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of Debates
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des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 10 December 2009

Jeudi 10 décembre 2009

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 10 December 2009

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 10 décembre 2009

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Season's greetings from Speaker Claus and company. Thank you to my elves.

Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the aboriginal prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENERGY CONSUMER
PROTECTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES CONSOMMATEURS D'ÉNERGIE

Mr. Phillips moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 235, An Act to enact the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2009 and to amend other Acts / Projet de loi 235, Loi édictant la Loi de 2009 sur la protection des consommateurs d'énergie et modifiant d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I should inform the House that I plan to share my time with the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale, my good friend the Minister of Consumer Services.

I look forward to the debate here on the bill and I look forward to it no doubt going to committee. I think it's fair to say that this is a bill that has the interest of every member in the Legislature.

For the public's knowledge, it deals really with three areas. The one that I found has the most public interest is dealing with what are called energy retailers. These are companies that sell contracts for natural gas or contracts for electricity. The second part of the bill deals with what we call sub-metering in multiresidential buildings, which means allowing tenants in a multiresidential rental building to have electricity metered for their own apartment and paid separately. We deal with that issue. And thirdly, the issue around setting some standards on when utilities can require security deposits and what we call disconnect policies, when they can turn off the electricity or the gas.

As I say, I think every member in the Legislature—I think I probably heard from every member of our caucus on this bill, and I think that's probably true for the opposition as well. This is an area that we get a lot of comments from our constituents on, and this bill is designed

to address the issues that each of the members are dealing with.

I want to thank my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane, Dave Ramsay. The member started working on this a couple of years ago, really; he had a private member's bill that highlighted the issue. So he has been among the leaders here, and I want to thank him. He deserves a lot of credit for where we stand now, although I would say he's not alone in terms of this being an important issue for us in the Legislature to deal with.

It's very important that the public have clear rules of conduct when they're dealing with these retailers, that they have a right to expect honest, straightforward business practices. They have a right to expect that when abuses occur they will be dealt with severely. There is an obligation for us to create an environment where business can operate, but equally where consumers are treated fairly. I believe this legislation strikes that balance.

I look forward to the debate here. I look forward to suggestions on improvements, because at the end of the day, as they say, I'm determined that the consumer will have the appropriate level of confidence, that they understand what they are dealing with and they are making an informed decision in the proper environment. The legislation firstly deals with making sure the consumer has every opportunity to understand the offer they are being presented with; I'll talk in some more detail about that later. But it's fair to say that understanding the electricity market is not easy. We have to make it easy for people to understand what they're buying. We have to make sure that the retailers understand they've got a clear obligation to present their offers clearly and fairly.

Not everybody may be aware, but these fixed energy contracts have been around for some time. Maybe the best analogy I can give is that these fixed energy contracts are sort of like buying a fixed-rate mortgage. You know how most of us have a debate about whether we want a variable or a fixed-rate mortgage. These contracts essentially allow consumers to buy at a fixed rate. Typically, our utilities have a variable rate; the electricity price changes over time.

The contracts in gas have been around since 1997, so a little more than 10 years. In 2002, the same business model was introduced here in Ontario for electricity, where consumers can buy at a fixed rate over a fixed period of time. So it has been around for some time, and a considerable number of people have signed up for them. However—we're all aware of this, I believe—the Ontario Energy Board, which has the responsibility for regulating these retailers, gets between 100 and 150

consumer complaints every week about energy retailers. Over the past three years—and my colleague the Minister of Consumer Services would tell us—typically this issue ends up in the top 10 of the consumer grievances that he deals with. So there's a clear need to act, and we are acting with this legislation. The act contains measures to ensure that legitimate businesses are permitted and illegitimate behaviours are subject to severe crackdown. So, that's the energy retailing side, and I'll get into a little more detail in a moment.

The second part of it is that it strengthens the protection for residents of multi-unit rental residential buildings where suite metering is in place or being introduced. What this means is that we're anxious in this province, working very hard on energy conservation, trying to find ways for people to use less electricity, less natural gas, less gasoline in their cars; wherever we can cut down on energy use, we're anxious to do that.

0910

Experience has shown that in a rental apartment, the use of electricity drops by 20% to 25% if you are paying for your own electricity. It kind of makes sense that if you turn up the heat a little too much or you are over-using your air conditioner, you would recognize that and you'd see that if you cut that down, you would save money. We are determined to move to helping people in this province make those informed decisions. We are moving to something we call smart metering across the province, which allows people to have what's called time-of-use pricing, where the price of electricity is less in off-peak hours, so we can get people to use it then and we require fewer electricity generating plants.

It's a good idea for people to have the ability to control their own electricity use. However, in existing buildings it's equally important that tenants have some protection against the sort of arbitrary use of this. I think we are striking that balance—and I'll get into more detail later—when a building is going to be suite metered: Individual tenants will have the choice either to go on individual billing or to stay where they are. I think that protects the rights of existing tenants, ensures transparency and will help us along the way to this culture of conservation we often talk about.

The third area of this piece of legislation clarifies circumstances for consumer security deposits and disconnections. We want to make sure there's a standard in this across the province. Businesses have the freedom to require security deposits when warranted. We want to make sure that when the service is left unpaid for an extended period of time, disconnection is a reasonable response, but there should be objective and standard practices guiding such measures, particularly ensuring fair treatment of consumers who are vulnerable, such as those for whom energy disconnections are not an option: individuals with particular health or income challenges.

I'll go now to talking in some detail about the part of the legislation that deals with energy retailers. The first part ends what I call unfair consumer practices. I get a lot of comments, not just from members of the Legislature

but from other people, about the practices of door-to-door salespeople. There is a concern that they don't, in all cases, identify who they are, or if they say who they are, they are misleading. In fact, we've had instances where people look like they're from the government—they have a trillium logo that they're carrying around—and the consumer doesn't know who they're dealing with. They will essentially leave the impression that they have the right to look at your bill and whatnot.

We have to find a way that door-to-door salespeople are properly regulated; that when they appear at the door they are clearly identified—this legislation calls for that—and that you know you are not dealing with your local utility and you are not dealing with the government of Ontario but you are dealing with a particular company. They will be required to make an oral disclosure of who they are.

Importantly, we will ensure that the companies are held accountable for their salespeople. The salespeople must be licensed. That is not the case right now; the retailers are licensed but not the salespeople. The companies are going to be held accountable for behaviour at the door. Too often we've heard examples where the company will say, "Well, that salesperson certainly wasn't following company orders. We'll get rid of them." Often these people are contract employees; essentially, they are commissioned salespeople.

I believe the legislation gives us the tools to ensure that door-to-door salespeople practise fair consumer practices. This will be the subject of some debate. There is the concern: Can we hold them accountable? I believe we can, particularly with the part of the legislation that holds the companies and the directors responsible for the actions of their salespeople at the door. That's a very important part of this legislation: All of us will have to be satisfied that this legislation will be able to hold those door-to-door salespeople accountable. I would also add that the legislation applies to online sales and phone sales. But we seem to have the highest number of complaints door to door.

The second part of the legislation—and this is crucial for me—is to make sure that people have the information to make an informed decision when they are being asked to sign a contract. Essentially, as I said in my earlier remarks, what the consumer is buying is a fixed price over a period of time. That essentially is what it is. The company will say, "We will sell you electricity for this rate over this period of time," three or four years. But there has to be a way, and there will be a way, and the legislation contemplates having a way, that people have a clear understanding of what that is.

We have another sub-issue that we are dealing with and must deal with in this, and that's called the provincial benefit or the global adjustment. That's jargon for—the electricity price has two elements in it. It's very confusing to the consumer. We have to fix that in here, and we have to fix it in the non-retail area as well. It's very difficult for the consumer to understand. But I'm determined that people will understand what they're buying.

I will say that I looked at what British Columbia does in the natural gas area, and there it's crystal clear. They simply say, "Here's the price you're paying for a measurement of natural gas," and then, "These companies are offering a one-year, a three-year, or a five-year fixed rate on natural gas at this." It gives the consumer essentially the same information you have when you're making a decision on a mortgage, where you can understand: Is it variable or fixed, over what period of time, and what's the interest rate?

We have to find a way, and we will, and the legislation gives us the opportunity to do that, so that when the consumer is being asked to sign the contract, they will understand, firstly, who they're dealing with, that it's not the utility; it's a company. They'll understand, if they don't sign it, the consequences. The consequences are, you stay with what you're doing. So I would stay with my local utility.

Then, the third part of it is to understand what they're buying and how it compares to what they've been paying. Part of it, by the way, is that the contracts will be text-based. So even if you're dealing on the phone, before the contract is valid you have to sign a hard copy of it.

A piece of legislation where there's still flexibility—well, there's flexibility everywhere, because we're going to amend it, but where we will be looking for advice in the committee is, who is authorized to sign the contract? There are essentially only going to be two choices. Is it the account holder, or the account holder and spouse? There's a debate around that. But we are going to dramatically narrow who can sign the contract, so that we don't find inappropriate people signing the contract.

The third part of dealing with the concerns of the consumer is the feeling that you've been pressured into signing. You're often dealing with an expert salesperson at the door, and somehow or other you sign the contract. The legislation contemplates three opportunities for sober second thought. One is a 10-day cooling-off period, where you can just unilaterally not do it; cancel it.

Then, between 10 days and 60 days after you've signed the contract, we will have what is called third party verification. What this means is that the Ontario Energy Board, which has a responsibility for regulating this, will prepare a list of companies capable of doing this third party verification. One of the criteria would also be being able to do it in several languages, as appropriate. The retailer has to select, off that list, the company to do the verification, and they will do it from a prescribed script so that the consumer should feel confident that the companies that are doing this, selected by the Ontario Energy Board and monitored by the Ontario Energy Board, are not working for the retailer but are working on behalf of the public.

The third cooling-off period is that 30 days after you get your first bill, you can cancel it. This is the third area that we get a lot of comment on—"I didn't know what I was signing" etc.—and this will deal with that.

0920

The next area is unfair cancellation policies. Right now, natural gas contracts have an automatic renewal

provision, which we are going to remove, but we're going to also deal with some of the practices that go on. I think many of us have found examples where a cheque is sent to a consumer, and they cash it, not being aware that a condition of cashing it is that you are renewing your contract. Well, we're going to deal with that, and that will not be acceptable.

We're going to prevent excessive fees and remove the fees altogether if you move into a rental building where you couldn't possibly use the contract. Strangely enough, actually, there are a lot of examples where people have signed two contracts. It's hard to believe, and we'll deal with that where the first contract is the one and the second wouldn't be.

The next problem I want to talk about is accountability—and I touched on this a little bit earlier—holding the companies accountable for the salespeople going to the door. We're going to require additional licensing conditions, including background checks. If you want to volunteer to be an assistant hockey coach, you need a background check. It seems to us that for somebody selling fairly expensive contracts door to door, the same sort of standards should apply. So we're determined to find the mechanisms to make sure that people who are selling door to door are accountable and monitored and the company is held responsible.

The last point I'd make on the retailer is to ensure that, as I said earlier, all costs are disclosed. We still have what's called a provincial benefit or a global adjustment that we must deal with so that consumers understand that when they are buying this product, everything is in on it.

My belief is that this legislation will deal with the major issues that we get on a daily basis. As I say, I look forward to the debate here and to suggestions from the Legislature at second reading and then input at the committee. I repeat: It's an issue of intense interest to virtually every member of the Legislature.

The second one I want to talk about is what's called suite metering. I mentioned earlier that the purpose of it is to find ways that people can conserve energy. This is pretty important to all of us. We have, in this province, quite substantial peaks in daily usage. You get, particularly in warm weather—in the province, our biggest-use days are the hot summer days. At one time, it was the cold winter days; now it's the hot summer days. You get these peaks through the day. If we can find a way to lower those peaks by 10% or 15%—because, obviously, you have to generate electricity for the peak—you need 10% or 15% less generation in the province, because many of these things run 24 hours a day, but you've got to have what's called peaking power.

So it's in all of our interests to find ways to conserve energy. That's what this suite metering is about: finding ways that people can control their own energy use and benefit from it. So the solution is that in all new residential buildings it will be mandatory to have individual suite metering. That makes sense to everyone, I think.

But in existing buildings, whether you move on to suite metering or not will be voluntary, and that's designed to give us an opportunity to phase this in. The

problem right now is that there aren't good rules for individual billing in rental buildings. The proposed solutions in the legislation are to:

- require consent from sitting tenants;
- require the landlords to adjust the amount of rent paid to offset the electricity cost that would have been billed to the tenant; and
- give prospective new tenants the necessary information when they move in, because when they move in, they will be on their own suite meter.

Another problem is that the companies that actually install the metering—the individual apartment metering—are not subject to the same rules as the local distributing company. Here in Toronto our local distributing company is Toronto Hydro. They have firm rules from the Ontario Energy Board about individual or suite metering. But private companies can also do it without the same rules, and we are going to have the same rules for them as for the local distributing company. Why is that important? It's important that fees be regulated. It's important that there's confidence in the suite metering company, and that renters who are anxious about getting on individual metering are not inappropriately taken advantage of.

Another challenge is to make sure tenants don't move onto individual metering in highly inefficient buildings. We're going to require certain standards around the appliances in the individual-meter situations.

The last thing I'd touch on is the consumer security deposit and disconnects. There's quite a variety of rules around this across the province. The proposed solution here is that the OEB would regulate disconnection security deposits for both electricity and gas companies and look at alternatives to deposits, requiring specific standards for disconnects for vulnerable consumers, and requiring utilities to accept payment of security deposits over time. So it will give us an opportunity to have some standards around disconnects.

Back to what I find tends to be the main element of this piece of legislation, and that is, finding ways to regulate electricity and gas retailers. As I've said several times now—I've been the minister for four weeks and three days, but it has been a subject that many of my caucus and many of the opposition have talked to me about. It's one that we have to solve.

It is not a small purchase for people to make. It is not currently easy for people to understand, so I'm determined that this legislation—amended, if there are good ideas—will solve these problems. Problem number one is inappropriate pressure at the door, and maybe one on the phone as well. When somebody knocks on your door, you will know who you're dealing with. They will be required to disclose who you're dealing with; you will be able to identify who you're dealing with. And importantly, we will find a way to hold the companies accountable for that. It no longer will be acceptable to say, "Well, they certainly weren't operating under our guidelines."

0930

The second part of it—and this is crucial—is that when people are being offered this contract, they clearly under-

stand what they're buying. Right now, I dare say, many don't. Certainly, experience in my constituency office and in my colleague from Peterborough's constituency office is that we run into cases where people say, "I didn't know what I was buying." We probably all have family who have been involved in it, either not knowing what they're buying or being unable to find any way out of it.

We are determined to ensure that people understand what they're buying. To retailers who may say, "Well, it's pretty onerous on us to spell that out in all that detail and all that clarity," I'd say, "If the product you're selling doesn't stand up to the full light of disclosure, where people have complete understanding of what they're buying, then maybe the product has difficulty in being a sale." To me, almost the cornerstone of this is consumers understanding exactly what they're purchasing in a good price comparison. I looked at what is going on in BC with natural gas retailers, and that's the case.

The cooling-off period: Consumers have a chance for a little bit of sober second thought. That's why there's the 10-day cooling off period, which by the way is standard in a lot of other consumer legislation, I believe, very standard. Then there's what we call third party validation, where a company selected, screened and agreed upon by the Ontario Energy Board makes that call to people and they understand exactly what they have signed on for, and then a last opportunity once you get your bill. That, I believe, will be very helpful in weeding out inappropriate practices. As I say, I'm satisfied that this legislation will tackle those problems, and they have to.

On suite metering, individual metering: It's part of our plan to help people conserve energy. I mentioned before that we are moving to something called smart metering across the province; the public may have heard of that. Currently, or in the past, there was no capability to sort of measure your electricity use by hour. First, it was difficult for you to find a way to manage your own energy use. Secondly, there was no way that the utility could charge a different price depending on the time of day. I just say again that if we can find ways to shift the use of electricity off those peaks, it is very beneficial to our electricity system, because you don't have to build electricity capacity to those high peaks.

What we're trying to do, and what we are doing, is encouraging people to do that by what is called time-of-use pricing, which means that the price in non-peak hours is lower than in peak hours. So if you're going to do your dishes, don't do them at 6 o'clock, do them at 10 o'clock at night. If you're going to do your laundry, don't do it at 6 o'clock, do it at 10 o'clock at night. We've even moved to help people automatically turn down their air conditioners through the day and then turn them back up at the appropriate time.

We are determined to find ways that people benefit and are encouraged to reduce their use during peak hours. By the way—I did not mention this earlier—part of dealing with the retailers will be to make sure they offer time-of-use pricing. We cannot let this retail area under-

mine what we're trying to do on energy conservation, so that will be required.

This is back to the second part of the legislation: the individual metering in buildings. I think it's a good balance, and it's always this balance between our very important objective of energy conservation—and that's the suite metering—and making sure that existing tenants are treated fairly. I choose to believe we've found that right balance, where if you're in an existing apartment, you have the option of moving on to suite metering, or not. If you move into an apartment that's already suite-metered, you would understand you're moving into that apartment on the basis that you will be individually billed for your electricity.

I believe we've struck the right balance, and it's a way that the province can move forward pretty aggressively on individual apartment and rental accommodation, but not treat tenants unfairly.

We begin second reading debate today. When the Legislature comes back in a few weeks, I assume we'll continue the second reading debate. My instincts are that there will be a fair bit of interest on the committee work on this as well.

At the end of the day, as they say, I look forward to a piece of legislation that is fair to the business community, fair to the retailers, but very importantly, that the public will say, "You know, that's what was needed. I understand now what I'm buying. I can now make an informed decision."

I dare say that for many of us, when we get this right, it will reduce the workload in some of our constituency offices, because I think all of us deal with people who feel that they have entered a contract that they would have preferred not to be in.

I'm satisfied that we've struck the right balance here. It's an important issue, and I look forward to the debate here in the Legislature and to finally have, when we finish it and if passed, as we always say—if passed—an act that will provide good protection for the consumer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Following my colleague is a bit like dancing after Baryshnikov, but that having been said, we'll continue through. I want to begin by saying that as Minister of Consumer Services, it's indeed my pleasure to stand in support of this legislation, the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2009, and to speak additionally of some of the benefits.

The very best political advice I ever received—I think I've shared this with some of you privately—was from the late, great Sterling Hunt, a farmer up in the Lynden area who, when I was running for mayor of the beloved municipality of Flamborough—which no longer exists, by the way, but that's another day—said, "Ted, tell them what's broke and how you're going to fix it." I think if we stop to think about it a bit, that's really what politics is all about, isn't it? Tell them what's broke and how you're going to fix it. It's about leaving the place a little bit better than you found it, about making a difference,

about giving back, all those things that mom and dad used to talk to us about as we were growing up. Anyhow, that's the personal part I want to share.

On this legislation, it really is the kind of legislation that my ministry and the McGuinty government believe in very strongly: policies focused on helping to protect everyday working people, ordinary Ontarians, from unfair consumer exploitation. It's the kind of role that Ontarians have come to expect of their government: to act clearly in defence of their right to be treated fairly, honestly and openly in the conduct of commercial affairs, to be treated as customers, not targets, and to be shielded from shady practices and sleight-of-hand salespeople.

0940

This is of particular importance during such challenging economic times as we're facing right now, as my colleague joins me—thank you. These are days when consumers are more likely to be looking for opportunities to save a few bucks. Unfortunately, such an environment is also where the unscrupulous try to make a fast buck at the expense of people, and that's not good; that's not right.

The act does not remove the right of private sector companies to carry out legitimate business activity. We don't want to do that. There should be no complaints from those business people who are running a clean operation and approaching customers in a spirit of openness. Indeed, I'm pleased to say that from a number of legitimate energy retailers, we've enjoyed positive consultations and dialogue. My wife and I are founding members of the Bullfrog movement, the clean, green energy movement; it's a good example of a private company that wants to do the right thing. So to all those Bullfrog users out there in Ontario, I say good morning and all the best. I say that to everybody, but particularly to the Bullfrog folk out there, who are making a statement every single day about clean energy and how they want to support things that move in that direction.

This act will, of course, be unwelcome to those whose business model relies on misinformation, unethical sales techniques and blatant misdirection. We want to go forth from this place with a very clear understanding that we're not here to support that kind of behaviour. This act will establish clear rules for businesses in the energy retailing industry, and that's important. It's important that we bring clarity and transparency to how consumers should be treated and how they ought to be able to expect that they'll be treated. Above all else, it places a pronounced focus on granting prospective customers the information and the knowledge necessary to let them make sound decisions. When all is said and done, an educated consumer is a wiser citizen and, I would argue, a better citizen—President John F. Kennedy in his famous address about consumer rights to Congress said that it also ensures that they're better citizens. An informed constituency making good decisions builds consumer confidence and all the positive things that necessarily flow from that. So I just want to get that on the record as well.

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to congratulate my colleague the Minister of Energy and

Infrastructure on this important step. I had the good fortune to serve as Minister Phillips's parliamentary assistant and consider him a wonderful mentor. His introduction of legislation this morning is for me an affirmation of the kinds of things and the kinds of values that he and this government, in fact, have stood for in the past and will continue to stand for and fight for as we move forward.

I note with particular enthusiasm that this legislation will extend many of the protections that my ministry offers under the Consumer Protection Act, but it does so in a way that tackles the specific and growing needs of consumers in the large and very competitive energy field.

In the Ministry of Consumer Services, we're keenly aware of the need for action in this area. In fact, in the 2010 edition of our Smart Consumer Calendar, which I know many MPPs have and are very wise in getting distributed in their own riding, there's a whole section devoted to helping educate consumers about their rights with respect to buying energy. This new legislation of course delivers a vital set of reforms to complement all of the previous educational efforts and the ongoing educational efforts, so this is a helpful addition to that. Again, we want to be as helpful to consumers as we can.

As you've heard already from my colleague, the legislation has three principal thrusts. First, it takes decisive action to ensure energy retailing is conducted in a way that is transparent and fair to consumers, offering them exactly what they need in order to make informed choices. Second, it clearly strengthens consumer protections for those in multi-unit residential buildings, like high-rise apartment buildings, where smart metering and suite metering technology is being introduced. We know from research internationally that the time-of-use meters, taken as a whole and juxtaposed against previous energy use, have resulted in an average of about a 23% energy conservation factor, and 23% energy savings is certainly something that I suspect everybody in this House would willingly embrace.

Mr. Frank Klees: Good luck.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Maybe we can even do better than that, Frank. Who knows? Let's hope.

Third, this legislation establishes new standards for consumers facing disconnect or security deposit issues. In our MPP offices, we've all heard from time to time some of the horror stories involved in this particular area.

Each of these initiatives will improve the protection of Ontario consumers. That's fairly obvious. Each of these efforts and initiatives will also increase transparency and enhance information available to consumers. That's good. Each of these initiatives will create a fair environment for Ontario consumers, something that Ontario consumers deserve to expect, and we're adamant that we're going to deliver that fairness, that openness and that fair environment.

That said, I want to highlight the first and last measures in this act in particular, because these are items that speak specifically to correcting unfair consumer practices which, as you can imagine, as Minister of Consumer Ser-

vices, are of considerable concern to myself, my ministry and, I suspect, likely all members of this House. As the Minister of Consumer Services, I have direct responsibility for a registry of consumer-based complaints placed by the public. I think my cabinet colleague the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure alluded to this, but let me re-inforce for the record that energy retailers have consistently been in the top 10 complaints received by our ministry over the past three years. Each week, the Ontario Energy Board receives between 100 and 150 complaints about pressure sales tactics, contracts that are unclear or misleading, pricing deals that seem at odds with what is promised, and more. It's not a pleasant situation. Again, I think it's important to underscore that energy retailing is a legitimate business practice, provided the seller and the customer both understand the terms and conditions of the transaction.

0950

The Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, I thought quite helpfully, referenced that and compared it to one who negotiates a mortgage. You can negotiate a fixed rate or a variable rate. In some instances, there are some stories of people who have negotiated a fixed rate that has worked out to be, in the long run, quite favourable to them.

Again, I think it's important to underscore that energy retailing is a legitimate business; notwithstanding, consumers do need to make sure that they understand precisely what the terms and conditions of their contract would be.

That, by the way, is precisely what this legislation attempts to do. It's specifically and precisely what this legislation intends to do. In fact, the specific provisions allow for a number of specific improvements. For example, it would impose increased transparency and explicit disclosure on the part of electricity retailers and gas marketers, including providing plain-language disclosure about a number of key contract items. By the way, this would be done in a number of languages so that those whose mother tongue perhaps isn't English, who in some instances are perhaps more vulnerable, will be provided additional protections. I think that's good too, isn't it?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Excellent.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: It would also ensure that each customer is given a standardized accounting on their doorstep, in an easy-to-read format, that will spell out explicitly to the purchaser the price of the energy contract that they are about to enter into, versus the price they currently pay with their existing utility. It would set out clear rules to allow consumers the ability to cancel their contracts under specified conditions, and it would set maximums on cancellation fees.

Again, my colleague the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure has referenced the 10-day cooling-off period, which is standard in the consumer protection business; the 30-day provision; the independent confirmation of the knowledge about the contract; as well as the ability to cancel a contract after the first payment if you discover, to your chagrin, that the terms aren't exactly what you

thought they were. So there are all those protections. As we consult, perhaps additional protections might be built in.

We're absolutely determined to get this right. I think the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure has gone quite a ways to ensuring that this legislation is what we need in Ontario, and I know he's open to any enhancements of this legislation. That's just the nature of the man. He has always been open to getting something in place that works better for Ontario consumers. That has always been his *modus operandi*, and I'm pleased to say that's exactly how we work in the Ministry of Consumer Services as well. He has set a good example.

We'll continue to work hard to set out clear rules that allow consumers to cancel their contracts under those specified conditions and that set maximums on cancellation fees.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Hear, hear.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I know.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Good stuff.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: You know, it's not always the most exciting stuff, but the day-to-day business of government doesn't have to be charismatic or what have you. It has to be solid. It has to be based on principles and good social policies about "Let's think of this together," telling them what's broke and how you're going to fix it. Right?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Excellent.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: So after the initial contract has been signed, it would require retailers to go back and verify the consumer's attempt to freely enter into that contract, before any deal is considered done.

Finally, it would allow the government to establish new regulatory and training standards for salespeople and, importantly, create legal liability for directors and officers of the electricity retailing and gas marketing companies.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: More good news.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: You're right: more good news. It is a good-news morning, isn't it? You know what? It has been a good-news week, actually. Isn't there a song about that?

Interjections.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Well, Russia hasn't launched a satellite this morning, I don't think, so we won't go there.

These are not small matters. For anyone seeking to deliberately make a buck from unfair exploitation of consumers, we want you to know that we intend to force you to clean up your act. We're going to make you clean up your act. These measures will establish a new standard of and for transparency, disclosure and accountability that will surely discourage scam artists and charlatans. They tend to hang out together, the scam artists and the charlatans, right? It will create a series of penalties and remedies that will encourage businesses to act in the best interests of the consumer. Anybody here in this House who doesn't want to act in the best interests of consumers, raise your hand. No, nobody; I didn't think so.

Let me also take a moment to discuss the issue of security deposits and disconnections, for these too are

areas that attract considerable complaint from the public, and understandably so. On the one hand, it is only natural that companies exercise due diligence in the extension of service to those with a checkered past paying their bills. I've been in business. You've got to guard yourself. Being an idealist doesn't mean you're naive, right? You have to protect yourself, and we want to make sure that legitimate businesses are protected as we're clamping down on those scam artists and charlatans who meet in the dark and plot nefarious deeds.

On the other hand, widespread and indiscriminate use of security deposits can become a barrier to accessing service, particularly for vulnerable consumers. We need to have a particular interest in and focus on defending the vulnerable, and this legislation clearly is intended to do exactly that. The challenge here is to ensure a common set of principles and rules. We will bring clarity to a practice that seems far too capricious for the tastes of many individual consumers. The legislation will allow the OEB to establish transparent guidelines for when and how utilities employ security deposits to ensure that, to the greatest degree possible, utilities maintain their focus on honest-to-goodness credit risks and not just on turning another buck.

The same will be true of disconnections. New rules and clear, transparent measures will be established. Moreover, the legislation will prescribe what classes of consumers cannot be disconnected—I know we've all had those horror stories—subject to certain criteria. Again, the ambition here is to ensure fairness and consistent practice all across this great province of ours. Importantly, this legislation will ensure that such practices in the electricity market are extended to also capture the natural gas and suite-metered sectors.

In wrapping up, I appeal to my fellow members on all sides of this great Legislative Assembly, the people's place, the place where we have important debates and make important decisions that impact literally millions of Ontarians, from the eastern part of the province right through to the Windsor area, from that great urban municipality of Hamilton right up to the northern sections via Kitchener, and elsewhere. To all Ontarians, we want to give assurance that we're trying to do the right thing and that all members of this Legislative Assembly will in fact not only consider these measures now but do a speedy review and ensure a speedy passage of this important legislation.

1000

Mr. Frank Klees: Just deem that it was done.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Well, some governments have worked that way in the past but we want to make sure we get it right. As the Premier is fond of saying, "None of us is as smart as all of us." So we're going to take our time to get it right, just as we have on other pieces of legislation that we've dealt with recently in this House.

Sound policies to protect consumers are surely a priority that we in this place can all agree upon regardless of partisan stripe. That's what's so wonderful about this place. When something makes sense we embrace it to-

gether and we move forward together to better serve—working together to serve the people of Ontario even better, right?

Mr. Frank Klees: Hallelujah. Amen.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Amen, brother.

The problems to be corrected are not difficult to identify and the solutions are, I believe, we believe, equally apparent. This legislation builds on our province's proud record of strong consumer protection—

Applause.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: They say, “Never step on your applause”—record of strong consumer protection and permits fair commercial activity to unfold. Extending such principles to the energy sector is a logical, progressive and desirable move. Leadership is about doing the right thing. We believe this is the right thing, and our sincere hope is that we will find in this House an agreement, a certain and hopefully unanimous agreement, on this matter.

I thank you for your patience and I thank all the members of the Legislative Assembly for listening so attentively on this important issue. I want to say to the good people of Ontario who may be tuned in this morning that the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure and his team have gone out of their way. I've got to tell you they have worked around the clock, and my ministry has contributed in some small measure to the important legislation before us. It's good legislation. It's the right thing to do. Leadership is about doing the right thing, and all the members of this assembly, regardless of stripe, share the concern that we do the right thing.

Thank you for allowing us this time. As Barack Obama said, “We're not here to fear the future, but to shape it.” Let's do so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Interesting. The Minister of Consumer Services talks about working around the clock. Well, you know, David Ramsay introduced a private member's bill that we were going to work with on this subject last year, a year ago. We had second reading a year ago. So it's been a very slow clock if they have been working on it.

Why they're introducing second reading today, the day we're exiting this House for winter recess, is clearly pure politics. They want to send out what they see as a positive Liberal political message for the holidays because they've had so many negative messages with the HST. I've got all the respect in the world for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, but to bring a second reading debate today, one hour of debate and then nothing for several weeks, a couple of months, perhaps, seems kind of strange to me.

He talked about a couple of things: sub-metering, or, as they've called it, suite metering. They've changed the term. I guess they want it to sound sweeter. The reality is that we told them in 2004 that they had to go with sub-metering if they wanted to get some gains on energy conservation. That's when we really needed it. Today we ac-

tually have a demand that is much lower than our supply, and that's because, when they talk about their lowering those peaks, they've managed to do a good job of lowering demand during those peaks by getting rid of 330,000 manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario. That's what has gone on under their watch. So it's kind of rich that they're talking about that kind of thing now.

But in cabinet meetings, George Smitherman, before he was Minister of Energy, and Michael Bryant fought against sub-metering; otherwise, we would have had it in this province sooner. They fought against it because they didn't like the politics of it in their ridings.

The other thing about this bill is that it doesn't speak much about what they're actually going to do. It's very difficult to debate something when it's going to be done in regulation. We know the principles, and we support the principles, because we have to do something about unscrupulous energy retailers; they have to be stopped. But we need to know more about what tools we're actually going to use to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: We're all in favour of protecting the consumer. The minister stood up and he did quite a theatrical presentation with all kinds of quotes and it was really a very good Hollywood-style presentation. I must credit him on his acting ability.

However, if he really wants to protect the consumer, then maybe he should look at the billing process, because, before I was in this House, I used to look at my bill, and you needed a Philadelphia lawyer to figure out all the charges that come from the middleman, which they created. They allowed middle producers in there that have transportation costs and storage costs and all these other things that the consumers don't really understand, and they sure don't spell it out. I'll tell you, they created a middleman, because I remember when it was just one utility. You'd pay the utility, you'd pay the gas bill to Union Gas, you'd pay Hamilton Hydro, and then they created this whole group of guys in the middle, squeezing the population for more. More bureaucratic levels were created, and that just costs more money to the consumers.

So when they stand up and say, “We're here to protect the consumer,” well, they might not want to create all these bureaucratic levels that get more charges for people, whether it's gas, hydro, you name it, all these things that have been created. When you stand up and say, “We're for the people of Ontario, and we want to protect them,” then really do it. Don't create all these other agencies and things that are charging the people of Ontario. That's what they don't talk about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'd just like to clear up some of the information this morning. The middleman was brought in before 2003. This bill will clean up the mess that was left of not properly legislating these people.

In my experience as a member, I've received many complaints from my constituents about the practices used

by some of the less scrupulous door-to-door energy sales-people. I've experienced that first-hand—not only once, but twice. Very plainly, this bill, if passed, will eliminate these practices from the marketplace, and this is extremely important to ensure that seniors on fixed incomes and new Canadians, who perhaps do not have a strong command of the language, are not locked into bad contracts.

It will also allow individual units in apartment buildings to be metered for electricity individually, and this, again, is very important. This will allow those individual owners to control their own costs by lowering their energy use. I'm very much in favour of this measure. Shifting some of the responsibility to use less energy to tenants will help Ontarians to achieve greater greenhouse gas reductions, and we know that is very important, with the talks going on in Copenhagen this week and next.

As we know, conservation is not only good for the environment, but it's the most cost-effective way of cutting energy costs. It is an action that will help us achieve the goal of having 3.6 million customers on time-of-use pricing by 2011. By 2014, the goal is to reduce province-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 6% below the Kyoto-established levels of 1990.

Our Green Energy Act will help us to achieve these targets. Already, the feed-in tariff is being lauded as the best program of its kind in North America. It will lead to a renewable energy upsurge. In fact, green companies are already moving into Ontario. For example, Canadian Solar Inc., which was mentioned in this House yesterday, will be setting up a manufacturing plant. The Green Energy Act is truly a significant step toward building a thriving green economy in Ontario, and this bill we are debating today will only build on the significant achievements made so far.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to respond to the minister with regard to Bill 235, An Act to enact the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2009 and to amend other Acts.

Two minutes, of course, is not much time to hit all the aspects of the bill, but, you know, the minister said that there are 100 to 150 complaints a week with regard to energy retailers. I would say, from my own experience in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, that, through my offices, I have had many complaints where seniors, in particular, are what I call preyed upon by pushy and forceful salespeople going door to door, and just never saying no—sometimes misleading as to the facts. More protection for those individuals is a good thing.

I'd say why not consider making door-to-door sales of anything illegal, because I think the great majority of people don't want to be disturbed at their house by a door-to-door salesperson. I'd be open to consideration of that. It would need fuller investigation for sure.

The minister talked about the provincial benefit. I've got a situation in my riding where a corporation, a manufacturer, signed a fixed-price contract. They say they were misled by the salesperson and didn't realize that the

provincial benefit, in a time of low energy prices, actually becomes a cost of thousands of dollars a month to them, and they are quite concerned about that.

I would agree that it is very complicated. Suite metering, as the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke pointed out, is something that we were pushing for many years ago. It allows individual meters for condos or apartments so that people understand and have an incentive to save electricity.

On the surface, this bill looks like something that, certainly, I would like to support. I hope there's no poison pill in it. I hope they take time and don't time-allocate this one, and actually listen to people to try to get this one right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Two-minute response?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Just to thank all of the members.

The member from Pembroke indicated—sort of a comment that we've got so much supply, we don't have to worry about conservation.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, I did not indicate that.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Well, you said conservation is not as important now.

I would just say to the public that this is always a challenge. We have to keep relentlessly pursuing conservation, even if supply is seemingly fine. They're somewhat unrelated. I wouldn't want anybody out there who is thinking of conservation to back off at all.

To the member from Hamilton East on the billing, I am determined that our bills become more understandable to the consumer. I don't disagree that it is somewhat difficult.

And earlier, I think about a week ago, to another question in here on the same issue that the member from Parry Sound raised, and that is the provincial benefit, or the—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Global adjustment.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Global adjustment. Thank you very much. We have to find a way to clarify that.

I want to thank the member for Ottawa–Orléans. The day he arrived here, he was pursuing energy conservation. He was working on the building code, I remember. He's kind of made a career of this. And he was talking about it before many of us were as aware as he was. He's been relentless on this, and very knowledgeable, and I thank him.

To the member for Parry Sound, as I said earlier, we do have to find a way that our bills become clearer. He mentioned the number of complaints he has. He's probably not unique. We need to deal with that, and I believe this legislation does.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being just about 10:15, this House stands in recess until 10:30, at which time we will have question period.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm delighted to welcome two friends in the gallery: Adam Grachnik and Andrew Block. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Christopher Dabner's family is back today, including his mom, Katie; his grandma, Nancy Hood, from Tennessee; his brother Geoffrey; and this time also his father, Mike Dabner. Welcome.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to welcome the family of our page Jamie Sheidow. Her mom is here, Lori Sheidow, with her sisters Alex and Andie. Welcome. Your sister is doing a great job.

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to welcome my cousin here today, Janice Habasinski, who's also a proud member of the Ontario public service. She's here to watch question period.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I would like to welcome back again David Wolfe, our page Sam Wolfe's dad, who is here again with us from North Bay and hopefully celebrating what will be a lovely final day for our group of pages.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery a visiting delegation of parliamentarians from the law committee of the Vietnam National Assembly, led by Professor Dr. Phan Trung Lý. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests to the Legislature today. Welcome.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Hopefully, this is the last day. As much as they don't want to leave, I would just like all members to join me in saying thank you to this group of pages for the great job they've done on all of our behalf.

MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Before we do break for the Christmas holidays, I want to first—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Who says we're breaking?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I certainly would welcome a motion to extend the sitting.

I know we don't make reference to absences, but we do have three members who have been under the weather: Peter Kormos, Pat Hoy and Jim Brownell. On behalf of all of us, and I know they're watching—especially I know Peter Kormos is watching on the Internet—we wish them well and a speedy recovery.

In closing, I just want to take this opportunity to thank the honourable members for their co-operation over the past session, thank the table, thank all the legislative staff, the political staff, and everybody who's there to support us day in and day out. On behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario I want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, happy holidays. Have a great festive season. Use it as an opportunity to relax and

re-energize. We look forward to seeing you all in the new year. All the best through the holidays.

VISITORS

Mr. Mario Sergio: I have the pleasure of introducing a delegation from Milano, Italy, here. Even though they are on a business trip, they are enjoying our wonderful city and the warm weather that has received them. From Milan, I would like to welcome Franco Invernizzi and the delegation, Joanna Maio, Mr. Enzo and Giancarlo. Benvenuti in Canada.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to welcome to the Legislature today Richard Yeates and his son Liam. They were successful at a Knights of Columbus auction to have lunch with their MPP. So, welcome and condolences.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I have some special guests with us today: Jon Vapsva and Vidas Vapsva from Mississauga South. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Dave Levac: Up in the visitors' gallery is a very dear friend of mine from many years in the education field, who has been watching Queen's Park—and I hope she doesn't hold it against us—Cheryl Fullerton from OECTA. Thank you very much for being here, Cheryl.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Acting Premier. After six years, this government is arrogant and out of touch, and Dalton McGuinty certainly isn't the person voters thought he was. Let's take a look at his economic record: spending \$2 million more per hour than received in revenue; adding \$13,500 in new debt for each and every family in Ontario; \$32 billion of stimulus money and no jobs; Ontario, as a province, receiving welfare; one tax increase after another—the health tax, the HST and now road tolls; Saskatchewan overtaking us in per capita income. What made you think you could get away with that?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: All Ontarians look to their Legislature to lay out plans to build a better and brighter future as we approach the new year. Ontarians acknowledge the work of our federal finance minister and of the federal government with us on the HST. They acknowledge the fact that this plan will create some 600,000 net new jobs in Ontario. They know the challenges that Ontario has been faced with, and they understand the need to make those decisions. We look forward to the next year, we look forward to growth coming back in Ontario and we only hope that that member and her party will start doing some things that show what they stand for instead of the games and the stunts. Why don't you lay out a plan? Give the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: But, Acting Premier, nine months ago you said you had a plan to create 300,000 new jobs. You also said you would create 100,000 new student jobs, not to mention the 50,000 new so-called green jobs that you would create. But Ontario has net job losses under the McGuinty Liberals. What made you think you could get away with that?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Well, about a month ago we announced the Pan Am Games, for Toronto and yesterday, the International Indian Film Academy awards in 2011, a large coup for Ontario. Canadian Solar Inc. announced that it's manufacturing solar panels, moving 500 jobs from China to our province. Just this morning, Toyota announced another 800 workers being hired at the Toyota plant. What did Tim Hudak say about our work with Toyota? He said it was corporate welfare and that we shouldn't have done it.

This government has laid out a plan through difficult times. We're optimistic about the future and about Ontario. We know the people of Ontario will rise to the challenge in the economy. This plan will create jobs, it will lower taxes for people and it will make Ontario bigger, better and stronger as we come out of this global downturn.

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The bigger this government's failure to deliver on a job promise, the bigger promise they make the next time. You promised 450,000 jobs since March but delivered none. Now you've promised 600,000 more jobs. Whatever makes you think you can get away with that?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Just a couple of weeks ago, General Motors announced a third shift at its Ingersoll plant. That member and her party did not support our initiatives to help keep the auto industry in Ontario. They called it corporate welfare. We saw it creating jobs and maintaining jobs. We have three shifts at Chrysler in Windsor, we have a new shift at Ingersoll, 800 more jobs at Toyota and a growing and thriving industry in renewable energy.

We have a thoughtful Premier who has laid out a plan, who sees a brighter future for this province, as opposed to that party: no plan, no future; stunts and slogans in front of the mirror every morning. The people of Ontario see a plan. They like the plan, and they support it. We're going to move forward to a better future in the new year.

1040

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question again is for the Acting Premier. After six years, Dalton McGuinty's government has become arrogant and feels entitled to waste taxpayer dollars. Let me refresh your memory on your record: a billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle; forcing nine staff at the Integrity Commissioner's office to review thousands of expenses; hiding bureaucrat salaries and the McKinsey contract in overstretched hospital budgets;

sole-sourcing the Maid of the Mist contract; sole-sourcing the Casino Niagara contract; sole-sourcing a \$15,000-a-day Windsor Energy Centre that was over budget and turned into a Dwight elephant; and finally, expensing Steve Mahoney's GPS at taxpayers' expense.

Acting Premier, what made you think you could get away with it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The people of Ontario recognize that there's been an enormous upheaval in the economy over the last year. I remember a year ago that there was concern that the Detroit Three automakers would leave Canada and close down. Not only are they open and running, they're hiring new people. When that member and her party opposed helping Toyota, they didn't think about the 800 jobs that were announced this morning for an additional shift.

The people of Ontario can see past the empty rhetoric. They can see past the noise. They can see past the stunts. They know that the world and Canadian economies have gone through a tremendous upheaval. They know that we have a Premier who has a vision for the future of this province, a vision that sees more jobs, a growing and thriving economy as we move forward, an economy with challenge—

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Well, when that member and his party took office, they lost millions of jobs in this province and they spent us into deficit. You did nothing to stop the scandals and the waste. You waited—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I am quite content just to stand here, and the pages, I know, do not want to go home. They just told me so.

I would like the honourable members to come to order so we can complete this question period.

Please continue.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I did not know they were awake for the past six years, but today they just showed that they were. They did nothing to stop the scandals and the waste; they waited until they got caught.

So I'm going to ask him again: What made you think you could get away with it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think Ontarians see the importance of a plan for jobs in the future. I think Ontarians recognize that we have to take important steps forward. I'm really excited about full-day learning in junior and senior kindergarten. That member and her party are voting against it.

I look forward to a rational debate around the important public policy issues that we will contend with. I look forward to debate where members can respectfully put their points of view, have their differences. But most importantly, I look forward to a brighter new year with more jobs for Ontario, full-day learning for junior and senior kindergarten—a brighter future with more jobs, new investments coming to Ontario, and 600,000 families with

a brighter future because of the tough choices this government's made in a calm, cool and rational fashion.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: That member and his party know who got rich off the scandals and the waste because they did the deals. You can keep your secrets, and you can continue to block a public inquiry into the eHealth billion-dollar boondoggle.

You've dodged, deflected and stonewalled each and every question we have asked, so let's try it—the sixth time is a charm: What made you think you could get away with it?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The job plan that we've laid out is important to Ontario's future. It is important that we work together, have our debates in a calm and rational way and focus on the issues that are important to people: jobs, learning opportunities, better post-secondary education.

The Premier of Ontario, Premier McGuinty, has laid out a plan that we believe is the right plan. We welcome the support of the federal government on our tax reform plan. We look forward to implementing our full-day learning program for junior and senior kindergarten. We are happy with the announcement at Toyota today.

We are still not completely out of the woods, but unlike that member and her party, we have a focused, positive view for a better future for Ontario, more jobs for our families and a higher standard of living. That's what's important to the people of Ontario, not the cheap rhetoric and the stunts.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Over the last four months, the very people who make this province work have watched as the government that's supposed to stand up for them has repeatedly failed them, from an unfair tax scheme that leaves them paying more, just to finance another corporate tax giveaway, to a billion-dollar scandal that saw scarce health dollars flow into the pockets of well-connected insiders while local emergency rooms closed.

My question is this: Why has this government put the interests of the people of this province last, time and time again?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This Premier and his government have put the interests of the people first. Let me remind the member: That member and her party opposed support to the domestic auto industry at a time when they were threatening to pull out of Ontario. There are tens of thousands of Ontarians working today because of that.

That member and her party opposed us when we assisted Toyota Motor company to locate here in Ontario, and today they announced yet another 800 jobs. They spoke against that kind of assistance.

That member and her party voted yesterday against the tax cut for the lowest-income Ontarians, contrary to the advice of her party's own economists. That member and

her party yesterday voted against doubling the property tax credit for seniors.

Premier McGuinty and this government have a better view for Ontario's future than that member does. We're optimistic about the future. We'll continue to make the tough—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Just saying it doesn't make it so, unfortunately, and the finance minister needs to realize that. The people who make Ontario work have been ignored, flatly ignored, by a government that has grown increasingly arrogant and out of touch.

The legislation this government so proudly stood for yesterday will make life more expensive—it absolutely will—every time people fill up their cars, every time they heat their homes, when they turn on the lights, even when they buy a Christmas tree.

Ontario families already spend a lot of time going over their expenses each and every day to try to scrimp and save, to make ends meet. They make tough decisions about what they can and can't afford. My question is this: Why is their government ignoring them?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Our government has responded to the genuine needs of the people of Ontario resultant from one of the worst downturns in the western economy since the Great Depression.

We took steps immediately to invest in the auto sector when that member and her colleagues said not to. We took steps to increase the property tax credit for Ontario seniors. That member and her party voted against that.

When that member and her party spoke against and voted against Second Career, a real opportunity for 21,000 Ontarians to get retraining, we stood strong. Now more than 25,000 people have gone through that program successfully.

There are no doubt difficult issues. Our Premier has the leadership and the courage to take good and tough decisions to build a better future, a brighter future for all Ontarians, with more jobs and higher incomes.

1050

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The only thing New Democrats were concerned about was making sure that this government didn't flush more money down the toilet and not guarantee jobs with those investments, and of course we know that they didn't, in many cases.

But this is about the McGuinty government and the fact that it is so out of touch that ministers, in fact, are surprised that people do not want to see the harmonized sales tax in this province. The government is so arrogant that they rammed it through with almost no consultation or debate. There were no hearings on this unfair tax outside of Toronto, and Liberal MPPs walked off the job to ensure that the committee that was reviewing this tax and did actually hold those very few hearings was not even allowed to report it to the House.

Does the minister really think that by just ignoring thousands and thousands of people who write to us every

single day about the HST, their concerns are just going to magically go away?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We've been focused on public consultations, not on hurling insults—insulting the integrity and character of honourable members—and stunts. We will continue to be out in the public, to work with the people of Ontario, to help explain the benefits of this plan.

The third party chooses to insult people, throw words around—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask the member from Hamilton East to please come to order and particularly, if he's not going to be sitting in his seat, to not be interrupting the House.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: They choose to hurl personal insults.

I think the people of Ontario know they have a Premier who has his eye on the future of this province, a Premier of integrity and of decency, who is putting forward a plan to create tens of thousands—hundreds of thousands—of jobs.

These decisions aren't easy. They do require a lot of consultation. That's why we spent nine months up until now, and that's why we'll spend more time helping people see that. We believe very strongly that this province has a better and brighter future. We've tried to lay out a plan that we think will lead to us to that future. I'm optimistic about the future, and I—

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

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is, again, to the Acting Premier. Since this legislative session started in September, people have been let down by a government that has grown arrogant after six years in office.

In October, we learned about the shocking waste of one billion precious health care dollars at eHealth. Days later, we discovered the government was hiding bloated health bureaucrats' salaries in hospital budgets. Then, people watched as local emergency rooms began to close and the Premier mused on further health cuts. Why is the McGuinty government ignoring the health care concerns of the people of Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think the people of Ontario see a government that has brought forward things: a plan for 600,000 jobs, full-day learning, nurse practitioners' clinics, cap and trade, and a Green Energy Act, creating jobs. They've seen a government that has responded to real issues around the proper oversight of eHealth by taking the recommendations of the Provincial Auditor and moving forward.

We're going to continue our focus on creating jobs. We're going to continue our focus on working with all Ontarians to make this province a better place, to improve our education and health systems, to make the kinds of investments that will improve life for all Ontarians.

I regret the tenor of the name-calling and the language that is used around here. We look forward to an informed and rational debate around the future of Ontario, a future which we know is full of promise, full of hope for all of our citizens.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's not just in health care. This government has also let down Ontarians who have lost their jobs. The unemployment rate is the highest it's been in 15 years in this province. From Windsor to Hamilton to Timmins, jobs continue to vanish. Rather than a plan to create jobs, this government chose to ram through an unfair tax that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce says will cost us 40,000 jobs a year. Why is the McGuinty government so blatantly ignoring the plight of unemployed people in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I think Ontarians understand that the world economy has gone through a difficult period. I think they understand that job losses are extraordinarily high throughout the Western world.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: They're looking for leadership.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: As my colleague says, they've been looking for leadership.

We've laid out a plan; that member and her party have not. A lot of rhetoric, a lot of harsh language, a lot of personal attacks on the character of our members and the character of members of the Legislature—we reject that kind of politics. We embrace the politics of hope. We look forward to a better year ahead on this last day of 2009. No doubt this has been a difficult year, particularly for those families who have lost their jobs. But as long as one family wants a job, wants a better life, this Premier and his government won't rest until we deliver that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If this government's big-budget production were a Bollywood blockbuster, it would surely be called *The Big Letdown*: people forced to drive for hours to find an emergency room as health care dollars are squandered on well-connected consultants; an unfair tax scheme that works like Robin Hood in reverse, forcing struggling and unemployed people to pay more so that profitable corporations are able to pay less; a government that refuses to listen to the very real concerns of everyday people.

My question is simple: How could this government have allowed things to get this bad?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Again, I think the people of Ontario understand the challenges of the global economy. I think they reject the politics of division, the politics that that member espouses.

Interjection: You underestimate people, Andrea.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: She really does underestimate the people of this province and their resilience.

There is no doubt, like all over the Western world, too many people lost their jobs. Too many people are more vulnerable today than they were at this time last year. But they have a government that's laid out a plan, a solid plan that, according to the NDP's own economists, will create

600,000 jobs. That member and her party have not. They continue to use empty rhetoric, to hurl insults around, to undermine the integrity of people in this province who want a better future.

This is a party and government about hope. This is a party and government that will deliver a plan to get people back to work in Ontario, and the working families of this province know that.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Mr. Toby Barrett: My question is to the Acting Premier. The ink wasn't even dry on your greedy HST tax grab before you announced that you're thinking about slapping new taxes and tolls on public highways. What makes you think you can get away with this one?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I don't know where he gets that from. I think that is not—

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: It's a Tory story.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It's just a Tory story, devoid of fact. I thought the Minister of Transportation spoke about Highway 407. It's a tolled highway. When the extension proceeds, it will.

That party has offered no solutions. That party continues to rely on empty rhetoric, on stunts in the Legislature, on yelling and shouting. The people of Ontario want more than that. They want a plan that recognizes the bright future of this province, that recognizes the challenging times we've come through. Our Premier has shown leadership and integrity. We're committed to building the jobs, to building the future that all Ontarians demand and deserve.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I know specifically where I got this one; it's a quote in the Toronto Star. It's from Environment Minister Gerretsen, when he was asked about slapping fees on existing public highways: "We are open to anything that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions...."

Ontario families already pay taxes at the pumps. Dalton McGuinty's HST on everything will make those families pay even more to fill up. Now you want them to pay even more, with talk of fees.

Again, what makes you guys think that you can get away with this?

Interjection: Come on, give it to Jim.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I should first of all remind the member, through the Speaker, that the deal of the century was negotiated by the Conservative government. When they were faced with a deficit, they decided they would sell Highway 407 at a bargain basement price to balance it. Then they allowed Highway 407 to charge whatever price they wanted for their tolls. Then they allowed them to take people's licences away. They signed the deal of the century, and now you ask that question?

I've clearly said, when asked, and our position has consistently been that we have no plans to toll existing highways in the province of Ontario. I don't know how

much clearer I can be than that. I know that you are concerned because this government may be looking at reducing emissions of some kind, and your government—

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

1100

SEWAGE SLUDGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is for the Minister of Health. Two weeks ago, the member from Nickel Belt raised concerns in this chamber about the health dangers of sewage sludge being spread on the flood plains of the South Castor River near the village of Vernon. Residents and farmers depend on the health of that river, which is used to irrigate fields. They wrote to the Minister of Health about their concerns about a month ago.

What action has the minister or the government taken to address the sludge-related health concerns of Vernon residents?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know the member opposite understands that this is an issue that the Minister of the Environment has been working very, very hard on. We are committed to the health of the people of Ontario. We've taken important steps to ensure that Ontarians are just as healthy as they can be. That includes our ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides and the tremendous investments we've made to clean up our drinking water—a number of initiatives.

We take the environment very seriously. We absolutely understand the link between the environment and our health care. The member opposite does understand that this particular aspect of our health care is under very, very careful review by our Minister of the Environment.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The minister has deflected the question. The letter that was sent by the residents has not been responded to. Independent tests are showing four times the level of E. coli in the water coming into the South Castor that is allowed by this province. That indicates that all kinds of other contaminants are going into the river. Clearly, the Minister of the Environment is not paying attention to this issue.

To the Minister of Health: Will she act to protect the residents of Ontario? Will she act to stop the spreading of sewage sludge on flood plains in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We in Ontario have the highest standards of drinking water in the world. We continue to protect drinking water.

Let me shed a little bit of light, though, on the new regulatory framework for non-agricultural source material. There is a new regulatory framework for the management of biosolids and other non-agricultural source materials. This new framework includes new and improved standards for these materials in the nutrient management regulation. It includes removal of duplicative requirements for farmers, haulers and generators. There's a focus on the quality of the material that is being applied to land, and we are committed to maintaining Ministry of

the Environment oversight and enforcement. Collectively, these are exactly the steps we need to be taking to continue improving the health of Ontarians.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, this week our government tabled legislation that is designed to protect consumers from unfair, misleading practices of retailers, particularly energy retailers selling door to door in our province. This has been a real issue in my riding and, I can believe, probably in almost every other riding in the province.

Every week, constituents contact my office because they've had problems with energy retailers. These salespeople make promises, but they don't provide the full details of the contract. The information they provide is often incomplete or misleading. Many consumers quickly discover they're actually paying more, and in countless cases the retailer makes no effort to ensure the person who is signing the new contract has signing authority over the existing account. When the consumer attempts to get out of these questionable contracts, they frequently face harsh financial penalties.

Minister, are you confident that this legislation will rein in these retailers, and will this bill actually deal with the issues my constituents have raised?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I thank the member for the question. I would say that I think virtually every member of the Legislature has had similar issues. The bill does deal with each of the issues that the member just raised. It deals with proper conduct by door-to-door salespeople, which is not taking place in all cases now. It deals with ensuring that the information that people are provided with before they sign the contract is clear and understandable. It deals with holding the companies accountable for the actions of the door-to-door salespeople, and it does provide much better cancellation provisions, I would say, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member; my apologies.

The bill does deal with each of those. We began debate today. I look forward to input from the Legislature and improvements, if we can see any.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Minister, thank you for the response. The bill does seem to address most of the issues and problems my constituents have repeatedly raised. My concern is what this will still really mean for them. The information that is going to be provided back to my constituents, as well as other constituents in most ridings across the province, is what we're really interested in finding out. I know it's what the people in my riding are most interested in. In numerous cases, we've heard about constituents not being fully informed about the impact and aspects of the contracts that they've signed.

How will this bill ensure that my consumers have accurate and adequate information?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Well, that's at the heart of this issue, I think, and that is that people need to understand

clearly what they're buying. The best analogy I can provide to the House is that we all kind of know that on mortgages you can get a fixed-rate mortgage or you can get a variable-rate mortgage. What these retailers are offering on gas and electricity is a fixed rate over a period of time. What you get from Toronto Hydro, for example, is a variable rate. But people do not understand the detail of that. This legislation will require that people have a clear understanding.

I look at British Columbia. You can go on a website and you can get clear information on fixed contracts on natural gas purchases.

The answer to my colleague is that the legislation provides us with the opportunity to make sure the consumer is clearly understanding what they're buying and makes an informed choice, and we'll make sure that—

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

SKILLS TRAINING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, I ask this question today on behalf of the thousands of unemployed men and women, not just in the region of Waterloo but throughout the province of Ontario, whose lives have been shattered yet again by the McGuinty government's management and retroactive rule changes to the Second Career program, which means they won't qualify for retraining despite promises made to them eight months ago that they would. These people are flocking to my office because you refused to help them—you, on the other side.

Minister, I ask you, where is the compassion and the fairness for these men and women? And what makes your government think you can get away with treating these people in such a cavalier and disdainful manner?

Hon. John Milloy: I know the member in no way wants to suggest that somehow she has a monopoly on compassion for unemployed workers in the province of Ontario. Every member of this House is concerned about those who are looking for a job in our province. We introduced, in June 2008, a Second Career program targeted at 20,000 Ontarians. Despite the ongoing criticism from her and her party, after 17 months, we were able to surpass that number at 21,000, and we made a decision not to end the program but to continue it and welcome 8,000 more people into training.

I also know that the member would never want to leave the impression that these are the only supports that are available to those who are looking for a job. In the supplementary, I'll be quite happy to share what some of those supports are, to those who—

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

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Our office has been inundated with people walking in, faxing, e-mailing, demonstrating and telling us they are being treated in a cavalier and disdainful manner.

I ask you today, Minister, why did you break your promise of retraining to these unemployed men and women? Will you, today, demonstrate fairness and compassion and accept the applications of those who had submitted them under the old rules, and jumped through about eight months of hoops to qualify?

1110

Hon. John Milloy: I would like to inform this House that there has been no one who has been accepted into the Second Career program who has not proceeded with their training going forward. It is absolutely wrong to somehow represent that the opposite is true. The fact of the matter is, in the Kitchener–Waterloo area alone, 1,107 people have enrolled in Second Career training since June 2008. The Second Career program is an application-based program. It is not for everyone, but for all those Ontarians who are looking for jobs we have a variety of services: job-finding clubs, resumé-writing workshops, interview preparation courses, Job Connect, literacy and basic skills, career preparation and counselling, targeted wage subsidies.

It's a good thing for those thousands of people who are part of this training program that we did not listen to the honourable member and her party, who were calling for us to end the program and did nothing but criticize and mock it for the past two years.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. The Auditor General's report this week reports that very little of the money that has flowed to municipalities for infrastructure has been going to transit, roads and homes; that, in fact, for the 2007-08 year, only 6% of the province's \$900 million in municipal infrastructure has been used by municipalities. Tens of thousands of Ontario families are struggling with the recession. Why isn't your government doing more to make sure that those families are getting the jobs they need?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: My colleague here, the Minister of Finance, in the budget announced, I think, the most ambitious infrastructure program certainly in Canada and in the history of the province—\$32 billion. You should be aware, and probably are aware, that all of this is on our website.

You mentioned transit. Honestly, no government has been as aggressive in support for public transit as this government, whether it be the extension to the Spadina subway; in my area, work beginning on the Sheppard extension; the support for Metrolinx transit projects; and right across Ontario.

I think the public probably understands that no government has put support for rapid transit and transit like we have. That's part of our green energy plan and part of creating—

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, I'll give you this: You're very aggressive about making announcements, but the

reality is, of the 25 municipalities that the Auditor General examined, only two had used all their funding and 15 municipalities hadn't spent any of their infrastructure money.

You're saying that you can spend \$32 billion over the next few years. How can the people of Ontario believe that when you can't even flow a billion dollars and get people back to work?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I announced here in the Legislature about three weeks ago—

Interjection: You announced.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: No, no. You've got to listen to the answer. We record how we're doing on each project. We've got 2,600 projects under way out there. We are moving forward aggressively. We measure where we stand on them, how much progress we're making.

I repeat to the public: a \$32-billion infrastructure program over two years—very aggressive leadership in that area. The projects are under way. All you've got to do is go on the website to see the progress on them.

So I'm actually quite pleased with the progress we're making. As I said here in the Legislature about three weeks ago, there's lots to come in the next year and a half to continue to create jobs.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. We've seen a major commitment from all levels of government to deliver more housing to those who need it most. At the end of the day, Ontarians are not looking for bickering between the different levels of government. They want us to work with each other to deliver housing for them.

There are seniors on fixed incomes who need a safe, clean, affordable place to live. There are young families who want to see their children succeed and need our help to ensure that they get off to the right start. These are some of the people who will benefit from our commitment to housing.

When the minister speaks to the House, he'll often speak about the investments we're making using the large province-wide numbers. Frankly, \$1.2 billion sounds like a lot, but how does this translate into our communities? Minister, I want a straight answer and no spin.

Hon. Jim Watson: With friends like that, absolutely.

I welcome the question from the honourable member, and it's true: We often do speak about the large number, \$1.2 billion. But what it translates into is housing and providing a home for some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Earlier this fall, 48 housing units were announced by the honourable member in Peterborough. Next week I'll be joined by my colleagues from Ottawa in announcing a very important project for victims of domestic violence in our hometown of Ottawa, and in Burlington, 65 homes are being built now for low-income seniors. These are investments that are not only helping the most vulnerable; they're creating 23,000 jobs in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Leal: That was a great answer. I appreciate the update. As you said, it's important to always remember that there are people we're doing this for. I'm proud that in my riding, as a result of the extension of the affordable housing program, 71 new homes will be built and over 1,000 homes will benefit from the renovations made.

Our government—and you, as Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing—have championed the positive relationship that we've built with our municipal partners. It is a relationship defined by historic consensus. A report announced that last year they began the uploading of a number of services. I want to know what work specifically has been done to foster that positive working relationship with municipalities.

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm proud of the work that we've done to foster a much more productive and positive relationship with the municipal sector, whether it's through the memorandum of understanding, the uploading or the record amount of infrastructure money that we brought down to the local level. It's a track record that we first started when we had the honour of forming government in 2003.

In the spirit of Christmas, let me quote someone who normally does not support our government when she said, "We applaud the province for signing this new Canada-Ontario affordable housing agreement. Long-term partnerships such as this are needed to ensure income and housing security for all members of society."

"Halton region is delighted the province of Ontario is pursuing partnerships with municipalities to deliver improved access to provincial services and programs."

Who said this? Let me just check: Joyce Savoline, regional chair for Halton. I thank the honourable member, who is now my critic. She was right then. She's not always right now, but I appreciate her sentiments.

TOURISM

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Minister of Tourism. Minister, as I'm sure you know, the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario commissioned a study to determine the HST impacts on different segments of tourism in the province because, as the association said, "The impacts on tourism have either been overlooked or not considered." The study shows that the HST will result in costs paid by visitors increasing as much as 44%. The HST will result in widespread increases on visitor-related goods and services, causing dramatic price jumps for travellers.

Minister, you're supposed to be the advocate for the tourism sector around the cabinet table. How could you let this damaging tax go forward without raising alarm bells? What makes you think you can get away with failing to stand up for the sector that you were appointed to represent?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'd like to thank the honourable member from Leeds–Grenville for the oppor-

tunity to respond and to wish him a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, as we spend a lot of time together: We're both House leaders and he's also my critic.

As the member knows, the report or the letter that he quotes from is far outdated. We have been working very closely with the tourism sector since the introduction of the HST in the spring budget, on a number of fronts. Our spring budget allocated \$40 million in ongoing annual funding to support the regional destination marketing in Ontario's tourism regions once they are established. Since that time, we've worked with the sector in supporting them and ensuring a further \$25 million annually to transition to the new structure and to allow for our tourism partners to settle into the new structure. We've been working closely with them. We think this is going to—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It was a study and not a letter, and it was done quite recently. Minister, the study ran a number of visitor scenarios, and the findings should have been alarming to you and your cabinet colleagues. For example, for a weekend getaway for two visiting Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Shaw Festival, taxation as a per cent of total costs jumps 44%; a one-week camping holiday for a family of five, up 33%; a three-day family ski holiday, up 25%. The Canadian Resort Development Association says that the HST completely takes away the province's competitive edge locally and internationally.

Minister, you've failed to do your job. What makes you think you can get away with abandoning the people you're supposed to fight for by supporting a tax grab that will do significant damage to an already struggling industry?

1120

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I just want to reiterate that we have been working closely with this sector and addressing their concerns.

I'd like to quote Dick Brown, the executive director of the Ottawa Gatineau Hotel Association, who said on December 5: "At the end of the day, the HST could turn out to leave us as well off or better off than we are today. I think it's a great opportunity for Ottawa."

While we are on quotes, I always think it's important to remind my friend, who sometimes forgets where he was not that long ago: "Historically"—this is quoting Mr. Runciman, the member for Leeds–Grenville—"the Progressive Conservatives have supported the concept of the HST," and that was in the Brockville Recorder and Times on December 8, 2009, a mere two days ago.

I think we're all very clear on where the opposition party is on this, and I think that the tourism sector will be well served by this new tax structure, including all the corporate taxation cuts that will greatly assist them—

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

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health. Over the past three months, New Democrats

have regularly raised the issues of health care cuts in the Niagara region. Those cuts continue to this day. The Niagara Health System recently announced the closure of 39 hospital beds: 22 in Welland, 10 in Port Colborne and seven in Fort Erie. Fort Erie and Port Colborne already had lost their local emergency rooms as well.

When it comes to health care, my question is this: Why are Niagara residents being treated like second-class citizens?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Sometimes there's a healthy debate in this House and sometimes there's just a blatant misrepresentation of the facts. This one—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the opportunity to correct the member opposite. We have made substantial investments in health care right across this province. That is true in the Niagara region, as true as it is anywhere else.

We not only have spent money; we have seen results. We have well over 800,000 more people who have access to family health care. We've increased hospital funding by well over 40%. We're seeing shorter wait times. People are getting access to services much more quickly—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The facts speak for themselves. It's as if Niagara residents are being made to pay for this government's health care misspending—the billion-dollar eHealth scandal, precious health dollars flowing into the pockets of well-connected insiders, bloated health care executive salaries hidden in hospital budgets, and massive waste in the assistive devices program.

The McGuinty government seems to be spending health care dollars on everything but front-line services. Until it can get its health care spending in check, will the minister place an immediate moratorium on all cuts to beds, to layoffs and to front-line staff in Niagara?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's important that people understand that our health care system is much, much healthier now than it was before. We are focusing on supporting our hospitals. We're also really making important investments in community-based supports. We're actually trying to reduce the reliance on hospitals, because if people don't need to be in the hospitals, then we don't want them to be in the hospitals. We want to provide supports in the community, at home, in other places, where they can get the right amount of support at the right time.

As people stay shorter periods of time in hospitals, we actually are decreasing our reliance on hospitals. It's part of our strategy towards a sustainable health care system in this province, so we're making significant investments to improve the quality of care for Ontarians.

We understand that change is difficult, but—

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

WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. While certain members of the Legislature have been preoccupied with childish games and petulant antics, Ontarians have been focused on several very important questions: What criteria does Santa use to determine if one is naughty or nice? Does Santa prefer oatmeal or chocolate chip cookies? Does Santa have an enhanced driver's licence for his sleigh?

Children are especially concerned with Santa's reindeer. They know Ontario's north is home to Donner, Dasher, Blitzen and their cousin the caribou. Ontario's children cannot in good conscience settle off to sleep on Christmas Eve without knowing that their government is doing all it can to protect and support these majestic animals. Would the minister assure this House, Ontario's children and Santa Claus that we are?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to respond to the member from Huron-Bruce, of course. This is of paramount importance at this time of year, and Santa needs to know that that caribou and his cousin the reindeer are protected—in particular, the flying reindeer, and Rudolph the most.

But the most important thing that we're able to do is to provide protection for habitat and protection for the reindeer itself. This is particularly important to give Santa some peace of mind, as he is doing that list that he has to do. He has to pick out who's been naughty and who's been nice. Now, Mr. Speaker, you know how to do that and you do that very well, so you know how difficult it might be for Santa to do. So he's got to have peace of mind that in fact those reindeer are protected, and protected they are and will continue to be for many years to come, for all the children in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I trust that the minister is doing all she can do to avoid appearing on the "naughty" list.

Children around Ontario are looking forward to lighting the menorahs, the kinara candles and Christmas tree lights. They are decking the halls and jingling bells. The young and the young at heart are eager for the joyous season to get into full swing.

So many families will be gathering Christmas morning around Christmas trees grown right here in Ontario. It's a well-established fact that the finest Christmas trees in the world are Ontario trees. Spruce, pine and fir trees from Ontario are gorgeous, but without action from our government, these treasures could be at risk. Can the minister please assure this House that generations to come will enjoy Christmas the right way, gathered around an Ontario tree?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I'm pleased to rise and respond. The Ministry of Natural Resources has an extraordinary program of silviculture to ensure that we renew this resource on a continual basis.

The Ontario fir tree or the balsam or the spruce has for years been a tradition—

Mr. John Yakabuski: What about the Scotch pine?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: —or Scotch pine—a tradition for families. We encourage people to purchase a natural tree. That helps the industry. It reassures that we are continuing to support our forestry industry, and at the same time recognizes that this is an Ontario tradition.

So, to everyone in the House, may I wish them the very best for the holiday season. Merry Christmas, and please remember: Buy an Ontario tree.

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Labour. I want to just say that this naughty government has done nothing to address the ongoing DriveTest strike, which is now in its 17th week and affecting over 400,000 Ontarians, and that number grows by over 4,000 people every day.

Throughout this session the government has dithered, delayed and denied action while driving instructors, small businesses and truck drivers are at risk of losing their jobs, just before Christmas.

So I ask, will the Minister of Labour agree to swift passage of my bill or bring in his own bill to end the strike today so that people can get back to work, pay their bills and feed their families? What makes you think that doing nothing is a fair option for the people affected by this strike?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question, because it gives me an opportunity to speak about our labour relations record in this province. We have the best labour relations record in this province in over 30 years. The reason that we have that type of labour relations record, where over 97% of agreements are done without any work stoppage, is because we have some of the best mediators in the world. Those mediators are there to assist, especially in difficult situations and in difficult negotiations like we have right now with DriveTest.

I know that the parties are working with the Ministry of Labour mediators, and they're scheduling meeting dates for the very near future. I say to the member, look at our labour relations system. It's one that works, and others look to it.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: This House is set to rise for at least nine weeks. After today, there will be no legislative means available to end the DriveTest strike. By the time this House returns in mid-February, more driving instructors will be out of work, driving schools will be forced to close their doors, new immigrants won't be able to get the jobs that they were promised when they came to this country, and truck drivers won't be able to upgrade their skills. So I ask again: Why is the government being so ignorant to the plight of these people? Why won't you act today? What makes you think that doing nothing is fair to the over 400,000 people directly affected by this strike?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: From what the member has said, I can understand all those who have been inconvenienced by this work stoppage. But the member knows full well

that the best deal, the most productive deal, the most stable deal is one that is negotiated at the bargaining table. As I just mentioned to the member, through the assistance of the Ministry of Labour mediator, the parties are going to be getting back to the table and working out their differences. I trust that they'll conclude and do everything they can with a new collective agreement. This is the right way to move forward. What the member is saying, what the member is condoning, is not the correct manner in which to move forward. We have great labour relations in this province. We will continue to work with employees, with labour and with employers.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Culture. The minister was asked yesterday in question period what action she would take to protect the view of the Ontario Legislature. The view of this building is threatened by a development on Bloor. She refused to commit to any action, ignoring calls for action from the chairman of the Ontario Heritage Trust, Lincoln Alexander.

If the provincial government itself refuses to step forward to protect the dignity of the Ontario Legislative Building, who does the minister expect really will look after our heritage?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I would strongly disagree with the honourable member's suggestion that I am ignoring the chair of the Ontario Heritage Trust. That would be most inaccurate, because I have fully appreciated the work that he has done and the advice that he has rendered, along with that very venerable agency and the board.

In this case, a letter has been leaked, and it has caused confusion on the other side of the House—confusion that is unwarranted. I indeed value his opinions. I think it's important we note that while there is a great deal of expertise at the Ontario Heritage Trust, there are a variety of views among heritage experts on whether or not the visual context of a cultural site should be protected; indeed, whether or not it is our prerogative to step into the planning of this city in a variety of dimensions. So I—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Neither the Minister of Culture nor the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing even bothered to show up at the preliminary hearing at the Ontario Municipal Board. If indeed she was listening to Mr. Lincoln Alexander, I think that she would have taken a different position. The government has refused to declare provincial interest in protecting the dignity of the Legislative Assembly. It has not sought official status in the OMB hearings. Unless the provincial government steps forward and declares this hearing to be of provincial interest, representatives of the city and other heritage advocates have little hope of protecting the dignity of the Legislature at the OMB. Why is the minister refusing to take the necessary actions to protect the unique heritage and architectural role of the Ontario Legislature in the city of Toronto?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: Au contraire, I think we have done much to protect heritage here in this city, and throughout the province as well. Queen's Park is a very important heritage landmark in the province; indeed, it symbolizes our parliamentary democracy. I know, as I said yesterday, that all members of this House value the treasure in which we work and the heritage that it represents. I think it must be remembered that crown properties, just in case that is being suggested, are ineligible for designation by the province or municipalities under the Ontario Heritage Act.

With regard to whether or not the municipal affairs department, or mine, chooses to engage to ask for amicus curiae status at an Ontario Municipal Board hearing is our choice to render. Since that hearing is now under way, I do not intend to speak further on that dimension of this matter.

OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: My question is to the Minister of Tourism. Minister, I'm very excited to tell this House that tomorrow afternoon, December 11, the Olympic flame, as part of the torch relay, will be welcomed to Ontario for the first time as it enters the town of Hawkesbury in the beautiful riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. I am delighted to be participating in this historic and very important occasion and so proud that Hawkesbury will be featured on national and international media. The Olympic torch is a very important part of the games.

Can the minister tell the House what the McGuinty government is doing in support of the torch relay in Ontario?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Thank you to the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, who's a huge proponent and supporter of the Olympic torch run in Ontario. The Olympic games in Vancouver this year are really Canada's games, and we are excited to be a partner in this.

The Olympic torch relay will cover 6,000 kilometres in Ontario and travel through 232 Ontario communities. In 42 of those communities, we will be hosting celebration sites. We will also be supporting 20 First Nations communities which will be hosting blessings of the flame as they go through their communities. We are supporting 38 of our communities with a \$15,000 contribution. Another four will be receiving a \$35,000 contribution; they will be celebrating in a broader way for the region.

The torch will run within 100 kilometres of 92% of the population in Canada. That gives everyone an opportunity to come out and celebrate the flame. I am very excited to be in Hawkesbury tomorrow morning to welcome the flame to Ontario with my colleague Jean-Marc Lalonde and to be able to celebrate the torch throughout Ontario and with all Ontarians. As we lead into the Christmas season, this is a great way to celebrate with your community.

I just want to take this opportunity, as I'm the last one up this morning, to wish everyone a very happy holiday,

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Bonne année, joyeux Noël.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Toronto Centre, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome two guests who will be joining us today: Mr. Rick Bonnette, the mayor of Halton Hills, and his father, Louis Bonnette. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LEGAL AID

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to raise concerns over recent changes proposed to legal aid services in the Parry Sound–Muskoka region. While I understand services are to be made available through enhanced Internet and telephone service, I'm concerned about the accessibility of legal aid services. Not all Ontarians have embraced technology, and of course nothing can replace a face-to-face interview.

I've learned that legal aid offices in Bracebridge and Parry Sound will move into courthouse space and be open by appointment only on limited days. I know that the Bracebridge courthouse is currently bursting at the seams. Will it be able to physically accommodate the new demands? Will the reduced staff members proposed, and the limited hours, be able to satisfy the demand for legal services?

How will those people who are most vulnerable find out about the new 1-800 number? What happens if they have problems communicating? In fact, even if you do learn of the new 1-800 number, in many cases you will still need to meet someone face to face to obtain a legal aid certificate.

While I recognize that the intention is to control costs, I'm concerned that residents in our area will see reductions in services, just as we have seen in Burk's Falls, where cost savings are borne on the shoulders of residents through the closure of the Burk's Falls and District Health Centre.

I'm concerned that once again the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka will be negatively affected by the actions of the McGuinty government.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I just wanted to take this opportunity to express my disappointment with the government around two particular issues.

One of them has to do with the harmonization of the sales tax. It's not because I'm just so profoundly opposed

to it, because I think flat taxes are bad, and not just because the government has given away close to \$5 billion to the corporations and has eliminated \$1.2 billion in progressive income taxes, which are based on ability to pay—not just because of that, but because they have simply eliminated the proper debate that we should have for hearings.

I recall in the 1990s that we used to have hearings that lasted a whole month, and we used to get beaten up by our supporters and our foes. Today, we have hearings that last a day, a half a day, two days, and it's an extension of what Mike Harris used to do in the old days. I don't know how you could live with yourself.

The other one is Bill 175, the labour mobility bill, which I have profoundly opposed, because I really believe it's an extension of NAFTA. I believe it's not just going to wear down our standards overall in terms of the way we hire people from outside the province, but it's a trade liberalization bill that is going to affect our ability as a province to manage our own affairs.

TAXATION

Mr. Rick Johnson: Starting as soon as January 1, you will see a reduction in the amount you pay in personal income tax. On the first \$37,000 you earn, our government has cut the taxes you pay by 17%.

A relief package will accompany this cut, which will help seniors and low-income families in my riding the most. The other day, I met with a senior on a fixed income and explained how the relief package, coupled with these tax cuts, equals the taxes paid on more than \$12,000 worth of newly taxed purchases. Their inner skepticism soon changed to a sigh of relief.

These are challenging times for people in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, and indeed across the province. In order to heal our communities, heal our cities, heal our great province, we must forge a new path to future prosperity.

For our neighbours, our families, our children and their children, we are moving ahead with a plan that will create some 591,000 jobs in the coming years. This plan will offer a lifeline to those seeking work.

This plan will buttress existing businesses by stabilizing our marketplaces with thousands of new consumers while enabling them to find growth in a more competitive tax environment.

My friends, the economy that we once knew is not coming back. As hard as it has been, it will be that much harder if we bury our heads in our sleeves of denial and refuse to accept the new world economy.

My friends, this is supported by our local chamber of commerce because this plan is good for small businesses. I have heard positive feedback from poverty groups because this plan is aimed at supporting the most vulnerable in our society. For those reasons, this plan is indeed a comprehensive reform package—

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

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett: On February 28, 2006, the subdivision in Caledonia, Douglas Creek Estates, was occupied by force and, three and a half years later, the site remains occupied while Mr. McGuinty picks up the tab.

According to an FOI, I regret to report that the DCE bill gets higher. Given that they're paying the bills, people ask what other costs are being borne by taxpayers for Douglas Creek Estates. Why has government paid \$213,000 for soil excavation and demolition? Why pay \$50,000 for erosion control? Why shell out \$2,000 for "no trespassing" signs that allow no one but occupiers on the site, not even OPP? Why \$103,000 for fencing and \$131,000 for an archaeological assessment? Property taxes over three years come in at \$152,000.

We've finally gotten Dalton to admit that taxpayers are footing the heat and electricity bills for the lone remaining house on the site occupied by militants, a house the occupiers have used as a base for intimidation, trespassing and assault. We already know McGuinty spent \$22 million of taxpayers' money to purchase the land.

I ask the Liberal members opposite: How much more do taxpayers have to pay for an invalid land dispute they're not even allowed to access? What makes you think you can get away with this?

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: On Monday, November 30, I had the pleasure of attending the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's reception to honour our government's trade mission. It was great to meet with participants and see their enthusiasm for the mission and the support for a strong relationship between Ontario and India. Our Premier and Minister Papatello are leading the mission of about 25 Ontario companies in the clean technology sector.

I'm pleased to share with you that the mission is already a great success. On Monday, the Premier announced that Ontario companies have signed \$200 million in agreements with partners in New Delhi. I'm proud to say that one of the companies involved in the agreements, Admira Distributed Hybrid Energy Systems, is located in my great riding of Mississauga–Brampton South.

I look forward to seeing the great success of our government's initiatives towards enhancing Ontario's trade partnership with India.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Yesterday, the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills considered Bill 132, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act. The bill was designed to assist Ontario's rural economy and the province's farmers' markets by allowing the sale of fruit wines at those markets, a practice already carried on in four other provinces and many neighbouring US states.

When the bill was debated in the Legislature during second reading, the Liberal members, including the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, spoke in support of the legislation. The Minister of Agriculture also wrote a letter supporting the sale of fruit wines at farmers' markets.

Regrettably, that support was as sincere as Dalton McGuinty's promises not to raise taxes. At committee, the Liberals sided with big business, also known as big donors—the spirits producers and alcohol import businesses—and killed the bill along with the hopes and dreams of many.

Without one word of explanation, Liberal members voted down every section of the bill in a display of duplicity that has become all too common with this Liberal government. It was a shameful display that, at the end of the day, does further damage to small-town, rural Ontario.

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TAXATION

Mr. David Zimmer: Yesterday, 253 members of the government in Ottawa voted to approve the HST. Included in those 253 members were 24 federal Conservative members who share 24 ridings with their provincial cousins who are sitting here. Those federal Conservative members who voted in support of the HST did this province a service. They are helping to build jobs; they are helping to build our economy.

Those 24 federal members in Ottawa included the Conservative member for Niagara West–Glanbrook, represented by Mr. Hudak here; the Conservative member for Nepean–Carleton, represented by Ms. MacLeod here; the Conservative member for Kitchener–Waterloo, represented by Ms. Witmer here; the Conservative member for Newmarket–Aurora, represented by Mr. Klees here; the Conservative member for Leeds–Grenville, represented by Mr. Runciman here; the Parry Sound Conservative member, represented here by Norm Miller; Whitby–Oshawa, represented here by Ms. Elliott; Simcoe–Grey, represented here by Mr. Wilson; Carleton–Mississippi Mills, represented here by Mr. Sterling—virtually the entire front bench of the Conservative Party of Ontario. Their federal cousins in Ottawa saw the wisdom in supporting HST.

HANUKKAH

Mr. Eric Hoskins: It's my pleasure to speak today about the important and beautiful celebration of Hanukkah, the festival of lights, which begins tomorrow. In Hebrew, the word "Hanukkah" means dedication. The celebration dates back to the rededication of the holy temple in Jerusalem following the Jewish victory over the Syrian Greeks in 168 BC.

At that time, the Jewish people were being denied the right to practise their faith, and even though they were outnumbered, they fought valiantly and won back their

religious freedom. When the holy temple was reclaimed, the people wanted to celebrate their victory by lighting the temple's menorah for eight days. Unfortunately, they had only enough oil to last one day. So they lit the menorah, and miraculously, the oil lasted all eight days, and the menorah remained lit throughout the celebration.

Tomorrow night, members of the Jewish community in my riding of St. Paul's, as well as across Ontario and around the world, will commemorate this important holiday by lighting the first candle on their menorahs, until all eight are lit on the eighth day.

On behalf of the Ontario government, I would like to wish the Jewish community in Ontario a very happy Hanukkah.

MEMBER FOR TORONTO CENTRE

Mr. George Smitherman: Mr. Speaker, before the House sits again, I expect to resign my seat as MPP for Toronto Centre. When I first arrived in this place 10 years ago, I set out on a mission to serve this diverse riding with passion and dedication. Much progress has been made, and thanks especially to the confidence of my leader Dalton McGuinty, I have been provided with an extraordinary opportunity to serve my province, and in so doing, I have had my life deeply enriched by the people I have met and the remarkable places I have visited. Each of us privileged to serve in this place benefits from the companionship of members on all sides. My experience has not been any different.

As much as I am enthusiastic about the new pursuit I am to undertake in the new year, I'm saddened that the relationships I have made here will be renewed somewhat less frequently. Yet I have noted that the mayor of Toronto does frequently attend here, sometimes even without cap in hand.

I wish to acknowledge the many staff who have dared to work with me in service to Ontario and to the people of Toronto Centre.

Mr. Speaker, I close with thanks to you and to the staff of the Legislative Assembly, and most especially to my family and to the people of Toronto Centre who expressed confidence in me for three successive elections. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): As a member of the class of 1999 to the member from Toronto Centre: From the 1999 alumni, we wish you all the best.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Since I've had the opportunity to interact with the member who has just indicated he's going to be leaving us to pursue another political career, I just want to extend to him, on behalf of our caucus, our sincere appreciation for his dedication and commitment. I don't think there was any time that I wasn't well aware of the fact that he personally had a sincere commitment to the people of this province and of his riding, and I want to thank him very much.

Mr. Michael Prue: On the same point of order: To the member from Toronto Centre, it's been a slice. It's

been amazing watching a man from this side of the House become a man from that side of the House. But on both occasions I have to say that his passion and his understanding of what goes on here has always come to the fore.

I wish him all the best of luck in his new endeavour. I wish him the best of luck going into municipal politics; many of us have come from that sphere. I know he was involved with Barbara Hall in the past, but not as an elected politician. I think he will find, over time, that it's a very difficult job to which he aspires. All I can say is that the lessons you have learned here and the passion you have shown here will stand the people of Toronto in good stead, should they decide upon your candidacy.

Mr. Dave Levac: On the same point of order: In 1999, I had the opportunity of meeting this gentleman, and I want to tell you that beyond the political life we lead here, his passion was infectious. The most important thing I have to say today is that I say goodbye to a friend. This gentleman has taught me an awful lot about man's humanity to man and the capacity for him to believe strongly in the people he represents.

I want to say to all the members here that regardless of what political beliefs you have, what political stripe you have, what you believe in terms of the service this man has given his community and his province, we know that we've all seen everyone pay tribute to a gentleman, a man who has passion about this place, a man who has passion about his province, his riding and the people he serves, in particular those who are the underdogs. I have watched him work, and I can tell you that he believes strongly in lifting people up and not putting people down. God bless you, my friend.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Perhaps the member needs to take some lessons from the member from Toronto Centre and understand that if you are going to speak, you need to be in your seat. I noticed the member from Toronto Centre had some difficulty finding his seat when he arrived today.

Mr. David Zimmer: On the same point of order: There's one thing that I think George Smitherman will go down in memory for, both in this chamber and in the city of Toronto. Before I was elected in 2003, I was chairman of the Toronto Community Housing Corp. The Toronto Community Housing Corp. decided to undertake an enormous project, the redevelopment of Regent Park. I can say—and I want to say to you, Mr. Smitherman—that without your help at that time, before I came into the Legislature, and without your ongoing support while you were here for the redevelopment of Regent Park in your riding, which I know is very dear to you, it would not have happened. On behalf of all the residents of Regent Park, I want to thank you in this chamber for that initiative.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We do wish you well, and I think it demonstrates to all members of the House that we can rise to the occasion and move beyond some of the partisanship that exists in here, and use it as an opportunity to pay tribute to a good member.

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INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LIQUOR LICENCE AMENDMENT ACT (UNLAWFUL WEAPONS IN BARS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES PERMIS D'ALCOOL (ARMES ILLÉGALES DANS LES BARS)

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 238, An Act to amend the Liquor Licence Act with respect to weapons on licensed premises / Projet de loi 238, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les permis d'alcool à l'égard des armes se trouvant dans un local pourvu d'un permis.

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. Mike Colle: This bill amends the Liquor Licence Act to add a new requirement that an applicant for a licence to sell liquor demonstrate that the applicant is able to take responsible steps to prevent the presence of unlawful weapons on the premises in respect of which the licence is sought. Failure to meet the new requirements also becomes one of the grounds to suspend or revoke a licence to sell liquor. If the registrar issues a proposal to suspend or revoke the licence on this new ground and an unlawful weapon was present on the premises, the bill provides for mandatory interim suspension of the licence, which, by the operation of the act, can last a maximum of 15 days before a hearing is required.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (LAY-OFFS), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (MISES À PIED)

Mr. Paul Miller moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 239, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to lay-offs / Projet de loi 239, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi à l'égard des mises à pied.

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. Paul Miller: Currently, the Employment Standards Act, 2000, provides that excluded weeks are not counted in some situations in determining whether a person has been laid off. An excluded week is defined as

a week during which an employee does not work for various reasons, including a lockout. The bill amends the act so that if an employee does not work for a period of time due to lockout, the time is not included for the purposes of determining whether the week is an excluded week.

This is important. There are people out there in a situation—in Nanticoke, for one—who are without any income whatsoever because of these oversights.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT
(IGNITION INTERLOCK DEVICES
IN SCHOOL VEHICLES), 2009

LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT
LE CODE DE LA ROUTE
(DISPOSITIFS DE VERROUILLAGE
DU SYSTÈME DE DÉMARRAGE
DANS LES VÉHICULES SCOLAIRES)

Mr. Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 240, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to require school vehicles in Ontario to be equipped with ignition interlock devices / Projet de loi 240, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d'exiger que les véhicules scolaires en Ontario soient munis d'un dispositif de verrouillage du système de démarrage.

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. Dave Levac: This bill would require prescribed school vehicles to be equipped with an approved ignition interlock device commonly known as an alcolock. It's designed to keep our kids safe in school buses when they travel to and from school.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each party to speak on International Human Rights Day.

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

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It is a privilege to stand on behalf of Premier Dalton McGuinty, the government of Ontario and members of my caucus.

We are today marking International Human Rights Day. It's the 61st anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations—a declaration which speaks to the very principles of human rights, which recognizes that you cannot have freedom and peace in the world unless and until you recognize the inherent dignity, worth and equality of all peoples. That year was 1948; 1948 is a long time ago, and we have come a long way in the province of Ontario since then. We are right to stand here in the

province of Ontario and celebrate who we are and how far we have come, but not for a moment believe that we can rest in addressing the continuous struggle to ensure all are respected in our society.

It was 1948, in Dresden, Ontario, when a carpenter, a veteran of the Second World War, attempted to be served breakfast. He attempted to be served breakfast in Dresden, Ontario—which is the terminus of the Underground Railroad, that great route to freedom for slaves from the United States—but he was denied service. He was denied service for no other reason than that he was a black man. He refused to accept his denial. He refused to accept it and struggled for a change in the law. Seven years later, the Legislature of the province of Ontario, under a Progressive Conservative government, brought in the forerunner legislation to our Human Rights Code; that was the mid-1950s. A year later, Hugh Burnett was served in that cafe in Dresden, Ontario.

In 1962, the government of Ontario brought in the Human Rights Code, and every single government under every single party since then has not only stood by the legislative principles of human rights but has built upon them. They have added provisions; they have added strengths; they have stood in defence of our legislative protections and approach to human rights. It has been all parties, all peoples. It is never the fashion of the moment; it has been a shared determination.

Every party can point to the part that they have played. We would stand and point to the development of the human rights system which now consists of three parts. One is a legal access support centre—the first time that human rights complainants in the province of Ontario have had a place to go to get free legal assistance so that they can pursue their human rights complaints. We also have a tribunal which will allow complainants direct access to protection and a commission which will look at systemic issues. But every party has had a part in this struggle, which, at its heart, is the legislation and a specialized enforcement mechanism.

As we stand today on the eve of the Olympics and we think about the magic of the Olympics, in which people from all over the world come to celebrate—they come once every four years, they come to celebrate and to work together, live together and play together for a period of two and a half weeks—we can say, with a great deal of pride, that in Ontario we have the Olympic experience every minute of every day. We have the Olympic experience not by accident but by design. We have the Olympic experience because we have a shared determination and a shared recognition that each one of us is only as strong as all of us, that the rights of one of us are the rights of all of us, and if anybody attacks or challenges the rights of one of us, they attack or challenge the rights of all of us. We have a shared determination that today, tomorrow and forever, we will stand in the defence of the rights of all, we will stand in the defence of the inherent dignity of all, and we will stand and ensure respect for all. We will not rest for a moment on the achievements of the past. We will look forever to

the achievements and the potential of the future in the great province of Ontario.

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Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Today, December 10, 2009, marks the day when, 61 years ago in Paris, members of the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Within this declaration, 26 of the 30 articles begin with the word "Everyone...." or they begin with the words "No one...." In so doing, they recognize that the fundamental principle of non-discrimination is at the heart of the UN declaration. This year, we recognize this foundation of human rights as we focus on the fight to end discrimination.

In 1951, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party introduced the Fair Employment Practices Act and the Female Employees' Fair Remuneration Act. The Female Employees' Fair Remuneration Act was the first of its kind, not only across Canada but across the British Commonwealth. It was far from perfect, but it was a step in its time to address the inequality and discrimination experienced by women of the day.

Speaking to the bill on March 12, 1951, Premier Frost stated:

"The question we may ask ourselves, 'Is the principle sound?' It has been acknowledged by the highest authority, by the United Nations in the preamble to its charter and in the declaration of human rights. It has been recognized by the International Labour Organization. We, therefore, in Ontario ... believe that our legislation is a sound approach to this problem, and will bring justice to both men and women alike."

Ten years later, during the throne speech on November 30, 1961, Progressive Conservative leader John Robarts recognized, "In Ontario diversity has produced rewards, and conflicts. We must always be vigilant to ensure that this fortunate state of affairs remains with us and that every individual, regardless of race, creed or colour, has a full and equal opportunity to direct his life toward what he thinks to be the most rewarding objective."

He continued, "It should be a matter of pride of every honourable member of this House that our province has been a leader in the campaign against racial and religious discrimination." That quote would stand well in today's House.

In 1962, under Robarts' leadership, the government introduced the first provincial human rights code in Canada. As a province, we have come a long way. Today, Ontario's Human Rights Code has 15 enumerated grounds of discrimination.

However, despite how far we have come, we still have a ways to go to see the reality of non-discrimination. When human rights are violated, they continue to exclude people from their rightful participation in the economic, political, social and cultural life of our province.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, speaking on Human Rights Day 2009, stated, "No country is free of discrimination. We see it everywhere, in many forms: old and new, covert and blatant, public

and private. It may appear as institutionalized racism, as ethnic strife, as episodes of intolerance and rejection or as an official national version of history that denies the identity of others. Discrimination targets individuals and groups that are vulnerable to attack: the disabled, women and girls, the poor, migrants, minorities and all those who are perceived as different."

We must, as a House, as a province and as a nation, remain vigilant in our fight to end discrimination. It is a reality that plagues and obstructs the lives of many around the world. Today, the PC Party recognizes the work of those who support and advocate for those whose rights continue to be violated, and we encourage everyone to remember, as written in the declaration, "the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable right of all members of our human family."

Mr. Michael Prue: It is indeed a privilege and an honour to stand up on behalf of the New Democratic Party of Ontario to recognize this important day in history.

It was, as has been said, 61 years ago today that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted and proclaimed. Canada was one of the first signatory nations. The declaration was the first of its kind, a set of laws written to protect all human beings, irrespective of their nationality, their race or their religion.

On this day, 60 years after the signing, I want to emphasize one point because I think there's one sphere that we still have not fully explored or implemented into law, and that is section 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It states, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

We have made remarkable strides in other aspects of human rights. In Canada, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights inspired the government to implement a host of human rights laws, both federally and provincially. Most significantly, in 1982, Canada saw the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, which was designed to protect ordinary citizens. This marked a great change in our human rights history, as citizens successfully challenged laws on such issues as freedom of expression, pay equity and same-sex marriage.

I turn to the issue at hand because I think it's a very real issue. Canada, and particularly Ontario, needs to do more if we are to give full voice and weight to the proclamation which we have been so proud of for 60 years. I'm quoting from the Senate report which was released just yesterday. They were talking about poverty. There are some excellent quotes in here that I would like to share with the Legislature and the people of Ontario. The first is on page 70:

"The committee has heard that poverty and human rights (or their denial) are intertwined. A report of the UN Higher Commissioner of Human Rights describes the linkages:

“Poverty is not only a matter of income, but also, more fundamentally, a matter of being able to live a life in dignity and enjoy basic human rights and freedoms. It describes a complex of interrelated and mutually reinforcing deprivations, which impact on people’s ability to claim and access their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. In a fundamental way, therefore, the denial of human rights forms part of the very definition of what it is to be poor.”

“Closer to home, Quebec’s legislation to combat poverty and social exclusion includes a preamble that refers explicitly to Quebec’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and presents poverty as an obstacle to the protection of and respect for human dignity that is necessary in a society committed to rights and freedoms.”

I say this because I think it behooves all members of this Legislature to look at how to enhance human rights and freedoms. One of those ways is the elimination of poverty. Much is said in this House about the elimination of child poverty, but we also know that many of our citizens live in poverty. And because they live in destitution, their human rights are often very much at risk. One only has to see the disabled, one only has to see new immigrants, one only has to see single mothers, one only has to see our First Nations communities to see that the intertwining of their human rights is somehow lessened because of their poverty and their inability to interact with governments or government agencies and to provide for themselves those things which are necessary for human dignity. I go on to quote from that same report, and I am mindful of the time:

“The standard under international human rights, which is the cornerstone of our protection of social rights in Canada ... is related to the application of what they call “available resources.” That is, the maximum of available resources is to be applied to protect these fundamental rights.... Issues of growing poverty and homelessness in Canada are seen as egregious violations because in this country these are avoidable. They are not caused by a scarcity of resources. In fact, we have seen homelessness and poverty become increasingly worse as Canada has become increasingly richer.”

I stand here in admiration and in support of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I ask all members to continue the fight which was begun 60 years ago and to trench within their own hearts and souls the necessity of extending those human rights so that all Ontarians, all Canadians, all people, no matter where they live in the world, have the rights and the freedoms that only come with prosperity.

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PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: “Whereas the hard-working residents in Simcoe–Grey do not want a harmonized sales

tax (HST) that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

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

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

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

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

I agree with the petition, and I will sign it.

RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I am moving this petition on behalf of my colleague from Hamilton Centre:

“Whereas to cover the cost of reconstructive surgery when a patient has had extreme weight loss after bariatric surgery, as these surgeries are not covered under OHIP and are at present considered cosmetic;

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

“That when patients have bariatric surgery and lose the required amount of weight and keep it off, they also have another set of health care issues that can be very costly to take care of. As these individuals lose weight, they end up with so much excess skin and fat pockets that no amount of exercise will take care of it. This excess skin and folds in the skin can cause anything from boils, cysts, skin infections and more that have to be cared for constantly in hospital emergency rooms and cared for by agencies like community care access centres. If preventative reconstructive surgeries are not approved, the constant medical care will cost the taxpayer much more money as said health issues would cost over time.”

I support this petition.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition sent to me by staff of the Port Credit Branch of the Royal Bank of Canada. I’d like to acknowledge Janine Henderson and Cathy Stacy for their work in collecting the signatures. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the population in Peel has tripled from 400,000 residents to 1.2 million between 1980 to present. Human services funding has not kept pace with that

growth. Peel receives only one third the per capita social service funding of other Ontario communities; and

“Whereas residents of Peel cannot obtain social services in a timely fashion. Long waiting lists exist for many Peel region service providers.... ; and

“Whereas Ontario’s Places to Grow legislation predicts substantial future growth, further challenging our already stretched service providers to respond to population growth;

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

“That the province of Ontario allocate social services funding on the basis of population size, population growth, relevant social indicators and special geographic conditions;

“That the province provide adequate growth funding for social services in Peel region; and

“That Ontario develop, in consultation with high-growth stakeholders, a human services strategy for high-growth regions to complement Ontario’s award-winning Places to Grow strategy.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this petition, to ask page Valerie to carry it for me, and to wish you, Speaker, and the members of the table a very Merry Christmas and joyeux Noël.

RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I’m pleased, on behalf of Shelley Kennedy from Waterloo, to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas to cover the cost of reconstructive surgery when a patient has had extreme weight loss after bariatric surgery, as these surgeries are not covered under OHIP and are at present considered cosmetic;

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

“That when patients have bariatric surgery and lose the required amount of weight and keep it off, they also have another set of health care issues that can be very costly to take care of. As these individuals lose weight, they end up with so much excess skin and fat pockets that no amount of exercise will take care of it. This excess skin and folds in the skin can cause anything from boils, cysts, skin infections and more that have to be cared for constantly in hospital emergency rooms and cared for by agencies like community care access centres. If preventative reconstructive surgeries are not approved, the constant medical care will cost the taxpayer much more money as said health issues would cost over time.”

I’m pleased to do this on behalf of Shelley Kennedy.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr. Michael Prue: I have the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

“Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

“Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people’s complaints about children’s aid societies’ decisions; and

“Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman’s office;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province’s children’s aid societies....”

I am in agreement and will send it with the page.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas unlawful weapons have no place in our community and especially in licensed bars and clubs;

“Whereas we need to give the police more tools to deal with the growing number of shootings in and around licensed bars and clubs;

“Whereas suspending the liquor licence of bar owners who do not co-operate with the police in ensuring there are no illegal weapons in their place of business is one way of protecting the community from gun-carrying criminals;

“Whereas at present our liquor laws need to be amended to better support the police and the community in ensuring there are no unlawful firearms tolerated in licensed bars and clubs;

“We, the undersigned, support MPP Mike Colle’s bill” to amend the Liquor Licence Act and get rid of unlawful weapons in bars.

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

TAXATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas residents of Oxford do not want Dalton McGuinty’s new sales tax, which will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals’ new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, telephone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to home sales over \$500,000; and

“Whereas the McGuinty Liberals’ new sales tax of 13% will cause everyone to pay more for meals under \$4,

haircuts, funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

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

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

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

TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a different petition here. It’s to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Ontarians already pay more than their fair share of taxes; and

“Whereas the Liberal government’s proposed harmonized sales tax (HST) will add 8% to purchases like gym memberships, running shoes, vitamins, coffee, gasoline, heating oil, natural gas, hydro, newspapers, magazines, landscaping, Internet access, theatre tickets and home renovations;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to cancel the implementation of this unreasonable, unaffordable and untimely tax.”

It may be slightly outdated but I’m still in support of it and would send it forward.

RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

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

“Whereas to cover the cost of reconstructive surgery when a patient has had extreme weight loss after bariatric surgery, as these surgeries are not covered under OHIP and are at present considered cosmetic;

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

“That when patients have bariatric surgery and lose the required amount of weight and keep it off, they also have another set of health care issues that can be very costly to take care of. As these individuals lose weight, they end up with so much excess skin and fat pockets that no amount of exercise will take care of it. This excess skin and folds in the skin can cause anything from boils, cysts, skin infections and more that have to be cared for constantly in hospital emergency rooms and cared for by agencies like community care access centres. If preventative reconstructive surgeries are not approved, the constant medical care will cost the taxpayer much more money as said health issues would cost over time.”

ELMVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

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

“Whereas Elmvale District High School is an important part of the community of Elmvale and surrounding area; and

“Whereas the school is widely recognized as having high educational requirements and is well known for producing exceptional graduates who have gone on to work as professionals in health care, agriculture, community safety, the trades and many other fields that give back to the community; and

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“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised during the 2007 election that he would keep rural schools open when he declared that ‘Rural schools help keep communities strong, which is why we’re not only committed to keeping them open—but strengthening them’; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty found \$12 million to keep school swimming pools open in Toronto but hasn’t found any money to keep an actual rural school open in Elmvale;

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

“That the Minister of Education support the citizens of Elmvale and flow funding to the local school board so that Elmvale District High School can remain open to serve the vibrant community of Elmvale and surrounding area.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I’d just like to take this opportunity to welcome some guests to the gallery today: Susan Dell, Bill Dell, Carol Mayner and Alison Demelo, guests of the member from Hamilton Mountain. Welcome to Queen’s Park today.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

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 second 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): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I’m happy to rise in the Legislature today to speak about my private member’s bill, the

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act (Institutions), 2009.

Just a little bit about my background: I'm a passionate Canadian. I am so very proud of the democracy that we enjoy in Canada and in Ontario, a democracy that our citizens—

Interjections.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I don't know why the members opposite are laughing, because I don't think it's a laughing matter. I'm proud of our democracy that our citizens have fought for—some have died for it—and continue to serve in countries, trying to bring this very same democracy to the people who live in violent and undemocratic conditions. I've lived in a refugee camp, and I know the difference—and I'm not crazy, Minister Fonseca.

As a municipal representative, I am proud to have served with the trust of the people who have voted for me in our democratic process. They voted openly and they voted transparently. I continue to represent my constituents as a member of this provincial Parliament, with the same beliefs in open communication, transparency, accountability and integrity. I believe in the people's right to vote and to speak to their elected representatives, and I believe that elected representatives should listen. That's really what my private member's bill is all about. It's intended to give Ontarians access to the agencies that serve them, to provide people with accountability, openness and transparency.

This is a bill of accountability and transparency, something we have heard this government talk about in great detail. If this bill is passed, it would amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to add a number of bodies—agencies—to the list of institutions as defined by the act. Bodies that would be added, and thus become subject to the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation—I'm going to read them—include the Biopharmaceutical Investment Program Marketing Advisory Committee, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres, Ontario Capital Growth Corp., Ontario Centres of Excellence, Ontario Economic Forecast Council, Ontario Educational Communications Authority—which is TVO—Ontario Innovation Trust, Ontario Investment and Trade Advisory Council, the Ontario Manufacturing Council, Ontario Research Fund Advisory Board, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Premier's Climate Change Advisory Panel, Public Interest Committee, Rural Economic Development Program Review Panel, the Small Business Agency of Ontario, Technical Standards and Safety Authority, the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp., Travel Industry Council of Ontario, and finally, Waste Diversion Ontario.

These are 21 agencies that are not covered by the FOI act. If this bill passes, the heads of these institutions that I just listed will be subject to freedom-of-information requests, thereby allowing Ontarians rightful access to information regarding their publicly funded institutions. These are institutions that use public money, tax dollars.

The PC Party has encountered resistance from some of these agencies that have received FOI requests. They have delayed providing information that has been paid for and requested. It is my hope that if this bill passes, these institutions will comply with the requests in a more timely manner.

I mentioned that this bill is a bill of accountability and transparency. While I think that Ontarians were horrified with the spending scandals that the FOIs uncovered earlier this year, there's also a sense of relief that all of that has been halted. Through freedom-of-information requests, questionable spending habits of agencies like eHealth and OLG were revealed. I think the same should happen for other agencies.

I am not intimating that other agencies have spending scandals. I am just saying that having an open and transparent process where people can have a look at what agencies are doing allows people to have confidence and trust in the people who are spending their money.

Through freedom-of-information requests, it was also revealed that OLG board members were expensing things like gym memberships and yoga pants, and even going to Weight Watchers.

The importance of this bill is that it will allow Ontarians that very sacred access to the freedom of information from the government agencies that are paid for with public money, paid for with our tax dollars.

We've seen some waste in the spending of taxpayers' money, and this bill will go a long way to prevent more of that waste and to instill, as I say, the trust and confidence that the people should enjoy. I hope for the sake of Ontario taxpayers that eHealth and OLG were the exception and not the norm.

In addition to this being a step in the right direction, I really believe that this bill complements what we have heard the McGuinty Liberals say over the last several months about their desire to increase transparency and accountability. We did hear that on September 16, the government introduced the Public Sector Expenses Review Act. This act received royal assent on October 19. That's a good step forward.

According to a Liberal press release upon introduction of the bill, this legislation would further strengthen accountability, transparency and oversight of expense claims for the 22 largest Ontario agencies.

My private member's bill is no different than the aim of the Public Sector Expenses Review Act, except it goes one further: It allows the access of the public to these agencies. Both are intended to increase measures of accountability and transparency with taxpayers' money.

In early October, the Premier advised that the Cancer Care Ontario agency would become subject to FOI in the future. I know that the government filed a regulation on October 26 that will see this take effect on January 1, 2010. That's great news. All I'm asking for in this bill is that the other 21 agencies also be given that same privilege. The Premier has done the right thing by allowing Ontarians access to information regarding Cancer Care Ontario, but I really think he should have gone that one

step further and done the same for those other 21 agencies. I look forward to him doing the right thing in supporting this bill and ensuring that all these 21 agencies have the same measure of transparency and accountability that Cancer Care Ontario has.

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My hope is that members in the House today will do the right thing, that they will look at this bill as a right of Ontarians to have that freedom of information, that right to access information about how their tax dollars are spent by agencies in this province whose members are appointed by the government.

It's only right that the people of Ontario have that access. That's part of our democratic process. That's what we believe in. That's what some of our soldiers have fought for and some of our soldiers have died for. Some of our soldiers continue to go to countries to try to instill the same level of democracy we enjoy in Canada. We should have the right to that freedom of information.

It's my hope that today, as we listen to speakers in the House comment on my bill, they will understand the point from which I bring this forward and will agree and vote, not for me and not just for my bill, but on behalf of Ontarians to give them access to the kind of freedom of information that should be available to them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'll be supporting this bill. I think it is a reasonable bill. The member from Burlington has covered a great deal of ground in terms of saying what I would have said. I am not going to take my full time, or at least not much time.

I think this list is probably not comprehensive. Twenty-one agencies, commissions and others are listed; it's a good list. We suspect it's probably bigger than this, but it doesn't matter. The point is that the public has a right to be able to access, by way of freedom of information, any information they would like about any institution that gets public dollars. That's the extent of it. That's how simple this is. They have a right to be able to do that.

I know that governments, no matter who they are, are very afraid to extend this right to the public to have access to this information. They're afraid because—I don't know—it might reveal something that might make them unhappy.

I think it's a good thing. I have to tell you that when I was in government, I alerted some of my colleagues to some problems that I felt were going on in the Ministry of Housing. I recall my colleagues being very nervous about having to open up a potential can of worms. In my view, it's good for the public to be able to weed out any potential problems that might exist in a ministry, agency, board and/or commission. It can only be good for politicians and the government.

But I understand the fear: If something happens while a particular party is in government, they fear it's going to be a blemish on them. Rather than taking advantage of the situation and saying, "We're the ones who opened the

windows and doors, we're the ones who gave access to this particular power, we're the ones who want to weed out any potential problems that exist," we hide, we circle the wagons. We say, "No, we don't want to cause ourselves any problems," versus giving the power to the public to have the transparency they deserve. I understand the fear. I think it's wrong-headed, but I do understand the fear.

For years now, we've been calling for the Ombudsman to have oversight over hospitals, and in many provinces across Canada they have such power.

Hon. James J. Bradley: He's busy. He's a very busy Ombudsman.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yet my friend Jim, the Minister of Transportation, refuses to listen to that request.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I always listen to you, Rosie.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The reason why he refuses is because he's afraid—not because he's arrogant, but because he's afraid. I understand the fear, because every time the Ombudsman has gone after my good friend Jim and all the other men and women ministers we have across the way, they cower with fear, and immediately they submit to his request, because it's the right thing to do, and they hope that the Ombudsman will go away and not say much.

Hon. James J. Bradley: You cannot count on that.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Why count on that? We like the work the Ombudsman is doing. Sadly, he's beating up on you this time around. But the next time it could be the Tories, and the next time around it could be New Democrats—we're all going to get our turn. It's okay. You guys are not going to be here forever. You have to remember, you're not going to be there forever. You might have two more years. Take advantage of it, enjoy it, and open the doors so that the next government—Tory or New Democrat—will have to face the music. If you can't do it for yourself, do it for us, do it for the others.

I understand the fear. We transfer about \$14 billion to hospitals and \$3 billion to long-term-care institutions. It's a whole lot of money. Our whole health care system amounts to \$44 billion—a whole lot of money. We need greater scrutiny in that regard. Am I accusing anyone of anything? No. But it would be nice to be able to say that someone has oversight, that someone is keeping an eye on things, other than my friend Jim from the Ministry of Transportation. We need to have a couple of more eyes on the file, because two is not enough. Jim's two eyes are not enough on this file. We need more eyes, more scrutiny, because he can't do it all. I know he wants to do more, but he can't do it alone.

That's why I'm saying, let's get him some help. Let's get the freedom-of-information requests so people can help you, Jim, to do the job well. Let's get the Ombudsman a power that every Ombudsman has across Canada: to use one's eyes and power of discernment to be able to get in there and weed out any potential problem—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Only if you're the Ombudsman.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: It's to help you, Jim. It's not about me; it's about you.

Mr. David Zimmer: No, it's about the NDP.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, it's not about the NDP. It's about me wanting to help you to do a better job.

This is a good bill, and I'm going to be supporting it. I am going to keep an eye to see how many left-leaning Liberals might still exist in the Liberal Party, and see who is going to be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I'll just remind the honourable members to please speak through the Chair.

Further debate?

Mr. David Zimmer: It's my pleasure to speak to this matter. I'll be sharing my time with the member for London—Fanshawe.

I do respect the intention of what Ms. Savoline has brought before the House. Indeed, all parties share and all parties understand the need for transparency, the need for and the right of the voters of Ontario, the citizens of Ontario, to have access to information that their government holds, to have a government that is transparent and to have a government that fulsomely shares that information with them.

But I say, with the greatest of respect, that this matter brought forward is premature, and it's premature for this reason. As the member knows, there is an all-agency review that is going to be conducted that is going to review all of the agencies with a view to seeing how we can increase transparency, how we can ensure that the information that should be available to the public is available to the public in a timely way. This is a very coordinated, comprehensive, detailed review of all government agencies. What we want to do, rather than approach it the way the member's idea is going to approach it—that is, in a very piecemeal fashion—is to have this coordinated all-agency review. But in the meantime, while that all-agency review is under way, there have been some very significant and important steps taken that are going to carry us along in the direction that I rather expect the all-agency review is going to come up with when it delivers the report coming out of its review.

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On April 1, 2010, for instance—that's about four months from now—there's a new expense-posting regime whereby our government has taken the 22 largest agencies here in Ontario and has asked that the OPS connected with those ministries, the political ministers connected with those ministries and the various senior executives to have a new regime for posting their expenses. As I have said, this is going to apply to the public service sector, the political staff, ministers and the senior executives.

The new rules are going to apply to some 22 of the largest agencies, and I'll run just down some of these agencies: Ontario Power Generation; Hydro One; Independent Electricity System Operator; Ontario Power Authority; WSIB; LCBO; eHealth; Cancer Care Ontario; Ontario Infrastructure Projects Corp., Infrastructure Ontario; Ontario Energy Board; Alcohol and Gaming Commission; Ontario Financing Authority; Ontario

Realty Corp.; Ontario Public Service Pension Board; GO Transit; Metrolinx; Toronto Area Transit Operating Authority; Ontario Human Rights Commission; Metropolitan Toronto Convention Centre Corp.; Ontario Educational Communications Authority, TVO; TFO; Ontario Racing Commission; and the Ontario Clean Water Agency.

All of the employees, all of the members of these agencies are going to be held to the same standards that cabinet ministers and political staff are held to in terms of managing and reporting on their expenses. To ensure that that's complied with, there are going to be annual audits of these agencies, boards and commissions, the 22 that I've just listed. But what's really important is that the auditors are going to be independent, external auditors, and they will be required to look at the expense practices to ensure that the rules in place are being followed. This is an independent, outside audit.

In addition, the Premier has issued a direction. He has made it quite clear that he expects that government should ensure that any requested information should be made public unless there is a clear and compelling reason not to do so. The Premier has made quite clear to his ministers, to his political staff and to all concerned that that's the expectation; that's the standard that he is going to hold his government to.

In that regard, I should say, in terms of the disclosure and getting the information out to the public in a timely fashion, in the past two years, in 2007 and 2008, this government has achieved the best-ever performance in replying in a timely way to freedom-of-information requests within the various time frames set out in those requests. In fact, the compliance rate has been 84%, and we are working very hard to close in on the remaining 16%.

Just to conclude, then, while I understand the intent of the matter that Ms. Savoline has raised, in my opinion this is a premature exercise. We should go through two things: one, the all-party agency review. We should do that in an orderly, coordinated, comprehensive and detailed manner. We should receive that report back, and then we shall move to see what we're going to do as a result of that report. In the meantime, until that report comes out, I've outlined a number of initiatives that are, in and of themselves, comprehensive.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to speak this afternoon in support of Bill 227, An Act to amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, that has been moved by my friend and colleague the member for Burlington. She first introduced this legislation on November 25, so it has been before the House for a few weeks. I think all members have a level of awareness about what is being debated here.

I listened with some interest to the member for Willowdale—because, of course, he is the first speaker from the government side—to hear what he had to say

about the bill, and I was quite disappointed that he didn't indicate clearly that he would support this. In fact, he talked about his support for the intent—I think he said he respected the intention of the bill—but then went on to suggest that the government had a process under way and that the bill was premature.

I think maybe we should remind some of the members of the House that second reading of a private member's bill is the debate on the principle of the bill. Logically, it would follow that if a member respects the intention of the bill and would seem to suggest that they support the principle of it, you would think, logically, they would vote for it at second reading. The bill would then most likely be referred to a standing committee of the House and there would be more opportunity for discussion and debate, perhaps public hearings, and then lots of issues could come forward and perhaps amendments made.

I'm sure the member for Burlington would be open to the idea of having amendments and certainly public hearings to allow this bill to move forward. I would suggest to the member for Willowdale that if he does indeed respect the intention of this bill and he would say that he supports it in principle, he should stand in his place and vote for it, as should the other members of the House.

I know we've seen a creeping partisanship brought into this House on Thursday afternoons on some recent private members' bills. I know that the member for Burlington is absolutely sincere in terms of bringing this bill forward to shed the light of day on some of these government agencies, and I think she is doing exactly what she was elected to do and the kind of thing that she has been known for in her public career and in her many years of service to the people of her community in Burlington, as well as the region of Halton and now here in this place.

I first met the member for Burlington in 2005, if I'm not mistaken, and I had an opportunity to meet with her in her office when she was the chairman of the region of Halton. We had quite an interesting conversation. I was immediately impressed with her sincerity, her intelligence and her obvious commitment to her community through her many years of service. I would suggest that she is one of the strongest members of our caucus and one of the best members of the Legislature. I think she deserves enormous credit for the work that she does.

I was glad she talked a little bit at the start of her speech about her background. I was aware that she was born in China, but I wasn't aware that for a number of years when she was a child her family lived in a refugee camp. Certainly, she has every good reason to understand how fortunate we are to live in this country. The democratic ideals that we embrace and share are ones that she values as much as anybody in this House, without question. I think that the comments she made this afternoon in terms of the need for openness and transparency in government are ones we would all want to heed.

This bill lays out 21 different organizations—actually, they're government agencies. I don't think I'll go through

the whole list, but—Biopharmaceutical Investment Program Marketing Advisory Committee, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres, Ontario Capital Growth Corp.—it goes on and on, a significant number of government agencies that currently are not subject to freedom of information. Yet we know that freedom-of-information legislation is something that has been around for years. I believe the legislation was first introduced before I was elected to the Legislature; I think it was in the 1980s that the legislation was brought in. At the time—I remember the debates—it was intended to be a sign of democratic maturity and openness in terms of government to allow citizens to have access to the kind of information that previously had been secret.

If the government is going to take the position today that these agencies should continue not to be subject to freedom of information, that this information should be kept secret, somehow, over time—I don't know why it would take that position other than that they do have something to hide in some of these agencies. Obviously, that's the conclusion that anyone would draw; you don't have to be cynical to draw that conclusion. I think the government has to give us more explanation if they are indeed going to try to vote this down. I would hope that I'm wrong and that the government members will approach private members' business today as they should, without the government whip telling them how to vote, and that they have an opportunity to express the wishes of their constituents, as I know they would want to do.

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So I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that this bill is one whose time has certainly come, and I would hope that all members of the House will support it. Again, I expect and anticipate that the bill would be referred to a standing committee of the House. We don't know what's going to happen in terms of the House proroguing perhaps in the new year, but in the meantime the business of the people of Ontario continues. We would hope that this bill could pass second reading and then go to the committee stage for more discussion, and hopefully, ideally, come back to the House at a later date for a vote at third reading, because I think it is a bill that certainly is needed in the province of Ontario.

The member for Willowdale talked about an all-agency review. I think that process could be ongoing at the same time as the Legislature considers this bill. There's no reason why the two can't continue concurrently. Certainly, it gives members of the Legislature an opportunity to have direct input in these kinds of issues, whereas an all-agency review, I suggest, would limit opportunities for participation by MPPs. In fact, we'd probably have no opportunity whatsoever.

In closing, I again want to commend and congratulate the member for Burlington for this piece of legislation today. I would suggest that it's a bill that is needed and it is a bill that should be passed at second reading today. I would encourage all members of this House to support Bill 227.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I've listened intently to the debate. I would like to encourage the member from Burlington in her efforts to try to shed some light. I listened with some puzzlement, I must say, to the member from Willowdale, who suggested we ought not to proceed with a bill of this nature because the government is planning to do something in the future.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: A comprehensive review.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, a comprehensive review. But nobody has announced any kind of comprehensive review. Nobody has shared which agencies are going to fall under this comprehensive review.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member for Willowdale did. He announced it.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, he didn't announce it. Nobody has told us which agencies are going to be included, which agencies are not going to be included, whether there are going to be public hearings, whether the opposition is going to have any role to look at this, what the government has planned. Quite frankly, I am going to support this bill. If it does nothing other than nudge the government to take action, it will have succeeded in something. And I think that what is being proposed here will in fact be a nudge for the government, to make them move ahead with a planned review. I know this is difficult. It's almost a quagmire trying to find out.

I know the researchers in my party—and they're absolutely brilliant researchers. They work in conjunction with the people in the library and this institution and they try to find out information which is presented every day in argument in this House. This has been a longstanding issue for them. They have sent me a little note: "We have talked to the library multiple times about compiling a list of excluded institutions, but have had no luck in getting an answer, due to the difficulty of finding explanations and not because of lack of effort." That's the note. We don't know who all the agencies are. We don't know whether the list that the member from Burlington has put in is exhaustive or not. But we do know that we need to shed light inside the four walls of this institution.

We do know that people out there are asking for explanations and we do know that the citizenry of Ontario is certainly much better educated and much better informed than they were in past generations. They have access to a broad range of multimedia—everything from television to film to print. They now have access to the Internet. They want and they require and they need additional information in order to make up their own minds. Gone are the days when the people in this Legislature were considered to be the elites, the ones who had the education, the ones who had the knowledge, the ones who could make the decisions. Ordinary people want to be involved in the process, too. Ordinary people want to look and make sure that their individual MPP is doing the right thing. They also want to make sure that the government is doing the right thing with their tax monies and the programs, and they are simply asking that a little light

be shed. I think we need to shed that light. Whether it is the auditor, whether it is the Ombudsman—whatever person is responsible—that light needs to be shed.

I congratulate the member from Burlington for asking that the light be shed, and I do not understand why there would be any hesitancy whatsoever from members of this venerable institution to say, "I have no fear." I do understand that from time to time in this government and in all governments, the auditor's report or the Ombudsman's report is looked at with apprehension: "Oh my goodness, people say the auditor is coming down with something tomorrow; we had all better run and hide." But the institution itself is not worse off for it. A day or two after the furor ends and the questions are asked in here, the service that was provided was a valuable one. Governments know where they need to plug holes; the opposition knows where they should be looking in the future to see whether the government is following through on the recommendations.

The people of Ontario understand that in the multi-billion-dollar enterprise that is the province of Ontario, mistakes will be made from time to time. We are human. The people in the bureaucracy who advise us are human. The people in the bureaucracy who enforce and carry out the laws are human. Sometimes things happen. Sometimes people take advantage of situations. But in the end, it is the auditor and the Ombudsman who provide the service to this Legislature. That's why they are servants of this Legislature.

I want to let those institutions and all the institutions shed the light of day. I am sick and tired, and I think my constituents are, of having things hidden away. Let the clear light of day shine on this. Pass this bill. Send it for committee stage. If there is anything being reviewed, subsume the recommendations in a government order. We all will be better for it, this government will be better for it and every government that sits in this Legislature for as long as we are the province of Ontario will be better for it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm pleased to enter the debate on Bill 227, An Act to amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2009, which was introduced by the member from Burlington and is being debated in the House at the present time. I listened to the member from Burlington, and I agree. I know that the member from the third party also spoke in support.

I want to say it's a very important thing for all the people who are listening to us today, especially taxpayers, to know how their taxes are being spent. Ontarians work very hard, and they give their hard-earned dollars to support many different agencies and programs across the province to deliver services for the people of Ontario. So they have a right to see how those agencies conduct their daily business without any abuse of tax dollars.

To the member for Beaches–East York: I'm a member of the government. I'm not afraid of the Auditor

General's report. As a matter of fact, I look forward to seeing it and reading it every single time it comes out. It has given me the chance to know what's going on, because as a member, I don't have the capacity, the ability or the privilege to see different books or agencies that are doing business on our behalf across the province of Ontario, whether it's eHealth, hospitals, the environment—whatever sector or whatever agencies that do business on our behalf as a government or on behalf of the taxpaying citizens of this province. It's important for all of us to learn. As the member from Beaches–East York mentioned, we are human. We are subject to making mistakes.

To be a subject for audit by the auditor, the Ombudsman or the Integrity Commissioner is a good thing, but I'm not sure how it's going to be implemented. We know that since we got elected as a government in 2003, we've taken a very important step in the direction of opening all the agencies to be subject to audit, whether by the Auditor General or by report to the Integrity Commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, you and I and everybody in this place—107 members—submit our information to the Integrity Commissioner on a regular basis every year. I think the taxpayers who elect us have a right to see us and know a lot about us, while we're doing business in the right way. We're not corrupt; we're not misusing the taxpayers' dollars; we're not subject to being influenced by lobbyists or taking money illegally, using our position to influence others or to benefit from others.

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I listened to the member from Burlington speak in detail about the importance of her bill. I think it's a very important bill and a very important subject to be discussed in this House. As a matter of fact, it's private members' bills time and the member comes with a lot of good ideas. I think I'm planning to support that bill. I'm going to support the member from Burlington because I think it is our obligation and duty to open up for the taxpayers, because as we speak today, there are people out there, outside this place, who have a bad perception of us. They think that all the agencies, all the organizations and all the people working for the government in the province of Ontario are corrupt. Why do we have to hide things from them?

The member brought 21 agencies to be open and subject to freedom of information. So be it; it's no problem. Maybe more should be subject to freedom of information. If you and I were subject to freedom of information and opened up on a regular basis to the Integrity Commissioner to tell the people of Ontario what we do on a regular basis—I think every agency, especially corporations or big organizations that collect and receive millions of dollars from taxpayers should be subject to it, to see their conduct and to tell the people of Ontario, "Look, these agencies and these organizations are doing a good job and not misusing taxpayers' dollars. They are investing it in the right place to benefit the people of Ontario."

I think it's a very good initiative, but I'm not sure how it's going to be implemented. I heard my colleague the member from Willowdale mention the government's directions to construct a committee to study and review many different organizations in the province of Ontario. I think if this bill passed and went to committee, it would not hurt to add to our initiative more initiatives, and shed a light on many different organizations where otherwise we would not be able to know what they do on a daily basis. I think, as taxpayers, as citizens of this province, as its elected officials, we'd like to know how those organizations, how those agencies, conduct their business on a daily basis.

I want to congratulate the member for bringing this issue forward, and hopefully, my colleagues and I and many other people will support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to add some comments to Bill 227, which is An Act to amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and it's put forward by the member from Burlington. Just having listened to the member from London–Fanshawe, it sounds like he's supportive of the bill. I'll be looking forward to seeing how he votes after private members' time. He did sound supportive, so I'm pleased to see that.

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes, hopefully it's not a whipped vote; this is private members' time. I do note that this week, Bill 132, the fruit wines bill put forward by the member from Leeds–Grenville, was in committee, and all the Liberal members on the committee were very receptive and had lots of positive things to say as all the people came before the committee in the public consultations. Then when it hit clause-by-clause time, they all voted against every section of the bill and shut it down. You've got to sometimes listen very carefully or just wait to see how they actually vote, because who knows what they might do.

The member from London–Fanshawe raised questions about how you are going to implement this bill. Well, it's pretty simple, because what the bill does is list 21 different agencies that would come under the freedom-of-information act. All you have to do is pass the bill and those freedom-of-information requests would—you'd be able to look into some of these different agencies. Frankly, I certainly would be interested to see, for example, some of the 21 different institutions and agencies listed. Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation: That was a creation of the current government. I think it's safe to say that the connections to the Liberal Party—it would be very interesting to see what those are and where the funding goes and what's happening there.

Let's remember that in the past year there have been some significant scandals for the government, and they came about through freedom-of-information requests. Pina Martino, who was in the research department of the PC Party until recently, was instrumental in making

several requests on the eHealth file. They kept trying to shut her down, as she was very persistent and kept refining her requests. Eventually, we learned that significant monies were wasted in the eHealth file with very little to show for it.

The same can be said for OLG and all the expense accounts which came to light through freedom-of-information requests. I would be very interested to see, from freedom-of-information requests, what sort of things come out by looking into the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. I think there's a lot of money spent in community care access centres, and I think the people of Ontario—

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: If the transportation minister asked his constituents, they'd probably be very interested to know the inner goings-on at some of these agencies.

The Ontario Economic Forecast Council is another agency where I think it would be interesting to see just how they're spending their money. I think accountability is good. What about the Technical Standards and Safety Authority? Or Waste Diversion Ontario? That's another organization that spends a lot of money, and I think the people of the province who are supporting government through their tax dollars have a right to look at the inner workings.

Hopefully, the government is going to not whip this private member's resolution but let the members decide on their own the merits of it. Really, the only reason for not supporting it would be if the government has something to hide, if they're worried about other freedom-of-information requests.

I know the member from Willowdale said that the Premier has made it quite clear that he's going to look into these types of things. Frankly, what can we believe of what the Premier says? He's the Premier who said he wouldn't raise your taxes, who signed a declaration saying he wouldn't raise your taxes.

Recently, they actually printed in the budget document that they saved \$45 million and it was going to front-line health services. The Auditor General's report came out last week, and you know what? That's not true. Surprise, surprise. A million dollars might have been saved, not \$45 million. There is a big difference there. So we have to look very carefully at what the government is saying to determine that it is, in fact, the correct information.

This is a very simple bill. It allows freedom-of-information requests for 21 agencies that I think the people of this province would be very pleased to have opened up so that they can get a better idea of how the money is spent within these different organizations. The Ontario Trillium Foundation—there's a lot of money spent in communities around the area. The Rural Economic Development Program, Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp., Ontario Educational Communications Authority, Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation—I think people would like to make sure their tax dollars are being wisely spent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mrs. Savoline, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I would like to thank the speakers from Trinity–Spadina, Willowdale, Wellington–Halton Hills, Beaches–East York, London–Fanshawe and Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I was a little disappointed to hear the member from Willowdale portray this bill as immature. No matter what party is in power, this bill is a good idea. It keeps people close to doing what's right. The Public Sector Expenses Review Act only reviews expenses of members in these agencies. It does not review administrative practices. What we found with eHealth and some of the other agencies is that their administrative practices weren't good, so the Integrity Commissioner will not be able to check on any of that. If it's good for Cancer Care Ontario to be included in FOIs, why isn't it good for the rest of these agencies to also be included? This is not doing work, piecemeal.

Given the revelations of this year, scandal after scandal, I think this bill is long overdue. It's not premature; it's overdue. Ontarians are overdrawn at the bank due to unchecked spending. They're overdrawn at the bank due to scandals. Why do we have to wait and wait and do nothing? Why can't we just act when we know it's the right time to act, and now is the right time. What are we waiting for? Allow us to move forward to third reading. I think that giving the people the opportunity to speak at public hearings—don't keep secrets from the people. They want to be able to talk to us, and we shouldn't be afraid to hear from them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will vote on this ballot item in about 100 minutes.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Eric Hoskins: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the 10th day of December each year should be proclaimed as Ontario Human Rights Day, to coincide with International Human Rights Day, and in doing so, this House promises to promote an Ontario, a Canada and a world free from discrimination and hate, and safe for all persons, and affirms that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and are entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, without distinction of any kind, whether race, gender, gender identity, language, religion, sexual orientation, political or other opinion, culture, national or social origin, property, family, birth or any other status.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order number 98, Mr. Hoskins, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Eric Hoskins: Today, December 10, is an important day for the province of Ontario, its citizens, Canada and the world, for today is International Human Rights Day. Sixty-one years ago this very day, emerging from the experience and the atrocities of the Second World War, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the first truly global

expression of the rights to which all human beings are entitled.

Drafted by a Canadian, John Humphrey, the declaration affirms not just our rights as individuals, but also asserts our responsibilities as MPPs, as those who are elected to serve our constituents and ensure that the rights of all Ontarians are safeguarded and upheld.

Today is therefore a day for all of us here to set aside partisanship in support of a just and inclusive Ontario. We all have constituents in our ridings, friends or loved ones, or even, I have no doubt, there are some among us here, who have had their human rights violated or denied, or who have been victims of persecution, racism, anti-Semitism or other forms of discrimination that must be confronted, and in doing so, eradicated. This is the very essence of our democracy in which all citizens are granted full and equal human rights and opportunity without exception of any kind. This is something we can never take for granted.

My experiences in some of the most troubled parts of the world, in places like Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the time I have spent meeting with people in my riding who have survived unimaginable horrors before beginning their new lives here in Ontario, have given me a unique appreciation for what we have in this province and for what we can achieve as parliamentarians.

There is nothing that makes you appreciate more the essence and the promise of Ontario and Canada than seeing what happens when it has all been stripped away: democracy, health care, respect for human rights, justice, peace and security. We enjoy these liberties, as is our right, but they cannot be taken for granted, and they must be upheld, and this is the cornerstone of the political process. This is why politics matters. Justice can prevail where impunity has thrived, equality can be achieved where discrimination festers, but only when we as Ontarians, as Canadians, as those elected to serve, commit to it, invest in it and are steadfast in defending these inalienable rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls out specifically to politicians of all party persuasions, asking us to promote and to secure human rights for all of the citizens of Ontario.

Twenty years ago, while living in Sudan, I shared an office with a Sudanese doctor, Mohamed, who became a close friend. We ate breakfast together most mornings and talked about the freedoms I enjoyed as a Canadian and the threats he faced daily as a Sudanese. At the time, doctors in Sudan, while respected for their social contribution, were largely dismissed when it came to matters of politics. Of course, I'm grateful that we don't yet have that problem here in the Legislative Assembly.

But, you see, months earlier there had been a military coup in Sudan, and a brutal and violent dictatorship had replaced the fledgling democracy. Yet, eventually, it would be the country's doctors who mustered the courage to stand up and oppose the unelected regime. When the doctors' union went on strike and publicly opposed

the dictatorship, the reaction of the government was as swift as it was brutal. Hundreds of doctors were jailed, and many went missing.

I became anxious when I arrived at my office the day after the arrests to see Mohamed's chair empty. I quickly learned that Mohamed had been seized in his home by the security forces. While detained by his own government, Mohamed was beaten, tortured and then killed. When his body was retrieved by his family, all of his fingernails had been pulled out, and there were burns and bruises covering his broken body. My friend was gone, his human rights trampled.

It is for people like my friend Mohamed and the six million Jews who were systematically and brutally slaughtered during the Holocaust and the nearly one million Rwandans and the many millions more who have paid the ultimate price for our actions and inactions globally that the universal declaration was written and why it is still as relevant now as it was 61 years ago. It is our moral and electoral duty to rise against hatred, against violence and against injustice both at home and abroad. In this we must never falter.

Through the passing of the Ontario Human Rights Code in 1962, this House made clear its belief that freedom, justice and peace are collectively built on the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of every person. While we must celebrate this recognition, we cannot allow it to blind us to the work that still needs to be done. As legislators, we must continue to work towards creating a society that is more tolerant, one that affords the utmost mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person. Ontario's identity, vibrancy and prosperity depend on whether we are able to achieve these goals, ensuring that each member of our diverse society is a part of the community and is able to fully contribute to the development and well-being of his or her family, this province, this country and the world.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and our own Ontario Human Rights Code spell out our obligations to put an end to all violence—to violence against women; to improve the quality of our health care; to end hate and fight anti-Semitism; to eradicate poverty; to ensure that our streets and our communities are safe; to end discrimination based on gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, political opinion, religion, race, family status, language, culture, disability, national or social origin or any other status; and to ensure that all current and future generations of Ontarians enjoy equality, opportunity and all the rights and freedoms to which they are entitled.

This is why we are here: to uphold, to defend and to maintain these rights. This is, at its core, the purpose of politics. It is a profound and serious responsibility. Perhaps it is therefore time, as we approach the tranquility and solemnity of the holidays, and particularly on the heels of the rather heated environment in the House over the past few weeks, that we take the time to refocus our efforts so that we may continue to provide the leadership and collaboration that our constituents expect of us, indeed, demand of us in these difficult times.

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Over my many years spent practising medicine here in Ontario and most recently as the MPP for St. Paul's, I have met with many Ontarians who, at some point in their lives, experienced persecution, racism or other forms of injustice. Some were seniors in St. Paul's nursing homes who had lived through the horror of World War II. Others were new arrivals: refugees from war-torn nations. Some were parents concerned about the safety of their children in Ontario's universities and colleges because of the presence of anti-Semitism. Still others, whether because of skin colour, religion, gender or sexual orientation, had experienced hate crimes, homophobia, domestic violence or racial slurs. But all shared a common belief that, as stated in article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" and the right to enjoy a life of dignity, fairness and equality. This is the promise Ontario makes to all its citizens.

This is why International Human Rights Day matters. It reminds us that we cannot lessen our resolve to foster an Ontario free from discrimination and injustice, one in which every Ontarian can live in full enjoyment of his or her human rights. This is why I'm asking today for this House to proclaim December 10 of each year Ontario Human Rights Day, to remind us that we can never be complacent when it comes to defending the values and ideals that we as Ontarians hold dear.

In closing, I may be the newest member of this House, but I do know what it means to live and work in communities in which human rights are summarily denied and in which violence, suffering and insecurity are widespread. I also know that those of us elected to serve will not and do not always agree on which rights can and should take precedence in our provincial democracy or how best to achieve them, but let us agree on this: Let us agree that we will work hard together to ensure that we bring Ontarians closer to realizing a world that is free from discrimination, intolerance and abuse. This is what the citizens of this province expect, and this is what we must deliver.

To the individuals, the families and the communities that rely on us for leadership, the unified message must be: "We will not let you down; rather, we will stand up for you, for your rights, for your freedoms and for a generous, caring and proud Ontario for everyone—not only today but for all future generations."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's obviously a subject of great passion for the member.

On December 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recognizing the fundamental principles of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Member nations agreed that the articles of the declaration were the common standards of fundamental human rights to be universally protected for all people. Subsequently, many members of the United Nations

signed and ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These two international covenants acknowledge that human rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person as well as the duties each of us has to promote and respect human rights within our communities and towards one another. Canada ratified both conventions on May 19, 1976.

Recognizing the dignity and equality of all people, many member nations also agreed on the need for the immediate elimination of racial discrimination and discrimination against women. In so doing, they acknowledged "that the existence of racial barriers is repugnant to the ideals of any human society," and further, that "discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity."

Canada ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination on October 14, 1970, and the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on December 10, 1981. The most widely ratified international convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, was ratified by Canada on December 13, 1991. This convention recognizes the human dignity and special needs of children as well as the full range of their human rights.

This is not an exhaustive summation of the international agreements to which Canada is a party and which Ontario in turn has recognized as a fundamental basis of our democracy, nor does it recognize the numerous declarations, principles, guidelines, standards, rules and recommendations that we and other member nations have supported. Nevertheless, what it provides us with is a general idea of the aim that member nations had in mind in Paris on December 10, 1948, when they proclaimed that General Assembly Resolution 217A would form the basis of a common standard for all people and all nations.

Sixty years later and a year ago today, the world recognized the 60th birthday of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The theme of this celebration was "Dignity and Justice for All of Us." It acknowledged the world's recognition under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the universal dignity of all people and of justice for them.

This year, the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights will focus International Human Rights Day on the fight to end discrimination. She has stated that, "Discrimination lies at the root of many of the world's most pressing human rights problems. No country is immune from this scourge. Eliminating discrimination is a duty of the highest order."

Ontario is not free from the scourge and obstacles which result from discrimination. We continue to struggle to overcome the burden of belief which hinders, overtly and covertly, the full realization of all peoples' human rights. However, as our system continues to address our ongoing challenges, it remains the envy of the world. We should never deny the barriers we have yet to overcome, but neither should we forget those that we have fought for and won. Neither should we overlook the work of the thousands of people around the world who are on the ground addressing and supporting the needs of those whose rights are threatened and violated. Their advocacy and acts of kindness must be acknowledged and admired.

We should also appreciate what we have here in this great province and in this city of Toronto. Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in the world, and Toronto remains a very harmonious city. We have problems and battles against discrimination, and they continue, but that we are able to live together and share our differences in relative peace is a badge of honour that we all wear together. Toronto is, in fact, the most diverse nation in the world. It is not only the most diverse nation in the world today; it is probably the most diverse nation that has ever been in the world. There are more languages spoken by first-generation immigrants than at any other time in the history of the world. The only other city that would come close to sharing that distinction with Toronto would be New York City in the early 1900s. But Toronto outperforms that city by a wide margin with the diversity that we have in our city. Yet I'm very proud of our civil rights, of the human rights that we are able to look to in the city of Toronto.

Looking at the history of human rights in this province and across Canada clearly demonstrates that we have been a country of inclusion and progression. We are a government which supports the goals of the UN declaration and a party that acts progressively to help ensure their realization. It was back in 1918 that Robert Borden ensured that women were given equal status and the right to vote. Premier Bill Davis appointed Margaret Birch as Ontario's first female cabinet minister and minister responsible for youth. John Diefenbaker chose the Honourable Ellen Fairclough as Canada's first female cabinet minister and Minister of Citizenship and Immigration in 1957. He also ensured that aboriginal people were given the right to vote in Canada.

In Ontario, we have been a leader in the advancement of human rights. In 1958, under the leadership of Premier Frost, we created the Ontario Anti-Discrimination Commission to undertake educational programs with the purpose of eradicating discriminatory behaviour in the workplace.

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This body also acted as an adviser to the Ontario Minister of Labour, who could appoint an independent conciliator to help parties resolve disputes of discrimination under various Ontario statutes. Less than 10 years later, in 1962, the government, under the leadership of Premier

Robarts, enacted Canada's first comprehensive Human Rights Code. That code prohibited discrimination in employment, accommodations, goods, services and facilities and membership in vocational associations and trade unions. It also provided the Ontario Human Rights Commission with the power to investigate complaints on matters under its jurisdiction and the capacity to settle matters before it.

Since that time, we as a province and as a Legislature have come to recognize that there are other grounds of discrimination which have been deemed to be intolerable in our society. Today the Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination on 15 different grounds.

I would like to note one problem in this resolution, and that is the fact that while it expands upon the grounds listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Ontario Human Rights Code, it fails to mention discrimination on the grounds of sex.

Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states:

"For the purposes of the present convention, the term 'discrimination against women' shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

Ontario's Human Rights Code also uses the grounds of sex as a possible discrimination.

Gender, a possible ground as recently identified in a bill introduced by the member from Parkdale-High Park, is not the equivalent to sex. While the former recognizes the social and psychological aspects of a person's sexuality, or in others, the social construction of a person's sexual identity, this is not always identical to their biological and genetic sex.

It is the disapproval of the fact that a human being who is biologically or physically a woman, and on that ground alone is denied the full enjoyment of her human rights that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and Ontario's Human Rights Code and other human rights instruments and bodies have recognized the ground of sex. It is the struggle of women because they are women, and that has been admonished.

I therefore would urge this House to amend the member opposite's resolution to include the ground of sex. It is likely an oversight, but I think it might be a glaring one at that.

The Progressive Conservative Party, from before we introduced the first Human Rights Code in Canada to the present day, has been an outspoken advocate of human rights. We recognize that there is always work to be done and acknowledge the need to work together to ensure that our system remains of the highest standard.

My party and I will support this resolution. We do so to acknowledge and support the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights agreed to by members of the United Nations 61 years ago. But we also do it to acknowledge each year the real struggles and obstacles that Ontarians and people around the world have experienced when their human rights have been denied; to reaffirm our commitment to fight for the equal enjoyment by all people of all nations of those rights which remain denied; and to recognize, with appreciation, the respect and acceptance that has grown in Ontario and in this great city of Toronto, the world's most diverse city.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I am rising today to support this motion. I do so because I believe that the fundamental rights of human beings across this planet need to be protected. The universal declaration contains 30 articles, and all of them are important to the well-being of humanity.

I particularly want to draw attention to a couple of sections, because I think they impact on Ontario, and I want to make sure, as we agree to the resolution being put forward today by the member from St. Paul's, that we understand that we do not do so just to talk about the atrocities and the lives of other countries, not to talk about Rwanda or Chad or Congo or what happened in the former Republic of Yugoslavia as it broke up, but to remember that we have the same obligation to uphold the sections here in Ontario. I do so with the full expectation that if the members here vote today, they will commit themselves to the sections for which we as a provincial government are responsible.

I start first with section 25, subsection 25(1) to be precise, and I'm indebted to Mr. Hoskins as well for providing these little booklets: 25(1) reads, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

The United Nations has talked about what this means. They have many, many things about what it means, but it all comes down to if one is poor, one's civil and social and legal rights are being impinged.

I quote from the report which was released in the Senate yesterday, page 71. The Senate, in their deliberations, quotes the United Nations, and I in turn quote them. It's from Louise Arbour, the preface to the principles and guidelines 2006. Louise Arbour, as we all know is a noted jurist from Canada, formerly of the Supreme Court. She wrote, "Poverty is not only a matter of income, but also, more fundamentally, a matter of being able to live a life in dignity and enjoy basic human rights and freedoms. It describes a complex of interrelated and mutually reinforcing deprivations, which impact on

people's ability to claim and access their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. In a fundamental way, therefore, the denial of human rights forms part of the very definition of what it is to be poor."

The committee has other good quotes, but I think that's the most powerful one. The committee says that we have a responsibility if we want to ensure human rights in Ontario. It is to ensure that no one is subjected to a life of poverty because, in fact, we will be impinging on their rights to full human rights.

I want to talk about four groups, four groups for which we are not doing everything we need to do for human rights in Ontario, and say that we if we pass this resolution, people will have an expectation that we will do more; that if we pass this resolution, they can come back and tell us, "We want you to uphold our human rights."

The first is the First Nations communities of this province. Any members of this Legislature, any people watching who have ever had an opportunity to travel through most of the First Nations communities in Ontario, will recognize one thing at the outset that they all share in common. They are all poor, or almost all are poor. They do not have the basic facilities which all of us take for granted.

If you go to Attawapiskat, you will see that the water is not fit for drinking. The people have had to be moved. There was a debate in this Legislature a couple of years ago: Children with sores all over their body had to be airlifted out to Timmins and Cochrane and other places where they could have better services. If one travels to some of the other communities—Port Albany hasn't had a school in years, not in years, because the diesel fumes have gone underneath the school, and they can't keep it open. The children who go there get sick. The parents have taken them out. There has been no attempt for them to get a new school or new facilities.

If you go there, you will see, endemic, young children sniffing gasoline and glue, alcoholism running rampant, people with no hope and no future—no roads, no sewers, electricity that is intermittent. If you go there, you will find the poverty, and the people, great portions of them, collecting social assistance and the pittance that that pays in Ontario. You will see them very often dropping out of school, and it's very uncommon to find most of them who have completed high school, never mind the chance to go to university. We have not done enough. We have not done enough for their human rights, and when I vote for this and we pass this today, I fully expect this Legislature to do something about it. It is not a matter of federal jurisdiction; it is a matter of human jurisdiction. We are a signatory to Treaties 3, 7 and 9 in Ontario. We are unique. We signed along with the First Nations and along with the federal government to guarantee in perpetuity that we would do everything possible to maintain the way of life of the First Nations and to make sure that they could share in the bounty of this land. We have failed abysmally in their human rights.

1510

I want to talk about the disabled, which is the second group in Ontario where I think we have failed abysmally.

We know from statistics that people who are disabled are most often poor. It is not synonymous; you don't have to be disabled to be poor. But I will tell you that if you are poor, you are likely disabled. It is what happens, and it happens because they do not have the same access to the prosperity of this province as all of the rest of us do. We know that to be disabled means you are eligible for the Ontario disability support plan, commonly called ODSP. We know that ODSP pays \$1,200 a month at the maximum, and we know that at \$1,200 a month, \$14,000 dollars a year, you live in poverty. We know, at the same time, that if any of them are capable of doing some small amounts of work and attempt to go out to better their lives, this government, this province, claws back half of everything they make; we know that. I've stood in this House many times, and will stand as often as I have to, until the government changes the law, to allow people to make the equivalent of \$6,000 to \$8,000 a year without having the money clawed back.

I pick that figure on purpose, and I want the government to hear it again. That is so that someone who goes out and gets a part-time job and who is disabled—we know they are disabled; we give them disability funds—does not have to live in poverty. Why should being disabled mean that your entire life you will live poor, that for your entire life your human rights will be violated? Why does that mean that? Why does that mean that in Ontario?

I chose the figure because if you combine \$6,000 to \$8,000 plus the maximum amount that we give for disability, ODSP, that will take somebody above the low-income cut-off figure, and I think that's what we need to provide. If we know that you cannot work, if we know that you were born with an intellectual disability and can do some work but maybe not hold down a full-time job, we know that that should not be tantamount to living your life in poverty and having your human rights violated.

I want to talk about the collecting of statistics, or perhaps if my friend Rosario wants to speak to this—I think not. We are, in the province of Ontario, starting in the school boards to collect statistics. We are starting to collect statistics on the incomes of parents and where they come from and what they speak—I am not sure that this is not a violation of human rights; I would like someone from the government to explain why this is being done and if this is not a violation of human rights—so that parents can pick and choose which schools their children go to on the basis of the literacy scores and the academic scores and whether or not poor children are in proximity to them. I think that is a very real violation. I would like to see an end to that, and if we support this, I would like to see the government put an end to it.

There is a very thorny issue for which I know that I'm going to get some complaints from some quarters across this province, but Ontario has twice been cited by the United Nations, under section 26 of this same human rights code, for our treatment of people and religious

education. Mr. Waldman, an observant Jew, has taken us to the United Nations twice because we provide funding for Catholic education in this province but refuse to provide funding for Jewish education. He has taken us twice, and it is coming up again next year, because it's coming back. He's going to go there again next year, and I know that we are going to be cited under the same section 26 again next year. So if we stand here today and say that we support the human rights code, we had better have a better explanation than we've had the last two times. The last two times, we simply chose to do nothing and to ignore it. I don't know what the solution is to that. I know it's a thorny issue, but I think that we cannot be in violation of the United Nations charter on one side and stand up here and support it on the other.

Better heads than I should be sitting around and thinking about this and what this province is going to do next year when we are about to get cited for a third time. Do we have a policy? Do we have a plan? Do we favour one education system? If we do, then we have to tell the world that we are prepared to live in violation. We cannot say any longer that we are in accord with this UN charter and not live it.

I have given four examples of what we need to do. We need, absolutely, if we are to stand here today and support this, to live it. We have to help our First Nations. We have to help our disabled. We have to bring our charter and our education system in compliance with section 26, and we have to stop collecting statistics that are used against the poor. If we do all of that, we will have done a real service not only to Ontario but the people of the world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am very happy to comment on my colleague the member from St. Paul's, first private member's resolution here in the Legislature, and I will gladly support proclaiming December 10 of each year as Ontario Human Rights Day. This will coincide with International Human Rights Day, as we've heard, which marks the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights back in 1948—a document that has been translated into no less than 360 different languages.

This motion is not just a casual, proverbial reminder of the rights and freedoms that we enjoy and often take for granted. It is rather a lasting tribute to the substantive rights that all people across all nations are fundamentally entitled to, thanks, in large part, to generations before us who have struggled for decades to overcome adversity.

I also wish to point out that this motion would resonate with countless constituents in my riding of York South–Weston, where residents who have settled from every part of the world are all too aware of the ongoing challenges faced by many in their home countries. After all, my colleague from St. Paul's, though this initiative, offers Ontarians a sombre reminder that despite the near-universal acceptance of the declaration by governments, millions of people around the world continue to be deprived of basic human rights on a daily basis, 61 years on.

Recognizing the strides that we have made here in our province, we must fight to preserve an Ontario in which democracy, equality and the rule of the law are not only restricted to a few but thrive among the many. That is why we, as elected officials and as Canadians, must make every effort to promote human rights and lead by example.

I will conclude by saying that I fully support my friend's motion and that I look forward to marking Ontario Human Rights Day for years to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I too echo the remarks made earlier in the brief comments that I'm able to make here.

I just wanted to read article 1—I don't know if anyone has read that yet—in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It says, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." That's the starting point for living a life where everyone is treated equally.

In my short moments here, I just wanted to congratulate the member for bringing forward this motion today. It's very, very important to have a resolution of this nature in front of us. I also want to point out that the majority of times, in history, from what I know, whenever a country or a group of people have decided to put together a declaration of rights, whether it be the Magna Carta or after the French Revolution—there were a number of rights put forward at that time; the Romans did it as well—it was usually after a war. This document also came after a war. What we need to do in the future, and what hopefully the member is achieving here by bringing forward this resolution, is that he is saying that we don't need to have a war; we don't need to have a conflict in order to go forward and protect and perhaps even bring forward new rights for all people.

It's a forward-looking document and a forward-looking idea. I support that very much and I congratulate him. I hope that we don't need a war or some kind of revolution or conflict in order to enshrine rights, that we are now enlightened enough to do it on our own.

1520

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Reza Moridi: I'm pleased to rise in this House today on behalf of the residents of my riding of Richmond Hill to speak on the motion put forward by our colleague from St. Paul's to proclaim December 10 as Human Rights Day in Ontario. Today commemorates the 61st anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. The member from St. Paul's has been a very strong advocate of human rights around the world. He is the founder of an organization called War Child Canada, whose main aim is to assist children affected in war-torn countries around the world.

First of all, I fully support his motion and I expect all members of this House, of any political stripe, to support

this motion. But the point I want to make is that the respect of human rights and also the respect of ethnic rights are the two major pillars of democracy in every country around the world. In this country—we are so blessed to be Canadians—human rights are engraved in our constitution through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, thanks to our late Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who engraved this in our constitution, and also in our federal and provincial legislations.

In our blessed province of Ontario, I have heard Premier Dalton McGuinty many, many times speaking of diversity as a strength of this province. This is what we stand for, and we expect that countries around the world, nations around the world, stand for human rights.

In the country where I was born, human rights are not respected. Just three days ago, two million Iranian students poured into the streets from 50 universities in Iran. All the students poured into the streets to protest the violation of human rights in that country. We are so blessed that in this country we are free, we can express ourselves and our rights are respected. Wherever we come from—any cultural background, any ethnicity, any religion we practise, any language we speak or any colour we have—we are all the same. We are all equal, thanks to Canada.

I expect every nation to respect human rights around the world. Again, I commend our colleague the member from St. Paul's for bringing this motion forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It is also my pleasure to rise in the House in support of the member from St. Paul's and ballot item 56 to declare December 10 as Ontario Human Rights Day. In the short amount of time that I have, I just wanted to thank my colleagues from St. Paul's, London-Fanshawe, Scarborough Southwest, Richmond Hill and York South-Weston for joining us in this debate.

I wanted to share some comments in several capacities: as a mom, of course, as a teacher, as a vice-principal, as the former parliamentary assistant for women's issues, as the current parliamentary assistant to education and, of course, as the member of provincial Parliament for Kitchener-Conestoga.

The member from St. Paul's reminded us that citizens deserve full and equal human rights. It reminds me of ancient Rome. The duties of a citizen from the outset, of course, were those responsibilities, as well as the duty to give back to society. What we heard from the member from St. Paul's today is that members of provincial Parliament have those duties as parliamentarians. As he said, politics matters. He also talked about a moral duty that we have, which, as we know, is ingrained in the essence of being a citizen and in the duty itself.

I wanted to share two thoughts on the concept of moral duty, one that I use as a mom, as a teacher to kids and as an MPP to my constituents. I remind you of the quote from Margaret Mead when she says, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can

change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

The last thought that I wanted to leave you with in the time I have is a thought, of course, along the lines of moral duty from Mother Teresa, who said to us:

Spread love everywhere you go;
 First of all in your own house.
 Give love to your children,
 To your wife or husband,
 To a next-door neighbour.
 Let no one ever come to you
 Without leaving better and happier.
 Be the living expression of God's kindness;
 Kindness in your face,
 Kindness in your eyes,
 Kindness in your smile,
 Kindness in your warm greeting.

That is our moral duty. It is a basic human right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: First, I want to congratulate the member from St. Paul's for bringing such an important issue to the attention of all members and all the people who are watching and listening to us this afternoon across the province of Ontario.

I know the member is not just speaking, but has a passion about this issue and also acts on this issue. In his capacity as a doctor, he has travelled the globe to help impoverished people, people who are torn by war, people who are oppressed or who are not able to find care for themselves.

It's important to speak on this issue, not just in this place now, but to enact and, in our capacity as elected officials, to exercise that right and that ability to give to the people who deserve it all the attention.

I listened to people before me talk about the importance of human rights, the importance of people to be themselves, to have the ability to move and talk and speak and feel and express themselves without any fear, without being abused, without being jailed, without being killed. It's important. We take this for granted in Ontario and in this nation, because we are blessed and honoured to live in a society that gives us the right to do whatever we want, according to the laws and the constitution of this land.

I listened to the member from Beaches–East York, who said a lot of underprivileged people are living among us. I think it is our duty as citizens and elected officials to pay attention to those people and give them the ability to live like us and like others. It's important to remember all the people who live in poor conditions, who have no food to put on the table, who have no place to live, who have no place to shelter themselves and their families in this bad weather; and also to remember those people who have no right to speak for different reasons— for traditional reasons or for religious reasons.

As people of this planet, as citizens of the world, it is our obligation to speak up and defend the rights of people on this earth who have no rights.

I want to congratulate the member for bringing up such an important issue to declare December 10 Human Rights Day in Ontario, in conjunction with the universal day internationally, as declared by the United Nations.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak. Once again, I want to congratulate the member for bringing this important topic to us and also congratulate him because I think it's the first private member's resolution he's brought before us. I wish him all the luck and success.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Seeing none, Mr. Hoskins, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Eric Hoskins: First, I would like to thank the members for York South–Weston, Scarborough South–west, Richmond Hill, Kitchener–Conestoga and London–Fanshawe. But particularly, I want to thank the members for Halton and Beaches–East York for their very profound, enthusiastic and responsible comments toward this resolution and toward human rights generally.

To the member for Halton, I appreciate in particular your reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is an important document that the Canadian government had a significant hand in drafting and promoting.

I understand your concern about the lack of a reference to sex in the resolution. The reason for that is that in human rights language, the term "sex," generally speaking, almost universally has been replaced by the term "gender," and that is the term I used in the resolution.

To the member for Beaches–East York, let me say that I am particularly grateful for your emphasis on anti-poverty measures that are required and our responsibility to First Nations. Perhaps I could say that the reason I felt so strongly about the need to declare an Ontario Human Rights Day, in the face of already having an international Human Rights Day, is specifically for the reasons you mentioned: The obligations and responsibilities we have for the people of Ontario are in many ways still unmet. There is a lot of work to do, and human rights are as important to the citizens of Ontario and Canada as they are to anybody around the world.

I think in closing, I would just like to say that the fact that this resolution, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was actually drafted by a Canadian, John Humphrey, speaks to the kinds of ideals that we have here in Ontario and Canada.

I'd like to conclude by wishing all of you a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, season's greetings and a happy and peaceful new year.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll vote on Mr. Hoskins' ballot item in about 50 minutes.

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 second 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, the honourable member has up to 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I appreciate the opportunity today to debate second reading of this bill, which is a consumer protection bill. As we go through it, you may see some similarities to a bill presented by the government yesterday and debated, actually, this morning with regard to consumer protection. That bill did refer to deposits, but I don't know exactly what it is the government bill has in mind; I haven't yet read it. I know that there will be regulations to the bill. So I want to put forward my private member's bill that's coincidentally coming the same day, to either have it pass, which I certainly hope it does, but at least to emphasize to the Minister of Energy my feelings on a particular part of consumer protection.

This bill does basically five things: "A distributor shall not shut off the distribution of electricity under subsection (1)"—which is the first part of the bill—"to a property that is used, or is intended to be used, for residential purposes if,

"(a) the only amount payable that is overdue is in respect of a new security deposit, or an increase to an existing security deposit, demanded by the distributor; and

"(b) the person who is responsible for the overdue amount was receiving electricity from the distributor at the time that the distributor demanded the deposit or the increase to a deposit."

It refers to codes under the Ontario Energy Board which it would change. It says also "any provision in a contract between a distributor and a person who is receiving electricity from the distributor for a property that is used, or is intended to be used, for residential purposes."

Finally, it says, "Within three months after the day" that this bill would come into effect, "a distributor shall notify each person who is at that time receiving electricity from the distributor for a property that is used, or is intended to be used, for residential purposes of the prohibition in" this subsection. In other words, it lets everyone know that this exists, and if the distributor asks

for an increase in a deposit, they understand what their rights are.

So let's define the problem as I see it and as it has arisen in my riding. Some electricity retail distributors in Ontario have begun to charge their existing customers with security deposits that we have found are as large as two and a half times their highest bills, sometimes in excess of \$1,000. These changes appear on a customer's bill once they've received more than one disconnection notice in a 12-month period. In some cases, these notices of pending disconnection are sent within one day of the bill being overdue. They haven't threatened them with cutting their electricity off, even. The bill is just, in one or two cases we've found, one day overdue, meaning that a person can be charged a large security deposit simply for being late in paying their bill more than once in a 12-month period.

What's more, the customers are told that not only do they have to pay their ongoing usage costs in order to avoid being disconnected, but they now must also pay their security deposit in order to avoid being disconnected as well.

We've seen recently a steady increase in the number of constituents, and there were several days where we had one per day, visiting our constituency office with this problem. These people have struggled to pay their bills for the most part, and just when they're finally caught up, they're hit with huge security deposits that they simply can't afford. And then, to make things even worse, they're told that their power will be shut off if they don't pay up on the security deposit.

For many of our constituents, it can be difficult just keeping the current and actual usage charges up to date. We understand that in today's economy these can present difficulties, never mind having to pay an additional \$500 to \$1,000 on a security deposit.

Many see the fact that they can be disconnected from an essential service for non-payment of a charge that is unrelated to the actual usage of their electricity as an unjust policy that has a disproportionate effect on low-income people, and I agree.

Until 2002, electricity retail companies in Ontario were free to set their own individual policies surrounding security deposits. At that time, the Ontario Energy Board—we know it as the OEB—began consultations to craft guidelines as to when and how much hydro companies could charge their customers. During the consultations, the OEB received submissions from companies across the province regarding their individual security deposit policies, and at the time some companies had quite punitive policies. I might say, in singling one out, that Hydro One stands at the top of the list, and when it comes to the concerns that are brought to my office, Hydro One stands at the top of the list. Some of our urban members may not have run into this problem yet. Others, however, had quite lenient policies, charging only small deposits when new accounts were opened or when accounts were reconnected after being shut off for non-payment.

The board also received submissions from customer advocacy groups, which urged the OEB to err on the side of the consumer by adapting more lenient policies already in use by some companies and applying them across the board to all electrical retail companies.

The Vulnerable Energy Consumers Coalition recommended to the board at the time, “The proposed code amendments set out a formula for calculating the maximum amounts of a security deposit which a distributor may require of a residential customer.... These amounts could be prohibitive for many low- and fixed-income customers, as even a cursory analysis of income levels of those in the lower-income brackets and the financial challenges they encounter reveals.”

The energy consumers’ coalition went on to say, “If the board proceeds with the proposed amendments to the code which would impose security deposit requirements on virtually all residential consumers, we propose that the code be amended to state that non-payment of a customer’s security deposit by a residential customer be specifically exempted from the distributor’s power to terminate service under section 31 of the Electricity Act, 1998.”

That is what I am proposing, in this bill, that we do.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I’m supporting you, Bruce.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Thank you. My friend from Trinity–Spadina supports me, and I appreciate that.

I have several examples that will really point out how difficult this can be. Here is a case: Ontario Works called our office. They have one of our constituents in their office, and Ontario Works is trying to assist them with social services. The husband has a broken leg and is off work, their hydro bill is overdue, and the hydro company put a security deposit of \$1,500 on their account. They’re getting assistance from Keep the Heat, but cannot afford this deposit. I’m not so sure that I’d like to shell out \$1,500 for a deposit on my electricity bill.

1540

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Go after them, Bruce.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I will.

So we sent a fax and an authorization to discuss their account to Hydro One regarding their situation and the security deposit requested. Hydro One called us back right away and said, “No chance of reducing the deposit.”

Another example: A constituent came into the office because she had received a bill from Hydro One for an additional security deposit of \$240. She’d just paid them an \$805 security deposit a month before, and now they wanted more. “The constituent, frankly, was in tears and”—and this is my staff in the office talking—“I told her I would call Hydro One to see what I could do. I called our contact at Hydro One and asked her if there was anything at all that could be done. I explained that the constituent had just paid a large deposit and, obviously, it was upsetting to her to then get a bill for even more.”

My constituent staff was told that the constituent had been late a few times since the first deposit was paid and this triggers the computer to double-check her deposit

amount to make sure it’s two and a half times her highest monthly bill.

That’s what we’re having to deal with with some of these—I cited one in particular—electricity distributors. So I’m asking today that my colleagues in the House consider this problem and that they support second reading of this bill so that we can, at least, assist some of those who are having difficult times with paying their hydro bills in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It’s my pleasure to add some comments with regard to Bill 228, which is An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998 to protect residential customers from hardships created by security deposits.

As has been explained, the bill amends section 31 of the Electricity Act, 1998, “to prohibit electricity distributors from shutting off the distribution of electricity to residential property if the only overdue amount payable by the person receiving electricity is in respect of a new security deposit or an increase to an existing security deposit.”

I’m happy that the member from Essex has brought this bill forward. I will be supporting it. I would say that I’ve had numerous situations in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka where people have contacted my constituency office, usually when the power is about to be disconnected or has been disconnected. In many cases, it is because a security deposit has been requested.

The way it often works is that the customer has been making regular payments and then, for whatever reason, misses or is late with one or more payments within a year. That could be because they were away on holidays and got back and missed the due date on the hydro bill by a few days, or perhaps it got lost in the mail—lots of things can happen; whatever. Because they were late on a couple of payments, then, as has been mentioned, a security deposit, which is often two and a half times the highest monthly bill, is requested. If they can’t come up with the money for that, the power might be shut off. This bill would make it illegal to shut off the power if that’s the only money that’s owing; they’ve been making the regular monthly payments but aren’t able to come up with the money for the security deposit.

I would simply say that in many cases the people this is happening to—there’s often a reason why they’re struggling to make their payments, and requesting a security deposit is like getting blood from a stone. If they’re struggling to make the monthly payment, where are they supposed to come up with this security deposit?

I’d like to illustrate, with some correspondence I’ve had in my office, exactly to do with this issue, just some real-life situations. I will omit names, but here’s a long letter from a constituent, from which I will take some excerpts to try to tell their story:

“In May of 2008 the Hydro One company sent me a notice telling me I owed a \$1,785 security deposit. The Hydro One company called me numerous times from May to October this year. They said that my account was

way overdue and I'd better do something about it or they would disconnect me.

"I talked to the Hydro One company on six separate occasions regarding my account. I said to them that they should check my record in the past. I said [that] for over 30 years I've had hydro accounts and never been behind on my bill and always been current. Doesn't that count for something? I was told that I'm just another number in the system, and the computer automatically sends out the bills, including security deposit requests. I complained on those six separate occasions that the human factor when dealing with people has completely disappeared."

And further down in the letter:

"I sleep at night with a BiPAP machine, which assists me to breathe while sleeping. I woke up Tuesday, October 28, at 8:30 a.m., gasping for air. The power had gone out and my breathing machine had stopped working. I then got up and called Hydro One. I was told that my power had been cut off for non-payment of my bill. I complained that my consumption has been kept current for over 10 months and in fact the amount you are telling me I'm overdue on my account only pertains to the security deposit. The Hydro One employee told me that if I didn't pay the total amount of the bill, they would not turn the power back on. I stated that I had a machine that assists me in breathing at night and I also needed to keep my insulin in the fridge since I'm also a diabetic. The Hydro One employee said, well, that's too bad but there was nothing he could do.

"I brought to this person's attention that there was \$1,670 that Hydro One wanted and the security deposit that had been requested was \$1,785. I told this employee of Hydro One that, 'Other than the fact that you want this security deposit I couldn't pay, I would actually have a credit for over \$100 on my account.' His reply was, 'Well, sir, you owe us \$1,670 and until we receive these funds, your power will not be turned on.' At this point I was totally frustrated and upset.

"This brought me to contacting your office. Yvonne in your office took my call and listened to my story. It was so nice to talk to someone that was polite, courteous and had some compassion for my situation. Yvonne told me she would see what could be done through your office."

And to make a long story short, eventually through negotiations the security deposit was waived. He goes on to say:

"I must thank you, Mr. Miller, for all your assistance that you and your staff have provided. The kindness and compassion your office has extended to us has been wonderful.

"My wife and I are truly grateful. In closing, I will say that the human factor needs to be exercised in cases such as mine. There must be many others out there in the same situation that are as helpless as we were in this situation. Having to pay this reconnection fee"—that was the other news, that there was a \$400 reconnection fee—"for something that Hydro One ended up waiving in the end is bizarre."

I must say that all the credit goes to Yvonne and my office staff, not to me, for that situation. But it illustrates what is happening with lots of people.

Another constituent writes in:

"There are times the hydro is out for days.... With the times right now, so many people out of work or cut back"—it's written; it's a little hard to read—"in their hours, it's not easy to keep up with everything and still put food on the table.

"Now Hydro One wants to us pay a security deposit because we haven't had enough money to pay the bill in full each month. If we could pay our bill in full each month, we would do so...."

"We aren't the only family that is finding it hard to make ends meet. I hope you can help us and anyone else with the same problem with Hydro...."

It goes on: "The cost of living up north is very high and we just can't compare, since most people have to travel to work half an hour or more"—and not to get too political, but he'll have 8% more to pay next July 1, with the HST, I'm afraid to say.

Another constituent writes:

"I was in breach of one of their conditions that I not receive more than one notice of disconnection within the previous 12 months. I received notices last December and this July and have paid promptly on receipt of such notices. And consequently I am required to provide Hydro One with a security deposit equivalent to 2.5 times my average monthly bill, amounting to \$840, which is a substantial amount of money for me.

"I am self-employed and operate a small drywall business with several employees from my home. As you can appreciate, in this industry there are always cash-flow problems, particularly these days, and we have been late in paying our bills. However, we always pay our bills and we are currently paid up. The only other time I can recollect that we received such a notice was in 2007, when businesses was flat. I consider the requirement for such a high security deposit a counterproductive and unnecessary burden in these trying times. I hope that will give you a better appreciation of where I'm coming from on this issue. I hope you can help us out."

I've got many more examples, but I think they do illustrate that it's a real problem out there.

I commend the member from Essex for bringing this private member's bill forward, and I hope members will support it. I'll leave some time for other members of our caucus who wish to speak to this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm going to be supporting this bill. It's a good bill. The member from Essex made a sound argument. And given the context of this economic disaster that we have faced over the last little while, the context of low-income ratepayers who are seriously affected, the context of the potential for this government to continue to sub-meter even more and the context of the impact of the government's energy policies, I believe this bill is sound and I'm going to support it.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I am pleased to stand up and speak in support of Bill 228 An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998, to protect residential customers from hardships created by security deposits.

I know the member from Essex spoke about this issue, about why he came up with this idea, and he wanted to share it with us in this place. I know in his old capacity as a mayor, he used to sit on the utility commission in his township.

This is important because so many people across the province of Ontario who are facing difficult times, facing hardship, cannot come up with the money to pay hydro. They get penalized if they're overdue a day or two, they're sent a disconnect notice, and if they don't pay it, the security deposit goes up, sometimes up to \$1,000. I think it's a punitive measure. So many different companies, distributors of electricity, don't care about this issue. Some of them are good; some of them are bad. Some of them don't care about the circumstances some people are facing. They want their money to be collected; otherwise they'll be penalized or be disconnected from hydro. Therefore, they created the security deposit. As the member from Essex mentioned, sometimes that security deposit goes up to \$1,000. That's a lot of money for a person who is collecting money from Ontario Works or who has lost his or her job, and they live in a house with their family—especially in cold weather like today—where they cannot afford to lose hydro for even one minute.

We heard the member from the opposition party speaking about many different examples. One of his constituents talked about how she lost her hydro. In the meantime she was sick and she needed to use the fridge to put her insulin in because she's diabetic. So we hear a lot of different stories on a regular basis.

In my constituency office in London, Ontario, especially in the wintertime, we hear a lot of bad stories. We hear a lot of stories from constituents who, for some reason, are facing difficult times and they're not able to pay the hydro bill, so they're faced with losing their hydro. They're forced to live with no hydro. Their families have no stove to cook on, they have no heat in their homes. I think it is a very important issue. We should deal with it in a professional matter.

I know our government was debating an energy bill today to create a balance between the consumers and also the distributors, to create a fair balance between the customer and the company that distributes. But the member from Essex brought to our attention some important elements, and hopefully both sides of the House will support it and it will go forward to committee, will be ironed out and will also see more details so that it can be beneficial to the people of Ontario.

So, again, I want to thank the member from Essex for enlightening us about his experience and sharing all of his thoughts and information with the rest of us in this place and with the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'd like to speak to Bill 228 this afternoon. I was hoping that my speech would be shorter than the member for Trinity–Spadina, but I don't think I'm going to be able to do that; there are still a few minutes on the clock.

I certainly want to express my support, in principle, for Bill 228. I certainly do have a high regard for the member for Essex and the work he does here. I know he's been in the Legislature since—I think it's 1993, Bruce?

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Yes.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I remember that by-election and I remember him taking his seat in the House. He's been here for a long time and done good work on behalf of his constituents.

It's clear to me that this is a bill that has come out of his constituency office, which I think is often the best kind of private member's bill, which actually comes forward based on things we hear from real people in our ridings and issues that need to be addressed. He talked about a number of true-life examples of situations that have arisen in his riding where people have experienced hardship on this.

The only thing I would say with respect to this bill is, I hope that—and I assume it will pass, because it appears that it has the support of all sides of the House—it would be referred to a standing committee so that there could be some further discussion. I think that the local electrical distribution companies, what we used to call the PUCs, now the corporations, should have a chance to have some input as to some of these policies, as well as the Hydro One staff, so that we could hear both sides of the story and then hopefully move forward in a way that's in the public interest and in a way that protects consumers.

So again, to the member for Essex, I think it's a good bill and I congratulate you for bringing it forward. It will have my support. I would encourage all members of the House to give consideration to supporting it as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: At the outset I want to say that I too will be supporting the bill. I'm sure all MPPs in this House have, from time to time, received the kinds of letters that have been referred to here today. In my own office, from time to time, we have people who come in who maybe have lost their job or have found some unexpected bills, and hydro or the gas company or somebody is there at the ready to shut them down. It's not because they owe any amounts or that they're not willing to pay; they're just simply having a cash crunch at a particular time. The penalty to them seems to me overly harsh.

So I'm going to support this bill and I think it's absolutely the right thing to do, but there are two things that I have to say. The Minister of Energy put his bill in, and I'm not sure, as the member from Essex rightly pointed out when he was introducing the bill, how this is going to impact or whether there's going to be something

contained within the regulations of the Ministry of Energy's bill that was put before the House yesterday and was debated in part today. I too have not had an opportunity to read that, but I would hope, in any event, that his bill, or at least the regulations, does contain what you are trying to do here today.

I know what happens to most private members' bills around here. Even though they're good ideas, unless the government picks them up and runs with them at some point, they invariably die at prorogation or some other time. I see my colleague from Brampton, and her wonderful bill on fire sprinklers has never seen the light of day, although every single time it comes up we have people in here trying to speak in favour of it—

Mr. Dave Levac: Tell us how yours did.

Mr. Michael Prue: Mine passed, again.

Mr. Dave Levac: How?

Mr. Michael Prue: How? It was because every member who was there wanted to support it. But very often you see private members' bills that are really excellent ideas that don't tend to go anywhere.

First of all, we have a whole process by which we choose them. The Liberals can have two, the Conservatives can have one and the NDP can have one. They are allowed to go forward but not given any real support. I had the opportunity, as the chair of the regulations and private bills committee, to try to shepherd four of them through, but when you're given one hour for depositions and one hour to do clause-by-clause, it doesn't take much to throw them off the rails.

I see my colleague from Peterborough nodding. He had an excellent bill, and it was just simply thrown off the rails. To him, I can only say, that bill should have passed. If it doesn't pass, I would hope the government would pick it up and run with it sooner rather than later in the form of some other bill. We all have good ideas here. It just seems that if you are not in the cabinet, your good ideas don't often see the light of day. I commend the member.

The second thing I wanted to talk about is the companies themselves. I have noticed something not very good happening over the last number of years. It was my privilege and honour at one point to be the mayor of the borough of East York, a community—although some people called it small—of 120,000 people. Part of my duties as the mayor was also to be a hydro commissioner. I served on the hydro commission of East York for a period of nearly five years, and it was a very rewarding and intellectually stimulating time. I did not know a great deal about hydro or the production of electricity or what was done, so it took some time to learn.

1600

One of the human elements there was that we did not cut off anyone's hydro until it had come to the hydro commission. There were two elected hydro commissioners and the mayor; there were three of us. We had an opportunity for a person to come forward, if they were going to be cut off, to tell their side of the story before it was done, and we also gave them an opportunity to pay

down any of the debts they may have had. So if somebody came forward in good faith, told us why they had not paid and made a payment of \$50 or \$100 against the debt, we would give them another month. We would expand it. We wouldn't just shut them down in the middle of the night, especially when they had medical conditions. We would not do that. We saw that as our duty and our responsibility, and the elimination of the hydro commissions and the elimination of the human element to where you simply phone someone, a faceless person whom you phone, who tells you off in the middle of the night, that you're going to have to pay, is not a good forward step.

I'm not sure whether this is ever going to see the light of day, but I would like to see some kind of body—maybe it will never be an individual community hydro commission again—to whom a person can appeal, some kind of body to whom they can go if they're not able before it is shut down. So they may have a week or 10 days to go before the body, explain why they're unable to pay and try to make some financial arrangements, which would seem reasonable, before it's cut off. If that can be done, that would be a good thing too.

I commend the member. I hope that it's contained or subsumed within the body of the new energy bill or that, if it is not, the regulations that the minister can sign can do that. I ask all of us, when we're developing these new goals, these new institutions, these new corporations and the laws that go around them, to never forget the human element, because it is that which makes Ontario great, and not the fact that a corporation makes millions of dollars, but the fact that people will listen and people can act and people of good faith can, in the end, not be harmed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to support Bill 228, which has been put forward by my colleague from Essex, Mr. Crozier. I know that his interest in this issue of security deposits goes well beyond his time here, as he's been here since 1993. I certainly know—he was the former mayor of Leamington and sat on the public utilities commission in Leamington—that as mayor, he would often get people coming into his office, no doubt with these challenges of security deposits.

At that time, most public utilities commissions in the province of Ontario did have a mechanism to hear people that found themselves in somewhat difficult financial situations, couldn't pay these deposits, and the publicly owned utilities with these commissions would take the time to review those cases and put in place a repayment schedule that would meet the needs of the individual who demonstrated a really serious problem.

I certainly believe that the provision of electricity is indeed an essential service. It's something that we all depend on each and every day. It's interesting to note, back in 1960s and 1970s, the old Hydro One had a slogan, Live Better Electrically. There was a great rush at

that particular time to install baseboard heating services across the province of Ontario. Indeed, many low-income individuals acquiring homes and apartments installed these baseboard heating systems, and we know now that, without proper insulation, these baseboard electric services can certainly run up extremely high bills, and people find themselves in very difficult positions. Sometimes these security deposits are 2.5 times their bill, ranging from \$500 to approximately \$1,000.

We know that several studies have indicated that particularly low-income Ontarians spend a higher degree of their income on such essentials as electricity, fuel and water. When they have to face the problem of a security deposit, it becomes a very punitive situation that they find themselves in. When we add the deregulation of the electricity market, when we had many private entities that went around the province of Ontario and scooped up former public utilities, we found that their policies were even harsher when it came to security deposits because they were very concerned about the bottom line and the bottom line only, as opposed to former publicly owned utilities that were much more sympathetic when people would come to them with their cases about security deposits.

Mel Hurtig wrote a book several years ago entitled *Pay the Rent or Feed the Kids*, and through that book he certainly identified the need to keep providing electricity as an essential service.

I believe Mr. Crozier has brought forward a very important bill and something that we need to support in this House to get rid of these punitive security deposits, to make sure that we continue to provide electricity as an essential service.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Levac: It is indeed a great pleasure to speak to the private member's bill. I continually mention, time and time again, that indeed it is a private member's time and it is a private member's bill, and to each individual who does bring in those ideas, I have committed myself to continually evaluating and commenting on the individual's idea, the individual's concept. This is not attached to the government, so Bill 228 is an experienced member's experience in his constituency, and then he did further research to find out what was happening in the province of Ontario. So I want to commend him first, the member from Ess—

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Essex. It's a tongue-twister.

Mr. Dave Levac: Just a minute. Merry Christmas—and to compliment him on bringing that voice to Queen's Park.

Now, some members have voiced some concerns over the last few Thursdays during private members' time that it's co-opted by the government and that there's creeping politics coming into it. That's the thrust and parry of what this place is all about, but anyone who says, in this particular moment, that anyone's got a monopoly on good ideas has not been paying attention to a lot of the ideas that have been floated in private members' time.

I recall being, in 1999, a member who gave 15 different private members' bills, and inside of those 15 private members' bills, the government of the day found a way to put them in some of their government bills. When I became, on this side, a part of the government, I offered a few other private members' bills that have found their way into government policy. My own self, personally, I have not been offended by that. What I've said is that at least somebody took an idea and made a run of it, and that's quite all right by me.

I remember writing a letter to one of the government members of the day when I was in opposition that said, "Please steal the idea. Take it. I don't need credit." What we're talking about in this particular bill is something that everyone, so far, has stood up and said they thought was reprehensible—that this type of thing was happening in the province of Ontario, particularly to those who are less fortunate or who can less afford to have these kinds of caps on top of their own payment of their bills. The member has found something that I think this House can indeed take a look at, and it will continue to be talked about.

The member has indicated a willingness to meet with the companies, to give them an opportunity to share their opinion and their ideas as to why they think it's important to do these types of things. There might very well be, and I say this hesitantly, a reason why they are doing what they're doing. If there is a good, logical, rational reason for doing it, they haven't done a good job of explaining why it works. I want to just stand on record and say that this member has brought forth a good private member's bill that deserves a good looking at, and I'm pleased to do that.

I'm also saying to you that I will be supporting the bill and I've had these types of e-mails and phone calls in my riding as well. The member has found something that all of us can agree on, that if there's a way for this government and this House to deal with private members' time, it is to take a good idea and make a commitment to investigate and to deal with some of these issues that make it difficult for us. I'm all for it and I congratulate the member for doing so.

Finally, with the last few seconds that I do have, I want to just take a moment to say a very Merry Christmas, season's greetings and all of the wonderful good joy that everyone deserves at Christmas time, to our security guards, inside and out, especially Harold; our clerks, the House committee and House clerks; the maintenance crew; the cleaning staff; the pages, the university pages, the elementary pages; the co-op placements; library research; legislative counsel; ministry staff; constituency office staff and all their families; and the Queen's Park office staff and all their families. Each and every one of you, on behalf of myself and my family, I wish you all the joy—

Interjections.

Mr. Dave Levac: Particularly the guy with the sword, the Sergeant-at-Arms. I want him to feel very comfortable. Just stay right where you are and don't go any-

where, because I think that sharp thing should just stay right where it is. You need a new chair because you've poked a hole in it.

Anyway, Speaker, to you and your family, Merry Christmas, and to all a good night.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Is there any further debate?

Seeing none, Mr. Crozier, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I don't know whether I can follow that or not, but I do want to thank the members for Parry Sound–Muskoka, Wellington–Halton Hills, Beaches–East York, Trinity–Spadina, London–Fanshawe, Peterborough and Brant for speaking today on this bill. I have to admit that I'm often not around here on a Thursday afternoon, and I was afraid, since this very well might be the last piece of business before Christmas, that there might not even be anybody here to listen to my bill.

Mr. Paul Miller: Oh, we're here.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: You're here. I really appreciate that.

But I also want to thank Darcie, Patti and Tracy in my constituency office—Tracy works part-time; Darcie and Patti are there every day of the week—because they're the staff who have to deal with these kinds of situations. Quite frankly, they brought it to my attention and said, "Bruce, we think this is something we should bring up in private members' business." So I want to thank them. They may even be watching today if they haven't left. It's a Friday, and I don't know what they—or a Thursday. It's only a Thursday.

I also want to thank Mark, who is in the members' east gallery here. He is my Queen's Park face. Mark works with me part-time here. I tell them I'm low maintenance down here so I don't need to—but thanks, Mark, for your part in this.

To legislative research and those who drafted the bill, I appreciate all the comments today, and I want to tag onto the wishes of my friend here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time provided for private members' public business has just about expired.

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)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll first deal with ballot item number 55, standing in the name of Mrs. Savoline.

Mrs. Savoline has moved second reading of Bill 227, An Act to amend the Freedom of Information and

Protection of Privacy Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will call in the members after we deal with the next two ballot items.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll now deal with ballot item number 56.

Mr. Hoskins has moved private members' notice of motion number 125.

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

Motion agreed to.

ELECTRICITY AMENDMENT ACT
(PROTECTION AGAINST
SECURITY DEPOSITS), 2009
LOI DE 2009 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR L'ÉLECTRICITÉ
(PROTECTION CONTRE
LES DÉPÔTS DE GARANTIE)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We will now deal with ballot item number 57.

Mr. Crozier has moved second reading of Bill 228, An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998 to protect residential customers from hardships created by security deposits. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. It's carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Crozier.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I would request that it be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it agreed that it be referred to the standing committee? So ordered.

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)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll now call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1614 to 1619.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mrs. Savoline has moved second reading of Bill 227. All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Marchese, Rosario	Rinaldi, Lou
Chudleigh, Ted	Miller, Norm	Savoline, Joyce
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Paul	Sterling, Norman W.
Hardeman, Ernie	Prue, Michael	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): All those opposed will please rise and remain standing until counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Delaney, Bob	Moridi, Reza
Albanese, Laura	Dickson, Joe	Pendergast, Leeanna
Balkissoon, Bas	Duguid, Brad	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Fonseca, Peter	Ruprecht, Tony
Best, Margaret	Jeffrey, Linda	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Zimmer, David
Colle, Mike	Mangat, Amrit	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 11; the nays are 20.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: Speaker, I wish you and all members and staff here today in the Legislature a Merry Christmas and all the best for the holidays, and I'm pleased to move adjournment of the House.

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

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

I just want to join with all members in wishing the best in life to our pages, as this is, of course, their last day.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Merry Christmas and happy holidays to everyone. This House stands adjourned until February 16, 2010.

The House adjourned at 1622.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

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

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

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

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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
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	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Brotten, 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	
Craiton, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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) Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Oakville Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP) Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Nickel Belt 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) Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Kenora–Rainy River 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) Hoy, Pat (LIB) Hudak, Tim (PC)	St. Paul's Chatham–Kent–Essex 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) Jeffrey, Linda (LIB) Johnson, Rick (LIB) Jones, Sylvia (PC) Klees, Frank (PC) Kormos, Peter (NDP) Kular, Kuldip (LIB) Kwinter, Monte (LIB) Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB) Leal, Jeff (LIB) Levac, Dave (LIB) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham Brampton–Springdale Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock Dufferin–Caledon Newmarket–Aurora Welland Bramalea–Gore–Malton York Centre / York-Centre Glengarry–Prescott–Russell Peterborough Brant Nepean–Carleton Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Marchese, Rosario (NDP) Martiniuk, Gerry (PC) Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina Cambridge 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) McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan 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) Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans 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) Miller, Paul (NDP) Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Parry Sound–Muskoka Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek 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) Moridi, Reza (LIB) Munro, Julia (PC)	Huron–Bruce Richmond Hill 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
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