental side, on the labour side and on the social responsibility side. I think that is a model that we're able to follow.

My problem with this legislation is, on the one hand, I, as a Canadian—let alone as an Ontario legislator—want to see a Canada where workers, professional tradespeople, and professionals are able to use their certifications and work from one end of this country to the other; I don't oppose that. But if you're saying to me that Ontario is going to become the haven for anybody that wants to come and work here and not have to meet our higher standards—because Ontario does have some of the highest standards—then it becomes a problem. Then why have we invested billions of dollars in training tradespeople, foresters, CGAs—and the list goes on—to a higher standard here in Ontario only to allow people with a lower standard to come in and compete for those jobs here in Ontario? I think this is completely a step in the wrong direction—not as far as the intent of being able to enhance labour mobility. I think that's a good idea. But you have to do it with an eye that we try to have a standard across this country that doesn't rush us to the lowest common denominator.

Now, I look at table 1 in the bill on pages 28, 29 and 30 and take a look at some of the acts that are going to be affected by this legislation, and let's just walk through what that means. I look at one of them as being the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, 1994, which my colleague, Howard Hampton, when he was Minister of Natural Resources, brought forward to this House. It has turned out to be one of the better acts that have been passed in a number of years when it comes to how we approach forestry from a stewardship perspective here in Ontario.

Ontario is second to none. If you look at our practices, how we approach harvesting and silviculture in this province, we are heads above others. All you need to do is look at the northern Ontario forests and compare them to forests across this country, and you will see that Ontario is really light years ahead when it comes to how we do forest management.

Just to put it simply for those people who don't know, there used to be a time in this province when forest companies and others who were just trying to cut the trees and sell them to the companies didn't have to have regard for the damage they were causing in the forest and the sustainability of that harvesting practice. Along came the Ontario NDP government, and under my colleague Mr. Hampton, we put in place the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, which set in place a very, very strict system about how we approach the issue of harvesting our crown forests. A forest company that has a sustainable forestry licence has to follow a forest management plan. That forest management plan, simply put, says that if the natural cycle of the forest, by argument, is 90 years, you will have your forest divided up in such a way that when you start cutting in spot A and you finish cutting in spot Z you're going to be in a 90-year cycle, so that you're able to come back to that first block that you cut 90 years ago, but that you have reforested that block that you cut 90 years ago.

That's done in a number of ways. In some cases, it's a question of replanting. Where that's applicable and where

that makes some sense, we replant. In other places, we do careful logging, where you go in and cut the more mature trees and you leave the smaller, younger trees there to continue growing. In some other cases, you do aerial seeding. But the point is, it's all based on the science of what is the best thing when it comes to the sustainability of the forest.

I have great delight when colleagues of mine and friends from southern Ontario come up to northern Ontario and I take them out for a ride in my airplane, and I'll say, "Look out the side of the window. What do you see?"

And they say, "Well, I see trees."

And I say, "Look over the horizon. What do you see?"

"I see trees."

I say, "Can you believe that this has all been cut in the last 20 years?"

"You're kidding? How would I know that?"

"Well, because we do a good job with silviculture, and we make sure that when you cut a tree it's in fact replanted or there's careful logging or there's some mechanism by which you protect the forest."

0930

Now, what does that have to do with this? Well, because it's in the act. Bill 175 is going to make an amendment to the Crown Forest Sustainability Act. The act currently says that those forest management plans and the carrying out of what's in those plans have to be done under the guidance of Ontario foresters and have to be certified by them. We have a standard here in Ontario that is far superior to that of any other foresters across this nation. So we are going to put ourselves in the position of presumably being in a spot where a company can say, "All right, I've got my forest management plan. I'm going to hire you, from another jurisdiction that has a lesser standard. Maybe I pay you fewer bucks, and you certify my plan." Okay. The MNR minister is going to say, "Yeah, but they have to follow the standard." My point is that that forester may not have the same training requirements as an Ontario forester who is trained under the CFSA.

So I'm just saying to the government, why are we rushing to the lower standard? We should be trying to move ourselves to a higher standard and say that across this nation we should have a system by which, if you were a forester, in this case, and you wanted to go to college to become a certified forester—which is a great job to get, if you're able to pass the program, and more importantly to get the job at the end in this particular economy is difficult—there should be a standardization across the country, to the highest standard. So if you are a forester in Ontario or British Columbia or NWT, at the end of the day you are trained according to a similar standard.

I look at other acts that are going to be changed by this particular act. For example, the association of professional engineers, as you know, is a self-regulating organization as well. It's going to mean that other professional engineers from across the country are going to have the

ability to come to Ontario and work and compete with the professional engineers of Ontario, and they may not have necessarily the same training standard that our current professional engineers have in this province. I say again, why do we do that? We have spent billions of dollars to train people in colleges and universities in order to bring them to a standard in Ontario that we can be proud of. We pride ourselves, in this province, on having an excellent university-college system that has trained among the best in this nation, if not in the world in some cases. We are second to none when it comes to many of these certifications. Why in heck would we want to allow ourselves to be put in a position where our professionals, who graduate from our post-secondary institutions, have to compete against people who have a lesser standard? Again, why not follow the model of the European Union and say, "We will work to a standard that is equalized but higher, and one that is able to give us the standards that we need"?

I want to turn your attention to the other two acts that affect me directly—because as some of you may know, I'm an electrician by trade. It's going to affect the Apprenticeship and Certification Act and the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act. My friend Mr. Paul Miller will know this, because he's a certified tradesperson as well. We went through apprenticeship training in order to become certified in this province. That training, again, is one of the higher standards in Canada. I'm not saying there aren't other provinces that have similar training, but I can tell you there are some provinces have much lower training. I can get into stories about that, but that would be for another debate. My point is that what you are going to end up with is a situation where electricians, machinists, tool and die makers, welders, mechanics, carpenters, you name it—those certified trades that are out there are going to be in competition with those of workers who come from outside of the province who may have a trade certification that is less than that of Ontario. So I ask the question: Why did the province of Ontario spend the tens of thousands of dollars it spent to train me as an electrician to come to a certain standard, to attain that standard, and then say all of a sudden, "That training doesn't matter anymore, because we're going to allow a certified electrician from another province who may have a lesser standard to do your job here in Ontario"? Again, why not follow the model that we have in the European common union and work to a higher standard? Let's say that British Columbia was to have the higher standard than Ontario. Should we not want to try to meet British Columbia's standard on whatever certification it might be, or vice versa if it's Ontario? It's to the benefit of workers, it's to the benefit of the economy and it's to the benefit of everybody around.

So I say to my friends in the government, I want to make it very clear that I and other New Democrats are not opposed to trying to find ways to deal with barriers of trade between our provinces. That is a concept that we well understand, and in this day and age we need to find ways to trade east-west, even more so now that we've

done trade agreements such as NAFTA, the free trade agreement. But if you're going to do that, you have to, I think, work to the higher standard.

That's the point that I want to make in this particular debate, and I look forward to comments from members present this morning.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to join the debate. I want to congratulate my colleague from Timmins–James Bay. As always, he contributes very well to debate here, and I often enjoy his ability to bring to this Legislature the unique experiences that they face up north and what they're doing with the logging industry there.

One of the challenges that we in the official opposition find with this piece of legislation is that while the minister here will not accept or revise apprenticeship ratios to one to one, we will be recognizing certification in other provinces in which apprentice-journeyman ratios are one to one. That is something that my colleague from Simcoe North, in particular, has raised several times in this chamber, as has my colleague from Simcoe–Grey, Jim Wilson, who is the critic for this piece of legislation.

It's one of those concerns that we have and one that we're going to continue to push right up until 2011, when we face another election. I think it's something that this McGuinty Liberal government must look at. This, we feel, could put Ontario apprentices at a disadvantage in trying to find skilled trade jobs in this great province.

So I think there is more to be done, not only in this chamber but certainly across the province—how we can get those apprentice-to-journeyman ratios to be equal at one to one, and how we can ensure we are at a competitive advantage when dealing with apprentice-journeyman ratios elsewhere. We don't think that this is adequately addressed, and we'll continue to pursue that.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank my colleague from Timmins–James Bay. It's good to have a fellow tradesman in the caucus who understands the ins and outs of the trades and crafts.

I would also like to bring forth a major issue here about safety and health. Safety and health are always foremost on the list of job sites. I can tell you about several projects in Hamilton that were non-certified-trades built. It has been a nightmare for years, to say the least, with plumbing problems, drywall problems, electrical problems, shorts—all kinds of things that happen in certain buildings. I don't want to name them in particular because I don't want to jeopardize their ability to rent. But the bottom line is, they did have to repair them over the years and bring them up to standards that were far below the acceptable level before.

I feel that if you bring in trades that are not as well trained, you are going to compromise safety and health. There may be stuff inside the walls that even inspectors can't look at because the job's done. They come in at different levels during the job, but sometimes things have

been closed in and boxed in that they can't see and they're assuming that a certified tradesman in Ontario would take pride in his work and do a good job and not cut any corners. But as we know, in a lot of jobs people cut corners to save money and put it in their pocket.

I don't want those types of situations to happen in Ontario. I would like to see Canada-wide certification for all trades, and to be able to move interprovincially with no problem, no questions asked, and without having to write interprovincial tests, because they are qualified in Canada. I think that would be a much better atmosphere.

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

0940

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to engage in this debate for two minutes. We're hearing from the opposition that it's missing this, it's missing that and it's missing the other, and it's not a perfect piece of legislation. Back in 1994, there was the Agreement on Internal Trade signed, and nothing has happened. All the different governments had an opportunity to approach this. They didn't, and here we are today, trying to bridge some of that gap.

I just want to relate this—and I believe I related this to this House once before. In my own riding, actually in my own community that I'm fortunate to represent, there was a doctor from Nova Scotia, I believe, who wanted to come to practise in my riding. One of the biggest challenges was, here's a doctor who's qualified to practise medicine in Canada—in this case, Nova Scotia—but is not allowed to practise in Ontario without going through some major hoops. It created some challenges. As a matter of fact, after a long ordeal—and my office got involved to see how we could expedite this, but there was no way; that doctor didn't come to Ontario, although that's where they preferred to practise and they had some family here in my riding that they wanted to be close to. I think this will bridge that gap.

We hear about a national standard, national licensing. This certainly will open the door to that. We talk about how some professions may be not as qualified. That's why those exemptions are there. We want to make sure that the standards of folks wanting to practise their profession in Ontario are equal to or better than what we have now. If not, then there is an exemption.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to offer a few comments. Listening to the debate by the members in the last few minutes, I think that the most important concern that the bill must address is the fact that we are the first province to offer this kind of mobility. What that means, of course, is that there's nothing compelling other provinces to open their doors in a similar fashion. While there is definitely an advantage to being in a leadership role, in this particular case I'm not sure that you want to be first—not without the opportunity to move in concert with the other provinces.

The second thing is the question of the ratio, as other speakers have raised. As long as Ontario has a three-to-

one ratio for apprentices, this not only puts our young people at a disadvantage in their own province, but certainly not on a level playing field with those from other jurisdictions where there is a one-to-one ratio, and the same thing for areas where there's a significant difference in the level of training for particular groups that is not matched by the other provinces.

These are all very serious issues that the government needs to consider before the passage of the bill, before the proclamation of the bill, to make sure that when we open our doors, it's going to provide the very best for Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Timmins–James Bay, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to thank the various members for their comments, and I just want to quickly say two things. One: My good friend the member from Northumberland—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Gilles Bisson:—Quinte West, thank you—that's why I will never run for the job of Speaker: I never can remember names of the ridings; I know their names and not their ridings—made the point that this would deal with the lack of doctors in our rural communities. I wish it was the case, because when I read the act, nowhere did it say it was going to change the college of physicians, who are the ones who are responsible for certifying doctors in the province of Ontario. What it does say is that there was already a change made in the Regulated Health Professions Act, which was in the Legislature earlier this fall. There are changes there to deal with other health care professionals, such as nurse practitioners and others, but it doesn't deal with the larger issue as far as I know, which is the college of physicians. I would look for some clarification on that.

It also leads me to the point: Even if it did include the physicians, Ontario is known as a jurisdiction that has some of the best training in Canada when it comes to various things, including physicians. There's a good reason why we limit people to practise to an Ontario standard; it's because we have a very good standard here. There are very few countries that you can go to, get your training and then come and practise in Ontario, because the training in Ontario is fairly specific and has a pretty high standard.

We do that for what reason? Patient safety. That's why we do it. We have a public health care system, and we decided some years ago that we need to maintain a higher standard.

To argue that we can lessen that standard by allowing somebody to be trained somewhere else at a lesser standard—and in Canada it's probably a little bit less of an issue but still is an issue. I argue that going to the lowest common denominator is not the way to go; it's about trying to get to the higher standard.

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

Mr. Dave Levac: My engagement on Bill 175 is to try to bring a little bit of history and get us to this point and

then to continue the debate about how this bill could be implemented and whether or not we would be, as we've been doing quite often, having consultations and continuing the debate about having hearings. We will be having hearings, and my understanding is that we will be having public hearings so that deputations can be made—as I've said in this place many times, all bills are fluid—to hope that we put together the best piece of legislation we can.

I want to speak very quickly to my friend from Timmins–James Bay on two points. First, there's his comment about the NDP saying they understand the theory behind what this bill is attempting to do and it is supported by them, and they understood that mobility is an extremely important issue. A couple of the members have spoken about a national approach to this. Consultations have been taking place since 1994. As that has been rolling out, I think it's important to point that out. I'll talk about that in a minute.

The other part that I wanted to make reference to is on the doctors' side. It does include the bill, and it does say that they have to reach the standard. Let's make it quite clear that when we have those foreign-trained professionals in terms of medical on the doctors' side and the dentists' side, they are, by this legislation, demanded to meet that standard. I don't think that we should be saying that's not the case out there. If there's a concern about it, which I've always said is a very legitimate thing to do in this place, you raise it, get an answer and say, "Yes, we now believe that's covered off," and that can be done in two or three ways.

One way it can be done is by going to the minister and getting that clarification through a request from the member's office, which has been done by all members of this place, where you've gone to a minister—and as a matter of fact, I've actually seen it being done in the House, where members will come over and sit down beside the minister to seek clarity and ensure that that's going to happen.

The second way in which that's done is through formal communication with the ministry on an interpretation of the bill.

The third way is through briefings, which take place on an ongoing basis. As an offer, the ministers that I'm aware of continually do that.

What I think is happening is, whether or not the members are asking that question in a legitimate way, they can proceed to do that and get clarity on that. If it's not clarified, then they come with an amendment that could change that direction that's being set.

The advice that I've been receiving, and the note that I received, indicated that in the case of doctors, which has been talked about, they will have to meet the standard that's established in Ontario.

So why has the government introduced labour mobility legislation? First of all, we're not the first. Manitoba has already done it and BC's legislation was produced, and I'm not sure, from the prorogation of the House in British Columbia, whether or not it died.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Was that an NDP government in Manitoba?

Mr. Dave Levac: Yes, in Manitoba. But in terms of being the first, we're not the first. Manitoba has already passed legislation. BC has already introduced it, and I think the bill was ready to be voted on, but they shut the House down.

This started in 1994. Before 1994, we had a tremendous problem in our country, and I don't think anyone would stand to say that they did not recognize that. We had a tremendous problem. There was no mobility. As a matter of fact, it was almost impossible to get jobs in other provinces. In 1994, the AIT, which is the Agreement on Internal Trade, at a national level, with all ministers and all those responsible for internal trade from whatever department they came from in the province that they represented, came together—so the territories, the provinces and the federal government of the day—to strengthen the competitiveness of the Canadian economy. That was the focal point. The focal point was to ensure that we stopped working against ourselves so that we had an opportunity across the breadth of our country to have the economic engine chug along.

0950

That's precisely what's happening with this piece of legislation. This piece of legislation is to say that that mobility is an important piece of the puzzle for our economic prosperity. That's why this piece of legislation is being introduced.

Contrary to some of the arguments that have been laid out, I am not convinced that this will be a race to the bottom. I am convinced it's the opposite: This will be a race to the top. Why? Because the government, our Ontario government, supports the red seal program as the model of labour mobility and common interprovincial standards for skilled trades, and this commitment is explicit in the proposed Ontario Labour Mobility Act, Bill 175. The red seal endorsement provides tradespersons with a competitive hiring advantage, because if they are red-seal-approved, it moves from province to province, from territory to territory, across the breadth of the country, as agreed upon in 1994.

That tells me that that discussion in 1994 is an extension—it found its way through to Manitoba, to BC and now Ontario. I think—this is a prediction, so you can hold me to it—we will be seeing these types of legislation pop up right across the breadth of the country.

We are in economic times that require us to look at all avenues possible to improve our economy and to land on our feet running when the economy does the uptick. That's exactly what the rest of the world is doing. We should not be left behind by not having legislation in place that allows for even our own mobility, to support our own country inside our provincial territories.

While many tradespersons were assured recognition for their qualifications from one province or territory to another through the interprovincial standards red seal program, workers in regulated professions continued to face barriers when moving between Canadian jurisdictions. That was the recognized reason for the 1994 accord. So what are we doing today? Well, if passed, this

bill, Bill 175, would successfully support full labour mobility and allow more professionals and skilled workers across Canada to work in Ontario.

I think there's another piece to this that allows each of the provinces to design a bill that would be successfully supportive of the idea that there are professionals within our own country. It's not necessary for us to go looking to Europe or the United States. We should at least look into our own country to invite them to come and practise their trade in Ontario.

For us not to proceed with this type of legislation would be at our own peril, because as the economy moves up and recovers from this worldwide catastrophe, we need to be able to say to those people in Canada who have those skilled trades that we need, "Please come on board, because our mobility will respect that," and, importantly, there will still be a way in which we can raise the bar on expected standards of behaviour and standards of practice.

By recognizing the rights of the workers to full labour mobility, the proposed Ontario Labour Mobility Act would eliminate the delays involved in certifying workers. Anybody who has gone through the process, and anyone here who has heard those stories at their constituency offices about "I've been putting in for my ticket and it's been taking me forever. I've had to take job X, Y and Z instead of job A, B and C"—that part is being dealt with by the bill as well. So the time it takes on task to get that skill recognized in the province of Ontario will be expedited. It will be turned into a faster process.

That knowledge alone will permeate across the country to those skilled trades organizations that have national scope, so they would be able to communicate to their membership across the country that the time which it's going to take you to get your licence has been shrunk in Ontario. That, to me, is a communications issue that those organizations and this province would undertake to ensure that people realize that Ontario's doors are open for business on the skilled trades side.

It provides all Canadians with the freedom to work where they choose and where opportunities exist. As we start to move the economic engine again, people will be realizing, "I'm going to move to Ontario, because their economic engine is moving and chugging again." When that takes place, the word gets out, as it has in our history. Where the west was a place to go, where the economy was booming, people moved. Where now it's going to be rejigged and restarted in Ontario, we want to have the table set so that when they hear about that economic upstart, they will be joining us because, number one, we have a labour mobility act; number two, it's respective of all those skilled trades we are talking about; and number three, the doors are open in terms of how fast it takes you to get certified and qualified to perform those tasks in Ontario.

Having said that, one of the things I think we also need to review is the commitment by the Council of the Federation in their meeting of July 2008, where all provincial and territorial governments agreed to amend

chapter 7 of the mobility act of the AIT, the Agreement on Internal Trade, by January 2009, and to implement those amendments so that full labour mobility would exist for workers in regulated occupations by August of this year. Hence Manitoba's movement, British Columbia's movement, and now this movement that allows us to fulfill our agreement from 2008, the grandfather being 1999, where that agreement first was struck.

So please just take a few seconds to look back and ask yourself—before 1994, for those people who were around at the time and during the skilled trades issues particularly. I defer to my friend from Prescott and his knowledge of how it worked in mobility between Quebec and Ontario. When you take that, complicated by adding the rest of the provinces and the territories, you would see pre-1994 as a quagmire of mess for the transportation of those individuals trying to earn a living for their families. So then 1994 comes along and we finally get our act together, where the federal government and all the territories and provinces come together to say, “You know what? It's time for us to put this silliness away and coordinate this on a national level.”

The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek had made the comment about it at a national level. I don't disagree; I think that's one of the spots where we need to continue to push to ensure that when we do this mobility discussion, it's in concert with the agreements that already exist and the improvements that were agreed upon in 2008. Now that it's starting to happen, we are starting to see the types of legislation here that allow for that to be completed by August 2009, which we made a commitment to do.

In addition to this commitment, governments agreed to amend chapter 17, the dispute-resolution procedures at the AIT, to strengthen the dispute resolution provisions for government-to-government disputes over internal trade, including those related to labour mobility.

The other piece of this that's inside this legislation is to allow us to continue to take those barriers down and at least come to the table to discuss them with a dispute mechanism that allows us to actually put our concerns on the table, and have it done in a way that one doesn't walk away from the table as the loser and the other ends up being the winner. This is about the mobility of labour and any other intertrade mechanisms that show that the unity of our provinces and our country is strong enough to deal with trade.

One of the things that came up in a lot of conversations I had when I was talking about this particular topic to a lot of the companies out there was, if Europe can do it, if the United States can do it, why can't Canada do it? This nation was built on the capacity for us to go from coast to coast to coast, not only in the transportation issue historically, but also in the mobility of our workers across the breadth of this country.

There's a little bit of internal pride that should be recognized here. If we're not going to be able to conform to those issues, the business world, the industrial world, the world of work, will leave us behind and go to those

jurisdictions that have the capacity to show their citizenry that they can move anywhere they want.

The European Union is getting it. The European Union is beginning to recognize that that mobility strengthens each piece of that union. In the United States, from state to state to state, they too have been grappling with this problem. But because they have been able to start to break those barriers down inside their own country, they are keeping that employment, and each state, each piece, becomes stronger for it. We should not be afraid of the very same theory that has already been proven to be successful. So what we should be doing is working collectively together to find out what is going to make us stronger in the competition in the global world and global economy and also a certain amount of pride that we have been able, inside our own sandbox, to get along. Therein lies the rub. This piece of legislation isn't punitive. This piece of legislation is enabling, which allows us to do exactly what we all know in our hearts is something we should be able to do.

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Traditionally, Canadians have not been terribly mobile. We've now gotten out of that mentality and started to shift to the capacity that, “Inside of my country, I can move from Vancouver, British Columbia to Toronto, Ontario, or Brantford, Ontario, or Thunder Bay, Ontario, or Montreal, Quebec, and feel that I'm still part of this whole big piece and making each one of it stronger as I do that.” Instead, if we continue to not eliminate these barriers, what we have seen in the past—and I'm hoping that this bill will help move towards eliminating it—is all of that talent moving out of the country altogether and moving to the United States or shifting to Europe, and saying, “We're going to take these skills and move them there.” Instead, we should be opening the door and making a loud proclamation: “It's moving to us.” That's the national perspective.

From an Ontario perspective, by doing what we're doing, I'm convinced that what we've established is the message out there—and the messaging is very important—that we are open for business and if you have those skilled trades, please come on in.

There has been a voice of concern as to whether or not we are racing to the bottom. As I said earlier, I don't subscribe to that thinking. I tried to give evidence to one of the other concerns that was raised about doctors. I've been informed by the parliamentary assistant that that's not the case. As a matter of fact, that's protected inside of that. That makes sense to me, and it makes sense to me that we are going to be able to start to attract those people with those skills and qualities that are needed inside our businesses to continue that economic engine that is beginning to fire. Once firing on all pistons, we are going to be seen landing on our feet and running to ensure that when that mobility is established, they would come to Ontario when that new manufacturing economic engine begins to renew again. That would be my hope.

There are major elements of the proposed legislation that include the labour mobility code, which does talk

about the regulatory authorities in Ontario which govern how they treat the applications of individuals already certified in the same occupation by a regulatory authority in other provinces and other territories. The proposed code sets out a rule that a worker certified in an occupation in one province or territory would be certified in the same occupation in another province or territory without training, experience, examinations or assessments—again, the process of how fast it is for them to be certified to work in Ontario.

It would prohibit residency in Ontario as a condition for certification, which means the transportability of individuals—they don't have to live here in Ontario to apply that trade. It provides them with an opportunity to fall in love with Ontario, because once they're here, they'll recognize that, "I'm a tradesperson from New Brunswick or British Columbia. I'm applying for a big job here in Ontario. I kind of like it here." They can pick up roots and move here. As I said earlier, historically, we have had a habit of saying we don't like to be mobile. In the United States, on the other hand, they've got this unbelievable history of moving from state to state because they still believe that they're working in the United States and that's where their pride hangs. I think we should be modelling after that, which allows us to move from province to province to territory to territory. I hope that this bill would help spark that a little bit.

The regulatory stream is established quite clearly in this bill, authorizing changes to certification practices. That's another item that the bill does.

I'm running short on time and I've got five or six things to review but I'll try to get them done in a short time.

Line minister oversight: There's oversight by the minister to ensure that if there are some glitches in how this is being interpreted, the minister has the authority to move in and say, "This is what the implication was, this is what we are hoping to do, and that's what's going to happen."

Enforcement of the provisions: There are administrative penalties, there's recovery if a penalty is imposed on Ontario. There are consequential amendments required to other acts in order for us to make this work. There are ways in which this piece of legislation has been issued.

One of the things I want to make sure I cover before my time finishes is to ensure once again that inside the consultation—this was national in scope with other provinces and other territories. The second component to that was taking the 1994 agreement and making sure that by July 2008 we did a review. Now we have what we see this legislation as: a continuation of a consultation that has been taking place since 1994. From 1994 we now have this. There's nobody who doesn't know that this is a topic that has been discussed and that this is a topic that has had input from not only stakeholders in Ontario but stakeholders right across the country. From 1994 to now, we have had this capacity to put a bill together.

The good news is it will still go to committee and seek stakeholder comments and input on any of the other

pieces of the legislation they believe would be better improved if we offered those amendments.

One last comment that I will leave us with is I honestly do believe in my heart of hearts that this type of mobility legislation is accepted by all members. It depends on how it's interpreted by some as to whether they will be voting in favour or not.

I understand how the process works; I appreciate that. But something that I think is not good for us is to not pass legislation by the end of our agreement of 2008 that simply says we want to have labour mobility in the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to compliment the member from Brant. I think he gave a very fair and informed impression and interpretation of the legislation, and I commend him for that. I would like to be clear about that. But what we in the opposition are not going to agree with is we would like to strengthen certain provisions. Again, you're clarifying, as you're a former educator, that we don't want to have lower standards in Ontario. As you say, labour mobility—global mobility in the global economy—is an important objective, if you will. Ontario, as the largest province, should be setting the pace.

We have some regional issues; I'll leave it at that without getting into too much confrontation. But I can say he's right. Even when I was working in employment—in fact, I was in personnel, involved with General Motors, and I know the issue of trying to get visas between different countries and getting working permits. I can tell you globally—I have a son-in-law who's a securities lawyer. He worked for Cassels Brock here in Toronto and was recruited. Now he's in England; he had to write the British bar. It's not unique to us, but it is a global phenomenon. I commend you because I believe Ontario should take the lead, but at the same time, it should not lower standards.

Therein lies the real dilemma. We have internally, in Canada, different rules for different things. I've pointed out a couple. CAs, chartered accountants, would be one. Another one would be opticians, which I know to be a bit of an issue.

There are provisions—and this is what should be clearer here—in the third section. The following exemptions in the exemptions section set out provisions, and if you see it, it also says it may refuse to certify at the end of the process. It may require people to post bonds, have insurance and undergo other kinds of checks for ability etc.

I commend you for your comments. We would like to support it, but we need to be strengthening it.

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: In the two minutes I have, I want to try to make sense of this for people who might be watching or listening at home. I think most people across Ontario today, particularly once you get outside of the greater Toronto area, would say that Ontario is in deep

economic trouble. I know in my part of Ontario, the unemployment rate in the forest sector continues to grow. The mining sector is struggling. The general economy across the north is in trouble. I know if you go to Windsor or Chatham or St. Thomas or London or Oshawa, the auto sector is in trouble. I just read today that in Hamilton, more children are falling into poverty, and the unemployment rate continues to grow. This suggests to me that there are very serious economic problems—people are having trouble paying the hydro bill, people are having trouble paying the heating bill, people are having trouble paying for food to put on the table. More people than ever before are being forced to go to food banks to try to feed themselves and their children. I look at this and I say, “Boy, we’ve got some serious troubles here.”

1010

Then I look at this bill and the amount of time the government is spending on this bill. I’m trying to relate: How does this bill do anything for somebody who is unemployed in northern Ontario? How does it do anything for somebody who is unemployed in Brantford or St. Thomas or London or Chatham or Windsor or Oshawa or Hamilton? I’m having real trouble making the connection, and I think people across Ontario are having real trouble making the connection. People feel we’re in serious economic trouble, and they want some response from this government. I’m sorry, this bill doesn’t do it.

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

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: First of all, I want to compliment the member from Brant, especially the fact that he refers to the contents of the bill and also the importance of the bill.

I would say that this is one of the most important bills that the McGuinty government has said that it would bring to the attention of the people—one of the most important bills after the HST bill. Why am I saying that? Because the HST would create, we say, over 600,000 jobs. And we know, at the present time, that we are looking for investors, we are looking for people to create jobs, and we will have to be able to compete with other countries.

When I looked at the comments brought forward by the member from Timmins–James Bay, when he referred to the standards of labour mobility in this province, it’s very clear, on page 27, section 35 of the bill, section 17 of the act, that it requires the certification.

I remember when we debated Bill 60 at the time, which was my bill on construction labour mobility. It took 10 years before we finally got the province of Quebec to agree, and we signed the agreement on June 2, 2006. Let me tell you, we said all along that whatever is required here in Ontario, the people coming in from Quebec had to respect our standards. It was the same thing for us if we wanted to go to Quebec: We had to respect the standards that they had in place.

But, today, this bill will give people living on the border of other provinces the chance to keep working.

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

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: In principle, this bill is hard to disagree with. And I agree that the member from Brant made some very good comments today. I just have some issues, and that is, whether or not we are creating a level playing field for our own Ontario workers.

One of those professions that are concerned is the College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario. They have some real concerns that they have to, without question, accept folks from other provinces and not ask them about their qualifications and whether or not their qualifications meet the standards that this province has set and, I think, that all audiologists in this province live by. I think that that begins to rock the boat a little bit. There’s concern that this same thing will happen in other professions.

Those wrinkles need to be ironed out, but they need to be ironed out publicly, not in regulation, where nobody knows what happens until someone emerges from a closed room and says, “Here. Here’s what you have to live with.” So we need to understand how this works in protecting the professions that have set standards and live by standards in the province of Ontario now.

I think it would behoove the government to look at those things, iron out those wrinkles, but do it publicly, before the bill goes to regulation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member from Brant, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Dave Levac: I do very much thank the members from Durham, Kenora–Rainy River, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell and Burlington for their measured comments. I appreciate the level of debate. That’s exactly what we should be entering into on an ongoing basis, because this is talking about job, jobs, jobs, jobs, and I think there’s a recognition of that.

As for regulatory streams that were mentioned by the member for Burlington, all bills carry regulatory streams. All bills within the bills that I’m referencing, in terms of the professions themselves, have actually in some cases asked for it to be dealt with in regulation. I’m not excusing the member’s concern but I will come back to it and say that I hope that that comes out in hearings and that we do get staff to listen carefully to the concerns that are being raised.

The member from Durham brought up a very important point on an international scope. I would hope—and I have faith in this bill—that we may be seeing the repatriation of Ontarians, and not just from the rest of Canada. When they recognize that that mobility is there, we will start seeing a repatriation of some of those with those skilled trades. I think that’s the possibility of this piece of legislation.

As for the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, we should be thanking him for all of the work that he’s been doing on mobility between Quebec and Ontario. He started the ball rolling quite some time ago, even before I got here. I want to thank him for his tireless efforts to ensure that our ability to move from border to border is recognized.

I want to thank all of them. The member for Kenora–Rainy River made the reference that this bill has no implication whatsoever. I disagree with him vehemently. I think this is a bill that would increase the opportunities for jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs. I think he knows that. I don't know whether or not he wants to speak against the bill or whether or not he's basically saying, "Continue looking for jobs," which this bill will do.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 8, this House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1017 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to introduce the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance, who will be here in the Legislature later on today, including Réjean Picard, Andy Kuyvenhoven and Len Roozen. I encourage all members to attend their reception in the dining room later this afternoon.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: It's my pleasure today to introduce the Wolfe family. Ann and David and their daughter Maggie are here in the members' gallery. They are the parents and family of Samuel Wolfe, who is our lead page today. They're all from the great city of North Bay. We're delighted to have them.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On behalf of my page, Vanessa Van Decker, I would like to introduce two guests of hers and ours in the Legislature: her grandmother Stella Madigan and her aunt Debbie Madigan, who will be joining us for the proceedings today.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature, from Nanticoke, Lake Erie steel, United Steelworkers Local 8782, president Bill Ferguson and some of the people with him: Ron Beaver; Greg Stallwood; Clayton Mereweather; Colleen Hall; Enzo Volpini; John Che-chak; Bob Smith; Bob Martin; Gord Parrington; Mike Phibbs; Kim Nanticoke; Denise Hicks; Mark Talbot; Young Mellenbacher; Don Dawson; Jeff Martindale; Mark Brock; Phil McCulla; Rob Clark; Jim Swing; Jim Armstrong; Cliff Homer; Bryan Kennedy; Ron Schmidt; Branco Jagodic; Gary Wills; Scott Jenereaux; Ron Maws; Emma Stephens; Patrick Verri; Sharon Hardwick; Paul Lacy—it's coming to an end, Speaker—Robin Hichon; Tom Jones; Larry Porrit; Dave Sinden; Ted Payne; Gary Rosehart; Ron Van Den Eckout; Keith Spours; Vinnie Hoskins; Bruce Brown; Rob Luke; Jerry Dejonge; Dave Stone; and Graham Carroll.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'd like to introduce guests of the page from my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East, Melissa Bray: her mother, Yvonne Yen; her father, Randy Bray; her brother Nicholas Bray; her aunt Grace Kwan; and her great-aunt Margaret Kwan. They are in the members' gallery.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: We are about to be joined momentarily by three members from my community, three

wonderful women who have given countless volunteer service hours, particularly to York Central Hospital: Nancy Cutler and Enid Mills from Richmond Hill, and Ellen Hoffman from the township of King.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to welcome the parliamentary internship program interns from Ottawa, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I trust the members will demonstrate the contrast between this Legislature and the House of Commons today. They are José Charlebois, John-Michael McColl, Alison Smith, Nathaniel Lowbeer-Lewis, Allison O'Beirne, Anna Hopkins, Brent Jolly, Janique Dubois, Leah Stokes and Vanessa Cotric. Welcome all to Queen's Park today.

M. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you'll allow me to indulge. À nos collègues qui sont ici d'Ottawa, c'est pour leur laisser savoir qu'on peut tout faire en français ici aussi.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Minister of Finance. November marks the one-year anniversary of the McGuinty Liberals' transforming Ontario from the economic engine of Confederation into a have-not province. Just yesterday we saw two new indicators that Ontario's economic prospects continue to slip under Dalton McGuinty: EI applications are up 83% over last year, and now Saskatchewan has surpassed Ontario as the second-wealthiest province in Canada.

Minister, according to your so-called "plan," how many more years will Ontario remain a have-not province?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The challenges of the global economy have affected all of North America; they have affected much of the world. I would submit to the member opposite that, in fact, when one looks at what has happened to Alberta, British Columbia and others in Canada, the challenges we're facing, while enormous—we are certainly not alone in this.

With respect to equalization, with respect to a variety of other factors, I would point out that Mr. Orr, in the commentary he had in his report, attributed a number of the challenges that our manufacturing sector is facing particularly to the value of the dollar. In fact, this decline that he—and by the way, he is not saying it has happened; he is projecting it could happen, and there's a very big difference. All of these factors impact. That's why it's important to take bold steps. That's why it's important—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, obviously, these factors don't seem to be hampering Saskatchewan.

Quite frankly, Dalton McGuinty's "tax more, spend more, regulate more" policies have turned Ontario into a

have-not province receiving equalization payments for the first time in our history.

Minister, you told Ontario families that the so-called health tax would be good for them. You told businesses that your business tax increases would be good for the economy. Now you're telling Ontario families that your sales tax on everything is going to be good for them, too. Minister, why is it the only solution the McGuinty government ever has for our economy is simply to increase taxes more and more?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government is cutting taxes over the next year. That member and his party, by their tactics, are trying to block a large tax cut for all Ontarians, to kick in on January 1, in a mere five weeks.

There is no doubt that there are enormous challenges in the global economy. In the case of Saskatchewan, they have the good fortune to rely heavily on potash. The member will know that the commodity prices do impact some provinces; they don't impact ours. This calls upon government to take bold and decisive steps, to face the truth, to bring forward plans that will create jobs and will help people transition to that new economy.

We intend to proceed with the tax-cut package we put forward. People will see their first tax cuts on January 1, 2010, unless that member and his party continue to try to—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Only the McGuinty government could call lowering a tax rate that you jacked up in the first place a tax cut.

In fact, Minister, you know full well that in your catastrophic first budget you increased taxes through the roof to make Ontario among the most uncompetitive jurisdictions in which to open up a new business.

The reality is the McGuinty government has been so distracted by scandals that they've lost track of the basics, like jobs and the economy, and sadly, just like the McGuinty government is collecting welfare payments from the federal government through equalization, the provincial welfare rolls have swelled as a result. Some 68,000 more people are now on the welfare rolls of our province since Ontario became a have-not province.

To date, Minister, you've collected \$347 million in welfare payments from the federal government. What did you do with the money? Did it go to eHealth or the Windsor—

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

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I remind the member opposite that Ontario paid itself because of a system that the federal government refuses to fix, and I can cite reference after reference after reference with respect to that.

The one thing the Leader of the Opposition hasn't said is what he would do.

We are faced with a global economic challenge.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will come to order, please.

Minister?

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Hon. Dwight Duncan: We are faced with a global economic challenge. We have put forward a package of tax reforms that will lower the overall tax burden for 93% of Ontarians. Mr. Hudak and his party used to say they supported the HST; now they say they don't support the HST. Mr. Hudak and his party pretend to have answers when all they have is empty rhetoric and loud responses.

We remain committed to this. We remain committed to a better and brighter future for all Ontarians. We remain committed to creating jobs for those Ontarians that lost their—

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

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the finance minister: The backroom HST deal that you signed locks the province into your tax grab until 2015, according to the terms that are buried in the fine print on page 69. Minister, according to the agreement that you yourself signed, what is the earliest date when everyday necessities like home heating fuel could be exempted from your HST sales tax grab?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: That top-secret deal is right here, line by line, signed by Jim Flaherty—

Interjection: Not a Magna budget.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: "Not a Magna budget," my colleague says.

It's very simple, Mr. Hudak. Read it; read pages 69 and 70. You can in fact get out of the deal; you just have to give the \$4.3 billion back to the federal government. Now, the member opposite laughs—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They said the deal couldn't be changed. In fact, we are proud to work with Mr. Flaherty, we are proud to work with Mr. Baird, with Mr. Clement, who at least have been consistent in their view on the harmonized sales tax. That's why they signed the deal: because they, like us, know that in spite of the political challenges associated with this, it is absolutely essential that we do everything we can—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Now we understand from the finance minister that Ontario can get out of the deal only if they pay the \$4.3 billion that they're giving away to taxpayers with a bribe with their own money. If that is what passes for deep economic thinking among the Liberals, no wonder Ontario has become a have-not province.

There you have it. What the finance minister says, the Premier would not. You have signed a \$4.3-billion poison pill. You didn't run on this greedy tax grab in the last election campaign. You're afraid to go out to get the public's support for your HST sales tax grab, and now we

find out that if the government tries to get out of your bad deal we have to pay a fine of \$4.3 billion.

Taxpayers want to know: Why did Dalton McGuinty lock taxpayers into such a bad deal?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Four point three billion dollars—some poison, some pill.

Let me just ask the Leader of the Opposition, then, why is it he said, on March 24 this year—this is what the now Leader of the Opposition said: “We understand how that (single sales tax) can help the economy.” That’s Tim Hudak on March 24. A month later at the Economic Club of Toronto here’s what he says: “I agree that there’s little sense in allowing two separate governments”—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I’m finding it extremely difficult to hear both the question and the answer. I find it a little challenging when government and opposition members are shouting down their own questions.

Minister.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This is Tim Hudak: “I agree that there’s little sense in allowing two separate governments to apply two separate taxes and policies and collect two separate groups of sales taxes.” One day, he says one thing, and the next day he says another thing—no ideas and no plan for the future. We’re about creating jobs for all Ontarians to get this economy back to where it should—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: I’m going to have to check Hansard, but did the minister just say, “\$4.3 billion—some poison, some pill”? You’re darn right that’s a massive poison pill. That’s a lot of money to the working families in the province of Ontario, and it shows how deeply out of touch—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Government members will come to order—and the members from Cambridge and Renfrew.

Please continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: It shows how deeply out of touch the Dalton McGuinty government has become after six years in office. Not content to raise taxes on Ontario families in 2010, Premier McGuinty now wants to raise taxes all the way to 2015.

Premier McGuinty had the gall to say, “I’m not going to make it easier for the opposition to undo a deal I’m profoundly proud of.”

I say to the Minister of Finance, if you’re so proud of your \$4.3-billion poison pill, why did you bury it in the depths of an 80-page secret agreement?

Interjection.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Yes, I think the first time we mentioned it was on page 3 or 4 of the budget last March, so this is nothing hidden. In fact, it’s been agreed to by two governments. It will be debated in the federal House as well.

Let me credit the member opposite. He’s absolutely right: It is a lot of money for taxpayers. That’s why it

makes the deal possible. That’s why we’re able to cut taxes. That’s why we’re able to ease them into the new HST. Because the Premier is right: This is the right plan. It will create some 600,000 net new jobs, increase capital investment, and increase incomes for families. It’s the right—

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

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, New Democrats wrote to the government House leader indicating our willingness to support extending the legislative session to continue debate on the government’s tax plan, but in exchange, the government must agree to at least five days of public hearings across Ontario.

My question is a simple one: Will the government agree to this?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government is continuing to sit; we’re continuing to debate this issue in the House. We have hosted more than 160 sessions across the province, including in opposition members’ ridings—I’ve done those myself and taken questions. We will continue to work to get this package through the Legislature. It’s had a lot of debate and a lot of discussion—more than 33 hours of debate in this House, which is an extraordinary amount of time.

It’s the right package. It’s about jobs and a brighter future for more Ontarians.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The finance minister is right: This government continues to consult, but in backrooms and at Liberal fundraisers. But everyday Ontarians, like the dozens of steelworkers that are here today in the chamber, are being shut out.

Their voices, in fact, are summed up by Jacqueline DeRoche of Exeter, who says this: “Don’t put more of a tax burden on those that are just trying to make ends meet”; and pensioner Mary Jan Lyle, who writes this: “What happens when folks like me stop shopping because we can’t afford the extra tax?”

Why is this government so afraid to hear from people like Jacqueline, like Mary, and the workers who are here today in our gallery?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We always welcome guests to the Legislature, and as much as you may desire to participate in the proceedings, you can’t. That includes applauding or any other means.

Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: In fact, we meet with organized labour all of the time. Just recently, I met with the outgoing president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. The day after tomorrow, I believe, I’m meeting with the secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Labour Congress. My hope is that the incoming president of the Canadian Labour Congress will be there.

1050

Hugh Mackenzie did some wonderful work for the Steelworkers—and I believe he came up through the

Steelworkers. He says that this tax package is the right tax package for Ontario.

In addition, Jim Stanford, the CAW economist, is on my economic advisory committee. He peer-reviewed the work by Mr. Mintz and supported the principles that are outlined in that, that this is a job creation project that will help our manufacturing sector, help those workers in that sector, help the forestry sector and help those workers, along with many others across the province.

It's the right policy, it's the right plan, and I will continue to meet with organized labour on this and any other issue they want to talk about.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families are feeling the pinch, and what they tell me they want is their government to listen to them.

Canadian Business magazine's annual survey of the wealthy reports that Ontario's billionaires are richer than ever, increasing their wealth in the midst of this recession. They're being heard at Liberal fundraisers and backroom meetings.

At the same time, on the other side of the coin, Statistics Canada reports that 22,000 more Ontarians claimed employment insurance this month—an increase of 83% since last year. The government will make their lives even more expensive, but they don't even get a voice.

My question is this: Why is the government refusing to hold hearings so that these people can be heard?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member for Hamilton Centre conveniently forgets a couple of factors about our tax package: We are cutting taxes for low-income Ontarians, and that is why a variety of anti-poverty groups, labour economists and others have endorsed the package. The member opposite forgets to mention that 90,000 low-income Ontarians will come off the tax rolls on January 1, if only she and her party would allow this bill to pass. They're trying to have it both ways. NDP increasingly stands for "never done pandering." You've got to look at the whole package. You've got to acknowledge what Hugh Mackenzie, what the Daily Bread Food Bank, what anti-poverty groups have advocated: that this tax package is indeed good for lower-income Ontarians; it's good for middle-income Ontarians; it's good for—

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

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm proud to be a New Democrat—the only political party that's consistent across this country on this nasty tax.

My next question is also to the Acting Premier. The arrogant McGuinty Liberal government expects Ontarians to simply shut up and accept their unfair tax scheme, but this government can't even get a commitment from their federal Liberal caucus.

My question is a simple one: Will the McGuinty government proceed with harmonization if the minority

Parliament in Ottawa doesn't approve the federal government's transition funding of \$4.3 billion?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The policy we have put forward is the right policy for Ontario. It will create some 600,000 net new jobs; it will lower taxes, particularly for Ontarians of more modest means. The future of this province, the future of British Columbia—that's why British Columbia decided to harmonize, because, as the finance minister and the Premier of British Columbia said, they will lose competitive advantage to Ontario if they don't. Four other provinces have harmonized.

We believe this is the right policy that will create jobs. It will help this economy get through a very difficult and challenging period of time.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Liberals in Ottawa have been asked repeatedly, and they won't commit to funding the McGuinty government's unfair tax scheme. In a recent by-election, in fact, the federal Liberals campaigned against harmonization as "the wrong thing to do."

This government says it has 4.3 billion reasons to actually do this, but the minority Parliament hasn't signed the cheque yet. So my question is this: Will the government abandon harmonization if the minority Parliament does not approve the transition funding?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The policy we put forward in the March budget is the right policy for Ontario's future. It is about jobs, it is about jobs in Ontario, it is about jobs for those people who have suffered the effects of the global economic downturn. We've put together a package that will build on the strengths of this economy, that is being recognized by economists on both sides of the spectrum, on the left and on the right; by anti-poverty groups; by business groups; and, by the way, endorsed by many Ontarians who I have spoken to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Perhaps the member from Trinity–Spadina and the Minister of Culture can continue their conversation outside, because you are interrupting the proceedings of the House.

Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This package is the right package for Ontario's future. I believe the government and Parliament of Canada will honour any deal they sign and treat Ontario the way that Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Quebec have been treated.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The finance minister's new best friends in the Harper Conservative caucus are running away from the harmonization scheme. The finance minister's—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm sure the government members want the Minister of Finance to be able to hear the question so that he can provide the answer. I would just ask that the government members please come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Peterborough.

Please continue.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The finance minister's own federal cousins do not support harmonization. If this unfair tax is such a wonderful idea, why does the government even need \$4.3 billion in bribes to make it a reality? If it's such a great deal, they shouldn't need the bribes. What happened?

My question, yet again—and I haven't heard an answer to it yet—is this: What happens if Parliament simply does not mail the cheque?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I'm not going to debate the machinations of the federal House. I do note that the NDP are currently supporting the Harper Conservative government in the federal House. Those alliances do tend to change from time to time.

What I know is this: that in fact, our plan will create some 600,000 net new jobs for Ontario, it will raise incomes for Ontario, it will accelerate capital investment. It represents the right course of action to pursue. More than 130 other governments in the world have a value-added sales tax. Four other provinces have done it; one, since we announced, has announced they are doing it. It is the right policy for these times. It's about jobs; it's about a brighter future for Ontario families.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: My question is for the Minister of Health. I was at the public accounts committee hearings looking into the eHealth scandal. I couldn't believe it when I heard eHealth CEO Rita Burak say that she got a legal opinion about evidence of—her quote—“inappropriate practices” because she thought they were criminal.

Minister, which consultants and individuals committed the inappropriate practices that Rita thought were criminal?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Following yesterday's question, I did investigate more what this was about, and we have actually released copies of the legal opinion that the chair of eHealth got in response to the Auditor General's report. She was showing responsibility and took the Auditor General's report seriously enough to seek the legal opinions, which found that in fact there was nothing to pursue with the allegations that had been made.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: The minister seems to have forgotten that two ministers, the chair and the CEO of eHealth were dumped because of a billion-dollar boondoggle.

The McGuinty Liberals have shut down public accounts committee hearings into the eHealth scandal, just as Ms. Burak said she saw enough evidence of criminal activity to get a legal opinion. John McKinley was revealed to be the one who blocked the auditor's investigation and Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford implicated Sacha Bhatia of the Premier's office in the eHealth affair.

There are still a number of unanswered questions. If the minister cannot answer enough questions about eHealth, will the McGuinty Liberals agree to public hearings on the eHealth scandal?

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I understand that the opposition wants to continue with this. We are committed to moving ahead with the implementation of the very important initiatives contained in eHealth. I do want to—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's not helpful from the member from Lanark, and it's not helpful hearing the voice of the Minister of Transportation.

Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do say that I have to take great exception to the characterization of the work at eHealth as a billion-dollar boondoggle. That is not what the auditor has said. The auditor has explicitly said that there has been tremendous progress made.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me just read from the conclusion of the legal opinion that was sought: “For these reasons”—and they outline the reasons—“in our opinion the facts set out in the Auditor General's report do not provide evidence of a criminal offence.” That is the conclusion that we got. This is available to all members of the public accounts committee, all members of Ontario.

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, you will know that Payukotayno child services, as a result of your want not to fund that agency, as other agencies across this province, is about to lay off the workers. You know that Centre Jeanne Sauvé, in Kapuskasing, finds itself in the same position. Come January, if something doesn't happen, they will have extreme difficulty paying the bills.

I understand from discussions I've had with various people in children and youth services that one of the things that you are contemplating is to merge Payukotayno, which is a First Nations child protection agency, and possibly—who knows?—even Centre Jeanne Sauvé into larger organizations that may not be First Nations. Is that true? Would you deny or—

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

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me be clear that we are absolutely committed to providing improved services for aboriginal children and youth on and off reserve to help them reach their full potential. We believe that wherever possible, aboriginal children in need of protection should be cared for in ways that recognize their culture and traditions.

We are the government that has designated more aboriginal children's aid societies, and we ended the previous government's moratorium on new CASs.

As I have said, we are working very closely with the leadership of all of these agencies, which have executive directors and board governance structures, working with them to find a pathway forward to sustainability. We work daily. We have folks on-site in Moosonee to work with the agency, and we continue to strive to find a pathway forward. But I will assure the member that no child will be put at risk in this province as we work toward that—

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The question I asked you was this: There are people within children and youth services who are saying to me and to others in those agencies that your ministry has been talking to other agencies out there about possibly taking Payukotayno, which is a First Nation child protection service, and putting it into a non-native organization.

That is serious for two reasons: One is the issue of child protection services for those kids on the James Bay, but also the issue of the autonomy of First Nations to be able to deliver their own services.

I want you, in this House, to confirm or deny that you're planning to merge agencies such as Payukotayno into larger child protection agencies.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Let me be clear and reiterate my respect for the leadership of those in aboriginal communities who seek to care for their children. We are working with the Chiefs of Ontario. I'm working with my colleague the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to find a pathway forward for these communities who have been challenged for many, many years.

There's no doubt there's a great deal of work to do. We are doing that work daily. My ministry is actively engaged, working with the leadership across the north and in the child agencies that are struggling at this time. We continue to look for solutions. I'm committed to finding those solutions, and we will find solutions. We will find a pathway forward. We will find better outcomes for their kids. It is incumbent upon all of us to do that. The way of the past has not been working.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. A company in my riding, GRK Fasteners, the makers and importers of highly specialized patented fasteners from overseas, has been accused by their Canadian competitors of dumping product. These allegations have led the federal government to impose an 8% tariff on their product. Then, in February 2009, with only 24 hours' notice, they increased the tariff to 170%.

GRK has appealed to the CITT tribunal, and based on testimony given at this hearing, their prices are several times higher than those being charged for what the domestic industry calls comparable products. Exclusions to SIMA duties can only be granted if a product is demonstrated to be unique, yet descriptions which can be en-

tered on CITT's product exclusion request forms can only be stated in very generic terms, not allowing the unique nature of this patented product to be demonstrated.

The tribunal's decision comes between now and March 2010. For this reason, Minister, I ask you: While this is a federal matter, what can your ministry do to keep GRK jobs in Thunder Bay?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: First, let me say that I applaud this member from Thunder Bay for his steadfast resolve in supporting jobs and businesses in Thunder Bay. In this time, when we suffer as we do, it takes that kind of leadership in local communities to make sure that the right authorities understand what the decisions they make have as an impact on our businesses.

GRK Fasteners is a case in point. I was delighted to hear from this member so that we could take it further to the federal government. We placed the case of GRK before Minister Day. I spoke with him directly last week. We afforded information to him so that he, too, would review this and ideally make us understand how a company would be charged with dumping and therefore have a tariff when in fact this price point is four times that of any other competitor in Canada.

This is a very interesting story. We want to see some federal action—

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: Minister, I want to thank you for your role in trying to secure jobs and investment in the province and engaging your federal counterparts on this issue.

Ontario is changing, and job creation in my area of the province, especially in smaller communities, is vitally important. The economic downturn has created unexpected and challenging pressures for companies to look even more closely at costs incurred in operating their businesses.

For this reason, Minister, I ask you: What other steps is our government taking to engage other levels of government, both foreign and domestic, to improve the ease with which companies may do business in this province and, in turn, create and maintain jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I thank again the member from Thunder Bay, who is a steadfast supporter of business in Ontario and, in particular, in Thunder Bay.

It's important that our government support and lead in initiatives like the Agreement on Internal Trade, a trade agreement that took many, many years to resolve, but we have finally signed that, and that's for internal, inter-provincial trade.

In addition, we are proud supporters of a potential agreement between Canada and the EU to open markets to our companies in Ontario. Whether you're in small-town Ontario or large cities, our companies are exporters, and we are doing what we can to promote further exportability by our companies.

GRK Fasteners is a case in point. That's why we need support at the federal level to support companies like GRK doing good business and hiring great people.

Having 40 jobs at risk in Thunder Bay isn't acceptable, and we want support on this front.

WINDSOR ENERGY CENTRE

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the finance minister. You've been so distracted by scandals that you've turned Ontario into a have-not province. What did you do with the \$347-million welfare cheque from the feds? We know you spent \$81 million for an energy centre that has yet to produce a single watt of power, and that is to blame. Earlier today, the contractor gave you an opportunity to recoup the taxpayer dollars you wasted on the energy centre. What, Minister, is your answer?

1110

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite is referring to, I think, a rumour that's out there, because nothing has in fact been given to me. Now, whether or not something has been given to OLG is another issue. I wouldn't be speculating on that, and I remind the member that there are lawsuits with the individual—who the rumour has it is giving us an offer—and a countersuit, so that makes it difficult for me to comment on those matters.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Good to see that the minister is that up to date. You'd think the McGuinty Liberals would be eager to have someone take this Dwight elephant off their hands. This is your first anniversary of being the only government in Ontario history to accept welfare from the other provinces. There's no time to pretend you're too proud to do so. Ontario needs revenue, not a contraption that you say is a power plant but that certainly isn't working like one.

What is buried under the \$81-million air conditioner that Minister Duncan needs to keep hidden?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government won't put down Ontario; we'll build up Ontario. We are in fact paying ourselves some \$300 million in equalization payments. That is in fact true.

There are lawsuits outstanding around this energy suit. There is a lawsuit from the contractor against the OLG. There is a countersuit. The courts will be able to resolve these issues in a full and transparent manner, and I look forward to the courts having the opportunity to do that.

TAXATION

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the minister responsible for seniors. Last week, Ruth and Phil from my riding wrote me to say: We "just received your newsletter today and it has prompted us to send you an email letting you know how strongly we are opposed to this so-called 'harmonization' tax ... this is much, much more than a melding together of two taxes, it is a huge addition of tax on a vast array of services which are not currently taxed ... it is becoming more and more difficult for people such as Phil and I who are on fixed incomes and trying to hold on to homes we've lived in for years to make ends meet."

Why won't this minister and the government listen to Phil, Ruth and all other seniors?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: The question being on the HST, I'm referring it to my colleague Mr. Wilkinson.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'd like to say to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek that I would appreciate it if you could give me the name and the address of the people who wrote you back. I would like to see your newsletter, and I would love to have the address of those people, because I have a sneaking suspicion that perhaps the \$15 billion worth of tax cuts coming to the province of Ontario over the next three years—maybe not all of that information has been disclosed to that senior couple. So I'd ask the member to do the honourable thing and send over the names of these individuals and their address. I'd be more than happy to write them after reviewing your newsletter.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm not sure the minister knows what her portfolio is.

Ruth and Phil also said, "Now they want to put taxes on our home heating cost, electricity, etc. etc. And the very idea of even more of a tax on car gasoline would be almost funny if it weren't so sad. Most of what we currently pay for gas is taxes and now they want to add more.

"A much better name for this tax would be a 'discordant tax' [as] there is much more discord than harmony to be found in it."

Why is it that Ruth, Phil and other seniors get what this tax is really going to do to them, but this minister and the McGuinty Liberals don't get it?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I say to the member, are you somewhat afraid that perhaps I may share with your constituents the fact that their income taxes are going down on January 1? Do you have some concern that I may share with them the fact that we are enhancing the property tax benefits for seniors?

Now, it's very simple. I have asked the honourable member to send over the names of Phil and Ruth and their address so that I can write them. I will send you a copy, but I am looking forward to taking a look at the newsletter. I would trust that that newsletter—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Hamilton East will please come to order.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I would hope that if there was anything that went out paid for by this Legislature, that the story that was told to them was complete and accurate.

Interjection.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Well, you just send me over a copy, then.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMS

Mr. David Oraziatti: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. In investing \$32.5 billion over the next two years in new infrastructure projects, we

are stimulating the economy and creating new jobs. On Monday, a new website that allows Ontario residents and businesses to track the progress of recently announced infrastructure stimulus projects in their community and across the province was put online by your ministry. It has the potential to be a valuable tool for engineers, architects, tradespeople and construction workers who are looking for employment opportunities. It will also be a great resource for residents in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, who are looking forward to the opening of public facilities such as the expansions at our post-secondary institutions and the new invasive species research centre.

Minister, I noticed on the website that only \$11 billion of our investments are tracked on this site and that a number of approved projects have yet to begin. Can you tell us why these projects are not under construction yet?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I thank the member from Sault Ste. Marie for the question. I hope all of us will take advantage of the opportunity to look at this website, and particularly the public. It's Ontario.ca/infrastructure. It does track where we are on a very substantial infrastructure plan. As you know, we've got \$32.5 billion.

The member is right: There are a substantial number of projects, and part of the website shows you how far along in construction we are. A substantial number have not started construction. I will say to the public that many of these projects must be complete by March 31, 2011—so they will be complete. They require, obviously, things like permits and tendering for construction. I can reassure the public that they are well under way. You can track them on a daily basis, and certainly we will be watching closely to make sure they are in fact complete by March 31, 2011.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. David Orzietti: Minister, that's great news for Ontarians. I recently had the privilege of attending several groundbreaking in Sault Ste. Marie that launched construction on a number of new and important public infrastructure projects: the \$22-million Algoma Public Health building and the \$16-million bioscience centre at Algoma University. Now that these facilities are being built, I know that some members of my community will want to follow the progress of the construction.

Minister, how frequently will the status of the projects be updated on the website? Also, will forthcoming projects that have yet to be announced be tracked by the website, in addition to those that our government has already committed funding towards?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: You'll find on the website 2,600 projects—a substantial number—and \$11 billion of that \$32.5 billion. There are, of course, many more projects to come. I will say we've been working in co-operation with the federal government on many of these. All of the projects on the website have agreement by the province and, where the federal government is involved, federal government approval.

The answer to the question is, we are going, in the next few months, to be tracking it monthly. We've tried not to be too bureaucratic, but I think the public will want

us to keep them apprised of progress. So the answer is, monthly we will update it, and that there are about \$11 billion of projects on the website—2,600 projects. Obviously we will be adding projects as we move up to that total program of \$32.5 billion over the next two years.

More to come. Keep an eye on the website.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Education. Despite the fact that the Premier promised to address the issue of school closures in 2003, and despite the fact that enrolment has declined by 90,000 since 2003 and is projected to decline by another 50,000 within the next three years, this government has failed decisively to address the issue. Instead, you continue to rag the puck by belatedly setting up two reviews, but you fail to answer key questions for concerned parents, educators and municipal leaders, such as, at what enrolment levels are schools sustainable and how will you deal with declining enrolment?

Will you today, Minister, end the uncertainty and your government's silence and answer those questions?

1120

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the member opposite knows very well that these decisions need to be made at the local level. When she asks about the absolute numbers at which a community school would decide to close or not, she knows that we have elementary schools in this province that have 12 students in them and we have elementary schools that have 1,900 students in them. All of those decisions have to be made at the local level, so there are no absolute numbers that the ministry can impose on local communities.

What we have done since we came into office in 2003 is, we've opened 400 new schools across Ontario in the face of a decline in enrolment of 106,000 students.

Those community processes that bring in community members, school boards and parents to talk about what the best decisions for programming are for students are extremely important for communities, and we leave that—

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

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Well, Minister, as a result of your failure to take decisive action, others have stepped into the void, and the uncertainty grows. On November 9, the People for Education reported that 172 schools are scheduled to be closed and another 163 are under review. You dispute this in an article.

Minister, would you set the record straight? Would you end the six years of silence? Would you tell concerned parents, educators and municipal leaders how you are going to deal with the declining enrolment? They are looking to this government for leadership, and your Premier promised to provide it in 2003.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: One of the ways that we have dealt with declining enrolment is, we have provided more resources for school boards in order to buffer them

against declining enrolment. For example, we introduced a school foundation grant that allows boards, when they deem a school to be viable, to automatically have a principal and a secretary in that school so they can keep that school open even if there are fewer students in it than the year before.

We've put more than \$5 billion more into the system. And remember, in relation to that declining enrolment, what we've said to boards is, "You need to make these program decisions in the best interests of kids. That needs to be a conversation in the community that takes into account the value of the school to that community and also the requirement for programming for those students." That's what the area review committee process is about. Those have to be local decisions. We are working with boards to make sure they have the resources they need, but those decisions have to be made community by community—

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

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Events at US Steel's Lake Erie Works have revealed a huge loophole in Ontario's worker protection legislation. Hundreds of workers are being kept on indefinite temporary layoff status because the employer has arbitrarily locked them out. And as long as these workers are on temporary layoff status, they can't collect severance and they can't qualify for EI or Ontario Works.

Will the minister immediately close this loophole in the Employment Standards Act, or will he sit back while a multinational company deprives Ontario workers of their basic rights?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question, as it gives me an opportunity to say what we've been doing in the province of Ontario when it comes to employment standards. We've strengthened enforcement, we've ensured that we have stronger laws now in the province, and we've reached out to employers and labour groups to ensure that they know their rights here in Ontario. We've done more to enforce employment standards laws than those two previous governments, the NDP and the Tories.

Between 1989 and 2003, there were 97 prosecutions in this province; since 2004, there have been 1,800 prosecutions initiated in the province of Ontario. That speaks volumes to how this government is committed to the hard-working men and women of Ontario—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The volumes that these workers want to hear is a commitment from this minister to do the right thing by them. As the minister should know, temporary layoffs, under the Employment Standards Act, are supposed to last no more than 35 weeks. After that point, laid-off workers are supposed to be considered terminated and able to qualify for the benefits available to

unemployed Ontarians, but the act allows an employer to arbitrarily lock out workers and stop the 35-week countdown during collective bargaining. This glaring loophole can be fixed with a very simple change to the Employment Standards Act.

With dozens of workers here today who are desperately needing his help, will this minister commit to making that very simple change that will change their lives in a very positive way?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: To all the workers in Ontario—and to this member, who I think didn't hear me the first time—from 1989 to 2003, under that member's government, there were 97 prosecutions. Since we came into government, from 2004 to today, there have been well over 1,800 prosecutions.

What else are we doing? We're recovering monies for workers that are owed those funds. In the last five years, we've conducted close to 11,000 inspections, and we've recovered \$7.7 million in owed wages and other monies to vulnerable workers. I know the member does not want to hear—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I am going to take this opportunity to offer my final warning to the member from Hamilton East.

Minister.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I know the member doesn't want to hear this, but those are the facts: 11,000 inspections, recovering \$7.7 million in owed wages and other monies. So I would hope that the member would get behind what this government is doing, which is more—

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

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Rick Johnson: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. In March 2008, we watched as our government closed the doors to Ontario's outdated institutions—institutions where sons and daughters, brothers and sisters with intellectual disabilities had been isolated from their communities for decades. Now our loved ones are living happy and healthy lives outside of institutions and in the community, but the reality is that they need our support.

Minister, last year, when the institutions closed their doors, you told us that things were going to change. You promised that we would have a more inclusive society where supports would be based on individual needs. What are you doing to make this vision a reality?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'd like to thank the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for his involvement. As a chair of a school board, this MPP welcomed in his schools a lot of these people who have developmental disabilities and who need our support.

First, let me assure you that this vision is still very much intact. Just this past summer, we posted our first regulation for public review. Thank you to all of our part-

ners—agencies, families and people with developmental disabilities—for their feedback. In the coming weeks we will post our second regulation under our new legislation for public review and feedback.

In addition, we are working with regional communities to ensure that the new access points for families meet their specific needs. This is the first major change to developmental services in 30 years, and for our families we need to make sure that we get it right.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Johnson: Thank you, Minister. I am reassured by your response and I appreciate your efforts on behalf of all the families touched by developmental disabilities.

I am intrigued by the forthcoming regulation. Can you tell us more about what we can expect from this regulation?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This regulation is incredibly important for the health and safety of our loved ones in care. The new regulation will establish quality assurance measures for service agencies for those providing residential care and for those helping families navigate the application process.

Since the day when the institutions first opened, our perception of people with developmental disabilities has evolved. We have a better understanding of their needs and of their families' needs. We continue to learn, thanks to the advice from agencies, families and people with developmental disabilities. We continue to work hard towards proclaiming the new legislation.

We still have more to do, but we are proud of our accomplishments and work so far. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the families and partners who helped us to achieve this important milestone.

1130

HYDRO CONTRACTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Why would your government be willing to pay a private power producer up to eight cents a kilowatt hour, causing ever-increasing power prices to our consumers, when our regulated power provider, Ontario Power Generation, only receives 3.2 cents per kilowatt hour for their regulated hydraulic resources? Why?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: The member probably knows this, but I'll repeat it for him. The actual negotiations take place between an organization called the OPA, Ontario Power Authority, and in this case a hydro dam. The purpose of this is to ensure that Ontario continues to have clean renewable energy. There are several of these electricity-producing hydro dams that require a fair bit of refurbishing and whatnot. Ontario Power Authority wanted to make sure that they would continue to operate for the future, so they did their role. They sat down and negotiated—in this case with a hydroelectric producer—arranged the best possible price for the ratepayers and also made sure that this organization had, for the next 20 years, a renewable resource—

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Some deal for the ratepayers. Minister, you know that this year there was never an inadequate supply of hydraulic power. In fact, OPG was forced to dump water without spinning turbines many times this summer because the demand was so low. In fact, there were times that we sold power to the United States at less than a cent per kilowatt hour. There was no shortage. The fact remains that Ben Chin's umbilical cord is connected to the Premier's office. He never left there.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw that.

We all know where Ben Chin came from. He came from the Premier's office and became vice-president of the OPA. Is this another one of those backroom deals that George Smitherman signed before heading out the back door?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I've reminded the members before about referring to members by their riding names.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —that the former Minister of Energy signed before he went out the back door so he could campaign for the mayor of Toronto while still collecting an MPP's salary? Reveal all of the details of these backroom deals so the people of the province of Ontario know how the—

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

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I really find that a bit unbecoming and offensive. I think the public should know this: The head of the Ontario Power Authority, the president, Colin Anderson, a former deputy here, a man of impeccable credentials, is one of the most respected people I know. He is responsible for this. I find it, to say the least, offensive that you would smear someone like Colin Anderson with a broad brush. I say to the member, I would be very cautious about how you deal with people's reputations. I have enormous respect for Colin Anderson and his integrity. I find it disappointing that you would use your immunity here to smear the Ontario Power Authority. I find it unacceptable.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, not a week goes by without new allegations of questionable activity in the city of Vaughan. An audit revealed 114 municipal audit infractions related to the election—the former mayor took \$180,000 without declaring from whom it came; \$14,000 in taxpayers' money was used by the CEO of the city, and that is still being questioned; \$30,000 in contracts were given to immediate families of council members. Now new allegations that yet another councillor is in a conflict-of-interest position have been filed with the courts. The citizens of that city now refer to Vaughan as “the city above the law.”

Will the minister exercise the authority of his office by calling a provincial investigation?

Hon. Jim Watson: This is the second occasion the honourable member has tried to undermine a locally elected democratic council. As the member knows, I cannot comment on matters that are before the court with respect to the Municipal Elections Act. But I can quote, from *Vaughan Today*, the honourable member who represents that community, Mr. Shurman: “‘Michael Prue doesn’t know what he’s talking about,’ said Shurman in an editorial board meeting with *Vaughan Today* last week.”

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I’m going to make some comments about language at the end of question period. I just ask that we be cautious when we’re quoting and bringing other members into these situations.

Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The member from Thornhill has already apologized to me for the comment. You should too.

The minister loves to say that the city of Vaughan is a well-run city, yet every week there are more allegations of unscrupulous behaviour on the part of its elected officials. At what point in time is the minister going to say enough is enough?

The taxpayers of Vaughan need to know the truth: the taxpayers of Vaughan who are forced to go to court at their own expense, the taxpayers of Vaughan who are told they have to pay \$32,000 for a freedom-of-information request, the taxpayers of Vaughan who are really under the gun.

Will the minister call for an immediate provincial investigation to determine that truth, or will he continue to do absolutely nothing?

Hon. Mr. Watson: Let me continue reading from *Vaughan Today*:

“Shurman sides with Watson when it comes to drafting a solution to council’s woes.

“Both say that rather than having the province step in, citizens should take up their issues at the ballot box next year.”

Quote from Mr. Shurman: “‘If Vaughan has any problems at the senior level, they are political problems, and if people don’t like the politics of Vaughan they should elect new councillors, or a new mayor,’ Shurman said.”

We have had staff go in and review the financial operations of Vaughan. We do not have problems with the administration of the financial operations. If the citizens of Vaughan have a difficulty with their council or mayor, they can take action, as the honourable member from Thornhill has said.

And I agree with the honourable member when he said, “Michael Prue doesn’t know what he’s talking about.” I concur with the honourable member from Thornhill.

Interjections.

UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The personal attacks back and forth are not helpful. There were some

issues yesterday with some questions. I’ve asked members to withdraw comments that we continue to hear.

You know what? There are 107 of us in here. We were all duly elected by our constituencies. We’ve all been sent here with a job to do, whether it’s a job as an opposition member, a job as a government member or a job as a Speaker.

At least, if nothing else, we can use language that is parliamentary and at least respect each other for the jobs that we have been sent here to do. I just really would ask all members, on all sides, to be conscious of that. Thanks.

To continue: As I have done on other occasions, I would once again seek the co-operation of all members in raising us to a higher level of decorum in this place, notwithstanding that sometimes a moment of heated debate tempts us to do otherwise.

It is important for the dignity of the House that we use temperate language and not language that is going to inflame further debate.

Specifically, today I’m troubled by accusations with the use of the word “bribery.” It has been ruled at least as far back as 2002 in this House as being unparliamentary. I heard it stated in questions; I heard it stated behind the scenes. I just wanted to let you know that such an accusation, directed at any member or the collective of members, can only be viewed as insulting and disrespectful, and likely to cause disorder.

Once again, I’m asking that all members refrain from making those accusations in the future. It is language that I will ensure I will be calling the honourable members on, whether they say it in a question or behind the scenes.

1140

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Earlier, during questions to the Minister of Health, the minister quoted from a document in her briefing binder, otherwise known as the House binder, that said basically to see if there was enough evidence existing to lay charges in relation to the eHealth scandal.

I want to draw your attention to Erskine May, page 441. It reads as follows:

“A minister of the crown may not read or quote from a dispatch or other state paper not before the House, unless he”—or he or she; unfortunately, it says “he”—“is prepared to lay it upon the table. Similarly, it has been accepted that a document which has been cited by a minister ought to be laid upon the table of the House, if it can be done without injury to the public interest.” I would argue on that particular point that obviously, this document is within her briefing binder, so if somebody put it in the briefing binder, they thought it was not an issue—that it was a subject of public interest.

It goes on to say, “A minister who summarizes a correspondence, but does not actually quote from it, is not bound to lay it upon the table. The rule for the laying of cited documents does not apply to private letters or memoranda.” I would argue again on that particular sec-

tion, if it's a private letter or memorandum, it would not be in her briefing binder. The briefing binder is brought into the House to be used, basically, as information for responses to questions from the opposition. So clearly, these are not documents that are private in nature.

It goes on to say on page 442, "On 10 August 1893, the Speaker ruled that confidential documents ... of a private nature passing between officers of a department, cited in debate, are not necessarily laid on the table ... especially if the minister declares that they are of a confidential nature." I would argue again, it is in her briefing binder. She is not declaring that it is private in nature.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to take a look at Erskine May, page 441, under, "Citing Documents not Before House," and to rule if, in fact, she needs to lay that document before the House, because she did quote from it at some length.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Perhaps I can lay this issue to rest. That document that was referred to by the member for Timmins–James Bay was tabled in public accounts yesterday.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm not aware of the document being tabled in public accounts, and certainly the minister did not make us aware of that in the House.

I have to share my colleague's concern with respect to the fact that the minister herself referenced this in a response to an opposition question, I believe yesterday. I would suggest to you, Speaker, that you consider this and look at this in terms of it being an infringement on the rights of the minority in this place. Again, that's what's happened here today.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Nickel Belt.

I'm prepared to rule on this.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Peterborough.

This is an issue that has arisen on numerous occasions. The clerks' table has cited numerous examples of quoting from documents and rulings by Speakers at least back to 1980, and some actually going further back than that. The general rule that has been set by the Speakers over the years is that when a minister cites a document in the House, he or she should, as a courtesy, table it. The members weren't aware until just now that this had been tabled at committee yesterday. But I would say that, as a courtesy, if you're going to cite at length from documents, they should be tabled in the Legislature.

We certainly recognize that a casual or a brief reference to a document not before the House places less of an onus on the minister to table it, but any document that's quoted at length should be tabled. Again, as a courtesy to the House, the document quoted from—ensure that it is available to the other members.

The comment was made that it was tabled at public accounts. Perhaps out of courtesy, the minister would table it here as well.

Government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Further clarification on this as well: I understand that in the late show last evening, the member for Huron–Bruce referred to it and referred to the fact that it had been tabled in public accounts.

M^{me} France Gélinas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I was at public accounts this morning and I looked through the documents that were circulated. I did not see that particular document.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: As the chair of the committee, we didn't sit yesterday—number one; number two, we had a meeting this morning, and I didn't receive any additional documentation from the clerk, and I certainly didn't receive this document.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Perhaps I can add some clarity. The clerk of the committee had the document. The document was tabled with the clerk last night, and the Clerk has assured me that that will be distributed to all members this afternoon. But it was tabled with the committee.

Pursuant—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Leeds–Grenville, the member from Kenora–Rainy River and the Attorney General, I would encourage you to continue your discussion outside.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: On a point of order, Speaker: I think the House would be interested to know that in the late show last night, the entire letter was read into the record, so that information was available there as well.

The House may be interested to know that following the question from the member from Oshawa, I did send him directly the letters that we've been referring to.

Mr. Frank Klees: On a point of order, Speaker: With regard to this matter, I think it would be helpful for all members if you could provide some clarity. All members were under the impression, based on the words of the minister, that this document was tabled with the committee. I would like—

Interjections.

Mr. Frank Klees: Here is the clarification that I believe would help all members, and that is in terms of the terminology that is used. If, in fact, the document is presented to the clerk of a committee, is that in effect tabling with the committee? If it is, we should know that. If it is not, if it is tabled with the committee when the clerk in fact distributes that material to members of the committee, which is how I would interpret it—I as a member have no way of knowing whether a document has been tabled with the committee unless I receive it. In order not to in any way leave members of the House with a false impression of what took place, I think it is appropriate that we have clarification on this matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The process that was followed is in order. The document was tabled with

the clerk. The normal process would be that upon receipt of that document by the clerk, when the next dispatch of information that would be going out to the committees, in this case the public accounts committee—the clerk would be sending those documents to the committee members. But in the eyes of the clerk, that document is filed with the committee.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I just want to indicate, I withdraw an allegation I made earlier today that was unparliamentary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I appreciate that.

M^{me} France Gélinas: On another point of order, Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Health just said that yesterday in the late show—I don't know how we refer to this parliamentarily. After 6 o'clock last night, I was here and I listened to her parliamentary assistant. She read bits and pieces of that letter with a lot of editorial in between. She certainly did not read the letter for the record like the Minister of Health just said.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Again, I can go back to numerous references of quoting from documents, either quoting a document in its entirety or making references citing specific points. So quoting from the document is quoting from the document, whether it is read in its entirety or with highlights from that.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Oshawa has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Health concerning eHealth. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Thornhill has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Finance concerning the Windsor Energy Centre. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure concerning hydro contracts. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

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

The House recessed from 1151 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO GREENHOUSE ALLIANCE

Mr. Robert Bailey: It is a pleasure for me to welcome the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance here today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus as well as the rest of the Legislature.

Ontario has a strong agricultural economy and the greenhouse industry is a strong contributor to that economy. The Ontario Greenhouse Alliance was created in 2001 when the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers, Flowers Canada (Ontario) and the Ontario Pepper Growers came together so that they could present a united front on behalf of the entire industry. TOGA's—an acronym for their name—goals are to establish the highest levels of production standards in the world and to increase consumer awareness of Ontario greenhouses and production excellence.

Here are just a few facts about Ontario greenhouses. Last year in Ontario, the greenhouse industry had over \$270 million in gross annual payroll and they directly employ 17,300-plus employees.

According to TOGA, there's currently over \$2 billion directly invested in greenhouse structures in Ontario, and that's not taking into account warehouses or associated businesses. At the current rate of growth, the greenhouse industry expects to increase that investment by about \$20 million per year in rural Ontario. Think of the jobs that this will create, both directly and indirectly.

Members of the House will also be interested in the fact that an acre of greenhouse yields six times more than an acre in a field under cultivation.

The Ontario Greenhouse Alliance, as an industry organization, does a tremendous job in advocating on behalf of greenhouse growers. I wish to congratulate them on a successful year and would like to remind all members that they are hosting a reception for the members and their staff in the legislative dining room this afternoon.

RUBY HAMILTON

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I rise in the House today to congratulate a very special member of our community, Mrs. Ruby Hamilton, who turned 90 years old this past Monday, November 23.

Mrs. Hamilton, born Ruby James, has spent all of her life in Russell township. Born and raised on her family's farm, Ruby married her childhood friend, Clelland Hamilton, the young boy she would visit as a child at the neighbouring farm. Clelland and Ruby were married in 1939 and together operated their dairy farm before Clelland passed away last year.

The first Hamiltons immigrated to Canada from Ireland in the 17th century. They were one of the first families to settle in rural Russell township and have remained there ever since.

Last Saturday it was an honour for me to celebrate Mrs. Hamilton's birthday with her family, and I wish her all the best. I thank the staff of the Limoges St-Viateur Nursing Home for the great care they have provided to Mrs. Hamilton.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: In March, I asked the then Acting Premier for government action on the US Steel lockout, the layoffs now affecting over 1,300 workers. I was told,

“We want to try to broker a solution.” Nine months later, the steelworkers in the House today were left with empty words.

Nine months ago, the government told me it would talk to union and management. Have those talks taken place? I’ve spoken with union and management; MPP Paul Miller has spoken with union and management. Thirteen-hundred steelworkers sitting at home destroys our local economy. It’s not just about steelworkers: Everyone wants both sides back to work again.

After 35 weeks of temporary layoffs, laid-off workers are supposed to be able to qualify for EI. However, the Employment Standards Act allows an employer, in this case US Steel, to arbitrarily lock out workers and stop the 35-week countdown during collective bargaining. Workers can’t qualify for severance, they can’t qualify for EI or Ontario Works. These steelworkers aren’t on strike; they’re laid off, they’re locked out and they are caught in a bureaucratic Catch-22.

Christmas is coming. They are losing their homes. The minister has the power to open up the act, open up regulation and close the loophole. If government is not already talking to the parties as it said it would, I ask them to speak now. If the minister is not already acting to ensure support for steelworkers, act now.

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN’S SERVICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As they say around this place and in literature, “The plot thickens.” We are now finding that the government has a goal when it comes to children’s aid societies, and that is, in order to deal with what they see as, I could almost argue—fiscal mismanagement is what they’re arguing. They’re looking at trying to start merging particular children’s aid societies together.

I just want to remind members why it is that we created aboriginal child and family protection services and why we did so for francophones. In many communities, as the member from Brant would know, there are cultural and language differences when it comes to how we deal with our kids. In the days before we had Payukotayno and the other child protection services up in the northwestern part of Ontario, those services were provided by run-of-the-mill regular children’s aid services. They tried their best. This is not to say that they were not trying their best, because they actually did. They’ve got professional staff who work hard, but they were not well suited to deal with the issues of First Nations.

There is, yes, a language issue, but there’s also a huge cultural difference, and also the understanding of the community and an understanding of where some of the dysfunction comes from.

We decided some years ago that we would create these agencies in order to allow them to deliver services to their own people. We now have legislation that says they must provide these services to the people of James Bay and northwestern Ontario, and for you down in your part of the province as well. If they are not funded, it is not their fault; it is the fault of this assembly. And for us

to go down the path of possibly merging these organizations into a larger, non-aboriginal organization, I think, is a very slippery slope for us to go down.

LIBRO FINANCIAL GROUP

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in the House today to congratulate and thank one of southwestern Ontario’s most successful financial institutions, Libro Financial Group. Apart from their success, they are devoted to giving back to the community through their community builder grant. Their objective is to help build confidence in youth who will contribute to community growth for generations to come. It gives opportunities to youth to develop leadership and career skills while participating in and leading community development projects.

It’s a truly unique endeavour. It gives London’s young and talented hopefuls the opportunity to collaborate as a team and design community-based projects and explain the implementation, management and financial steps needed to make them a success.

Students from all across southwestern Ontario participated, and to witness every project’s potential was inspiring. The winners of the grant saw a prize of \$10,000 annually for three years to ensure the implementation of their project.

Ontario youth are talented and intelligent. To see so many ideas created for the sake of supporting local residents shows that we are and always will be Canada’s leading province.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank the management and the leadership of Libro Financial Group for their determination in supporting the community and investing back in our community, because it’s important to support it.

SCHOOL BUS OPERATORS

Mr. Ted Arnott: Regrettably, the Minister of Education has been silent while independent school bus operators in the county of Wellington are threatened with the total loss of their business. In small-town and rural Ontario, the school bus is ubiquitous, morning and afternoon. We entrust our children to the safe care of our courteous and well-trained local school bus drivers. Many of these family businesses have transported students and served our communities for generations. They are local; they provide an essential service; they are cost-effective; they sponsor local minor sports teams; they buy their fuel, parts, tires and insurance locally; and they are firmly rooted in our communities.

Why would the McGuinty Liberal government want to fix something that isn’t broken? On many occasions in recent months, I have met with school bus operators and written the Minister of Education on their behalf urging a review of the minister’s flawed request-for-proposal tendering process. We have asked for an alternative approach which would give greater recognition to existing service in the criteria, as well as for a further review of the RFP pilot project and its results.

The minister promised fairness to our local school bus operators, but has delivered the opposite. Surely she understands that the cost of student transportation will only go up over time if our local school bus businesses are driven out of business. If a small number of huge, foreign-owned school bus companies grow to cover the whole province, they will eventually dictate price and dictate it upwards. This is always the way with monopolies. I call on the Minister of Education to keep her promise to school bus operators, halt this RFP process now and ensure that—

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

1510

LAST POST FUND

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I'm honoured to rise today to recognize the 100th anniversary of the Last Post Fund.

The president of the Last Post Fund, the Ontario fund, is a former member of this House, Lieutenant Colonel James Breithaupt, who served as the MPP for Kitchener from 1967 to 1984.

"The Last Post Fund is not a charity, it is a duty," is a quote from the founder, Dr. Arthur Hair, when it was established in 1909, and galvanized by a sense of "sympathetic camaraderie of one soldier for another."

In collaboration with Veterans Affairs Canada, the fund ensures that no eligible veteran is deprived of a dignified funeral, burial and headstone for lack of financial resources.

For the past century, the fund has arranged funerals and, where necessary, burial and grave markers for 145,000 veterans from Canada and other allied countries. The fund's own cemetery, the National Field of Honour, in Pointe-Claire, Quebec, is the final resting place for over 20,000 veterans, and military markers now identify unmarked veterans' graves.

The Last Post Fund has never deviated from the principles of dignity, compassion and respect that presided over its birth.

I'm pleased to acknowledge the tremendous work being accomplished by the Last Post Fund and express my sincere gratitude to Lieutenant Colonel Breithaupt for his invaluable contributions towards honouring our veterans.

TAXATION

Mr. David Oraziotti: I rise in the House today to comment on our government's tax reform initiatives.

Economists from every political viewpoint agree that harmonizing our tax would be good for businesses and consumers in Ontario. Noted economist Dr. Jack Mintz said our plan would create nearly 600,000 jobs and increase the incomes of Ontarians. The TD Bank and professors Michael Smart and Richard Bird of the University of Toronto said that tax reform savings will be passed down to consumers.

Studies in Atlantic Canada, where tax harmonization already exists, suggest that overall prices fell following implementation.

The Fair Tax Commission set up by the NDP recommended Ontario exempt all business inputs from the retail sales tax and harmonize our sales tax.

Last year, the Conservatives suggested we take the advice of economist Dr. Roger Martin's report on competitiveness and reduce the level of business income taxes as part of a plan to grow Ontario's economy. Just a few months ago, the Conservatives agreed that there is no sense in allowing two separate governments to apply two separate taxes.

As the global economy has changed dramatically, we have moved forward to modernize our tax system and strengthen our economy. By harmonizing our tax with the federal government, we will be joining four other provinces in this country, as well as the decision that BC has made to join in harmonization as well.

Our plan also cuts income tax for 93% of Ontarians and means that we'll have the lowest personal income tax rate of any province in Canada. Under our government, I've seen more investments in northern Ontario and more investments in my community of Sault Ste. Marie than ever before.

As we begin to see positive signs of economic growth—

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

ONTARIO GREENHOUSE ALLIANCE

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Mr. Speaker, I know that you and all of my colleagues will want to join me in welcoming the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance to Queen's Park today, and many of their members are sitting here in the east gallery.

I know, as well, that we're all going to want to go to our whip's office, get our certificate and go down and say thank you to them for visiting with us today—because I expect there might be beautiful poinsettias, there might be some great home-grown veggies down there—that we will want to shake their hands and thank them for what they do in the province of Ontario.

You know, these greenhouse growers, who are the vegetable, the pepper and the flower growers, make up the second-largest agricultural industry in the province of Ontario. We all know how much the Speaker has been promoting home-grown Ontario fruits and vegetables and all the good things that come from our agricultural community. We can go downstairs today and thank one of the finer groups in this province for what they do and what their agricultural products mean to all of us, say hello to them, wish them a merry Christmas and welcome them to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I honestly thought that the honourable member was going to start chanting from one of my favourite movies, *Animal House*, "Toga! Toga!" Welcome to Queen's Park, and thanks for the good things that you do day in and day out in putting

great food on our tables. I might be lobbying for an extra poinsettia or two.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AMENDMENT ACT (INSTITUTIONS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ACCÈS À L'INFORMATION ET LA PROTECTION DE LA VIE PRIVÉE (INSTITUTIONS)

Mrs. Savoline moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 227, An Act to amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act / Projet de loi 227, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'accès à l'information et la protection de la vie privée.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: This bill amends the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act by adding 21 government agencies that are currently not subject to the act to the list of institutions that are in the act. By making these agencies subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act legislation, we can ensure that information about publicly funded agencies is accessible to the public.

This is really a bill about accountability and transparency and is something that I think we need to move on. There have been some questions raised regarding appropriate spending in some publicly funded agencies, and the aim of this bill is to ensure that the measures of transparency and accountability continue.

ELECTRICITY AMENDMENT ACT (PROTECTION AGAINST SECURITY DEPOSITS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉLECTRICITÉ (PROTECTION CONTRE LES DÉPÔTS DE GARANTIE)

Mr. Crozier moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 228, An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998 to protect residential customers from hardships created by security deposits / Projet de loi 228, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur l'électricité pour protéger les clients résidentiels contre les difficultés occasionnées par les dépôts de garantie.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Bruce Crozier: The bill amends section 31 of the Electricity Act, 1998, to prohibit electricity distributors from shutting off the distribution of electricity to a residential property if the only overdue amount payable by the person receiving the electricity is in respect of a new security deposit or an increase to an existing security deposit, and the person was receiving electricity at the time the new security deposit or increase was demanded.

The bill also requires electricity distributors to provide notice of this prohibition.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas residents in Burlington do not want the McGuinty 13% sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services that they use every day; and

“Whereas the McGuinty 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 home sales over \$400,000; and

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Valerie.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to read in the following petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls and my colleague from St. Catharines.

“We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, petition the Parliament of Ontario to prevent the windup of Nortel pensions under current regulations administered by the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO). To be forced into annuities at this time is the worst possible outcome under current market conditions.

“Since Nortel fulfilled its responsibility under the pension benefits guarantee fund (PBGF), we are asking the province to honour its responsibility and protect Nortel pensions accordingly.

“We need our government fighting on our behalf in the bankruptcy court. We need change in provincial and federal laws which are unfair and outdated. They are in conflict with one another and allow failing companies like Nortel to deny pensions and benefits to pensioners, terminated and long-term disabled employees.

“Our government must convene a national summit on pensions and improve the Canada pension plan (CPP) benefits and make it mandatory. All provincial governments must take action now.”

I'm pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I continue to receive hundreds of these on a weekly basis.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I support the petition. I sign it and send it down with Iman.

HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition is in support of proclaiming April as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario and it reads as follows:

“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, Equatorial

Guinea, Estados Unidos, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, 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, film, economics, science and medicine;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support” Mr. Ruprecht’s and Mr. Colle’s bill “proclaiming April of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month in Ontario.”

Of course I agree with this petition and am delighted to sign it.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have a petition entitled “People of Ontario: Petition for Caledonia Public Inquiry.” It’s signed with well over 5,000 names, including Jennifer Stuart, and Ken Hewitt, who is in the gallery today.

The background for the petition is as follows:

“1. Commissioner Julian Fantino has proven through his own court testimony and published documentation that he is no longer unbiased or neutral. Along with native leaders having his personal cell number exclusively, he also uses his position to support them in court against charges by his own police force.

“2. Following the flawed results and recommendations of the Ipperwash Inquiry, the OPP and the command decisions made by the OPP have violated and ignored the rules and guidelines as set out by a number of statutes. These include the Criminal Code and the Ontario Police Services Act. In addition the OPP have violated or ignored their training and standard operating procedures. There is documented and electronic evidence that the OPP did so knowingly.

“3. The cost surrounding OPP is grossly underestimated. As taxpayers, we have a right to know the true costs of Caledonia. As the province of Ontario enters into years of deficits, how much more money will be wasted on flawed policing and the inability of leadership to change the tactics?

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

“1. To request the Premier of Ontario to immediately launch a public inquiry into the actions and decisions made by the commissioner of the OPP, Julian Fantino, and impose his immediate suspension without pay and upon confirmation of the facts, his immediate resignation;

“2. To request the Premier of Ontario to immediately launch a public inquiry into the actions and decisions made by the OPP with respect to Caledonia” over the past three and a half years.

I affix my signature as per part 2 at the bottom.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have the petition from the people of the city of Greater Sudbury and the ridings of Nickel Belt and Sudbury, and it goes as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario government is making positron emission tomography, 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 clerks' table with page Samuel.

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, Ontario;

“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.”

I support this petition, and I will affix my signature to it.

TAXATION

Mrs. Julia Munro: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election, but in 2004 he brought in the health tax, the biggest tax hike in Ontario's history; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new 13% sales tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as ... gas at the pumps; home heating oil and electricity; postage stamps; haircuts; dry cleaning; home renovations; veterinary care; arena ice and soccer field rentals;

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

“That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes, once and for all, on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses.”

I've affixed my signature as I am in favour and giving it to page Valerie.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: “On August 10, 2008, there was a massive blast at Sunrise Propane” on Murray Road in Downsview. At the time of the explosion, the site was under the watch of the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, a delegated authority of the provincial government.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It is a petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Okay.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My apologies, Speaker. It is a petition that I am reading out.

“During the 1990s, administration of safety standards” related to fuel “was removed from” direct provincial ministry management and oversight by Premier Mike Harris and was delegated to the TSSA.

“Recent audit results” of the TSSA related to propane facilities across the province revealed that almost half the sites designated for inspection were no longer in operation and 30 sites were closed down due to “immediate hazards.”

Following the Walkerton inquiry, Justice Dennis O'Connor expressed the need for “effective provincial government regulation and oversight as a key measure to reduce public health risk.”

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“The TSSA's accountability has come into question” as the provincial Auditor General, in the December 2008 report, makes note that there has been inadequate “assurance that public safety and consumers were properly protected by the industry oversight organizations.”

Therefore “we, the undersigned, urge the Legislature of Ontario to bring back the responsibilities of the TSSA under direct authority of the provincial government's Ministry of Small Business and Consumer Services.

“We believe that direct government administration and oversight of safety-related standards in the area of fuels is the most appropriate structure to ensure public safety.”

I sign this petition, I support it and provide other supporting signatures. It will be brought by page Nicolas.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It's submitted by the Islamic Society of North America, to whom I would like, on the occasion of this weekend, to bring Eid-ul-Adha Mubarak greetings. I also want to thank Aman Mir of Mississauga and Khalid Khokhar of Guelph for having collected the signatures. It reads as follows:

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

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could better be performed in an off-site facility. An ambulatory surgery centre would greatly increase the ability of surgeons to

perform more procedures, reduce wait times for patients and free up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2009-10 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature to this petition and to support it and to ask page Vanessa to carry it for me.

TAXATION

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a number of petitions from my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the new 13% HST was not part of Dalton McGuinty’s election platform in 2007 and is in addition to the new, enormous health tax; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government will pay taxpayers, with their own tax dollars, a one-time so-called tax rebate during 2010;”—how convenient—“and

“Whereas condominium owners in the province of Ontario will pay at least 6% more in condo fees as a result of the new 13% HST and additional amounts to comply with the reserve fund requirement of section 93 of the Condominium Act;

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

“That the Dalton McGuinty government cancel its plan to introduce a new 13% tax on Canada Day, 2010, and abandon this tax grab” immediately “against condominium owners in the province of Ontario.”

I’m pleased to present this to the page from the riding of Durham, Maggie.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The subject of this petition is to stop the exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers. It’s addressed to you, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

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

“We, the undersigned, support” the bill called “the Caregiver and Foreign Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, 2009, and urge its speedy passage into law.”

Since I agree, I’m delighted to sign the petition.

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 24, 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 floor was with the member from Trinity–Spadina. We will move to the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I am delighted to speak about Bill 218. I have had an opportunity since June, when I was appointed by the Premier to be Ontario’s Minister of Revenue, to do one thing: implement and communicate the largest tax reform in this province in over 40 years. I’ve had an opportunity to go right across the province of Ontario, and I want to share with you some of the things I have learned. I have been in Leamington, in your neck of the woods, Mr. Speaker; I’ve been to Fort Frances, to Ottawa and everywhere in between.

I always start my presentation by asking a few questions. I ask the good people whether they control the rate of exchange between our dollar and the US dollar. And they say, “No, John, we don’t.” I say, “Well, do you know what? The government doesn’t control that either.”

I say to people, “Do you control the price of energy and the price of oil? Are you in charge of that?” And they say, “No, it’s not up to us.” And I say, “Well, it’s not up to the government either.”

I say, “Well, how about how fast our good friends to the south get over this recession and come back stronger? Are you in charge of that?” They say, “No.” And I say, “Well, it’s not the government either.”

Then I ask people a couple of questions: “Who generates wealth in this province? Is it government, or is it business?” And they say, “Well, it’s business.”

Government redistributes wealth; that is what we do on behalf of the good people of Ontario—setting rates of taxation, deciding how that money is spent—but we don’t create wealth. At the moment, we can do what all

western governments are doing and borrow heavily to support the economy in the short term, but that's not a long-term solution.

I also ask the people, "Who is in charge of taxation and regulation in this province? Is it the private sector, or is it those of us who are elected?" And they say, "Well, that's your job, John, you and your colleagues in government, whatever the level of government. That's your fundamental role. That's what we elect you to do."

And then I ask a question I have asked dozens of times across the province: "When this recession, the biggest global recession since the 1930s, is over—and all recessions get over—do you think the economy will go back to the way it was, or do you think it's going to be different?" I say to people, "Hands up. Who thinks the economy is going to go back to the way it was?" Right across Ontario, not a single hand has been raised on that question.

But when I say, "Do you think the economy is going to be different?" every hand in the room has been raised everywhere I've been, and I would say I've given over three dozen presentations in the last 60 days. People have said the economy is going to be different. Then I say, "If we know the economy has changed—the world has changed—and we know instinctively that the world has changed, what kind of government would we be if our response to that was to do nothing—status quo—that we'd just hunker down and hope the economic storm blows over and nothing will change?"

On this side of the House we have been entrusted by the people to provide government, and government, by its nature, is to lead. That's why we've taken a bold but controversial decision to have the most comprehensive tax reform in this province in over 40 years.

We are doing a number of things. I say to the good people at home, they know that we are supporting the federal government as we move to one harmonized sales tax in the province of Ontario. Today we have two; we're going to have one on July 1, as long as this bill passes and another bill passes in the House of Commons.

Why are we doing that? Well, there are two sales taxes around, and of course I say to people, obviously one sales tax at one rate on one set of goods and services with one set of rules, one set of paperwork and one set of civil servants has got to be a lot less money for taxpayers, for government and for consumers than the system we have right now, which is two taxes at two different rates on two differing sets of goods and services with two different sets of paperwork and two different sets of regulations, going to two different governments with two different civil servants doing that work. That alone will save our government \$100 million a year just by harmonizing our sales tax to one—one costs less than two—and it will save our business community some \$500 million a year. I think that in itself is one reason for doing this.

But the nature of it is the difference between those two taxes.

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I've always said to people, "If something ain't broke, don't fix it," but the PST was brought in in 1961—I was

two years old and I could barely say "PST," let alone spell it—and that's the system, that 20th-century taxation system, that our businesses have as a burden today as they try to compete in the 21st century for the jobs of the future. The nature of that tax versus the GST, the federal tax, is what we need to understand. Businesses understand when they charge the GST, they charge it and collect it and send it in to the government. I know our friends the farmers from TOGA are here, and they understand that if they charge the GST, they send it off to Jim Flaherty—what?—minus the GST they have paid on all their inputs. So it is a net tax.

But when it comes to the PST, this 1961 version of retail sales tax, people charge that PST, they send it to me—I'm the tax collector in chief for the province of Ontario—and do I give them a credit for all the PST they've paid on all of their inputs? No, and that is the problem. Because of the nature of that tax on tax, where is that money? It's buried in the price. There is no other place for it to be. So the dirty little secret of Ontario politics of 1961 is that people think they pay that PST today at 8%, and they're not paying 8%; they're paying more, because that tax on tax, that embedded tax, is buried in the price of the goods and services.

When 130 countries around the world and four of our sister provinces took this bold step, prices went down. That is something you may not hear from the other side of the House. I'm particularly proud, as the member for Perth-Wellington, an extremely productive agricultural riding, that we will finally give our farmers here in Ontario the same advantage enjoyed by the farmers of Quebec, so that they have the same advantage that has been provided by them when Quebec, in 1990, went to the Quebec sales tax, which in effect is the harmonized sales tax. The only difference is that they administer it as opposed to the federal government.

If we just stop there, I think an argument could be made, but we wouldn't get what we need in this province, which is more jobs. That's why we're going to take all of that money, because we will have a broader tax base, and we are permanently cutting income taxes for people and for business by over \$15 billion over the next three years. The bill in front of this House is whether or not we should take that money and cut income taxes for people and for business by some \$15 billion. On this side of the House we believe that's the right thing to do.

I just want to outline briefly what those tax credits are. We are eliminating three taxes in the province of Ontario. We're getting rid of the provincial sales tax. After July 1, it doesn't exist. We're eliminating the capital tax, a tax that's put on business whether they make money or not. I would consider that to be quite a regressive tax. As well, we're getting rid of the small business surtax, a tax that our small businesses pay. When they're really doing well, when they're really starting to add more people, we've been slapping a tax on there. We'll be the first province in Canada, in this great Dominion, to eliminate that small business surtax.

As well, we're lowering personal income taxes for 93% of Ontarians. We will have the lowest personal income tax rate on the first income tax bracket, some \$37,000 a year, the lowest of any province in this great country. As well, we're lowering the small business corporate rate and we're lowering the large business corporate rate. The most important thing is that we're also doubling, more than doubling, the rebate for people of low income. I think of seniors on a fixed income and of middle-income families with a lot of children who currently get the GST rebate; they can expect to have more than that again from the provincial government on a permanent basis. As well, we're increasing the property tax credits. And for seniors, as a way of honouring those people who have contributed to our wonderful quality of life that we have here, we are doubling the seniors' tax credit by yet another \$250. So I think on balance we have found a way of modernizing our tax system, taking that money and allowing our economy to grow.

We had Dr. Jack Mintz, formerly of the CD Howe Institute, the Palmer Chair in Public Policy at the University of Calgary, do a report, and this is what he says is the consequence of the tax reform that we are doing. He says that just by doing this, three things will happen: Real income in this province can rise by as much as 9%; there will be \$47 billion more of investment in the province of Ontario. I come from Stratford, very near Woodstock. I know what a \$1-billion investment by Toyota in Woodstock has meant to that community. There will be 47 more of those over the next 10 years; I'm for that. Particularly, we are looking at at 591,000 more jobs.

I'm going to be yielding the balance of my time shortly to my parliamentary assistant, the member for Ottawa Centre, but I want to say to people: We are faced with a huge economic challenge. Traditional people in this House would say that there are only two ways to deal with it: one, you could be like Mike Harris, who was ably assisted by Mr. Hudak at the time, and slash and burn the public services which families count on and seniors count on. The other way that we could do it is the way that the NDP government dealt with it: "We'll just borrow like there's no tomorrow and add it on to our grandchildren."

The problem we have today is that the rate of unemployment has nearly doubled, so what we have is fewer people putting into the common pot and we have more people drawing out. I'm proud to be part of a government that is supporting our people, but the way to solve that problem is to get people back to work. One, they want a job; two, they want the dignity of a job; three, they want to be able to look their children in the face and say that they have a job. They will gladly pay their taxes. It's why it's so important for us to build that base to get them back to work. That's what we need to do, and our plan is designed specifically to do that. It's why the bill is entitled "our tax reform plan to get people back to work and to create more jobs."

On our side of the House, it falls to us, from the good people of Ontario, to lead. We are going to lead. We have

forged a historic partnership with the federal government and we are determined to move forward so that, effective on January 1, people will start to receive their permanent income tax cuts. I say to the members opposite: You really should decide that it's best to join us because I believe that this is the right thing to do. None of you have the intestinal fortitude to get up and say you're going to repeal it. So now is the time.

I'm looking forward to the vote. With that, I'm looking forward to hearing the remarks from my parliamentary assistant.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It's my great opportunity to follow the minister and talk about this tax reform package. We have heard a lot of one-sided conversation from the opposition benches on this very important issue. I always likened this to watching a play. This is a play with three acts. You have to watch all three acts to understand the full story. You can't just pick and choose act one or act two and be able to understand what the whole story is.

What is act one? Act one, as the minister talked about, is about the harmonization of the GST and PST and the important notion that we ensure that the PST become a value-added tax so that our businesses can input tax credits so they can reduce their cost of production so they can be more competitive globally.

I think we have to recognize that that, if anything, is what this recession has shown us: that we live in a very globalized economy. Our competition no longer is with British Columbia, Alberta or Quebec. In fact, I will argue that our competition is not even with the United States of America, because we live in a fairly integrated market. We are competing for the American consumers. Who are we competing against? We are competing with countries like China, Russia, India and Brazil. We need to make sure that our manufacturers and our businesses right here in Ontario are competitive enough to compete against those countries for that American consumer market. But that's act one.

The second act is that we are bringing extensive cuts in personal income taxes. What the opposition benches are essentially saying is that low- and middle-income Ontarians should not get a tax cut. That's their position and it's shameful that that's what they want. They don't want low- and middle-income Ontarians—the good, hard-working people in my riding of Ottawa Centre who deserve a 16.5% income tax cut—the opposition is against that. That's why they don't come out and talk about it. The tax cut which we have proposed will create the lowest income tax rate on the first \$37,000 anywhere in Canada, which means that 93% of Ontario's taxpayers are going to get a tax cut; it means that 90,000 more Ontarians—and these are low-income Ontarians—will no longer be paying taxes. That is significant. I think all of us in this Legislature should be supporting that motion.

1550

We are talking about cutting taxes for our seniors who live on fixed incomes. Do you know what? The kind of

fearmongering that's going on with seniors is becoming quite ridiculous. This plan is to ensure that our seniors are taken care of. This plan is to ensure that our businesses are doing well, because when they do well, they pay corporate taxes. When they are doing well, they hire more people who pay taxes.

What do we do with the revenues? We invest in our public health system to help our seniors and make sure they have quality care in this province. We make sure we are paying for our public education system so that our kids have the foundation necessary to build a strong economy.

That's why act three is very important: We are cutting corporate taxes. We are particularly helping our small businesses, which are the lifeline of our economy here in Ontario. In every single community in every single one of our ridings, we are making sure that our small businesses see a reduction in their corporate taxes by 18%. When I tell small businesses and retailers that their small business corporate tax rate will go down by 18%, they can't believe it. They're very happy and excited that this government is taking that step.

What is the opposition's plan? They don't want that tax cut to be extended to our small businesses. That, honestly, is shameful. That is playing games with the very hard working people in our communities who will see a significant gain because of these cuts in small business corporate income taxes, not to mention elimination of the small business deduction surtax and other corporate tax cuts.

All in all, this is a plan to cut taxes and create new jobs. In this economic recession, in this significant downturn, we need to make sure that our businesses continue to grow. We need to make sure that, as this recession comes to an end, our businesses are ready to pick up the baton and run and succeed in this global marketplace, because that is where our future lies. For that to happen, we need to ensure that there is a competitive tax structure in this great province of ours.

What is bothersome to me is that the opposition is very quick to criticize one aspect of this plan, not all three; they don't talk about the personal income tax cuts and the cuts in corporate taxes. They're quick to criticize one aspect, but there is a vacuum of any ideas from the opposition parties. They have not taken the time to tell us how they plan to move this economy forward, how they plan that Ontario will move forward as this recession ends. It is very easy to criticize, but it's difficult to take a bold leadership move like the McGuinty government is taking in this instance. This is a very well thought out plan. This plan is to ensure that we continue to grow our economy.

I have a couple of minutes left, and I want to quickly talk about some of the concerns about the harmonized sales tax. First of all, we need to tell—I tell my constituents all the time that we are already paying 13% on 83% of our consumer spending: 5% GST and 8% PST; there is no change. The change that will take place is on 17% of our consumer spending where we are only paying

5% and we'll see an additional 8%. That means what? That means an extra \$2.5 billion or so in the provincial treasury.

What are we doing with that? We're shifting all that surplus and giving it back to Ontarians through a personal income tax cut. Now, if we were not cutting personal income taxes, perhaps some of the criticism may have been valid, but that is not the case. We are bringing a very significant cut in personal income taxes, which directly helps low- and middle-income Ontarians and seniors in our ridings who are on fixed incomes, not to mention that we are bringing a permanent Ontario sales tax credit up to \$260 per adult and child. Those who are listening at home will recognize that because it's similar to the GST credit, which is up to \$160 per adult and child. We are also enhancing property tax credits, in particular for seniors, to make sure they continue to live in their own homes.

This is a concrete plan. This is a very well thought out plan. It is a plan that is deserving of support by everyone in this Legislature. If they don't support it, let's hear what their ideas are to ensure that there are jobs being created in this great province of ours. What I hear from the other side is silence, a vacuum.

Again, in the response you'll probably hear them all talking about the HST side of things, which will create almost 600,000 jobs over the next 10 years in this province of ours, but not talking about cutting personal income taxes for low- and middle-income people and seniors in our community.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to start fairly quickly by saying that we didn't say there weren't good items in this bill with respect to being more competitive. Let's be clear on that. I think we also have to be clear on this: There's only one reason they're changing the tax rules, and that is to increase revenue. You can talk about all the shifting and changes—it's to increase the money in the government's pocket. That's what it's about. You can argue it until the cows come home.

I'll give you one example, and I'd like the minister to respond to this. If you spend \$100 a week on gas, commuting or whatever you're doing, now you'll be paying \$8 more each week, and that's \$416 a year on that one item. I could say the same thing for heating your home and almost all of the other services that people use. Whether it's physical fitness or registering your kids in sports, it's going to cost the consumer more. In fact, every decision they make will cost 8% more. Whether it's getting your taxes done or buying RSPs, capital stock or groceries, you'll be spending 8% more. So it's about getting more money.

I listened to CBC Radio this morning—I think the minister should look it up—and I believe that Andy Barrie asked you a very fair question. He asked you why you weren't having public hearings. I didn't hear an answer, as I haven't heard an answer to why Premier McGuinty won't have public hearings. What have they

got to hide? What do they not want to hear from the people of Ontario? I would ask you out of courtesy to the people of Ontario to answer in your two-minute summation the question that I'm being asked wherever I go: "Why won't they have public hearings?" It's such a simple request. The dust would settle, and we'd get more people to understand what it is you're hiding.

I'll tell you why. Most of the provisions are income-tested on the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: This is a classic, watching these statements in the House. They start off by saying, "Oh, we're going to cut personal income tax"—wonderful—"and we're going to give them three instalments of \$334 in the next two years. We're going to give them back a whole whopping \$900." I believe they mentioned that some of the people in the lower income bracket would save anywhere from \$200 to \$500 a year. Wow, that's a lot of money.

They're talking about 600,000 jobs. Well, isn't this interesting? I've heard this number to the point where I'm feeling ill about it. They're going to create 600,000 jobs. I'll tell you what: I'll be sitting here a year from now and I want you, who keep talking about 600,000 jobs, to come and tell me the totals, because right now, Minister, there are 20,000 people in Hamilton out of work—320,000 jobs. And you think that by giving corporations money, they're going to pass it on to the consumer? You're dreaming. They're never going to pass it on to the consumer. It's not going to create work, but I'll tell you what will create work. If you had done our 10% manufacturing rebate tax, if you had Buy Ontario, and if you had 50% content on Ontario building things, which we suggested and which was ignored, that might help. If you think you're going to pay a welder 50 cents in Mexico or China, and they're going to pass on the savings to us, when you're paying a welder \$20 and something an hour here, don't you think those businesses are going to continue to move where they can make more profit for their shareholders and pay less to the people who work here?

If you don't think that, you're living on a different planet, because that's what has been going on in our economy for the last 10 years. It's the erosion of our base industries. Our base industries are leaving Canada and they're going south and going overseas. That's why we can't compete, and you're giving them more money to open more plants in other countries. You're not doing anything to help Ontario. Trust me.

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased to have just a couple of minutes to thank and commend the Minister of Revenue and the member from Ottawa Centre for their comments and speech with respect to Bill 218. They had 20 minutes allocated to them and they used that in this place for the purpose of debate so that the public, as well as those of us here, can hear what the debate's about.

As a matter of fact, the minister and I shared an hour. He led it off and I finished it, as his parliamentary assistant, and we used our entire hour for debate in this place to put forward our views in respect to this bill, including the HST.

1600

I can commend the member from Trinity–Spadina as well. He took 20 minutes yesterday, as the NDP wait for their leadoff hour by the member from Beaches–East York, and I would anticipate and hope that the member from Beaches–East York uses his entire hour within the time that's allocated.

Having said that, the official opposition had an hour leadoff. They shared that between two members, but during that time they rang the bell for two hours. For two hours they rang the bells: one hour of debate, two hours of dead time, dead air, wasted time in which members of this Legislature could have spent the time debating the matter here in this House and had exactly the type of hearings that we're talking about. This is what this place is about. But they wasted two hours of time here in this place because they couldn't get on with the hour they had allocated to them.

I hope, as the rotation moves around from the minister and the members and their speeches to the official opposition, that they'll spend the 20 minutes they have in this rotation for speaking and not for ringing the bells and wasting maybe another hour. Hopefully, when we get to the opposition, I'm confident that Mr. Prue, as the critic, will use his time wisely—provide us with his insights, as he always does; challenge the government, and that's his responsibility—and we will have a chance to respond accordingly.

I look forward to this debate continuing. I hope that we use the time we have available wisely in this place and not to have dead air.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I did get a haircut about an hour ago, and I'm still trying to—

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: We noticed.

Applause.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

This is a very serious piece of legislation, and it's one on which we, on this side, have made our stand very clear. It's well known that we oppose the implementation of the harmonized sales tax. It's also very clear that we stand united with our colleagues in the New Democratic Party to call for public hearings into the HST.

My colleague from Durham knows this bill inside out. We've had many conversations about the impact of the HST, what it will mean to his constituents and what it will mean, quite frankly, to his own municipality. They think, with Chair Roger Martin—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Anderson.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Chair Roger Anderson, I apologize—that this HST will cost \$7 million to their municipality. I think this is a real challenge that they're going to

face. I see some people shaking their heads on the other side, but the reality is that right now municipalities have the 100% rebate for the GST. Once the HST is implemented, there's going to be a 78% rebate, not 100%. What municipalities have to do is look at their invoices. They have to look at the contracts. They have to look at what they've paid out and what they've paid in PST and look at the difference of what that 78% will mean. In this case, in Durham, they've done that study, and it's \$7 million. That's a concern for us.

We're also seriously concerned about what the impacts of the HST will be on the medical community. We all know, for example, that medical supplies, their rents, their journals—and the rents, by extension of their hydro, heat and maintenance fees, are going to be included, and that is a serious concern. We don't know, after asking the ministry officials at finance, whether or not this is going to have an impact on the medical community. They said that they didn't know. You can't bring in a \$3-billion tax increase, you can't change the taxes, without understanding where the money is going to go in the health care system, because, quite honestly, that's where we're spending our money.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Minister of Revenue, you have two minutes to respond.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank my colleagues and friends, the members from Durham, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Pickering–Scarborough East and Nepean–Carleton, for joining in the debate. I agree with my colleague on the government bench that it's good that we're actually talking about this and that we're not just ringing bells and having dead air around here. I agree with you. We need to have this debate.

I say to the member from Durham, and I'd say to the good people of Ontario: You may recall that the member from Durham said there would be 8% more on groceries. Did you hear him say that? Because I know that Hansard will show that he said that. There is no PST and there is no GST when you buy basic groceries. It hasn't been the case in Ontario ever, and I assure you that there will be no HST on groceries. But it's exactly that type of loose way with the facts that actually is scaring people, because the statements are being overstated about the impact of this tax.

I agree with the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek that the manufacturing sector has been hit hard in this province. Our future is with advanced manufacturing. I know the good things that are going on in Hamilton. I remember, when I was the Minister of Research and Innovation, the funding that went into Innovation Park. These are creating the new jobs of the 21st century for our children. Those are wise investments. But in an advanced society, where we're adding value, we cannot afford to tax that value more than once. That is what the HST allows us to do by using the GST rules. That ensures that we are not taxing value more than once. That's what our competitors don't do; it's something that we also must resist.

I would say to my friend from Nepean–Carleton that when it comes to municipalities, it's very simple. With

the 5% of the HST collected by the federal government, they are still going to receive their rebate, but when the 8% comes through, I can assure you that there will be 78%. In other provinces that have the HST, the rebate on the provincial portion of the HST is either zero or 50%. Here in Ontario, it will be 78% to ensure that municipalities are made whole.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join this debate. It's interesting that when this government talks about cutting taxes—they stood against cutting taxes since before they were elected, and once they were elected in 2003, they hoisted the biggest tax increase in Ontario's history into their first budget. It's hard to square where they come across when they talk about cutting taxes.

Now they talk about permanent tax cuts. Who out there really believes it when Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government say, "We're cutting your taxes permanently"? Based on the record since 2003, we all know that a Dalton McGuinty promise has a shorter shelf life than whole milk. It just doesn't last. The first time that he's faced with the choice of either raising taxes or facing tough decisions as a government that they have never been able to make, he raises your taxes, because that's the easiest route for him. He's like water: He takes the path of least resistance and he raises your taxes because he believes, at the end of the day, that the consumers out there will simply pay it and suck it up.

When this government talks about the economic effect of this tax and they talk about this tax being part of Ontario's recovery, anybody who has studied any history of recessions at all knows that what drives economies out of recessions is consumer demand and consumer spending. What could you do to dampen consumer demand more than to hoist a consumption tax on the very people you're depending on to bring your economy out of recession? That is historically what has happened: Consumer spending drives the economy back up out of recession. We're going to have a reluctance from consumers to spend, some because they will be protesting the fact that they're paying 8% more for all of those goods and services that they use every day—some of them absolutely essential—and some of them will cut their spending because there's nothing left.

The Minister of Revenue talks about, "Let's talk about this. Let's talk this out. We're here to debate." Now that you can't get this channel on satellite television anywhere in the province of Ontario, you have to ask yourself who actually is watching the debate. I don't see anybody in here. Even my fan club didn't show up today—and it's getting small, too, I know. But the reality is that if you want to get out to debate this issue, the best way to do it is to take it to the people. Why wouldn't you, as a government that wants to proceed with one of the biggest, most sweeping changes in Ontario taxation history, do what the public is simply asking you to do and what we, as the people's messengers, the loyal

opposition, and our friends in the New Democratic Party are asking for on the people's behalf: call public hearings?

You want to find out? You want to talk this out? We'll be at the hearings. I know that all of the people who are interested in this bill—and there are millions out there—will be at the hearings as well.

1610

The minister talks about the 591,000 jobs that they expect to be created as a result of this DST or HST or whatever you want to call it.

Interjection: BST.

Mr. John Yakabuski: BST; whatever you want to call it. But the minister cites a report that was done by Jack Mintz. No one is going to question Jack Mintz's credibility as a forecaster and an economist on these issues. But Jack Mintz is also a businessman. He doesn't do these things out of the goodness of his heart because he wants to save the world or he thinks that all of his services should be provided free of charge because he has something to offer to the people. He takes contracts just like all other lawyers or economists or forecasters or whatever.

They would have done a study before they ever brought this issue to the House, before they ever spoke about this at the time of the budget in March, and said, "We've got this study that supports a blended sales tax or harmonized sales tax"—no, no; no such study. Now, when their backs are against the wall because seniors and those people who are going to be hurt most because of this tax are rebelling and revolting across the province, they say, "Listen, Jack, we've got a little bit of money available here in the budget to pay for some studies."

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes: "These are the answers we need. Let's get all of that empirical data and anecdotal data that you can find, but at the end of the day we need a conclusion that supports what we've already decided we're doing." Jack Mintz would say, "Do you know what? I think we can do that. How much did you say you had? Yes, I think we can do that. I think we can give you just exactly what you wanted," because you know the old saying that he who pays the piper gets to pick the tune? That's exactly what would have happened with Mr. Mintz. I'm not questioning his credentials or his credibility in any way, but I also know that if I'm working for someone, I'm going to try to please the person whom I'm working for.

The government goes on and on and talks about those kinds of things, and all we've ever asked for is to take this issue to the people. They ask us what we're going to do. We're more than prepared—I'll tell you, if the Premier and the finance minister and the Minister of Revenue want to say today, "We're staying the proceedings. We're going to just put this into limbo. We're going to say 'wait,' and we'll go to the people; we'll go to the polls, we'll fight an election on the issue," we would be glad—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: We will.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My friend Lou from Northumberland–Quinte West says, "We will." You'll do it 14 months after it's already law and you've signed an agreement and taken a poison pill that prevents anybody in the future from (a) changing the rates for two years or (b) getting out of the agreement for five years without cutting a cheque for \$4.3 billion. Where in the name of Sam Hill, after you've driven this province into a \$25-billion deficit, are you going to get \$4.3 billion to cut a cheque to the federal government? It's just not going to happen; you know that.

So I'm saying to my friend Lou: Stay the proceedings. Say, "We're not going any further; we're not proceeding. We're going to go to the people on this. We'll fight an election on the issue," and we'll be glad to join you. We'll be glad to join you, only we'll be on the opposite side.

Interjection: Why don't we have an election?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd be glad to have that. I think the people would be glad to have an election on this issue. And then we'd see what they really like.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd love to debate this for the next five months. The member for Pickering–Scarborough East wants to debate the issue, yet they limit us to 6.5 hours of debate in this House and then they'll have time allocation on the bill. After that, they'll time-allocate the committee hearings to be held only in Toronto, shortened, and then they'll time-allocate third reading. They don't really want to talk about this. They just want it to be over with.

But because they've taken all the arrows out of our quiver, we have no tools left in the toolbox, so to speak, to register our disgust and our sadness that a government would do this to the seniors, the golden generation in this province, Canada's greatest generation, those veterans of World War II, that generation, who are still here today, fighting and clawing and trying to keep their heads above water. That's the generation that this government is attacking. They're saying, "You know what? We don't care that you won't be able to pay your hydro bills anymore. We don't care that you can't put gas in the car. We don't care that the heating of your home is going to be out of reach. We're going to hammer you, because we have a different idea and we want to make sure that our agenda is the one that matters."

With those kinds of situations and these kinds of untenable circumstances, rendering us almost unable to properly debate the issue because it will go no further than these hallowed halls of Queen's Park, we want hearings to be in Pembroke, Arnprior, Sault Ste. Marie, Dryden, North Bay, Sarnia, Durham and Cambridge. We want them everywhere, and we'll throw in Parry Sound, if Norm would like it. But they're not going to have any hearings there.

With that being left as the only options we have—you've taken everything out of our option—

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Here we go—another 30 minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, I want you to get prepared. I want you to get prepared, Wayne. If you want to put the cotton batting in your ears, you go right ahead.

I'm sorry, but you leave me no option, Mr. Speaker. It's not you personally, but it is your government that leaves me no option but to move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Yakabuski 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 1617 to 1647.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 10; the nays are 36.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole: Ask them one more time for public hearings.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Actually, I agree with my whip, and I appreciate the prompting. Sometimes it's prodding; in this case it's prompting me to ask, before you all leave—don't go, because maybe I can get you to agree right now, one last time, to public hearings. That's what the people of Ontario want. That's what the loyal opposition has been fighting for, fighting tooth and nail to bring this issue to the people.

The Minister of Revenue was talking about how there's going to be an additional \$250 rebate or lowering of the taxes to seniors. When I talk to seniors in my riding about what kind of a hit they're going to take with the GST, it adds up to more like \$2,500. Let's just say that you're a couple that is retired. You've got a golf membership at the Whitetail in Eganville or Renfrew or Wolf Ridge in Killaloe. A couple is about \$1,500. Add your taxes on that, my friend, and then start adding 8% every time you fill that car. We live in rural Ontario.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: Oh, Yak.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have all the respect in the world for my friend from Etobicoke Centre, but in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke—and she has been there; the Minister of Natural Resources has been there. She knows what a vast tract of land we live on. You can't get into that car for a short drive, and you sure as heck can't get on the subway, so every time you fill that car, it's an additional 8%.

You've got to start thinking. I see the minister responsible for seniors. I think she's weakening. I think she's starting to wonder. She is starting to question whether or not she is fulfilling her mandate to those

people who have given so much to this country. She's starting to ask herself, as the minister responsible for seniors, "Can I sit back? Can I sit back and be silent on this?"

It is time. It is time for the minister responsible for seniors to stand up, face her cabinet colleagues down and say, "You know what? You're wrong. We can't do this. What about those people? What about those people who are living on fixed incomes?" As my friend from Leeds–Grenville—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, now the member from Algoma–Manitoulin laughs because they might have a golf membership. Are they not supposed to enjoy the fruits of their labour if they worked hard all their lives? Does it mean that now they shouldn't be able to afford to do some of the things they want to do? Maybe they've got children and grandchildren who could still use a little bit of help. You're hurting those people. It leaves the grandchildren—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: The grandchildren have jobs.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He says the grandchildren have jobs. Well, I'll tell you, 300-and-some thousand of those grandchildren lost their jobs in your Ontario, lost their jobs under your management, so there are a lot fewer of those grandchildren working.

You have to ask yourself about all of the ramifications, all of the effect of what you're doing and the decisions you're making.

I'm going to ask you: Don't let your leader lead—I know that's redundant—lead you down the garden path on this one. Don't go like lemmings over the cliff and just do as he does. Stand up. Stand up for seniors.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Stand up for children and youth. Stand up for those in community services who need our help.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Tourism, stand up for tourist operators in the province of Ontario. They need our help. They don't need to have this foisted upon them at a time when they can least afford it.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I think you've riled somebody up, so I'm going to give them a chance to calm down.

Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I'm doing my best not to rile anyone up. That is not why I'm here. But this is an impassioned call to arms, a call to action, to stand up for the people of Ontario.

Every one of you people, in your ridings, somebody sent you here. Those people who voted for you in Algoma–Manitoulin or Barrie or Ottawa–Vanier or—

Interjection: Huron–Bruce, Huron–Bruce.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —Huron–Bruce, they sent you here to represent them. They gave you a mandate and you

should be proud to serve them, and I know you are. But I'm asking you to stand up for those people now.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order. Member for Huron–Bruce.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Don't take your orders from Dalton McGuinty and his special interests. Don't listen to them. This is an opportunity for you to stand up for the people who sent you here, the constituents. That's who our loyalties must remain with: our constituents, who vote us here time and time again.

I can tell you, the only people who elect me or can un-elect me are the people of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. My loyalties remain, and will always remain, with them.

I will stand with the seniors, I will stand with the families, I will stand with the young hockey players and the soccer moms and I will vote against this bill.

What you have left me are no tools but to ask for adjournment of this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I take it that as opposed to asking for it, you've moved adjournment of the House?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Yakabuski has moved 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 1655 to 1725.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Members, take your seats, please.

Mr. Yakabuski has moved adjournment of the House. All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the clerks.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 8; the nays are 36.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

I want to advise the House of some good news for me. The three late shows previously scheduled for this evening have been withdrawn.

Further debate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I only have a minute left, and in the interests of trying to get people home a little earlier, we decided to withdraw those late shows and reserve the option of filing them on other questions at a later date.

But as I said earlier, I predicted this would happen. I predicted it, and recently we just saw that the government House leader has filed a time allocation motion on the debate on this bill.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Isn't that a surprise?

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, I'm not surprised because your record precedes you, Mr. Brown. This is the way

that this government works: "Shut down debate; shut it down. We don't want to hear from people. We know best. This is the Liberal Party, the Liberal government. We know everything." I cannot tell you how sad and disappointed I am that on the biggest piece of tax legislation that we've ever seen, the government has shut down debate. Shame on you. You'll have to answer to your constituents.

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm privileged and honoured to stand up and comment on the speech from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. He was talking about democracy and debate. In the meantime, within the 20 minutes, he shut the debate down for almost an hour. I guess to the people of Ontario who were listening and watching today, the opposition party was playing games. They don't want to cut taxes for 93% of Ontarians. They don't want to cut business tax. They don't want to help to create more than 600,000 jobs for Ontarians.

I listened to him about his arguments. It didn't make sense at all. He's asking us to open the debate. We had the debate in this place. It's the right place to debate any issues concerning the people of Ontario. Especially today, we've been debating the most important issue concerning the future of this province, concerning the future of our kids, concerning the future of our environment, infrastructure, education and health care.

The opposition party is playing games with the people of Ontario. They go and say, "We oppose this HST tax or tax reform." In the meantime, when the opposition leader was in London, I asked him, "If you get elected as Premier of this province, what would you do?" And you know what? He said nothing. He would never commit to repeal the transformation taxes in this province of Ontario.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It's Mr. Hudak you're talking about, right?

1730

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Yes, I'm talking about the opposition leader, Mr. Tim Hudak.

The most important thing is, this place is open for debate any time. They had the chance, and they shut down the debate twice this afternoon—twice this afternoon. It's not fair to the people of Ontario. It's not fair to the people who were listening to us, who elect us to come to this place and debate the most important issues. The member opposite, he claims he wants to talk to the people of Ontario. He had that chance, and he blew it. He blew it. The opposition party, all the time they have the chance, and what happens? They leave the House. They leave and go outside. They forget this is a place of the people. This place is open for debate.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke tried to convince the members to have a second look at this. It's the biggest tax grab in the

history of Ontario, a fundamental change to tax policy, and they refuse to have public hearings.

Now we have the time allocation motion, which is even sadder. What it does—and I can read it, quoting it here, “On Monday, December 7, 2009, those amendments which have not been moved shall be deemed to have been moved”—they won’t even hear the amendments; they’re just deemed to be moved—and the chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining” issues. The only reason they’re having these hearings is to move amendments because of shoddy drafting, probably, but there’s no room for input here.

I think we should leave with one thought in mind: We’ve tried everything we can to this point to bring a voice to the people of Ontario who have not been heard. What I can say to the people of Ontario is this: If you’re purchasing anything that amounts to \$100 a month, that will be 8% more on those purchases. Let’s take gas, as an example. If it’s \$100 a week, that would be \$416 a year on that one item. That’s not including Internet service, home heating oil, consultants, buying stocks, trading your RRSPs. This tax is going to hurt consumers at every level. No matter how you cut it, this is a policy shift that’s not going to tax income from stocks or wages or payroll; it’s going to tax everything you consume. It’s a consumer tax. I think it’s blatantly unfair for those on fixed incomes.

They have now determined that they’re not going to listen to anyone. Shame on the Premier for not having public hearings. I just think it’s completely unconscionable to have done this.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It’s regrettable that we get to these points in debate where the government decides to dig in their heels and go in one particular direction without giving an opportunity for process, both for the opposition and the public to be able to speak to this.

I said earlier, in another debate, that this is a key plank of what this government is going to be running on in the next election. I think it’s a plank that you’re probably going to walk off the edge of, but that’s a whole other story. The government has clearly set this out as being the key thing you’re going to do in this Parliament, and in the next election, it’s going to be one of the key things that you’re going to have to defend.

The government goes out of its way—the Premier, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Revenue and others—to get up in this House and say, “We’re doing the right thing. We’re proud. This is the right thing to do. All these people are behind us. You guys are just making all this up.” I say to you: Allow this thing to go to committee; allow the public to have their say. It’s a little thing called democracy that we gained some years ago as a result of the Magna Carta and a whole bunch of other things that happened since that time.

At the end of the day, the public should have an opportunity to have its say. You’ll get a chance to organ-

ize people to come to committee to say all kinds of wonderful things, I’m sure. You’ll be able to find relatives and other people, party faithful, to come over and talk about this bill. I know how that works; I was on the other side. But I’ve got to say, it will also give opportunity for those who are really concerned to have their say. What’s wrong with that? It’s called democracy. It gives them an opportunity.

We have made an offer to you. We have said we are prepared to allow you to sit until midnights without any debate on midnight sitting. We’d give it to you on unanimous consent, provided that you allow us to have some committee hearings in a number of communities. We’re not saying a gazillion; we’re saying Thunder Bay, Sudbury, London, Toronto—

Mr. Michael Prue: And Ottawa.

Mr. Gilles Bisson:—and Ottawa. That is not, in my view, an exorbitant or irresponsible approach on the part of the New Democratic Party. We’re trying to find a way to give the public their say and to do what it is our job in this place to do. I just find it sad that the government decides to do otherwise.

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

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I was listening to a couple of the comments today. I heard them last week, last Thursday, and there really is some misinformation that is being distributed.

I’ll give you an example. The member from Durham last week said, and I quote out of Hansard, “Tell the people of Ontario the truth, Minister: that this is an 8% increase in the cost of living.” Now, that is patently absurd. Today he used exactly the same argument, and he said, “If you spend \$100, it’s going to cost you 8% more.” That is not true. Some 83% of all the items that attract sales tax are not impacted by this at all. There’s only 17%, and there are offsets on the other side. What we have is the constant putting forward of information that is totally incorrect. And what he’s trying to say is that there’s going to be an 8% cost-of-living rise as a result of this particular initiative.

Interjection: Check it out.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: The member is saying, “Check it out.” I would respectfully submit that you should check it out and you should be saying something that can be actually validated. What you’re saying is absolutely not able to be validated, because only 17% of items that are currently not attracting a sales tax will be included.

Why don’t you just get to the point? If you’re so anxious to be able to convey this information to the general public, you have that opportunity right here in the House, but let’s make sure that there is, in fact, accuracy in your statements.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), there having been six and a half hours of debate, this debate will be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise. Government House leader?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: The debate can continue.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I am absolutely proud to contribute to this debate. I would like to thank the government House leader. I know that this is a very difficult time for her and for others in this House, but I have been waiting now patiently for days and days for an opportunity to give the leadoff speech for the New Democratic Party—for that very opportunity. I know that my colleague Rosario Marchese had an opportunity to stand up and speak for 20 minutes, but it was literally impossible for me to be here. I have about 40 minutes in total that has been agreed to. I am going to split my time with my colleague the leader of the NDP, Andrea Horwath, the member from Hamilton Centre.

I hope to bring some civility to the debate. I'm not going to be ringing any bells. I want to talk about the bill. I want to talk about why I am opposed to the bill, why I think the government is not making the right decision on the bill, and what we need to do—I'm being waved the time allocation bill—but with the greatest of respect, when bells are rung constantly so that the third party cannot do its leadoff speech, that is not very democratic either.

Mr. Norm Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm sorry, you could have done your leadoff speech yesterday, but you went to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That's not a point of order.

The member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: It is also pretty rude because, as the member knows, I had been requested for months to speak to that reception.

What is happening, in the whole midst of the economy of this province, is that 200,000 people have lost their jobs in the last year. We have to look at the context of what is happening here economically and in terms of this bill. How is this going to be remedied? I look to some of the experts, and we all look to some of the experts, in terms of what is going to happen in terms of the HST.

The first expertise that came along was the chamber of commerce. The chamber of commerce was very detailed, and although the government was not very pleased in the details and they like to cart around that the chamber of commerce was somehow supportive, the chamber of commerce was very detailed in what they had to say. They said that there were going to be up to 40,000 jobs lost as a result of the HST. And they went further than Jack Mintz, further than anyone else who has been paid by this government; they detailed how that was going to happen. They detailed that there would be 3,300 fewer jobs in construction. They detailed that there would be 9,800 fewer professional jobs. They detailed that there would be 9,800 fewer professional jobs. They detailed that there would be 3,500 fewer accommodation and food service jobs, and finally, that there would be 4,600 fewer manufacturing jobs.

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If anyone took the time to detail and look at this, it was the chamber of commerce. Surprisingly, one of the

authors of the chamber of commerce report was that very same Jack Mintz, and I'm going to deal with him in a minute because it seems to me rather strange that an economist can give one set of details one week and turn around, after he is paid to give another set of details, and do something else.

The government, when they didn't like the report from the chamber of commerce, which was co-authored or partially authored by Jack Mintz, went out and hired him directly. We all know what happens if you hire someone to give you an opinion you want to hear. It's like someone who's involved in a traffic ticket. The first lawyer he or she goes to says, "I'm afraid you're going to have to plead guilty because you've done all these wrong things." Hell, you don't want that lawyer; you want a different lawyer. So you go out and find one who says, "I'll defend you on this charge. Notwithstanding all these things, I'm willing to argue something else." So that's the lawyer you hire.

Nothing is any different with this government. They went out and paid for a consultant, an economist who would give them a different opinion even though the different opinion was, in part, against himself. They went out and got Dr. Mintz to tell them that they're going to create 600,000 jobs in a period of 10 years—the same guy who said they're going to lose 40,000 jobs. Same guy. So I have to ask: How could anyone believe that? He didn't detail a single thing that's going to happen. He didn't say, "These are going to be the construction jobs. These are going to be the service jobs. These are going to be the jobs in government." He didn't list any of them. He just has this airy-fairy thought that there are going to be 600,000 jobs, and I'll tell you, not one single economist who peer-reviewed him believes it. Everybody thinks it's a whole, giant joke, and I have to tell you, I consider it a whole giant joke. I could say that by not doing it, you're going to make a million jobs. What difference is me saying that and him saying that? It's ethereal. It is absolutely pulled out of the air. That's what "ethereal" means: pulled right out of the air.

This is the same Alberta academic that the government dissed in this House. I remember when the finance minister stood up and he was asked about Dr. Jack Mintz. He used the following words: nothing but an "Alberta academic" whose "neo-conservative ideas" simply "don't work." The same finance minister who stands up today and lauds the paid report—you pay for it, you get it, and all of a sudden the guy who didn't know what he was talking about is your hero, and there's the same Jack Mintz. I guess, when it's convenient, the finance minister is willing to embrace the old ideas of the Alberta academic whose ideas just don't work. Because they work for the finance minister, they're part of the argument he now wants to make, but nobody in this province believes those numbers except some members opposite.

Nobody believes the numbers at all. After all, who believes that an 8% tax on gas and hydro is going to create jobs? You have to drive farther to work. When you get some tomatoes out of Leamington, it costs 8% more

to drive them up to Toronto, where you buy them in the supermarket. The hydro that powers all of our factories is going to cost 8% more, but all the costs are going to go down. Everybody is going to live in some kind of giant utopia. Nobody believes this. Nobody at all.

Who believes the Alberta academic who, one year ago, wrote a paper that predicted the HST will kill tens of thousands of jobs every year and now says that it's going to create 600,000 jobs in their place? I don't know how much this government paid him, but I'll bet you it was a lot of money. I'll bet you that it was more money than I can possibly imagine or probably am going to earn in a year, for him to make those kinds of statements. One day I hope to find out exactly how much this government paid Professor Dr. Jack Mintz to go in a 180-degree circle, from it costing 40,000 jobs to the hugely inflated figure that it's going to create 600,000. He came to that whole thing in just the shortest possible time. In fact, I think that it's not going to happen at all.

Then I looked at the HST and I thought, "Why is the government doing it?" There's a lot of—

Mr. John O'Toole: More revenue.

Mr. Michael Prue: Well, here's my friend, and he just anticipated. Lots of people think it's going to create more revenue. I will tell you, without a shadow of a doubt, that it is going to bring revenue in. Ordinary consumers are going to pay \$3.8 billion more to this government. They're going to pay it on everything they buy, from gas to oil to lawyers' fees, professional fees. On everything that was not taxed before, they're going to pay it.

But the government, at the same time—and you will all admit it, because I hear the Minister of Revenue, the Minister of Finance, the Premier and the members opposite—my good friend the parliamentary assistant stands up all the time and says, "We're going to cut taxes to the big corporations. They're going to save \$4.3 billion by what we do."

Remember those two numbers: \$3.8 billion that it will cost the consumers, and \$4.3 billion that's going to go to the corporations. The government's actually going to lose money. It's going to lose money on this deal so that ordinary consumers, the people watching this television—you have to know they're going to take it off you, but they're going to give it to someone else. They're going to take it off you and they're going to actually lose money so that when you ask them about all the programs that need to be done, they're going to say that they don't have any money to do it.

In fact, the tax package is going to cost about half a billion dollars to this government. They're bringing in a scheme that's going to cost them, in the long term, a lot of money: less money for critical health services, less money for education, less money for the elderly, less money for long-term-care facilities. At the same time, all of those companies are going to look in there and say, "This is good."

I hear the government saying that, oh, my God, they're going to create jobs. I don't think so. I watch the United

States. I've watched them for the last 20 years. I've watched them under George Bush. I've watched them go through machinations. I've watched them being given trillions of dollars in tax cuts. Can anyone say that that country is any better off, with the trillions of dollars of tax cuts—which are being mirrored by this government—than they were before? I think not. Can anyone say that jobs have been created? Look at the unemployment lines in the United States; look at the unemployment lines here. There are absolutely no jobs being created as a result of this kind of thing.

Profitable companies that are going to get this tax—remember, it's only the ones that are making a profit. It's not all the others. It's not the ones that are struggling and have their fingernails up against the wall, trying to hold on, trying to keep a few employees employed, trying to make sure that the doors don't shut. The ones that are going to get this money, and the only ones that can get this money through tax cuts, are those that are making a profit. So they're going to make more profit.

I'm not opposed to profit, but there is nothing tied to that profit at all. There's nothing that ties down that they have to keep their employees. There's nothing that ties it down so that they can't take the money and move it offshore.

There are companies, and particularly banks—I've been warned that some of the banks are starting to move their operations to India. Now, do I care that they move it to India? Yes, I do. I care because thousands of Canadians rely upon those jobs. Thousands of people in Ontario and in this city of Toronto rely on those jobs. They're going to move them offshore. We're going to give them money to move it offshore.

This is what was talked about in the beginning. This is what the government has not looked at at all. This is what the government has not put through their heads: When you give these corporations a lot of money, there are only a couple of things they can do with it. They want to go out there and maximize their profits, and they're going to maximize them in any way they can. That includes moving offshore, moving the jobs to Mexico, moving the jobs to China, moving the jobs to India, and there's nothing in here that compels them to keep those jobs in Canada. So to say that you're going to create the jobs is a huge pipe dream.

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I have some real difficulties as well knowing that they're making a profit. I have some real difficulties when I look down those shareholders' lists and the corporate boards of directors' lists and see what they do with the money. Most of the money ends up in corporate pockets. The executives make \$500,000, \$800,000, \$1 million, \$2 million a year. This money is just going to go there. They're all going to get a raise. Everybody who's making \$1 million a year is going to get a raise.

But what about the ordinary people who are paying the freight? What about those poor people? Every one of those poor people who are paying eight cents on every litre of gas, paying eight cents when they're trying to heat

their home on every single dollar of home heating fuel—every one of those, when they turn on and off the lights, knows that it's going to cost them eight cents more. In the end, it doesn't come back to them, because for every \$1 that they contribute, \$1.06 goes to the corporations. For every \$1 they contribute, they're going to get 16 cents back in tax cuts. I hear the Minister of Revenue saying that there are going to be tax cuts for ordinary people. It amounts to 16 cents. The members opposite, I hope you're listening; that's what the tax cuts to ordinary people will amount to. They spend a buck; they get back 16 cents. If you wonder why the New Democrats are opposed, pretty much in a nutshell, that is it.

There have been lots of job losses: 200,000 in Ontario since December. Wages are down. Use of food banks is up by 120,000 people since March. I remember that the finance minister used to do this whole scenario: "This is up; this is up; this is up; this is down." I'm telling you, the opposite is true today. I'd like him to do that scenario today, because what he'd have to say is, "Unemployment is way up." He'd have to say, "The use of food banks is way up. The destitution of the people is way up. And what is down is our revenue." It's exactly the opposite of what he said a year ago, using those same theatrics. But do I see him saying that today? Not at all.

There are people out there who are suffering: our old, our children, and everybody except those who are getting the corporate tax cuts. If they were the answer, the United States would not be in recession, nor would Canada, nor would the world, because this is the failed policy that was followed by George Bush. And thank God, an end is being put to it by Mr. Obama. The banks cash in but the struggling businesses do not.

This government, and in particular this Premier, has been quite eloquent in past years criticizing such "a ridiculous policy," as even he characterized it over the years. A few examples of things he had to say over the years:

On March 20, 2008, the Premier of Ontario made the following statement:

"What the Conservatives are asking us to do is to cut corporate income taxes—those are taxes on profitable corporations—by \$2.3 billion.... That definitely means closing hospitals, firing nurses, cutting education. It means driving up tuition fees. It means cutting the Ministry of the Environment and the like, and it means running a deficit." Dalton McGuinty, 2008.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, it wasn't just isolated. May 14, 2002—and I remember, he wasn't the Premier then, but he was the opposition leader:

"They just have to tell their friends on Bay Street that the \$2.2 billion in corporate tax breaks they were expecting is something we just can't afford.... The truth is that this government is terrible with money."

Or how about December 5, 2001, when the Premier said—or the then opposition member, now Premier, said: "Minister, you say that you have to make cuts. We say

you could easily cut your \$2.2-billion corporate tax cut"? Dalton McGuinty.

Or how about November 20, 2001? "Quite simply, we believe that health care, public education and the protection of our environment are greater priorities than cutting corporate taxes by an additional \$2.2 billion. Our priorities are the priorities of our working families."

Last but not least, one of my really favourite ones, October 15, 2001—that was the month after I first arrived in this place. I remember hearing this quote from the Premier, the then Leader of the Opposition:

"Minister, you remain committed to your \$2.2-billion corporate tax cut. It seems to me it's becoming very clear that this cut in corporate taxes is going to leave you with one of two options: You are either going to run deficits or you are going to make serious and further dramatic cuts to health care, education and the environment."

That was Dalton McGuinty. That was the man who is the Premier of this province. That is the man who was telling us to believe him, that the things he once denounced are now somehow the mantra that he wants to embrace.

Mr. Speaker, I'm mindful of the time, and I have only a couple of minutes left. I want to talk about our First Nations people. I don't know how much has been talked about them since this debate began because, as I said, there have been many bells rung. The First Nations people of this province are amongst the most destitute people in our land. If anyone has an opportunity to go up into the Treaty 7 and Treaty 9 areas in northern Ontario, you will see poverty, you will see destitution, you will see despair, you will see children who have no opportunity—no opportunity for jobs. You will see them sniffing glue, you will see them drinking alcohol, you will see ordinary people in total despair, and what is this bill going to do to them? Right now they do not pay the 8% provincial sales tax when they live on the reserve or in the First Nation community. They are exempt. But when you pass this bill, every single thing that they buy on that reserve is going to be subject to 8%. It's not like me. I'm only going to pay on the gas and the hydro and the lawyer's fees and the professional fees. They are going to pay on absolutely everything.

They're going to pay 8% on every item that they have been exempt on up to this point. They live in despair, they live in poverty, and their cost of living is going to go up by 8% because this government is in bed with the federal Conservatives. They have not been able to argue, they have not been able to make a deal, and they are going to charge the poorest people in this land all of that money. I think that if there is one disgrace, that is it. I'm from Toronto. I don't have any First Nations communities. I do have a few First Nations people, but I don't have any reserves. But I want to tell you that I have seen it and I know what it costs. Those who've had the opportunity to travel across northern Ontario—and I see the minister here and he knows it—you go into the Northern Store and you will pay \$20 for a bag of potatoes; you will pay \$18 for a bag of milk; you will pay

for things what you cannot even believe. I know when the member from Willowdale went, he looked at his favourite ice cream, which he could buy in Toronto for \$3. It cost how much? 12 bucks?

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Fourteen dollars. He just told me \$14. That is now going to be subject to 8% HST. So not only can they not eat that ice cream, but if they do, it's going to cost them an extra buck and a half to get it. That's the whole thing of what's happening up there.

This government says, "Oh, I'm concerned," but have I heard them exempting the First Nations community? No, I have not. Have I heard them talking about the poverty that is endemic to those people? No, I have not. If you want to know why I stand here in rage, in moral outrage over all of this, it's not so much how it hurts my constituents, and indeed it does, but I see that those people who are being hurt the most are the ones who can least afford to be hurt.

If we want to forge that new relationship with the people of the north, if we are truly, truly wanting to talk

about the treaties that Ontario signed, Treaty 9 and Treaty 7, of which we are treaty partners—pretty rare; we are treaty partners—then I think we have to have a whole look at this HST and we have to look at how it is going to affect them. They have not been consulted, they are angry and they need to be listened to.

This government needs to make sure that what they are doing that really hurts the people of this province does not hurt the people of our northern communities any more than it hurts those in the south. I think that some real changes have to be made.

Mr. Speaker, I'm mindful of the time; I can see you looking at your watch. I think my time is up, and so I would stop now. The balance of my time will be used by the leader of the New Democratic Party on the next occasion.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member is correct. It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until Thursday, November 26, at 9 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1800.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

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

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| Arnott, Ted (PC) | Wellington–Halton Hills | |
| Arthurs, Wayne (LIB) | Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est | |
| Bailey, Robert (PC) | Sarnia–Lambton | |
| Balkissoon, Bas (LIB) | Scarborough–Rouge River | |
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| Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB) | Sudbury | Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels |
| Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB) | London West / London-Ouest | Attorney General / Procureur général |
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| Bisson, Gilles (NDP) | Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James | |
| Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB) | St. Catharines | Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports |
| Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB) | Etobicoke–Lakeshore | Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine |
| Brown, Michael A. (LIB) | Algoma–Manitoulin | |
| Brownell, Jim (LIB) | Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry | |
| Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (LIB) | Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre | Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles |
| Caplan, David (LIB) | Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est | |
| Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (LIB) | Barrie | Minister of Culture / Ministre de la Culture Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées |
| Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB) | Markham–Unionville | Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration |
| Chudleigh, Ted (PC) | Halton | |
| Colle, Mike (LIB) | Eglinton–Lawrence | |
| Craitor, Kim (LIB) | Niagara Falls | |
| Crozier, Bruce (LIB) | Essex | Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président |
| Delaney, Bob (LIB) | Mississauga–Streetsville | |
| Dhillon, Vic (LIB) | Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest | |
| Dickson, Joe (LIB) | Ajax–Pickering | |
| DiNovo, Cheri (NDP) | Parkdale–High Park | Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB) | Prince Edward–Hastings | Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales |
| Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB) | Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre | Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement |
| Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB) | Windsor–Tecumseh | Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances |
| Dunlop, Garfield (PC) | Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord | |
| Elliott, Christine (PC) | Whitby–Oshawa | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle |

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

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|---|---|
| Murdoch, Bill (PC) | Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound | |
| Naqvi, Yasir (LIB) | Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre | |
| O’Toole, John (PC) | Durham | |
| Oraziotti, David (LIB) | Sault Ste. Marie | |
| Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC) | Oshawa | |
| Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB) | Kitchener–Conestoga | |
| Peters, Hon. / L’hon. Steve (LIB) | Elgin–Middlesex–London | Speaker / Président de l’Assemblée législative |
| Phillips, Hon. / L’hon. Gerry (LIB) | Scarborough–Agincourt | Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l’Énergie et de l’Infrastructure |
| Prue, Michael (NDP) | Beaches–East York | |
| Pupatello, Hon. / L’hon. Sandra (LIB) | Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest | Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce |
| Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB) | Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord | |
| Ramal, Khalil (LIB) | London–Fanshawe | |
| Ramsay, David (LIB) | Timiskaming–Cochrane | |
| Rinaldi, Lou (LIB) | Northumberland–Quinte West | |
| Runciman, Robert W. (PC) | Leeds–Grenville | Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l’opposition officielle |
| Ruprecht, Tony (LIB) | Davenport | |
| Sandals, Liz (LIB) | Guelph | |
| Savoline, Joyce (PC) | Burlington | |
| Sergio, Mario (LIB) | York West / York-Ouest | |
| Shurman, Peter (PC) | Thornhill | |
| Smith, Hon. / L’hon. Monique M. (LIB) | Nipissing | Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement |
| Smitherman, George (LIB) | Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre | |
| Sorbara, Greg (LIB) | Vaughan | |
| Sousa, Charles (LIB) | Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud | |
| Sterling, Norman W. (PC) | Carleton–Mississippi Mills | |
| Tabuns, Peter (NDP) | Toronto–Danforth | Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu |
| Takhar, Hon. / L’hon. Harinder S. (LIB) | Mississauga–Erindale | Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux |
| Van Bommel, Maria (LIB) | Lambton–Kent–Middlesex | |
| Watson, Hon. / L’hon. Jim (LIB) | Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean | Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement |
| Wilkinson, Hon. / L’hon. John (LIB) | Perth–Wellington | Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu |
| Wilson, Jim (PC) | Simcoe–Grey | First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l’Assemblée |
| Witmer, Elizabeth (PC) | Kitchener–Waterloo | |
| Wynne, Hon. / L’hon. Kathleen O. (LIB) | Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest | Minister of Education / Ministre de l’Éducation |
| Yakabuski, John (PC) | Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke | Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l’opposition officielle |
| Zimmer, David (LIB) | Willowdale | |

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Garfield Dunlop
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Robert Bailey
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
Jim Brownell, Kim Craitor
Bob Delaney, Garfield Dunlop
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Khalil Ramal
Clerks / Greffiers: William Short (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laura Albanese
Laura Albanese, Wayne Arthurs
Toby Barrett, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Eric Hoskins, Pat Hoy
Michael Prue, Peter Shurman
Charles Sousa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: David Oraziatti
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Helena Jaczek
Helena Jaczek, Kuldip Kular
Amrit Mangat, Rosario Marchese
Bill Mauro, Reza Moridi
David Oraziatti, Joyce Savoline
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Laura Albanese, Michael A. Brown
Howard Hampton, Ernie Hardeman
Rick Johnson, Lisa MacLeod
Yasir Naqvi, Leeanna Pendergast
Jim Wilson
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Ted Chudleigh
Christine Elliott, Peter Kormos
Jeff Leal, Dave Levac
Leeanna Pendergast, Lou Rinaldi
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Khalil Ramal
Bas Balkissoon, Jim Brownell
Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Norm Miller, Khalil Ramal
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ted Arnott
Ted Arnott, France Gélinas
Phil McNeely, Jerry J. Ouellette
David Ramsay, Liz Sandals
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craitor, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Clerks / Greffiers: Trevor Day (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Sophia Aggelonitis, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Linda Jeffrey
Sylvia Jones, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Carol Mitchell, Shafiq Qaadri
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions / Comité
spécial de la santé mentale et des dépendances**

Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Bas Balkissoon, Christine Elliott
Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
Jeff Leal, Liz Sandals
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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