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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 23 February 2010

Mardi 23 février 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Tuesday 23 February 2010

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mardi 23 février 2010

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Good morning. Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by a moment of silence for personal thought and inner reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'APPRENTISSAGE
DES JEUNES ENFANTS À TEMPS PLEIN

Mrs. Dombrowsky moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters / Projet de loi 242, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne les éducateurs de la petite enfance, la maternelle et le jardin d'enfants, les programmes de jour prolongé et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm delighted today to stand in the Legislative Assembly. This really is a very special day, in that we have the opportunity to bring forward and debate what I think is an extraordinary piece of legislation—legislation that we will become known for, leaving a very significant thumbprint in education, one that is positive for all learners, and definitely for our future.

Our government prides itself on being a champion of public education. We have made great strides in the last seven years. Graduation rates are up. Elementary students' reading, writing and math scores have increased by 13%. Students are increasingly engaged in their education, thanks to our innovative student success program and SpeakUp! campaigns. Parents now have more resources and avenues to get involved with their child's school. Schools are more welcoming environments, thanks to our safe schools and equity and inclusion education initiatives.

Our government has worked to rebuild positive relationships with the education sector and to create a learn-

ing environment where all educators and educational support staff are appreciated and valued. I can say that when I visit schools, I am regularly approached. It's very uninvited, but teachers and support staff come to me to express their sincere thanks and appreciation. They have the sense that their government does value them, the work they do, how important it is and that we're there to support them on a daily basis.

Recent amendments to the Education Act have made student achievement and well-being the central priority and purpose for school boards. We have seen positive results and significant improvement all across the province. By working together, by putting student achievement first, putting their well-being first, at the very core of everything we do, we are building the best possible publicly funded education system—one that inspires confidence in our communities and success in our students.

Every day, as parents, friends, caregivers and educators, we can see the transformational and positive influence that education has on the lives of our children, the lives of their families and the communities where they live.

Our publicly funded education system truly makes a difference in the lives of these children, and now our government is moving forward on a pivotal transformation of our public education system: the introduction of full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds.

I stand in the House today to support Bill 242, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010. If passed, this act would amend the Education Act to ensure that all four- and five-year-olds have access to an engaging and enriching full day of learning.

Bill 242 would give school boards the responsibility and the authority to implement full-day learning programs, staffed during the regular school day by teachers and early childhood educators.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just beg your indulgence: I did neglect at the beginning of my remarks to indicate that I will be sharing my time with the member from Oakville.

This innovative new program will build on the very strong kindergarten programs that already are in place in the province of Ontario. Before- and after-school programs would be led by early childhood educators. Following the program model, the before- and after-school programs would be optional, and parents would pay a reasonable fee to enrol their children in those programs.

This bill would give school boards the authority and responsibility to set, charge and collect fees in accordance with the regulations that will be set, attached to

this bill, for those before- and after-school programs. The fees would be expected to cover the operational costs of this before- and after-day initiative. Under regulatory powers contained in the bill, we would ensure that the fees are reasonable by requiring that boards set the fees annually and approve them through the regular budget process at a board meeting that would be open to the public.

Although the fees will be set at a “reasonable” amount, we do recognize that the cost of the before- and after-school program may still be prohibitive for some families, and that is why we would also make subsidies available. So within this legislation, if it is passed, we would provide authority for the government to enter into agreements with municipalities or other parties that may already be managing subsidies for children before they enter school. The government would be enabled to administer subsidies for eligible families whose children are enrolled in the before- and after-school program. The government intends to enable a seamless subsidy flow to families in need as their children move through the child care and education systems. We intend to work closely with the municipal sector to make that seamlessness a reality.

I’ve had the opportunity—just last evening, as a matter of fact, I was visiting with many rural municipal representatives, and I have to say that the feedback that I’ve been receiving to date from representatives in the municipal sector has been very positive. In fact, I think it’s fair to say that they’ve been eager to have, and look forward to, an opportunity to partner with us in this very important endeavour.

If passed, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act would recognize the new role of early childhood educators in elementary schools and the work that they do to nurture our young students.

0910

The legislation would enable school boards and the minister to offer early childhood educators access to professional development courses and exchange programs so they, like their teacher partners, can continue to update their skills and expand their horizons to better help the children that they work with every day.

In addition, the legislation, if passed, would require that teachers and early childhood educators work together to provide high-quality, effective, play-based education to support enhanced learning and cognitive emotional and social development for the children that they have every day. It would mean that teachers and early childhood educators would work together under the direction of the school principals. They would collaborate to plan and deliver the kindergarten program, to assess and observe students and their achievements, and to communicate with the families of the students.

If passed, this legislation would provide an essential framework for the full-day learning program. It would be a pivotal step forward in our quest to ensure that all children and all families have access to high-quality education. Together, teachers and early childhood educators

would be responsible for maintaining a healthy learning environment, fostering and encouraging social and emotional development. However, teachers would remain responsible for formal reporting and discipline within the classroom. I’ve had the opportunity to speak with teachers about this, and early childhood educators as well, and they very much appreciate that it is clear to them the responsibilities that teachers will have in the early learning classrooms.

If passed, Bill 242 would ensure that the entire full-day learning program and its staff are held to the same high quality and safety standards as any other component of the education system. I have had parents inquire about whether the same safety standards would apply, and of course that will be the case if this legislation is passed. One of our core reasons for creating full-day learning was to make sure that parents had a safe, reliable and affordable option for before- and after-school programs for their young children. I’m sure many of us know friends and family members who have even first-hand experience with the challenges that can exist to find affordable, reliable and safe options for the care of children prior to attending school.

Children are precious. I think they are our most important and our most precious resource as a people. They absolutely deserve to be cared for in safe, healthy and stimulating environments. By passing the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, the Legislature will be providing such an option. Best of all, we are providing parents and students with a seamless day: one location to spend their day, not worrying about picking up the children from caregivers, getting them to kindergarten, picking them up at kindergarten and getting them back to the caregiver. Parents can pick them up at the end of the day. This is a seamless day, where children will arrive at school with their parents in the morning and they will be there, they will be cared for, for the entire day, and then they will be picked up by parents at the end of the day.

I think this shows that this government recognizes that parents need an affordable program to support them in their very good efforts to provide what is best for their children. We also recognize that this need exists throughout the calendar year, not just on regular school days. That’s why this legislation that we are debating in the House now, if passed, would also permit school boards to offer some additional programs. It is enabling legislation. It will enable school boards, if they so choose—if they hear from their parent community that this is an important service that they need to have in place for their children, school boards will now have the ability to provide programs for those students beyond age four, for the six- to 12-year-olds.

This means that boards could offer programs on non-instructional days, such as professional development days, on school breaks and also throughout the summer, but again, it will be the decision of the local board.

We certainly have been hearing from families who say that they are absolutely excited about our four- and five-

year-old initiative, but we recognize that they are also eager to work with us and their local boards so that the needs of families who have children six to 12 years old can also be met.

Boards would not be required to offer these extra programs. Instead, we will ask boards to listen to their communities. Whenever possible, where boards have the resources and the capacity to do so and where parents have asked for this type of support, we are encouraging boards to meet these needs. Schools are hubs in our communities, and the board and school staff know their communities. They know their students and the parents that they work with and serve. As always, we ask them to partner with their communities to do what is in the best interests of their students, within their means.

People have been talking for over a generation about the importance of a systematic approach to early learning such as this program. We've got a number of studies. We've talked about how this is the ideal, how this is what we should be doing. In Ontario, however, it seemed for a time that what we'd hear back in terms of the initiatives that should be mounted was, "Well, it just isn't the right time." That is what we heard. I say that we cannot wait for the perfect time; we must act now if we want to make a difference in the lives of our youngest children—and we need to make a difference in their lives; we absolutely do. They are our future. We want them to be successful, and we know that with these early learning opportunities, their chances for success increase. How can we turn away from that? These children are our future, and the future well-being and prosperity of Ontario rests with them. So we need to move forward on this right away.

Our government committed to this project in 2007, and now here we are. We are the first jurisdiction in Canada to be implementing full-day learning with integrated before- and after-school programs for four- and five-year-olds. Nearly 600 schools across Ontario are getting ready for this unique, innovative program in September. Up to 35,000 children and their families are looking forward to the benefits that it will bring them, and I can say that when this initiative was announced, it was very warmly received. I know that all members of this House are getting lots of positive feedback. The people of Ontario have been waiting long enough. They appreciate why it is so important that we move forward and do this for our children right now.

We went about this in a methodical way. We are taking our time to do this because we want to get it right. We want this program to truly make a difference in the lives of Ontario's children and families. We are taking a measured approach to its implementation. There are a couple of points that I would make on that.

Because we are the first jurisdiction to move forward in this way, we don't have a blueprint. We're not able to observe how and what did take place in other jurisdictions; in fact, other jurisdictions are watching us. We know that what is key to our success is to work collaboratively with our school boards and with community partners, and that is what we have done in identifying the

almost 600 school sites. We worked very closely with boards. We asked them to look at their system and identify where they had space available to move forward on this. We also asked them to work collaboratively with their coterminous boards. We wanted to ensure that within communities there was equity.

We also asked them to work with child care providers in their communities to understand where and how it was best to locate these centres.

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Mr. Jeff Leal: A team approach.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: It is absolutely a team approach.

People have been talking for over a generation about the importance of a systemic approach to early learning such as this program. Again, that is why we are moving forward on this now. In November 2007, Premier McGuinty appointed Dr. Charles Pascal to recommend the best way forward to deliver full-day learning for our youngest children.

I know that many in this Legislature—perhaps not so many people in our communities—have had the opportunity to read Dr. Pascal's report *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*. I would offer that for anyone who may have some questions about the thinking behind this initiative, I believe that Dr. Pascal's document does an excellent job explaining why it is so important that we make these types of investments for our earliest learners.

Dr. Pascal consulted with many parents and members of the education, child care and municipal sectors about how best to support children and their families. It's indicated in his report that he spoke with literally thousands of people. It is a very comprehensive effort that was undertaken. We truly appreciate that.

Dr. Pascal presented his report last June. Since then, we have been moving quickly to realize our vision for full-day early learning. That vision includes a teacher and an early childhood educator working together in every classroom to help our four- and five-year-olds learn and grow. It includes a before- and after-school program led by early childhood educators where children will continue to benefit from play-based learning activities and interaction with their peers. It provides a much-needed seamless, stimulating day for our youngest students.

According to Statistics Canada, both parents work in four out of five families in Canada today. That's very different from when I was growing up. This certainly is a huge contrast from even 30 years ago, when the majority of families had one employed parent and one stay-at-home parent. Also, I think we appreciate the single-family situation in Ontario, that the number of those families has increased as well. We have moved so far from the family model where one parent stays home and there is another parent working that we really do have to look at how we have structured our system to support our youngest learners.

We also know that too many transitions during the day for young people can be very disruptive. It can also be

very unsettling for parents with the uncertainty of wondering, if their regular caregiver is ill or unable to look after their child, what they are going to be able to do. It has an impact on our productivity as a people. With full-day early learning, our four- and five-year-olds will spend the day in one engaging, integrated program. That means that their parents will have peace of mind at work during the day, knowing that their child is being well cared for as they learn and develop with their peers.

This program will also help level the playing field economically for young families. Affordable, high-quality early learning and care is, in many instances, very difficult for young families to access. The before- and after-school portion of the early learning program will offer these families a better choice. During the regular school day and during the before- and after-school programs, children will be engaged to explore the world around them through play-based activities. Early learning will help children learn to read, write, engage with their classmates and develop the other social, emotional and academic skills necessary for success. By giving them those opportunities at a young age, we are giving them a boost that will carry them the rest of their elementary school careers, and that will ready them to continue learning and exploring their world as they grow.

Our children will be better prepared for the full-day school experience in grade 1. They will be used to the routine. They'll have established friends at the school and familiarity with educators and the school environment, and they'll have a strong foundation to continue developing essential academic and life skills. If children start off grade 1 on a strong footing, they'll be more likely to succeed there and in the future.

In his report, Dr. Pascal noted that, "A major source of the human capital benefits comes from the link between children's participation in quality early years programs" and what they are able to attain in the future. He cites a Rutgers University study which found that "prolonged and regular full-day preschool attendance significantly increased children's verbal and mathematics test scores in grade 1 and beyond."

I heard members of the opposition argue that this program costs too much, that it's too expensive. I would counter that that is very short-sighted. I ask them to consider: What is the price of ensuring that our youngest learners have the good start that will enable them to be more successful when they arrive in school?

Experts, educators and leaders in Ontario and around the world agree with this investment. They agree that this is the best way to ensure the well-being and the success of the students who come to us in our school system.

President Obama has even recognized the significance of education and the role that it will continue to play, perhaps an even greater role. President Obama has said that the jurisdiction that will out-compete them in the new economy is the jurisdiction that out-educates them. There are people from around the world looking at what we're doing with this initiative.

The Premier and members of this government and countless parents, teachers and early childhood educators

recognize that if we want to out-educate the world, we need to start from the very beginning. We need to give our children the most solid foundation, the most opportunities, the very best start we possibly can.

When children get a strong start in elementary school, they are more likely to do well in high school, and they are more likely to go on and graduate and enjoy an enriching post-secondary experience, whether they learn a trade, whether they go to a community college or whether they attend university. They are more likely to pursue all of those avenues if they have had a successful experience, particularly in their earliest learning years.

A study by James Heckman, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago, looked at the impact of social programs on the economy and on society at large. Professor Heckman calculated a 7-to-1 return on public investment for young children. That is compared to a 1-to-1 payback with regard to the investment in adults. Clearly, by focusing on investments in our youngest learners, that is where we get the biggest bang for our buck, so to speak.

Instead of thinking about the money that we're spending on early learning, I think that it's absolutely essential that we think about the money that we are saving by building a stronger education system, a stronger workforce and a stronger future.

It is clear that the benefits of investing in early learning go far beyond individual parents and children. These investments boost local economies, help Ontario compete globally and strengthen our social fabric.

Two recent major reviews of very different topics cited investment in early childhood as a vital driver of economic and social progress. I'll just take a minute to identify Ontario in the Creative Age. This is a document that was co-authored by Roger Martin and Richard Florida, and in that document they advise, "Make early childhood development a high priority. This is the highest-payoff investment that we can make in our long-run prosperity." This is the advice that very respected economists have provided to us.

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In addition to that, we have the Roots of Youth Violence report, which was co-authored by Roy McMurtry and Alvin Curling. In that document it was noted, "Given the relationship between undiagnosed literacy problems and behavioural problems later in life, including incarceration in many cases, effective early learning programs can play an enormous identification and prevention role"—yet another good reason that demonstrates the good sense of this investment.

Early learning for four- and five-year-olds is a significant investment. What are we spending it on? The bottom line is not the price tag. We are making this investment in our human resources, the most precious resources we have as a province. It is the children who are going to have more opportunities to succeed because of the benefits that early learning will give them. It is for the families who are going to have more opportunities to succeed because of the benefits that early learning will give them

with the before- and after-school programs in the full-day learning program. At the end of the day, when we have fully implemented this program across the province, that's going to be for all four- and five-year-olds and their families. That is good for all Ontario.

In his recent article in the *Walrus*, Roger Martin says that investing in education is an investment in the "future prosperity" of our people, our province and our economy.

What we are talking about here today is our vision for the future. This is not just planning for impacts within a term of office. Quite the contrary, what we have here is a vision for our future: building for a strong, prosperous and successful economy for all of the people of Ontario.

Today's four- and five-year-olds will be tomorrow's leaders, workers and innovators. They will run our private businesses and our public institutions. They are our collective success plan, and our investment in them will pay off tenfold.

To get there, our children need our full support now. They need the care and support of a full, integrated day of learning with a teacher and an early childhood educator. They need a seamless day in one place, with familiar faces and engaging activities. We need to put the pieces in place to give them that.

Full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds is the next essential step in our quest to make Ontario's education system the best in the world. Bill 242, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010, if passed, will allow teachers and early childhood educators to work side by side to help children learn, to help them play and grow during the regular school day. This will give children a seamless day in one location, with continuous staffing, familiar faces and friends, where they feel safe and encouraged to learn and play and explore.

This program is essential for giving our youngest students a brighter future, for giving our families the support they need and for building a stronger Ontario for all. I do urge all of my colleagues in this Legislature to please support this legislation for the children and the future of the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today. Certainly it is an exciting topic we're talking about, Bill 242, the full-day early learning statute law amendment legislation that the House has before us today.

It's a pivotal piece of legislation, one that's going to provide the framework for our innovative full-day learning program. It's a new and integrated program that's going to require boards across the province of Ontario to provide programs that are innovative and to provide additional services in their elementary schools for the families of this province.

It's also an essential piece of the government's plan to build a stronger Ontario and give the citizens of Ontario a brighter future. Because when we open our doors to full-day learning for our four- and five-year-old young citizens, it's not simply a matter of improving educational

opportunities for our kids and giving them more chances at success; it's going to be about ensuring that our children have every opportunity they need to prepare them for the more advanced learning that takes place when they enter grade 1, later in school, obviously, and even after they move on to graduation.

Full-day early learning is going to provide a foundation for the success of our youngest students. It's going to be a valuable support network for their families as well. It's going to provide parents in Ontario with an option that provides peace of mind—and we know how important that is as a parent. Not only that, it's going to provide that peace of mind at a very, very reasonable rate.

Many families today, we know, are caught up in the struggle to juggle the responsibilities that come with holding a full- or part-time job, being parents and having family responsibilities at the same time. With full-day learning, parents are going to know that their children are spending the day in an environment that's safe, welcoming, educational and nurturing. They will know that their child is learning and playing and growing up with their peers. That peace of mind helps make life a little easier for the parents as well.

The program is also about building a strong economy. It's going to give children a boost that will carry through during the rest of their elementary school and it's going to set them up to continue learning and exploring their world as they grow into older young people.

We know that this kind of program gives our kids a better chance of not only completing high school, but then, after that, going on to university, to college, to an apprenticeship program or skills training, to landing a good job and enjoying the quality of life that we all seek in this province. Full-day learning is going to set them on the road to becoming the innovative and creative young workers that this province sorely needs. It's a key part of our government's plan to create that strong workforce and a knowledge-based economy, one that can compete—and not just compete, but can excel—at the global level. As the minister has just said, it's an investment that we know is going to pay off dividends in the long run for both our people and our economy.

So our government today is committing to getting full-day learning into every elementary school across this province. We're committed to working with the school boards, principals, teachers, early childhood educators, the child care sector and the municipal sector to make sure that this program is successful. That's why we have introduced the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010.

If this bill before us is passed, Bill 242 is going to ensure that when a full-day learning program is fully implemented, all four- and five-year olds will have access to high-quality enriching days of both learning and play. It's going to give the boards across Ontario the authority and the responsibility to deliver these innovative programs. It's going to provide the framework that's needed for all of the key players to work together to implement full-day learning across the province.

We know that it's imperative that this be done quickly to give more children more opportunities sooner, but we're also aware that we're doing so during a recession—that we're rolling out a large program that is unprecedented in terms of its scale and its scope. So we're taking our time to make sure that we get this right. Nearly 600 schools will be offering full-day learning in September of this year, if this bill is passed. That number will grow over the next few years, and our goal is to have the program fully implemented in all Ontario schools by 2015-16.

In October 2009, the Minister of Education asked school boards to recommend which schools they would pick that could be ready to offer full-day learning in September 2010. We asked them specifically to look at whether a school had space available, space that would be appropriate for four- and five-year-olds. We asked them to also look at the immediate need for such a program in the community. More than one half of the schools that will offer this program in September are in areas where local boards have identified there are very high needs. We also asked those same boards to consider the impact that a full-day-learning class would have on existing child care in the geographic areas.

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We asked local school boards to work together. We asked representatives from the public, the Catholic, the French and the English boards to co-operate to ensure that full-day learning was spread out across all the communities in Ontario. They did. They came back to us. They made very strong recommendations to the ministry about which schools could bring full-day learning to their communities this fall.

The nearly 600 schools that were selected will serve as leaders in future years, schools we can learn from about the rollout of this program, much as Ontario will now be a leader for other jurisdictions that are also looking to revamp their own systems and improve their early childhood education systems. Other jurisdictions around the world and on this continent are looking for ways to do their best for their youngest students. Those jurisdictions now are going to be looking at what happens in Ontario, as an example of how it can be achieved.

I'm personally excited that some of my local elementary schools, those in Oakville, will be among those leaders. I've had the opportunity to visit some, and I know personally how much the schools are looking forward to this new program. I know that the children, their parents and the community overall will benefit greatly from full-day learning.

Recently I had the opportunity to visit St. Luke's school in the Clearview area of Oakville. I was able to introduce the program to those who are going to benefit from it most, and that is the parents themselves. I went into the JK class and the SK class, and I asked the students what they themselves thought about the introduction of full-day learning. When I told them they were going to have to stay at school all day, there were some groans. When I told them they were going to be able to

spend the day with their friends and they were going to be able to learn new things, they were very excited.

I talked to the grade 5s, as we all do when we talk to the civics classes. I asked them what they thought about Ontario and them as students having to compete with the rest of the world, having to become smarter than the rest of the world, having to become more educated than the rest of the world in order to get the jobs and the lifestyle that they want when they graduate and they move on to raise families themselves. Without any hesitation, the grade 5s in the civics class at St. Luke's, when I announced it to them—we did it in the form of a formal media release, and they participated and pretended they were members of the journalist industry—agreed at the end of the day that this is one of the best things that we could do for their younger brothers and sisters. So I take some comfort that not only are the experts saying that this is something we should move ahead on, this is something that the young people of the province realize is going to pay off in great benefits for them as well.

Some of the provinces currently offer elements of a full-day learning program for young children, but no other jurisdiction offers a full-day kindergarten program in the comprehensive and integrated way that an extended day program for four- and five-year-olds will accomplish. That's not because this model is any sort of outrageous idea. On the contrary, it's an idea whose time has come.

In 2001, a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said that governments were increasingly beginning to recognize that equitable access to quality early childhood education can strengthen the foundations of lifelong learning for all children and support the broad educational and social needs of families. And yet, regrettably, almost a decade later, integrated learning is still a relatively new concept in Canada and in all of North America. That's going to change if this legislation is passed.

It's exciting and it's challenging to be the first to do something that's this monumental. We're forging a path on this continent for early learning. We know that others eventually will be journeying down that same path, adopting and adapting our program for their own children and their own jurisdictions.

Other provinces, other territories and even other countries have already long looked to Ontario as a model for a strong educational system. Our government is confident that early learning will be seen as one of the strongest aspects of our education system, one that's going to be worth studying and one that's going to be worth emulating.

We're not starting from scratch, however, with this model. Already in Ontario we've seen some great, but different, examples of full-day learning for young students. For example, if we look at the French-language boards across Ontario, they've been offering full-day programs for the past decade, and they've seen, already, very clear improvements in their students' achievements as a result. Other boards, municipalities and even individ-

ual schools have worked hard to offer parents a better choice in terms of early childhood education and early care.

Dr. Pascal, whom we all know, spoke about some of these different models in his report that was entitled *With Our Best Future in Mind*. Our government staff then, in turn, looked to Dr. Pascal's report and to his recommendations as we developed our early learning model. Bill 242 would set in stone some of the best elements of a number of different models. If passed, it's going to create a seamless, integrated program for our youngest children in elementary schools right across the province of Ontario.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share with the Legislature some quotes from some of the partners that we engage in early education. Teachers and early child care advocates agree that giving four- and five-year-olds a stronger start on their learning path will be good for them. If it's good for them, it's good for Ontario.

Lois Mahon, president of the council of the College of Early Childhood Educators, says, "We are pleased to see early childhood education move forward in Ontario with the combined strength of a team of both early childhood educators and teachers.... With registered early childhood educators in the classrooms, children will get the full benefit of education during these critical early years."

Sam Hammond, president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, says, "We commend the government for its commitment to the welfare of young children. The decision took a lot of courage in today's economic environment, but it will pay a lifetime of rewards, not only for children, but for our communities and for our economy."

Economists and education advocates agree that full-day learning is a wise and much-needed investment. Veronica Lacey, president and CEO, the Learning Partnership, and Don Drummond, chief economist, TD Bank Financial Group, say, "We must invest, once and for all, in our youngest children and their families in a coordinated, integrated way. For Ontarians to reap the highest return on our education dollars, to help us succeed economically and have a strong social fabric in the future, extraordinary efforts are required to support early learning. At a time of soaring deficits there are, understandably, concerns as to whether the initiative can be afforded. But given rates of return to investing in early childhood education, the more pertinent question is whether we can afford not to make such an investment."

The executive director of the parent advocacy group People for Education, Annie Kidder, says as follows: "In these tough times it's encouraging to see the government sticking to a strategy that will be as good for families and children as it is for Ontario's economic recovery. Early learning is one of the best stimulus investments a government can make to stem an economic downturn."

Everyday parents recognize the value of this program. It speaks for itself and its value to not only the families but to the children as well.

In Dr. Pascal's report on how to implement full-day learning in Ontario, a parent from North Bay said, "I am

not a wealthy person and I have always had too much work to do. But my children were able to have all-day learning a few years back. It gave my boys a big help to their abilities and confidence." The same parent said to Dr. Pascal, "Tell the Premier it is a good thing that everyone in Ontario can have this choice for their children too."

This parent is representative of so many parents in my own community of Oakville, I'm sure in your community, and of parents right throughout the province—parents who know and understand that full-day learning is going to make their lives easier, who know that full-day learning will have an overwhelmingly positive impact on the lives of their children.

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Dr. Pascal also notes in his report that more than one in four children enter grade 1 significantly behind their peers. Our schools work hard to help all children succeed, but it makes sense that if children get off to a rough start, it takes more effort from them, from their parents and from their teachers in the future to help them catch up. It makes much more sense to not let them fall behind in the first place. When a child gets that focused and targeted assistance during their first years in school, they're simply more likely to succeed in future years. Research has shown it's less difficult and less costly to intervene and address a child's needs during those early years than it is in the later years. Early learning is key to that future success.

The Canadian Council on Learning tells us, "Research indicates that the experiences during the first five years of a child's life have a major bearing on his or her future success in school, in the workplace and many other aspects of a healthy, fulfilling life." Children's life experiences, especially in the first five years, are so varied. By the time they start kindergarten, some children are already reading independently; others, though, are still learning the alphabet. This is not good for them, for their families, and it's not good for the province of Ontario. A full day of learning where children can interact with their classmates, playing in and exploring the world around them; a full day in one location, one safe, welcoming location with two trained professionals—that's going to help level the playing field for all the students in our province.

If we pass this bill, the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010, it's going to provide school board staff, principals, teachers and early childhood educators in this province with a clear framework regarding their responsibilities in the new program because, like any other program we introduce, the success of full-day early learning depends so much on the front-line staff of our educational system that dedicate themselves to the students and the children of our province on a daily basis. In this case, the teachers and early childhood educators who will be working together in the classroom during the school day are the ones who will truly make a difference to our young people.

In Ontario—we all know this House would agree—we have high-quality teachers who constantly excel at help-

ing young people learn. We have stellar early childhood educators who make a world of difference to young children and their families in the most crucial years of their development. These two professionals have different skill sets and different experiences to inform their work in a classroom. Ontario's young children will benefit most when they have access to both of those skill sets. They need the guidance and the instruction of certified teachers to get them ready for the further education that lies ahead of them, and they need the guidance and the support of early childhood educators, who are specially trained to develop and implement activities that promote a young person's intellectual, physical, social and emotional growth.

I know some people have raised concerns about how those teachers and early childhood educators will work together in the classroom, how they will have to adjust to having to share space and responsibilities in a professional way in the best interests of our students. I have no doubt, however, given the quality of the individuals involved and the professionalism that they bring to their job on a daily basis, that our teachers and early childhood educators are going to continue to work well together, because they'll be united behind that same common goal that I hope this whole House unites behind: helping our children reach their full potential.

The legislation we're discussing today would help provide a framework for that relationship. It's going to create a duty to co-operate. It's going to set out very clearly the expectation that the professionals who look after the educational interests of our young persons, that is, the teachers and the early childhood educators in this province, work together to give children the attention they need in those early years that is so important, that they bring their best to work every day and that when they're trying to work out the new aspects of this system on a daily basis, they have a duty to keep the interests of the four- and five-year-olds in this province in a paramount position. It's imperative that they co-operate to make sure that children in our province of Ontario receive the attention they need.

Under the regulatory and the guideline powers of the full-day learning program, there will be one teacher and one early childhood educator in each class of approximately 26 students. That means that during the regular school day, there's going to be a ratio of one adult for every 13 students. That ratio is going to stay the same for before- and after-school programs: one early childhood educator for every 13 children. If more than 13 children are enrolled in the before- or the after-school program, another adult will come into the classroom to support the early childhood educator as well.

Children are going to receive the attention that they need in the early years. The staffing is going to be dealt with in an appropriate way, and the professionals themselves who are dealing with our children will have the time to dedicate to the individual issues that arise. Obviously, in a class of 26 four- and five-year-olds, you're going to have a variety of concerns and issues that need

to be dealt with. We need to be confident that the professionals who are employed in that field have the time.

Often, there were examples in the past where we felt our teachers hadn't had the time to dedicate to the individual needs of students. This act will ensure that the time is set out, that the time is prescribed and that the time will be dedicated to the four- and five-year-olds to help them begin to achieve their full potential.

That means that throughout the day, students will get more one-on-one attention and more opportunities to learn together in small groups. That means that students will do better in school. It's that simple. They will be more likely to succeed in high school. If you succeed in high school, you're more likely to succeed in post-secondary education, skills-training or in apprenticeship programs.

Our full-day learning program is also a key element of this government's poverty reduction strategy, which I know all members of the House support. The strategy is a long-term plan that focuses first on giving children and their families the support that they need to reach their full individual potential.

It's the right thing to do for Ontarians. It's a smart thing to do for our economy, as well. Educated, healthy and employable people make up an educated, healthy and employable workforce. It's critical to Ontario's future that we have those individuals, that we become, as a society, those individuals.

They say that public education is the great equalizer. We say a strong, publicly funded education system, especially a strong early learning program, will have long-term economic benefits for individuals, for families and for the province. You can start off in this life as a wealthy young person or as a person from moderate means, but what people have found about the public education system in the province of Ontario is that it's a great equalizer. If you can get into a quality public education system, which every child in Ontario can, the sky is the limit. Nothing holds you back. It's not a matter of income anymore. It's a matter of what you bring to your school on a daily basis, and it's a matter of what we do as legislators to ensure that that quality education is provided.

University of Toronto economists show that a developmentally enriched child care program results in a 2-to-1 payback ratio, due to the increased taxes that are then paid in the future by working parents, and the reduced need for social service expenditures. Look at the province of Quebec: Over 40% of the cost of their program is covered by tax revenues from mothers who would simply not be working if low-cost child care options were not available.

The evidence is clear. I hope the House agrees with this evidence. We cannot wait any longer to make full-day learning a reality. It's the right policy for strengthening our education system, and it's the right policy for enhancing our future workforce. It makes Ontario a better place. It gives Ontario a better future. It makes other jurisdictions around the world look at Ontario and realize that Ontario is going down the right road in this regard

and perhaps they should be paying some attention to what we're doing for our young people here.

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I tell young people in schools, when I talk to the grade 5s, that as I was growing up, I was competing with kids on my street for jobs. When our young people today are growing up, they're competing with young people around the world for jobs, and they understand that, even in the early grades. They understand that what they're able to do educationally in the early part of their lives is going to determine what sort of future they have, what sort of families they're able to raise when they become parents themselves, what they're going to be able to pass on to their own children and grandchildren. They understand the importance of their educational system, and they're very proud of their schools. Four- and five-year-olds I talk to are very proud of their schools, and I think once they realize that this is being expanded, that we're paying even more attention to those students in the younger grades, they'll be even more proud.

It's the right policy, we know, because it's going to strengthen the education system we have right here in the province of Ontario, which is already topnotch. And the employers in the province of Ontario and those who are looking perhaps to invest in the province in the future will look to the education system and see one that is leading the way.

Full-day learning is the right thing to do to make a difference in the lives of our young students. It's going to make a positive change in the education system in the province. It's going to work toward a stronger, more vibrant future for ourselves, for people who are parents, for young people who are in the system and for those who have yet to enter the system, for children who are just being born today or who were just born this week. They will be the beneficiaries of this too as we phase this in.

So just as teachers and early childhood educators will work together during the day to help children learn and play and grow, this government is going to continue to work closely with school boards and the other community partners to implement high-quality programs for our children. If we work together, we can give our children the best possible start in school and we can just give them a stronger start in life. This is going to set our children on the road to success, it's going to help the economy of the future, it's going to help the education system of today, and it's going to help us grow more and more of the fantastic young people we see in this province who are perhaps exemplified by the young pages who are sitting at your feet. This is worthy of the support of the entire House.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: I arrived in this Legislature most of three years ago, and I would be the first to admit that I arrived here with a certain degree of cynicism. When I listen to the debate that I'm hearing today, as we start talking about this bill, it increases the cynicism that I came with.

On the face of it, all-day kindergarten, four-year-old children—great idea. I'm sincere. I would like to see it happen. I would echo all of the sentiments expressed by the minister and by the member from Oakville. It's a lovely idea but it's a bad time, and that would indicate what we in this Legislature all know to be true: that this is a government that lacks the ability to prioritize the actions that it wants to take.

I'd be a rich guy if I had a nickel for every single time that I heard the phrase "it's for the children" come out of people on the other side, as I heard the minister say this morning. A couple of weeks ago I was on a pre-budget hearing tour with that same member from Oakville who just spoke, and I can't believe that we heard the same submissions from place to place.

I will recall for him and for this Legislature one very particular one, and that was from a woman in Niagara Falls, a woman with a two-year-old little boy who was severely autistic. She was pleading for increased allocation to children's mental health. I said to her, "If you had the choice and you were the Minister of Finance and you could help your son or you could fund junior kindergarten for four-year-olds, what would you do?" She said, "That's easy, because I not only have this two-year-old autistic son, I have a four-year-old girl who qualifies for the program, and in a New York minute I would go for the children's mental health."

That's called prioritization. That's what this government fails to understand. So while this may be a good idea in principle, in practice, it just is the wrong time.

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: In the two minutes that I have, I want to say this: This is a government that is renowned for offering up promises. Let me give you some examples.

We have heard from this government that they're promising retraining for workers, and we have heard it over and over again. But I know that in my part of Ontario, where literally tens of thousands of hard-working people have lost their jobs, what this government is actually doing is cutting retraining. You talk to any community retraining agency, and they will tell you that the opportunities for self-employment, the opportunities for retraining, are, in fact, being cut.

This is a government that has offered up a dream, a promise, that they're going to tackle poverty. But I can tell you, whether you're in Windsor or you're in London or St. Thomas or Niagara or Hamilton or Oshawa or Etobicoke-Rexdale or Scarborough or Peterborough or Sudbury or Timmins or Thunder Bay or Cornwall, more people are losing their jobs and falling into poverty every day.

This is a government that, not so long ago, made all kinds of pronouncements about children's mental health. A committee was struck, a special committee, to address that promise, but I can tell you that children's mental health services are disappearing just as cuts to children's

aid societies and children's mental health agencies are happening.

This government, again, is offering up another promise. But the reality out there is that child care spaces are disappearing. They're disappearing in Toronto. They're disappearing in Sudbury. A promise is one thing; reality is another.

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

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to join in this morning and respond to the previous speakers who spoke to Bill 242.

I was pleased when the Premier came to Chatham to visit Victor Lauriston school and talk about the possibilities that existed within early learning. The board members were there. They were very keen on this—the principal of the school and the parents as well.

We did visit some of the young people who were at that school in JK and kindergarten, and it's amazing how much information these young people retained. One little chap was telling us about Macaroni penguins. As soon as we left the tour, the adults were on their BlackBerrys trying to find out if there was such a thing as Macaroni penguins and, indeed, there is. That young fellow will carry that knowledge on for days and months and years to come.

I know this to be true, and many of us would identify with this, because we have grandchildren. Our grandson Trent is only three. He's in a daycare situation, but he is learning so many things and recalling them, remembering them and bringing them into practice.

Here is an example of what young people can remember: We were talking about the current Olympic Games going on at the dinner table. He was seated there, being good, eating his meal. He's listening to us talking about the Olympics, and he immediately broke into singing O Canada. They had been taking the issue of Olympics in daycare. At the age of three, he immediately recognized our conversation and went into singing O Canada—admittedly a somewhat difficult song to learn, but he did very well.

He can't wait to learn and begin to read. He carries books around with him all the time. He must have a few hundred books, and he's just excited and elated to know that one day he is going to read, and that will be very soon.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened quite intently, having served as a school trustee in the past; my wife, a teacher and, in fact, an early childhood educator; and my daughter being a teacher.

I do believe in the sentiment that education is certainly, as Charles Pascal or Roger Martin or Richard Florida would say, an important contribution to the economy and the welfare of the province. We've established that the premise and the objective is acceptable. But when you closely examine the reality, you find out that even in the beginning sections of the preamble of the bill there are some problems.

The problems are here: First of all, it's not fair. It's being implemented over five years. That's two elections. Who's getting left out? Who's getting left behind and why?

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I think this is an example—and the member over there said the Tories would be left out. I would hope that sort of attitude isn't prevailing in your caucus. It certainly may explain why you're not in cabinet.

The other thing is, the full-day learning requires—requires, and the word is in the bill—collaboration between the ECE as well as the teachers. Now, why is the word so demanding as “requiring” co-operation? Well, there are a lot of issues between the Day Nurseries Act and the Education Act.

More importantly, if you look at the promises and the deliverables, you can see here in this bill that they're actually going to be increasing class size. They promised in the last election to have classes of 20; now the classes are going to be 26. You can't have it both ways. I would think they should be first honest with the people. There's a \$25-billion deficit. They're spending \$2.8 million an hour more than they are receiving in revenue. That debt they're accumulating is going to our children. That's who will have to pay it off.

Many of the programs like special education aren't properly funded. Read the article by the Toronto District School Board today: They are short \$17 million, and they are closing schools—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Oakville has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I thought I was listening to Goldilocks there for a few minutes. It sounds like the official opposition says it's way too much, and the NDP says it's not nearly enough, so chances are it's just right.

But certainly there's an excitement out there amongst the profession. The schools have been identified. Those schools that will be offering full-day learning have been identified in my community. I know even Mr. Shurman, the member from Thornhill, with all his cynicism, has got to be excited that four- and five-year-olds in Thornhill will be able to go to school for full-day learning. Even though that thick skin he's developed, he knows that's a good thing for his students.

Applause.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: He's clapping, and that's the right thing for him to do.

It's self-evident that the investment that you make in early childhood education pays off in dividends in the future. There's an old-fashioned thought that maybe we shouldn't start school—there are some cultures that start school in grade 5, I think. Ontario's different. Ontario understands that investment in young people pays dividends for the individuals and pays dividends for the economy. That's why we are doing it.

It is a tough time to do it; the opposition is absolutely right. It's tough economic times out there. It would be

very easy for a government that didn't want to invest in its young people to walk away from this. In fact, there was a fear in the community for a while that because there was a recession, because there were global economic troubles, perhaps the government might not implement this. Well, this is a clear indication that this government has a commitment to full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds.

This initiative deserves the support of all members of the House. It simply is a good thing for our young people, it's a good thing for the economy, and it's a good thing for the province of Ontario and for the future of this province.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I would like to introduce today the parents of my page, Nevan. We have here today Pat and Brian Whiteside, as well as Nevan's uncle.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of the member from Ajax–Pickering and page Matthew Kostuch, we'd like to welcome his mother, Christine Kostuch; his father, Jim; and his sisters Jessica and Kristen, sitting in the west gallery today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

JOB CREATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, we are just weeks away from the end of the fiscal year and it is time to measure you against your promise to create 148,000 net new jobs by year end. Premier, again, you promised 148,000 new jobs but you lost 140,000. You fell well short of your goal and, in fact, went in the wrong direction altogether. Premier, are your job promises even worth the paper that they're printed on?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not exactly sure where my honourable colleague is getting his numbers. What I can say is that when Ontario, like the rest of the country and indeed most of the world, was affected by this global recession, we said that we needed to respond, and we did so in a way that consisted of a number of extraordinary measures. One of those was to invest over \$32 billion in infrastructure. We're talking about building schools, roads, hospitals and bridges and retrofitting schools as well, all with a view to creating jobs in the short term and enhancing our competitiveness in the long term. We know that this year alone, that'll create over 160,000 jobs. So I'm not exactly sure where the target my honour-

able colleague referenced has come from, but we are doing exactly what we need to do, given the times.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, the targets come from your very own budget. I guess that budget's not worth the paper it's printed on if you cannot remember your very own promises.

You promised 148,000 jobs this year and 162,000 next year. You promised 100,000 additional student jobs. In the rest of 2009, the Premier promised 50,000 so-called green energy jobs, 800 Ubisoft jobs, 16,000 Samsung jobs and somehow, 600,000 new jobs from your HST sales tax grab. Altogether, Dalton McGuinty has promised a grand total of one million new jobs in the last year alone, and in that time frame he has lost 140,000.

Premier, why should Ontario families believe your job promises if you cannot or will not deliver?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is having a lot of fun with numbers today. I think it's important to keep in mind what we did say, and I want to come back to our commitment to build new infrastructure in Ontario, in particular, that \$32.5 billion. You may want to recall how the leader of the official opposition received that news. He said, "This \$32.5-billion spend that they're going to do ... I don't think that's the right approach. It's too much."

We're talking about 160,000 jobs this year alone. The Conservatives think we're spending too much on new hospitals, new schools, retrofitting schools, new transit lines to cut commute times, repairs to aging roads and bridges, four-laning highways in the north, HOV lanes in the GTA and new affordable housing. We think it's a good idea to make those—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Obviously it's the Premier who is having fun with numbers. You've pulled out of the air promises of some one million new jobs in the last year alone. But it's not fun for Ontario's hard-working families, who saw 140,000 jobs leave our province in 2009.

I was proud to be part of the PC government that had inherited a province hit by recession but turned things around and created over one million net new jobs and, while we're at it, 20,000 new long-term-care beds, and we upgraded 16,000 more.

In contrast, Dalton McGuinty has turned the Ministry of Health into his own personal slush fund, giving out sweetheart deals to his friends at the Courtyard Group and bloating the size of his regional health bureaucracies, the LHINs.

I'll ask the Premier, when will Dalton the debt doubler offer Ontario families more than simply cheap talk when it comes to private sector jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's interesting how, as my honourable colleague gets a little bit older, he remembers even more clearly things that never happened.

He longs for the good old days, he tells me, of the Conservative government in Ontario under Mike Harris. I think Ontarians have a different perspective, a different

outlook on the warmth and rosinness of those days. They remember our hospitals being closed. They remember our nurses being fired. They remember the never-ending strikes in our schools. They remember schools being closed. They remember water inspectors and meat inspectors being fired. They remember public services being compromised. They remember a \$6-billion deficit. That's what they remember of those years, and they don't want to go back.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: Ontario families long for the day when Ontario will actually again lead Canada in job creation and in economic growth—our historic position in Confederation. Dalton McGuinty's "tax more, spend more, regulate more" policies have laid our economy low and put the mighty province of Ontario on the welfare rolls of Confederation. In fact, under Dalton McGuinty's leadership our province has grown by a paltry 6% total in six years. Premier, with that kind of growth record, why did you expand the size of government by 20%?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: More fun with numbers, no foundation in fact, lots of creativity. One of the things that I find interesting is that we've put forward a dramatic package, for example, when it comes to our tax measures, cutting corporate income taxes, cutting personal income taxes and moving ahead with a harmonized sales tax, something that this party always supported until the idea was presented in this Legislature for the very first time.

At some point in time, it might be of passing interest to the media, but more importantly to members of the Ontario public, if my honourable colleague, on behalf of his party, put forward their plan for the future. We keep doing that every single day. We're proud of our plan. It would be nice to know what they're thinking.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: To the Premier: If you have any kind of plan, it has been a dramatic failure for Ontario families that are seeing Ontario lead Canada in unemployment and job losses.

The Premier asked where these numbers came from; well, from Statistics Canada. When the McGuinty Liberals took office there were 980,000 public servants in Ontario, and today that number is 1.24 million. Premier, that is a 20% increase.

Somebody has to pay for all this. Premier, will it be the Ontario families of today, through higher taxes, or the Ontario families of tomorrow, through the massive debt you've put on future generations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I think there's an important recurring theme here that I should help Ontarians better understand: We have a plan and they don't. We favour full-day learning for Ontario's four- and five-year-olds; they don't. We favour family health teams for Ontario families; they don't. We favour nurse-practitioner-led clinics, for the first time in North America, here in

Ontario; they don't. We favour thousands more nurses for our families; they don't.

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Those are the kinds of contrasts I think it's important for Ontarians to understand. We'll do a little more work to make sure that becomes more apparent for them.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: The only part of Dalton McGuinty's so-called plan that seems to be working is how he is bloating the size and cost of government. Ontario's government has ballooned to 1.24 million employees. When Dalton McGuinty took office, the number of government workers making over \$100,000 a year was just over 20,000. Last year, over 53,000 government workers made it on to the sunshine list. That is a 164% increase. When it comes to your regional health bureaucracies, the so-called LHINs, the number on the \$100,000-plus list has grown a shocking 150% in three years alone.

Premier, do you really believe that Ontario families think you won't raise taxes again to pay for your bloated government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, more fun with numbers. It's true that there is a law on the books that requires that anybody making over \$100,000 have that posted. Every single year, some people who are a little bit below that get a bit more, and then they go above that, and suddenly, they're caught by that particular provision, which is a good provision.

But maybe what we really ought to compare is my office to their office when they were in government. In 2002, it cost taxpayers \$3.8 million to run Premier Harris's office. In 2009, it cost taxpayers almost \$1 million less—\$2.9 million—to run my office. That's the real comparison that we should talk about.

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Everywhere I travel across Ontario, people tell me that they are worried about the harmonized sales tax. Today, they have yet one more reason to worry.

Last June, my office submitted a freedom-of-information request asking for the impact of the HST on family energy costs. This government denied the release of those records, suggesting that the details were top secret and that releasing them would actually threaten Ontario's economic interests. After months and months of appeals, the government finally released one document—just one document.

My question is this: Why did it take eight months for that information to be released?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's no news that the HST will not affect 83% of consumer purchases, but it will affect 17% of consumer purchases, and energy costs are incorporated into that. That's why, as part of our comprehensive package of tax reforms, we have, in addition to the HST, personal income tax cuts; we have an Ontario tax credit which will benefit 2.9 million Ontario families

and individuals; and we have transition payments—all with a view to ensuring that we ease families over this period of time until the costs are passed down to the consumers.

This is not a surprise. Energy costs will be affected, and we have addressed that through other parts of our package of tax reforms to help families through this.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Ministry of Finance briefing note that we received admits the following: “The increase in typical electricity bill is about \$100 each year; the increase in typical natural gas bill is about \$125 each year.” In other words, Ontario families will be paying \$225 more to heat their homes and keep the lights on.

Why was the McGuinty government trying to hide this information from Ontario families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague likes to look at just part of this package and its consequences. I encourage her to take a look at the entire package.

I want to reference again a report which my colleague refuses to read. It's called Not a Tax Grab After All: A Second Look at Ontario's HST. It was put out by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. I'll quote what one of the authors said: “No group is significantly worse off or better off as a result of the province's HST plan. Assertions that this is a tax grab have no foundation in reality.”

I think, again, that's an objective, independent third party assessment of our tax reforms, and it's worth considering.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Here's the situation: Nearly a year after this Liberal government announced the HST, Ontario families now learn that it will cost them \$225 more to heat their homes and keep the lights on. Doesn't the Premier think that Ontario families have a right to know this information, and if so, why did the government spend eight months fighting its release?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It may have come as a surprise just yesterday to my colleague that the HST will cause some items to go up in cost, but that does not come as a surprise to Ontario families. What I would encourage her to understand and to pass on to Ontarians is the fullness of our plan, the fact that it's comprehensive, the fact that it includes transition payments for our families. We're providing families with \$1,000 and single Ontarians with \$300 in support during the transition.

Again, there is this new Ontario tax credit that we're putting in place which will benefit some 2.9 million Ontario families and individuals. That is permanent in nature as well.

A final point, again in reference to the same report, the one that is entitled Not a Tax Grab After All: It points out that poor families are better off, for middle-class families it's a wash, and for our richest families it's—

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

TAXATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. The same freedom-of-information request also asked for the government's estimate on how much the HST on gasoline is going to cost Ontario's families, but the government is still refusing to release that information. Ontario families are already feeling the economic squeeze, and they have a right to this information. So my question is simple: Why is the government refusing to release it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, my honourable colleague appears to be surprised at some of the consequences of the HST. It does affect 17% of consumer purchases, which we are addressing through the other parts of our tax reform—transition payments, permanent income tax cuts and permanent tax credits.

What I'd like my colleague to find a way to speak to as well are the nearly 600,000 new jobs that our package of tax reforms will create. Again, this is the subject of another report which my colleagues don't want to listen to.

I haven't met a single mum or a single dad or a single grandfather or a single grandmother who is not prepared to do whatever it takes to make sure there are jobs there for their children and their grandchildren. That's what our package of tax reforms is about: jobs for us today and jobs for our kids tomorrow.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The arrogance of this Premier is astounding. I am simply asking the same basic question that Ontario families are asking themselves day in and day out as they do their best to budget and to plan for the introduction of the HST. The McGuinty Liberals are fighting the release of information that will cast the HST as it actually is—a blatantly unfair scheme that will make life more expensive.

Why won't the Premier release all the information he has so that Ontario families know how much more they're going to be paying after July 1 for things like gasoline and housing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to quote this independent report again, which my friends choose to deny. The report is from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Here's a quote from their press release:

“The ... government's HST plan is virtually revenue-neutral when viewed as part of a total tax package that includes increased sales and property tax credits and a significant decrease in personal income tax rates.

“No group is significantly worse off or better off as a result of the province's HST plan. Assertions that this is a tax grab have no foundation in reality.”

That's an independent, objective third party. Again, I'd strongly recommend this study to my colleague.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier seems so proud of his unfair tax scheme that he's practically smug about

it. He says the HST is important, but when faced with very, very simple, straightforward questions like how much extra it will cost Ontario families to turn the lights on or heat their homes or drive to work in the morning, the Premier simply shrugs. If this plan is so good, why is he so afraid to come clean on the cost to families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can't recall when any particular piece of government policy has received so much publicity, been the attention of so much media scrutiny and been the subject of so much debate in this House and outside. And that's very important.

It is true that we stand proudly behind our package of tax reforms. My friend would have us freeze in the headlights of an economic recession in a world that's changed. We believe it's important for us to do things to make ourselves stronger and create more jobs—nearly 600,000 more jobs. My friend may dismiss that as being unimportant; we think it's very important. We think it's very important to our families. We think it's important to our future. That's why we're moving ahead with this package of tax reforms.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, when I first heard someone in your caucus say that morale over there is lower than a garter snake on a backcountry road, I thought they were saying it because you didn't like them. I'm not saying this statement came from the member from Don Valley East, but after you made him carry George Smitherman's dirty laundry in the eHealth boondoggle, no one would blame him if he did. Your former health minister is going rogue, with plans to charge Ontario families \$50 a month for tap water and dividing your caucus over whether to make the TTC an essential service. Is your caucus leaking their discontent and going rogue because they don't like you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is what the official opposition has been reduced to. Families are concerned about their jobs, about the future of our economy, about our ability to come together and work in their interests, to ensure that we can make sure that health care is sustainable as the baby boomers march towards their retirement starting next year. Those are the things that weigh heavily on their minds, and all my honourable colleague opposite wants to do is play silly politics. It's a sad statement; it's an unfortunate development.

I look forward, in the supplementary, to something that addresses the economy, health care and education, what we can be doing together to build a stronger Ontario for all the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment. I would remind the honourable member as well of comments that I made last week that we should not be addressing questions that pertain to internal affairs of any of the parties, that you should be putting forward questions that pertain to issues of importance to Ontarians.

Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker.

The member for Don Valley East isn't an isolated case. You also proposed a government resolution that you said would be debated over four days. But just like with your job creation promises, what you said and what you deliver are two different things. Debate on the resolution collapsed after just four speakers. It's a clear sign that the Liberal caucus doesn't want to carry the can for any more PR schemes cooked up by Dalton McGuinty's inner circle of unelected political advisors. None of your members in the House, not the Acting Premier nor the Minister of Revenue, stood up to rescue the debate. You must be embarrassed. Will there be more changes in the front bench during prorogation?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to say to my colleagues opposite that it's my sense, it's my firmest belief that, ultimately, what we do and say here is not about us; it's about the people of Ontario; it's about their hopes, their aspirations, their values, their longings, their yearnings and their futures. I think they want us to focus on their health care and want us to focus on their economy, their jobs, their environment, their infrastructure and their transit—all those kinds of things. I just don't see any of that in this question, and I encourage my colleague, when the next time comes around for him to ask a question, that he focus on those things that are important to Ontarians.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Labour. On Christmas Eve, four Toronto construction workers died in a tragic scaffolding accident. Last week, another worker fell to his death at a Toronto work site. In response to the earlier tragedy, the McGuinty government launched what they called a safety blitz. I'd like the minister to report to this House, since the blitz began, how many sites have been inspected and how many violations have been documented?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the question. The member is quite right when she says that we have launched a blitz, a Safe at Work Ontario blitz, where our health and safety inspectors, which we doubled over the last six years—we have 430—are out there every day, today, on those job sites collecting that data.

At the same time that I launched that blitz, I said that it would be a 90-day blitz and at the completion of that exercise, those stats would be reported and put on to our website publicly for all to see.

We continue on that blitz. We are getting those numbers. At the conclusion of those 90 days, I say to the member, those numbers will be made public.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I have to question the effectiveness of the blitz if workers are still dying on the job during the blitz. But that's not the only troubling aspect of how the ministry is handling this deadly issue. I have correspondence here from a complainant. He wrote to the

ministry about unsafe scaffolding. Ten weeks after sending this letter, along with photos to illustrate the safety violations, he has yet to hear one word back from this ministry. How can we have any confidence that this minister is serious about cracking down on unsafe workplaces if this minister shows such blatant disregard for a legitimate complaint?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I know I've said this before but it bears repeating: The number one priority for myself and for the Ministry of Labour is the health and safety of our workers. Whenever there is one fatality or one serious injury, that is one too many. That's why our inspectors in the year 2008—those are the stats I have—did 42,000 inspections. Ten thousand of those 42,000 were in cases where they were called in. The other 32,000 were proactive inspections. That's what our inspectors will continue to do, those proactive inspections.

We have also embarked on a comprehensive review of our occupational health and safety, both enforcement and prevention systems. We are always striving to do better when it comes to protecting the workers of Ontario.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. On January 12, all Ontarians, including over 9,000 Haitian-Ontarians, heard the shocking news that Haiti, one of the world's most impoverished countries, was hit by a series of 7.0-magnitude earthquakes causing catastrophic destruction. Hundreds of thousands of people were injured and it is estimated that 200,000 people have been killed. Those who have survived still have very limited access to drinking water, food, medical supplies, shelter and transportation. These basic needs remain a high priority to all relief efforts. In response, I've seen the outpouring of generosity at an event in Scarborough–Rouge River that raised \$125,000 at the Chinese Cultural Centre.

Minister, there is so much more to do for the people—
1100

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

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I want to thank the member from Scarborough–Rouge River for his compassion for and his dedication to the people of Haiti. The example that the member has provided in his community shows the generosity and the true spirit in Ontario with regard to this catastrophe. I want to thank the member for his involvement in that.

Just a few days following the earthquake, our government provided \$1 million in emergency aid to the Red Cross. Over the last few weeks, we have provided 2,000 kilos of emergency medical supplies through World Vision. We have covered travel costs to bring Ontarians home from Montreal. Ontario's chief forensic pathologist was part of the international disaster victim identification mission.

We've done that. We will do more, and we will continue to liaise with the—

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

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you, Minister. Ontarians should be proud that we're showing the people of Haiti and the international community that Ontario is involved and able to help.

With so much being done and yet so much left to do, I feel it's very important that our government continue to support the relief efforts in Haiti.

At a conference in Montreal that included the Prime Minister of Haiti, the international community attempted to set the stage for Haiti's recovery and committed to continued support. Several international agencies and economist Jeffrey Sachs estimate the cost of rebuilding Haiti is \$10 billion to \$15 billion. There is no doubt that the demand for aid and support will continue in the months ahead. Minister, with billions of dollars needed to rebuild Haiti, how is our government monitoring the relief efforts and how can we ensure that the aid is being distributed effectively to those who need it most?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Again, I want to thank the member from Scarborough–Rouge River. There's no doubt that there is a long road ahead for the people of Haiti. Certainly the numbers that he said are high. Haiti's recovery is going to be a long process which will demand continued and dedicated effort from the international community.

Currently, Emergency Management Ontario has done an exceptional job and is working closely across government to assess how Ontario can best provide further assistance and ensure effective efforts.

Recent catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami and the earthquake in Haiti have demonstrated Ontario's spirit of generosity and how we are willing to respond to the call to help our neighbours, whether they live in Ontario or thousands of miles away. Our government will proudly continue to represent that spirit.

ABORIGINAL LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. The minister is a fairly new member of the cabinet, having been picked by Dalton McGuinty over others in the Liberal caucus who have bided their time for some years.

Minister, is it government policy or a McGuinty Liberal policy to consider flying the Canadian flag an act of provocation?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to thank the member opposite for his question. It gives me the opportunity to indicate, which I'm sure all members of the Legislature would agree with, that I'm very proud of being a Canadian citizen and flying the Canadian flag.

I think every opportunity that we have—particularly, I think we have a special opportunity today and in the days ahead, with the Olympics, to express our pride, being a very proud nation which contributes a great deal to the rest of the world. I think we have a perfect example with the Olympics today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: In 2006, a man was arrested for carrying the Canadian flag down the streets of Caledonia, but when someone walked down the same street—they walked down the same street—with a Mohawk warrior flag, he got a police escort. The lawyer defending your government in a civil lawsuit characterized the flying of the Canadian flag as an act of provocation. He's your solicitor, your agent in the courtroom. He wouldn't speak without instructions, so he must be speaking for you. Why does the McGuinty government treat flying a Canadian flag as a provocative criminal act in Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I would like to refer this supplementary question to the Minister of Community Safety.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: This is the problem we have: We have people who try to incite that type of inappropriate behaviour. I will always support the actions of the Ontario Provincial Police. I will never interfere in operational matters.

This member and every other member in this House should support those types of actions that prevent violence. They should be supporting the OPP. That leader, that member and that side of the House should be ashamed of themselves.

NORTHERN AND RURAL HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Northern and rural communities are losing their health care services. Emergency rooms, operating rooms, in-patient beds and outpatient services are either closing or threatened with closure.

When local residents ask about these closures, this government tells them that these decisions are in their best interests. Can the minister tell me what policies at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care are guiding the LHINs in making these decisions about rural and northern health care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very happy to have a chance to answer that question. This is an issue, of course, that is facing jurisdictions around the world. As medical care becomes more sophisticated and more highly specialized, it's really important that we find ways to offer that very high-quality health care to all Ontarians, regardless of where they live. This is, in fact, the spirit that is guiding us as we actually improve health care for people right across the province.

There are unique challenges that are faced by people who live in rural and northern areas. That is why we have struck a panel that is helping us to understand the challenges in rural communities and actually give us advice on how we continue to improve services for people right across the province. The northern and rural panel will identify those challenges—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The northern and rural panel actually excludes hospitals, they cannot make recommendations that would increase financial demands and they have held no consultations. They won't till after they make recommendations to the minister.

This government is making decisions for northern and rural communities as if they were urban settings, but they are not. The Ontario Health Coalition understands that rural and northern communities need adequate health care services and they need to be heard. That is why I will be joining them in their town hall meetings across rural and northern Ontario.

The Ministry of Health policies, the lens through which LHINs look at rural and northern health care closures, have an urban bias. Will the minister commit to reviewing those biased policies and listen to the people of northern and rural Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I can absolutely assure you that I will listen to the people of northern and rural communities. We are doing that right now and we have asked the panel to come back with advice.

I think it's important to clarify that there are three phases to the work of the northern and rural panel. The first phase is coming to a close. They will be presenting their report in coming weeks. That will trigger the second phase, which is a broad consultation across the province in rural and northern areas so that we can actually hear more from people across the province. The third phase will inform the development of our provincial framework; that is the third and final stage.

We are very interested in hearing what people have to say. We are very interested in the solutions that are coming from rural and northern areas as we work to really improve health care in this province.

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TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

Mr. Reza Moridi: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, we are constantly looking for ways to spur innovation and to make use of green technology. Earlier in the month, a number of pilot projects were announced which achieve both of these objectives by piloting green technology at schools across the province.

These projects provide an excellent opportunity to expose our students and their parents to these innovative, environmentally friendly technologies. I understand that the project types were diverse and that the many innovations are from companies based in Ontario. I would also think that, in the booming field of green technology, there will be much interest in these projects. Would the minister let us know more about the projects and the next steps in these exciting pilot projects?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think that the people of Ontario would be very interested to know that our government is making some significant investments. We have established an important partnership with the Ministry of Research and Innovation, and in doing so we are

investing \$20 million to pilot innovative green projects in more than 155 Ontario schools across 40 school boards.

Now, school boards are very eager to look for ways that they can run their operations more economically. They believe that investing in green technologies will assist them in effecting more cost-effective expenditures in their operations, particularly as they relate to the energy used in their plants. So these project school boards are going to be looking very carefully at how successful they are and where they will be achieving savings, so that they can implement them in other—

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

Mr. Reza Moridi: I am truly excited to see these technologies being piloted across the province, but this is especially exciting news for the constituents and the companies—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Welland, even with your back to me I can still hear you.

Please continue.

Mr. Reza Moridi: —the companies involved and, most importantly, the students who will benefit from seeing green technology at work. With exposure to these projects, it's very conceivable that young minds may be impressed, influencing them to consider a career in the field years down the lane.

Red Maple Public School, a school in the York Region District School Board in my riding of Richmond Hill, received funding through this investment for SolarWall PV thermal photovoltaic walls for the school, which serve to produce both electricity and warm air for the buildings.

I know that there were many projects announced through the pilot, but I am wondering if the minister—

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

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I very much appreciate the question from the honourable member, who's obviously very interested in understanding how our investments in education—

Mr. Howard Hampton: What was the question?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Well, if the honourable member from Kenora's caucus wasn't heckling so much, perhaps you would have heard the question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will please come to order. Minister of Education?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The member has identified a particular program that we have in place, and I think it is important that, in addition to the environmental and educational benefits that these pilot projects will have in our schools and our communities, they will also benefit the communities and the local businesses that will be participating in providing the materials in the community.

What school boards have recognized is that when they are able to achieve savings in areas such as this, they are then able to take the dollars they save and direct more to

the students and programs in their classrooms. So this is good news for the environment, it's good news for the people in the community and, most particularly, it's good news for the students in our schools who will appreciate that they are in a green facility and—

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

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is for the Premier, and it relates to his government's plans for the construction of the new Dalton McGuinty office tower. At a time when the city of Toronto has millions of square feet of empty office space, when leasing rates are on a downward spiral, we now learn that the government is making application to construct a new office tower which will reportedly be one of the tallest buildings in the city of Toronto, all for the purpose of housing his expanding bureaucracy.

Can the Premier tell us why his government would feel compelled to go into competition with the private sector? When commercial landlords are already on the ropes, why would his government want to spend millions of dollars constructing a new office tower in competition with the private sector?

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm pleased to respond to the question of the member opposite. Indeed, ORC is responsible for the government's assets. The member is somewhat correct: ORC has indeed put forward a planning application to the city of Toronto to go through the process. What ORC does, on behalf of the taxpayers of this province, is to try and ensure they're getting the highest and best use for whatever properties we have. That's particularly important as we go through tough times, that we look to ORC to provide that kind of leadership to ensure they are getting the highest and best use out of our assets. That is what this is about. They are looking to get the highest and best use out of that asset.

I appreciate the question, and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: The issue is not for the ORC to take leadership; that's the responsibility of the government.

The question that I have, and perhaps the minister has missed the thrust of the question: At a time when we are in economic turmoil, when the government has a \$25-billion deficit, when the word of the day is "fiscal constraint," how can the government authorize the ORC to spend literally multi-millions of taxpayers' dollars at this point in time to build an office building that would be in direct competition with the private sector, where there are literally millions of square feet of empty office space? Could the government not in fact direct the ORC to work with the private sector to accommodate the government's

needs and not get into competition with the private sector?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member is jumping the gun a little bit here. The ORC is looking, as I said, to ensure that they have an opportunity to maximize the value of our assets on behalf of the taxpayers of this province. That's what they are doing here. There's no decision on the part of this government that has been made to build anything at this point in time.

Certainly, though, we take the advice of the member seriously. We always want to make sure that our agencies are acting on behalf of the people of this province in the best possible way. We'll continue to take a look at their actions, and we'll continue to make sure that those actions are responsible when it comes to the management of the public assets. And I'll certainly continue, as minister, to ensure that ORC is making these decisions in the best interests of Ontario taxpayers.

HOME CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. This morning in Brockville, home care workers and health care experts are holding a press conference because home care services are threatened in their community.

When this government quietly ended the moratorium on competitive bidding just over a year ago, we knew it was shamefully choosing private profit over quality care. Ontarians who depend on home care are extremely concerned that their quality of care is threatened.

My question is a simple one: Why won't this government finally take the only sensible step and end competitive bidding once and for all in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite knows that providing care for people in their homes is often what prevents them from going into long-term care or into the hospital. So providing home care is an essential part of the continuum of care that we offer through health.

We are absolutely committed to improving and enhancing services offered in-home. It's the best place for people to be, and we will continue to enhance services for people in their own homes.

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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: With all due respect, what this minister should know is that people want quality care. That's what they want in this province. They want quality care. Since competitive bidding was introduced more than a decade ago, the quality of home care has suffered, working conditions have diminished and costs have increased. Ontario is the only province in the entire country with a full competitive bidding system for home care, and even within Ontario no other part of the health care system uses competitive bidding.

How much more evidence does this Premier and his minister need before they do the right thing and end com-

petitive bidding in this province in home care, once and for all?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite is absolutely right. It is about quality, and we are committed to the very highest quality standards as we move forward. We're also committed to continuity of care for patients and stability for health care workers. The new strategy for continuity of care includes those quality measures and public reporting periods.

A competitive bidding process will ensure consistent quality of care for clients and enhance fairness and transparency in selection. Most importantly, it will provide clients with care suited to their medical condition.

We've invested significantly in this sector. Let me highlight some of the things that have been done: \$30 million towards a personal support worker stabilization strategy. That increases the base minimum wage for PSWs to \$12.50 an hour, it provides improved compensation for the travel costs and for travel time, and it—

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

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is also for the Minister of Health. Minister, one of the most telling indicators our constituents use to measure the quality of their health care in Ontario—and frankly, to measure our promise as a government to work tirelessly to deliver excellent health care—are wait times. The length of time it takes for a citizen to access a medically necessary service such as an MRI test will not only affect their health outcomes, but also their confidence in the system as a whole.

Can the minister please tell us what progress has been made in the province to bring down wait times for medically necessary services?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It is absolutely important that the people of Ontario have access to medically necessary services as quickly as possible—in a timely, efficient manner. When it comes to reducing wait times, we're doing three things: We're measuring wait times, we're making these results available to the public and, most importantly, we're bringing wait times down.

Since 2003, we've opened 19 new MRIs, and we are seeing the results of those investments. Since 2003, we've almost doubled the number of MRI exams per year from about 276,000 to over half a million. We've delivered almost 900,000 more MRI scans as a result of these investments and we've seen MRI wait times come down. We are continuing to work to improve access to MRIs, we're increasing capacity and we're ensuring that MRI services—

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm pleased with the work we as a government are doing to address wait times across Ontario, but as the member for Ottawa Centre, I have been keenly aware—and my constituents are understandably concerned—that Ottawa has had one of the longest

wait times for MRI scans in Ontario. This is clearly not an acceptable situation for the residents of Ottawa, myself as their MPP, or this government's clear goal of reducing wait times, as you have just shared with us.

Minister, I know you have been attentive to this situation. I was pleased that you came to Ottawa civic hospital in January to tour our facilities and see the situation on the ground for yourself. My constituents would like to know what has been done to remedy the delay in our community for access to MRI scans, and what actions we can take going forward to further reduce the wait times those in need of this important service are facing in my community of Ottawa.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: One of the benefits of actually measuring wait times is that you can make strategic investments where the needs are the greatest. In Ottawa, we've worked very hard with the Champlain LHIN to actually significantly improve MRI access in Ottawa. We've increased the number of MRIs from three in 2003 to eight: three at the Ottawa Hospital, one at the Queensway Carleton, two at Montfort and two at CHEO. Today we're providing almost 20,000 more MRIs every year than in 2004-05.

A new MRI machine was added at the Ottawa Hospital in January. Another machine at Montfort is scheduled to be operational in coming weeks. Combined, these machines will provide an additional 6,000 scans, actually.

Another great initiative in Champlain is that they are developing a region-wide network, a single queue, for diagnostic scans that will improve—

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

JOB CREATION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Premier. Premier, your government continually boasts about creating over one million jobs. The reality is that this year alone, your government has presided over the loss of 140,000 jobs. Just one more example of the losses in manufacturing is the Invar plant in Batawa, east of my riding of Durham, in the riding of Prince Edward-Hastings. Premier, this plant is closing, with a loss of 134 jobs. This is 134 families with no income. Furthermore, there were closings of the General Mills and PepsiCo Canada plant in Trenton. Premier, why is there such a wide gap between your government's job numbers and the day-to-day reality in the communities of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's always very difficult for the communities, but especially for the families involved, when there are job losses. Sadly, some of that still continues as I believe we reach the tail end of this recession.

But there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I want to reference a Conference Board of Canada report which was just released, that says that Ontario will surpass the national average for the first time in nearly a decade, with growth of 3.5%. Ontario's growth this year will exceed eight other provinces. It will also exceed the national average for the first time in 10 years.

What I say to these families is that we will do everything within our power to ensure that we live up to this prognosis on the part of the Conference Board of Canada and put in place the kinds of measures that give them reason to be hopeful, because of the job creation element that we're putting forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Premier, the evidence is quite the contrary. The only jobs that you're giving out are to your Liberal friends through the boondoggles at eHealth and others.

The government also tells us of their investments in Korea with Samsung. These are all promissory notes, post-dated cheques. Premier, with all of your good news, could you tell us: What number of jobs are you planning to lose next year in the economy of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I want to remind my colleague about that good news from the Conference Board of Canada that we're going to exceed the national average for the first time in 10 years.

We're supporting 25,000 Ontarians who have lost their jobs in our Second Career strategy, and that's a program that my friend and his party oppose. We're cutting corporate income taxes to give our businesses a bit more competitiveness in a highly competitive global economy. My friend and his party opposite don't support that measure. We continue to find ways to work with our businesses and to work with folks who have lost their jobs. In every possible venture and overture that we make, we are opposed in every way by the party opposite.

Again, we look forward to a plan at some point in time on the part of the Conservative Party that says what they're going to do for Ontarians. We have our plan. We're proud of it. We're always looking for ways to improve it. If there are suggestions in this regard, we would welcome them.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Two weeks ago at a press conference at Quanser in Markham, you said: "In a highly competitive, knowledge-based global economy, we're not going to succeed in Ontario by pulling stuff out of the ground." Given this statement, is this why you've chosen not to do anything to avert the closure of the Xstrata smelter in Timmins?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would encourage my colleague to look at all of my statement. I've had the opportunity to speak to this issue on many occasions. The fact of the matter is that the future of our economy is going to depend on growth in a number of areas, including in natural resources.

One exciting new story that keeps coming out of the north has to do with this Ring of Fire, which is part of the James Bay lowlands. It is going to be, as I understand it, the only source of chromite in North America, which is an essential ingredient in stainless steel. It's the biggest find of its kind in North America. It's the only source, in fact, in North America. We think that there's a great op-

portunity for economic development, and we look forward to working with the community to ensure that we develop that in the best possible way.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Premier, it was very clear in what you said, in that you said, “We’re not going to grow by pulling stuff out of the ground.”

We have a world-class refinery smelter in the city of Timmins. It’s the only copper smelter refinery; it’s the highest-tech one; it’s the cleanest one in the country, and you’re doing nothing to avert its closure.

I ask you again: What are you prepared to do in order to intervene and make sure that Xstrata does not shut down its smelter refinery in Timmins? Will you commit to the mining industry of this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I am absolutely committed to the mining industry in our province. I’m grateful for the wealth that they have created, the families that they have supported and the way that all Ontarians have benefited as a result of that.

I want to remind my colleague about something that he knows. I had a good conversation with Timmins mayor Tom Laughren last week. We spoke about the potential for future uses of that very same smelter. The mayor is looking for a bit of economic support so that they might hire a consultant to help them better understand the opportunities available for future use of that smelter. We are working hard on that. I think we’re going to have some good news for Timmins in the not-too-distant future on that particular matter.

I want to thank the mayor and I want to thank the people of Timmins for their continuing optimism and determination to find more opportunity with an existing piece of infrastructure, and we want to work with them to make it a reality.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, during the previous session, I heard many members of the opposition accuse the Ministry of Labour of forcing companies out of business due to overzealous enforcement activities. While I’ve heard no such stories emerge out of my riding of Mississauga South, I was nonetheless deeply troubled to hear these shocking statements.

I have, however, heard stories about the dedication and professionalism of the Ministry of Labour inspectors. Moreover, when I talk to local business owners they are appreciative of the efforts of this government, especially when it comes to trying to make them more competitive. Can the minister please explain what ministry inspectors do and put these allegations to rest?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for the question. I’m grateful for this opportunity to address these allegations.

One of the key roles of the Ministry of Labour is to investigate health and safety incidents in workplaces and to ensure that the Occupational Health and Safety Act is followed and enforced. The opposition likes to say that

by dedicating so much time to health and safety and enforcement, my ministry is forcing companies out of business. In fact, by preventing injuries and creating healthier workplaces, we’re not only saving lives; we’re also saving businesses money. For every workplace injury, each of those incidents costs the WSIB and employers \$120,000 in direct and indirect costs, and that doesn’t include the immeasurable emotional impact on our families, our friends and our community. These are all costs which are completely preventable. Thanks to the hard work of the Ministry of Labour staff, we have fewer injuries in the workplace and—

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

DEFERRED VOTES

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on a motion by Ms. Smith that the federal government support Ontarians in budget 2010.

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

The division bells rang from 1134 to 1139.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Will the members please take their seats.

Ms. Smith has moved government notice of motion number 172. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Gravelle, Michael	Naqvi, Yasir
Arthurs, Wayne	Hoskins, Eric	Oraziotti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Hoy, Pat	Pendergast, Leeanna
Bartolucci, Rick	Jaczek, Helena	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kwinter, Monte	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramal, Khalil
Brotten, Laurel C.	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Chan, Michael	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Fonseca, Peter	Moridi, Reza	
Gerretsen, John	Murray, Glen R.	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Klees, Frank	Savoline, Joyce
Bailey, Robert	Martiniuk, Gerry	Shurman, Peter
Chudleigh, Ted	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	O’Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakubuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 49; the nays are 18.

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

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a lonely place here at the top. Durham riding residents are growing more concerned about the new tax this government will introduce on July 1. This morning, we heard of the increase in electricity and natural gas. I had the opportunity to speak with businesses, families, retirees and indeed, Durham residents in walks around my constituency.

I can tell you that they aren't buying the McGuinty government's sales tax campaign for the HST. Their particular concern is over the impact of an added cost of 8% on essential things such as heating, electricity, natural gas and gasoline.

This tax is simply more than Ontarians can afford at this time. It is especially onerous for persons on fixed incomes; for instance, retirees, students, persons on disability, and those of modest income who are already finding it difficult to make ends meet. Those Ontarians don't have expense accounts or sweetheart consulting deals with the McGuinty government.

I would remind the House that time is running out. This government must act now to avoid the damage that they will pursue with the HST, even if they would come clean with the people of Ontario and tell them, "We're changing the tax rules to increase the revenue, to deal with the \$25-billion deficit." That's the long and short of it. Regardless of what they say, they're changing the tax rules, yes, on the income side, yes, on the business side. But the bottom line for the consumers is, you're going be paying more and getting less.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Paul Miller: Grandparents raising their grandchildren receive \$231 for the first grandchild and less for each subsequent grandchild, while unrelated foster parents receive \$900 per month per child. Over the past two years, since we raised this sorry situation, many grandparents have lived in fear of having their meagre temporary care assistance cut off because of this government's flawed directives.

Thanks to one grandmother's courageous two-year fight, the Social Benefits Tribunal issued its decision that she is entitled to the financial support and that the government is wrong in its interpretation of the intent of temporary care assistance. The tribunal concluded that a large and liberal interpretation must be applied to the TCA eligibility decisions.

I am appalled by the minister's callous response to my question yesterday. She said, "I encourage them to appeal

after they have spoken to the administrator of the program in each of their municipalities."

Why is this minister condemning these grandparenting families to further financial and emotional stress, and unnecessarily spending taxpayers' dollars to fight this Liberal government's inhumane treatment of these grandchildren? The tribunal's decision is quite clear. Why would this minister want to inflict further pain on these grandparents, who have set aside their retirement plans to ensure that their grandchildren have a good home with their blood relatives?

On behalf of grandparents raising their grandchildren, the unsung heroes of the child care system, I again implore the minister and the government to take immediate action to introduce regulatory changes to ensure that temporary care assistance is equally delivered across Ontario in accordance with the original intent and the law.

VARIETY VILLAGE

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I rise today to speak about Variety Village and the significant role it has played in the lives of children with disabilities.

Variety Village was opened in 1948 as a residential training school for boys with physical disabilities. It championed the goals of independence, access and personal achievement for children with disabilities.

With the construction of the Variety Village sports training and fitness centre in the 1980s, accessibility, inclusion and the achievement of personal goals for people with disabilities found a new home, as those with disabilities actively participated alongside able-bodied children for the first time.

Variety Village is unique to North America and one of the few places internationally to have a mandate which has continued to evolve over the years to meet the diversity of today's disabilities. This evolution has been driven by two significant factors. First, as medical advances have produced a significant reduction in congenital physical disabilities, there have been drastic increases in the identification and diagnosis of developmental disabilities, particularly the alarming increase in children with autism. Secondly, as the children originally served by Variety Village have grown older, their need for specialized programs and facilitated physical activity has continued.

Integration and acceptance are characteristics that make Variety Village the extraordinary place it is. Variety Village is grateful for the support of the Ontario government and is now working with corporations, foundations, individuals and all levels of government to establish a healthy and sustainable funding model to ensure that the important work that it does continues for many years to come.

EASTERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Yesterday at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association convention, my leader

and I and some of my eastern Ontario colleagues met with the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus. One of the issues we discussed was the unfair treatment that eastern Ontario receives in comparison to northern Ontario.

In 2006, I introduced a private member's bill to create an eastern Ontario economic development fund, and the McGuinty government adopted my idea just prior to the last election. Much as I'm pleased that they have adopted my idea, it is time the government put its money where its mouth is and funded the eastern Ontario development fund to the same level as it funds the northern Ontario heritage fund. Eastern Ontario has a population that is greater than that of northern Ontario, and yet the northern Ontario heritage fund receives \$120 million a year while the eastern Ontario development fund receives only \$20 million a year.

The wardens would like to see the funding criteria changed so that smaller businesses, those with five employees or more, are able to access funding. This could be done if the fund were administered by a board of local representatives from eastern Ontario rather than having it run by the bureaucrats down here in Toronto. This is the way the northern Ontario heritage fund operates, and I think the eastern Ontario development fund should run the same way.

I call upon the government of Ontario to treat eastern Ontario residents and businesses equally by putting a local board of directors in charge of the eastern Ontario development fund and by funding it equally to the northern Ontario heritage fund.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mr. David Zimmer: My riding of Willowdale has seen a boom in condominium construction in the last 20 years. In fact, it may come as a surprise to some members that my riding has the largest number of condominium owners in the province of Ontario. That's why I'm pleased today to speak about how our government is helping condominium owners manage their reserve funds.

The Ministry of Consumer Services will be extending the 10-year deadline for condominiums to fund their reserve funds. The Condominium Act, 1998, introduced a 10-year deadline for condominiums registered before May 2001 to maintain their reserve fund requirements. As this deadline approaches, it's appropriate to review the environment within which the industry is operating, including the current economic climate. Working with condo sector partners, our government has determined that extending the reserve fund deadline from 10 to 15 years will give boards more flexibility with their budgets. This change will come into effect July 1, 2010.

This is good news for condominium owners in Willowdale. It's a significant step in responding to the needs of condo owners, and it would mean that condominium corporations registered before 2001 will have an additional five years to ensure that their reserve funds are adequately funded.

BOWL FOR KIDS SAKE

Mrs. Julia Munro: Big Brothers Big Sisters describes Bowl for Kids Sake as their premier "fun-raising" event, where people get together with friends, family and co-workers and have a fun time bowling in support of Big Brother Big Sister mentoring programs in their communities. I encourage everyone to get involved in the important fundraising event.

York region's Big Brothers Big Sisters has six more bowling days scheduled in the region of York and in the town of Bradford in my riding. Bowling days are also scheduled across Canada, and you can find out when and where to participate at the website www.bowlforkidsake.ca.

1510

Last Sunday I was pleased to participate in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of York region Bowl for Kids Sake fundraiser at the Baldwin Rock'N Bowl in Georgina. This is part of a nationwide fundraiser.

It would be unfair of me to reveal my own team's score, but I want to thank the organizers for providing an exciting day of competition, with all of the money going to a good cause. The turnout for the event was great, and all of the alleys were fully booked as members of our community took the time to come and bowl for a very good cause.

ROTARY CLUB OF BRAMALEA

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I rise today to recognize the Rotary Club of Bramalea. I had the privilege of participating in the 45th-anniversary celebration of the Rotary Club of Bramalea. This organization is made up of men and women in my community who dedicate their time and energy to make the lives of their fellow community members better.

The Rotary Club of Bramalea was founded in 1965 and has been a fixture in our community. Over the last five years, the Rotary Club has raised over \$50,000 for the fire safety building at Chinguacousy Park; \$50,000 for the Wellspring foundation; money for a charity in Mexico; and has raised over \$2,000 for the Feed the Children organization for kids in Guyana. The club also supports the Salvation Army food bank and Polio Plus, and started the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program, which now runs all across Canada.

The money raised comes from the community from the 50/50 draws held at the Brampton Battalion home games and various fundraisers which are held throughout the year.

The success of this organization comes from volunteers such as Mr. Jerry Vanderklaauw, who is the director of international services for the Rotary Club of Bramalea. Jerry has faithfully volunteered his time to ensure that the organization maintains its goals in helping the community.

The work done by this organization deserves to be recognized, and I want to wish this organization continued success.

DEREK WHITSON

Mr. Pat Hoy: It is day 12, and what an incredible performance all Canadian athletes are putting on in Vancouver. And the excitement and thrill don't end on February 28, as an elite international competition will continue with the Paralympic Winter Games in March.

I'm proud to recognize Derek Whitson of Chatham, who will be representing Canada in the Vancouver Paralympic Games as a member of the sledge hockey team.

Derek was born with cerebral palsy. At just 20 years of age he has already travelled to several continents, playing football and sledge hockey for Canada. This will be Derek's first Paralympic Winter Games, but he competed in the 2007 Pan Am Games and world championships in the football seven-a-side. Earlier this season Derek helped Team Canada take home the silver medal at the 2009 World Sledge Hockey Challenge.

An accomplished artist, Derek has donated his artwork to support fellow athletes through the Canadian Athletes Now "Art of Believing" art auction.

Derek is an inspiration to all young people of what can be achieved if you believe in your dream and have the courage and determination to carry it through. This dream is a culmination of hard work and tireless dedication. His achievements show us that nothing is impossible.

Derek and his teammates will begin their quest for gold starting March 13. I wish them and the entire Canadian team good luck. Once again we say, "Go, Canada, go."

CHRISTINE NESBITT

Mr. Khalil Ramal: It's my pleasure to stand up before the House today and commend London native Christine Nesbitt on winning an Olympic gold medal in speed skating on Thursday. I had the pleasure of watching her compete against her contenders, and I felt proud that one of our own is the world's top speed skater.

Christine developed her love for speed skating in the London Speed Skating Club, where she was a member for many years. While we were all watching Christine compete in Vancouver, I would like to acknowledge the tremendous impact she has had on young athletes in London. Our local heroes have the greatest impact on our youth, and Christine has done an excellent job at being one.

Christine's hard work, dedication and commitment to her goals make her a strong role model for anyone who wants to achieve success. Her work ethic and passion have greatly influenced our growing athletes in London, who see her as an inspiration.

I wish Christine all the best in her future endeavours and thank her for being an exemplary athlete and role model for many people in London and in Ontario. I want to congratulate her, her family and all the people in Ontario for her success.

Thank you for allowing me to do this statement.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(b), the following changes be made to the ballot list for private members' public business: Mr. Hudak and Ms. Jones exchange places in the order of precedence such that Mr. Hudak assumes ballot item number 73 and Ms. Jones assumes ballot item number 65; and that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), the requirement for notice be waived with respect to ballot item number 65.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to rise today and to present once again a petition that affects the people of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services" that affect families and businesses each day. A list of those costs includes the following: natural gas; electricity; gasoline; coffee; newspapers and magazines; home heating oil; "haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements"—the list goes on; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the health tax, which" now "costs upwards of \$600 to \$900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes again;

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

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

I am pleased to sign to support this and present it to Jordan, one of the pages in their last week here at the Legislature—I think.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have petitions with regard to health care in Parry Sound–Muskoka. They read:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare has undertaken an operational audit to identify efficiencies and reduce costs; and

“Whereas we recognize that the status quo is not an option; and

“Whereas rehab services are of paramount concern to the residents of the region where income levels exclude them from accessing other alternatives; and

“Whereas the deficit recovery plan will not balance the budget;

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

“That the Minister of Health provide additional operational funding of 5% amounting to \$3.4 million to ensure the continuation of services as described in the deficit reduction plan submitted to the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN dated January 29, 2010.”

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Petitions? Petitions? If there are no further petitions, orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PENSION BENEFITS
AMENDMENT ACT, 2010LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 18, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act / Projet de loi 236, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite.

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

Mr. John O’Toole: It’s Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act. We’ve heard the leadoff speech by our critic, the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka—excellent remarks. In fact, I had a breeze-through over lunch period to look at those remarks to make sure that I don’t repeat them.

1520

But I just want to put on the record with a bit of liberty here this afternoon that we’re all making remarks with respect to the Olympics: “Go, Canada, go.” I’d like to add my voice to that, but more importantly, the ski club that my family and I belonged to for a long, long time was called Kirby Ski Club, and it has now changed its name to Brimacombe. I don’t why they did that, but nonetheless—Matt Morison is skiing this Friday, and he’s from that club. He’s a young fellow. I met him, but not in his current role as the world champion in parallel

snowboard. They are having an event this Saturday at the Brimacombe ski club, and I hope to participate in that.

Now on to more serious things. Not that that isn’t serious, but go, Matt, go; and go, Canadians, go. They’re all doing a great job out there. Not to change this into a tough topic, a tough time or a tough voice—we’re likely going to support this technical bill. Our critic has been very diligent in bringing to our attention some of the reports, not just the Arthurs report—that’s the expert panel—but also in a broader way. He has an advisory group that he works with on financial issues as our critic. They’re saying that there’s a lot of tinkering, if you will—I think that’s one of the terms they used—and the technical thing will help some pension groups. I’m going to comment in the very limited time that I’m going to have here, but I just want to put some frame around this.

Ontario regulates 4,100 defined benefit plans of the 11,000 defined benefit plans in Canada. So we have a good one third of all the plans right here in Ontario. The solvency requirements for pension plans ensure they’re able to pay out the benefits as promised in the terms of the plan. Now, plans are also required to fund according to going concern rules. Those are big distinguishing features. That’s the problem with the whole topic of pensions. It’s very technical—legal references also, with respect to actuarial valuations, if you will. “Going concern” just means that it’s presumed that the business will continue to go.

I think we should also recognize that these pension difficulties we have in Ontario are not unique to Ontario. In fact, I give Jim Flaherty, the Minister of Finance, federally, full marks because he has been very progressive in leading the debate in Whitehorse during December 2009. He had a meeting in Whitehorse with all the finance ministers across Canada.

Not only that, I know firsthand from my children who live in England that it’s a huge problem there. Gordon Brown has convened an expert panel with pretty much the same thing: how to value a pension during a time of economic—the great recession, as it’s being referred to in much of the literature today. I think it’s important to put that in context. Now is no time for Joe Public to jump out of some investment because the investment’s numbers are down. Where would you go with the money? Where would you put it?

The same question should be asked of a plan manager. Where would they put it? Any person who has been wisely—and I hope I encourage all people to invest for their own security into the future. That’s part of the discussion here, that money is a temporary store of value and, as such, it has a value fluctuation. If you look at the market—and I’m surprised at some of the experts here, saying that they’re going to insure or guarantee. If you can guarantee something in the market, you are more than a prophet or a futurist. You’re working magic, because the commodities themselves within the places where we live—the whole discussion on whether or not there’s a monetary crisis is a much more appropriate question right now.

There are a number of very interesting textbooks on the topic of where you would put asset value. Would you have it in gold—there's some speculation there—or in resources generally? Would you have it in uranium? Would you have it in paper? When you look at the currency debate going on between the United States and China, or China and Brazil, what kind of currency would you like? Many investors today in the currency market are making 10% and 15% a day.

Now, pension funds are regulated with respect to what and how much can you have in a particular sector of the economy, in the marketplace. These are important rules, and those valuation rules that were mentioned in this are a point of discussion.

Also, when you look at pensions, they're based on working for a company for a long period of time. In Ontario today, more people are losing their jobs than getting jobs, so what company is going to assume the liabilities? Putting this in context, if you look at the biggest corporations in this province, currently and within the last little while, all of them have discrepancies in their pensions. The big strike going on in Sudbury now is Vale Inco, and the major issue central to that whole agreement is the pension liability. We also know that a few years ago, Stelco had a problem. It still does, and it's a pension liability issue. General Motors has a huge liability.

The only pensions that really aren't subject to these liabilities—that is, the loss of market presence or failure of the product or of employment—are probably the public sector pensions. I don't say that with any malice. I'm saying that the employer of record on public sector pensions basically is the taxpayer, so those pensions will go on forever.

To add credibility to the broader comments I am making on pensions, I look at an article in the *Globe and Mail* this morning, "Not by Pensions Alone." This article is really quite a well-written article and says that federal public servants "have had benefits that few other Canadians have enjoyed, and it's not unreasonable to expect that, in today's climate, some of those should be called into question.

"The most obvious place for reform is the share employees pay into their plans. In 2007-08, federal employees made only 32% of the \$3.8 billion in total contributions.

"In many other plans, by contrast—the public services of Ontario, Quebec and Alberta; and the municipal, elementary and secondary education sectors of Ontario—employees and employers have a joint" contribution of 50%.

When you look at those contribution rules, these are very important. Who owns the liabilities and who owns the surpluses? These are questions that will come into play.

The bill was introduced by the finance minister on December 9. A year before that, he had commissioned the expert panel, of course, and a number of other experts to give advice, which I think is an important thing to do.

It says, "If approved by the Legislature, the government measures would provide temporary solvency funding relief"—that's a very good one. What does that mean, "temporary solvency funding relief"? What it means is they're going to extend the time that they will be able to make up the shortfall in the pension plan—that's all it means—provided they're an ongoing business. It continues: "through regulations, retroactive to September 30, 2008. If passed, the eight measures would include:

"An extension of solvency amortization periods from five to 10 years with the consent of active members or their collective bargaining agent and retired plan members": In fact, if there is a liability, they're going to give them 10 years to pay it as opposed to five. I think it's a good plan; otherwise, the plan has to wind up.

"Consolidation of previous funding schedules": There are a number of interventions that have been made over the years, often by the government, some by the plan administrators. Those have caused problems. In fact, I'd say the biggest problem that we're dealing with right now is the whole "too big to fail" decision made in 1993.

"Deferral of catch-up payments to provide one year of cash flow relief": There's a questionable one. If they're that shaky, if the plan in such a failed condition, I think the employers and the employees have to work together and look at each one quite uniquely. How vulnerable is the business? Is it about to collapse, or is it just a case that the market is down, and they have no cash flow to deal with their payments?

Look at each business; don't have one rule that's going to give some other plan manager controls that they perhaps shouldn't have.

This is important here: "Permitting the use of actuarial gains." That's just a way of recalculating the net present value of an asset. Also looking at it, what are the liabilities against the plan as well as the employer and their ability to pay? So I think that's a good one; and to reduce the annual cash payment to the plan sponsors.

1530

Now, any time they have a payout or a reduction of the mandatory payments, they should look at each one of those very carefully. It's fine in the public sector because the government, I guess, has deep pockets. They can carry a debt or a deficit. We see in Ontario a deficit of \$25 billion and we've almost doubled the provincial debt. So we have a huge hill to climb and it's a big hole we've fallen into in the last six or seven years. It's tragic, quite frankly. This is a debt that will be paid for by the pages sitting here today. We're spending more than we're earning by almost \$3 million an hour.

So in the context of this budget debate, that's an important observation. This is not unique. I don't say it's even particularly caused by Premier McGuinty, but what actions is he taking to prevent it? When we look at other jurisdictions in other provinces—let's look at the best practices. Some other provinces aren't suffering the job losses that we're suffering. What is it that they're doing that we're not doing?

Another provision under this legislation: “Temporary limitations going forward on certain contribution holidays.” Now, there’s one thing I don’t agree with at all. In fact, I would say when we were in government we provided contribution holidays to the MUSH sector—municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals—and we should not have. When you calculate and there is a surplus and it’s an ongoing plan, you can’t tell me that everyone knows the market is going to be a steady, positive slope line. That’s not how it works.

Long-term economics would tell us that there is a fluctuation in the economy, and that’s why I’m not in support of those ongoing contribution holidays. FSCO or the pension commission should have definite ministerial oversight and very exceptional rules on the contribution holidays. Everyone should be paying their way, and it’s proof now that when you look at all the pensions in Ontario—all of them without exception—they are basically, by current valuations, in deficit. Teachers’ pensions, OMERS, HOOPP, all of them are in deficit.

The problem is that we’re evaluating them at a time when the market is at the bottom. I think things will improve. I’d like to put a little bit of humour in here. I think they’ll improve after October 2011, when there’s a change in government. That’s my belief, because if you think that you can solve all the problems in Ontario or in your family by spending money, you’ve got it all wrong. We have almost doubled the spending and doubled the debt in Ontario. It is not better. Hospitals are in trouble. The Toronto school board had a \$17-million deficit. So it’s going south rapidly. I don’t blame it all on Premier McGuinty, but I don’t see a very consistent plan and I’m very disappointed as an Ontario citizen. But I do want to admit that this is a more complex issue than we would often like to give reference to.

In the very few minutes I have left, I’m going to talk about a couple of items here. I have quite a few notes. One of the big ones is a partial windup. I had the privilege, when I was the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, of sitting through one of the more important cases in pension law or pension reform: the Monsanto case, which was a partial windup. That case—which was viewed by the experts, not by politicians—was about how to apportion the assets of the pension to the members of the plan; one of the divisions was closing down. The attribution rules they used to apportion the real-time value, the current value, of assets during the time that they contributed—what was their base salary? To look at those schedules of how they tried to calculate that—it’s virtually impossible.

But I’m going to say that “As a transitional matter, partial windups can still be ordered prior to what will apparently be the effective date of the grow-in changes.” Some of that sounds a bit—growing in allows you to contribute and grow into a plan, perhaps leaving early. “The grounds for such partial windups are essentially unchanged from the current rules. In addition, the current rules relating to partial windups continue, including the provision which caused the Monsanto effect, as part of

the transitional provisions. However, while partial windups continue to exist, annuities will not be required to be purchased by any partial windup after April, 1987.”

That’s important. You would not want to be buying an annuity in a time when the market is so low. You’d like to buy annuities when the market is high, or the interest rate is high, so you can calculate future value at a different rate.

Full plan windups: “Three changes are made in the pension reform bill to when the superintendent can order a partial or full windup: (i) the test for when employee termination can cause a full plan windup will be whenever ‘all or substantially all’ of the employees are terminated.” There’s a case there where the superintendent of financial institutions will look at it, and it says a partial windup is “to be ordered where the purchaser or successor does not provide a pension plan; and (iii) a full plan windup cannot be ordered simply because the specific location is closed. These changes are all consistent with the elimination of” a partial windup plan.

So that’s what happens often. A company—for instance, let’s take a very successful company in Ontario, Research in Motion. Some people here may even have shares of it. I’ve watched that stock go from about \$30 to \$130; now it’s around \$60. Here is the issue: in three years, the iPhone—

Mr. Mike Colle: You should have bought, John. Did you buy?

Mr. Michael Prue: He should have sold.

Mr. John O’Toole: Yes.

Right now, if you look at the BlackBerry—we all have one; it’s mandatory equipment here—its technology is now becoming dated because it has a keyboard. The iPhone doesn’t have a keyboard. You can call up an icon which is a keyboard, but it’s not a mechanical keyboard, and I think that’s one of the BlackBerry’s shortcomings. If you happen to get water on that phone, it’s fried. I know many people who have had their BlackBerrys fried.

But the point is, those stocks are probably going to have less value. I can recall that one of the big issues when we were in government was—I think the example was the teachers’ pension plan—the way they evaluate the percentage of your portfolio in a specific sector. They had Nortel shares, and Nortel shares also ran through the roof: from an average of about \$35 to \$130. Well, it made their apportionment within the plan greater than is allowed. They appealed to the board to be able to hold on to the shares, and the board ruled against them. They had to share them. A few weeks—if not months—later, the shares were, as we all know, worth half or even less. They began falling after John Roth, I think it was; they fell off the board, and they were still out trying to push that stock.

So I feel badly, as well, in the context of the people from Nortel and the rules around that. I think there should be rule changes so that the people who in good faith gave up salary throughout their working careers can be assured of some kind of security in their latter years.

In this particular thing, I take the advice of the hard-working experts who have done the work. Our critic has done a very good job of giving us information, as well as some of the people I've talked to.

One last comment that I want to make: I worked for General Motors for 31 years. That plan group has a group called GenMo. I want to thank Brian Rutherford, John Vanderhorst, Joe O'Neill and a few other people. They asked—and I'm asking on the record today—that the Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan, allow them to have a seat at the table on what they call an advisory committee on a specific plan.

I spoke to another fellow the other day—his name is Karl Zimmerman—who was very active in the union side with General Motors employees, and they also want a voice. That does not mean that their voice should allow them to overturn the orders of the minister, but I think that they, in good faith throughout their working careers, tried to contribute to the company and look after themselves and were somehow hung up. It's partially the fault of the market, partially the fault of government and partially the fault of, perhaps, the company itself. So I'm asking that they be allowed to be on the advisory committee and follow the rules of that committee.

With that, thank you for allowing me the very few minutes. I had asked for unanimous consent for another half an hour.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Denied.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'd give it to you.

Mr. John O'Toole: No? Well, once again, I—

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

1540

Mr. Michael Prue: It is always a pleasure to listen to my learned colleague from Durham, especially when he talks about pensions. I have had the opportunity to not only listen to him in this House, but I've had the opportunity on finance committee to sit around in the wee hours of the morning talking about political issues, and one of the things that he feels most passionately about is pensions here in Ontario. So I hope that the members opposite and the government listen to what he has to say.

I sometimes hear things that I find a little bit far-fetched, I sometimes hear things that I feel are a little bit beyond the pale coming from my colleagues in the Conservative Party, but this is not one of those times. This is a time when he is talking absolute sense about what we need to be looking at. Surely everyone in this room understands the number of people who are aging and who are going to be looking to pensions in the next few years. We all know—anybody who looks at demographics at all—about the bubble that is coming. We all know about the boomers, of which I am one and many of the people in this room are as well, who are going to be aging and looking for pensions. We as a government have to look at how we are going to deal with that.

The bill is an appropriate bill, to look at it, and the suggestions that have been made by my friend from

Durham are absolutely spot-on in terms of the suggestions he is making, the people that he is suggesting should be talked to and how the government should proceed down the road, because to do absolutely nothing is going to send a whole generation of people known as the boomers, who have contributed largely to the success of this province, into penury. They're going to send them into a time when they are not going to have the money in their pensions that they should.

I implore the government to look—

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

Mr. Mike Colle: It was interesting listening to the member from Durham give advice on whether or not RIM stock was going to go up or down. I think a lot of people in the past underestimated the value of RIM and have regretted, including myself, not appreciating the incredible investment RIM is.

I know he was part of a government that drank the Kool-Aid at the time, and I know they did some pension changes right in this chamber here that I think he regrets. The interesting thing is, though, that governments of all stripes have not paid enough attention to pensions. I think it's obvious that there's an imperative to pay attention. That's what this bill begins to do, on the recommendations of Professor Harry Arthurs, because in many ways, pensions were almost some kind of magic black box that people paid very little attention to, especially the workers who worked for so many years and contributed so many dollars. Yet they found out in troubled times, as we have in the financial markets today, that it is critically important that governments protect workers when it comes to pensions, and there's a responsibility from companies and workers to ensure that pensions are viable and sustainable.

I think the challenge right now is to overcome such a great hurdle and years of neglect of this important file, not only for those who have the fixed benefits from pensions that they derive, but for the 70% of Ontarians who do not have a pension. Basically, they are the majority. How do we ensure that they have reasonable protection after they've contributed to so many years of work? That's another challenge that government has.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to add some comments to the speech from the member from Durham on Bill 236, which is the first of the government's promised pension bills. Of course, they said there are going to be two bills, as has been mentioned. As he stated, this one is kind of tinkering around the edges; we're expecting the second bill to be a lot more substantive. But I would like to thank the member from Durham. He works so hard for the people of Durham and, as always, has knowledge of so many different subjects, including pensions.

He did talk at length about valuations of defined benefit pension plans. That is certainly of critical importance, how we value these defined benefit plans,

whether they're counting on investment income to be solvent.

I think he mentioned the Netherlands. I know in my original speech I pointed out how in the Netherlands a few years back they changed the valuation system. They changed the way of valuing pensions to the same way they value insurance companies and banks—a lot tougher rules, in other words.

As the member from Durham pointed out, he thought it was a mistake when there were contribution holidays that came into effect a few years back. I would tend to agree with that. I think the more conservative approach we take to these things, the better, because having the plan solvent is in the interests of everyone, particularly those who are going to be benefiting from pension plans down the road.

He mentioned England. They've gone to a national system, PADA, that became this NEST program, a supplemental auto-enrol system. There's a lot of changes, many that probably should be national. But in Bill 236, tinkering around the edges a little bit, there are some things that are positive. I know the member from Simcoe-Grey has spoken in favour of the consolidated—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member from Durham has two—

Mr. John O'Toole: No, there's one more.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Sorry. The member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As they say, I'm number four.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: You're number one with us.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I know I'm number one with many of you.

I just want to say the government is attempting to do something in this legislation—and I listened to the comments made by the honourable member—that deals with part of the issue, but I've got to say it's a pretty small part. The reality is that most people in this province don't have a pension. In reality, nobody in this Legislature has a pension, let alone people in this province. I say what we need to do is look at reform around pensions that includes all people. It includes people at the minimum wage, includes people in this Legislature, and includes all those people in this province who—

Laughter.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: People laugh, but the reality is we're not any different than anybody else.

My point is that we need to have a regime that allows people to have a pension they can retire on. The reality for most Canadians and most Ontarians is that they're going to retire on a small Canada pension if they're lucky. They may get the full amount if they retire at 65, but most people will go early, so it will be reduced. Then they have a small old age pension. Between the two, they're lucky if they draw \$1,700 to \$1,800 a month to retire on. They're lucky if they get that. The reality is, we all know as homeowners that by the time your house is paid and you pay all of your utilities, your taxes, your insurance, your groceries and just the regular things that

you need to live, if you have a single income of \$1,800, you're not going to go very far.

It is clear to me that in this province we need to have major pension reform. That's why Andrea Horwath has proposed that we change and go to an Ontario pension plan so that we're able to put on top of CPP a similar type of Ontario pension plan that allows all Ontarians at least to get a minimum pension so that when they retire, between the combination of an Ontario pension plan, a Canada pension plan and the old age pension, they have an income of somewhere over \$2,500 a month. I think we need to get into that debate, and we should have done it many years ago.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Now the member from Durham has two minutes to reply.

Mr. John O'Toole: For all the people who spoke, there were a couple of very important points that have been made by the members. Summarizing them is important.

Only about 38% of people actually have a pension. The vast majority do not have a pension, so I think what we're trying to do is provide this universal benefit, which is even more complex. I think it would be important for companies themselves to get the rules straight on the CCAA; that's the bankruptcy protection act. I think we need to have successor rights outlined more clearly in that particular legislation. I would encourage all members to talk to Jim Flaherty on that.

I also think that we need companies to invest, so we can't be so prescriptive that no one wants to invest here. But in fairness, we cannot retroactively disadvantage people who, in good faith, contributed to a pension, regardless of whether it was public or private. I think there needs to be commitments there.

There are two types of pensions, the defined benefit is primarily what we're talking about, where I give so much of mine and the employer generally—often employees don't pay, which is not a good thing. They should be engaged in it, and there should be more transparency. But the important part is, it would be a defined benefit. At some future date, I would get around 50% of my pension plus the CPP kick-in and the Gains supplement.

1550

Here's the most important thing: Most companies or jurisdictions are looking at a whole new type of pension called a defined contribution plan. That's a very important change, and they are doing it in other countries. What that means is, the employer of the day gives their share and the employee of the day gives their share and it's put into a pension trust. There might be a number of different instruments within that trust fund that you can invest in. That's the future, because employers themselves will not last. They will morph into subdivisions or be amalgamated or be dislodged through the market; they won't exist. So I suspect it's up to the individual. Give them the tools and the tax regime to accumulate wealth over their lifetime.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I want to just interrupt for a moment to remind members that, pur-

suant to standing order 38(a), the member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Labour. That will be debated today at 6 pm.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue: I stand here to talk about pensions. This is a topic that, 10 or 15 years ago, I probably would have not stood in this place and cared a whole lot about. Perhaps it's a factor of aging; perhaps it's a factor of being one of those boomers on the cusp; but it is a time that people around this province are starting to look at pension plans, how they are vested, how they are being funded, whether governments have the ability to carry through with them, whether companies that once were seen as giants, like Nortel or General Motors, are any longer able to afford them. We are starting to look, I guess, at our own mortality. We're starting to look at whether or not the pensions will be there for us.

There was a book I read many years ago: *Boom, Bust and Echo*. Although I had read many books on demographics before, this was a very popular one; it was a very readable one. It is one that people across this province took an opportunity to read, and I think across this country as well. It simply showed, in very real terms, how consumer cycles changed. It showed how pension plans and thoughts changed. And it showed how this whole bubble, which is unique to Canada and Canada alone, that baby boom between 1946 and 1966, impacted not only our growth and our potential as a province and a country but will continue to impact us as it moves down the cycle.

Next year, 2011, is the first year of the baby boomers reaching 65, that magic retirement age at which people no longer retire, unfortunately, because many of them work until they drop. But in the meantime, people are looking at their pension plans and are looking at what is going to happen to them when they turn 65, or before, or after. They're looking at whether or not they're going to be able to do all of the things that they dreamed of.

I remember as a boy watching on television that they had this insurance ad called *Freedom 55*. I remember talking to my grandfather when I was only about 10 years old about the number of days and months and years. I had it right down to a science; I could tell him the number of years, months, days and hours until I turned 55 and I would be free. He was constantly amazed at me because I could do those mathematics in my head. He told me that that was a good plan, but I might not be able to retire when I was 55; it was a great dream but I might not be able to do it.

Well, six years after I turned 55 I'm still here and I'm still working, I guess in part because this place has no insurance. We have no pension. Not that I'm sad to be here, because I come here every day and the people at the front desk and the side desks and the east and west doors will tell you I walk into this place and they all yell at me, "Another day in paradise," because if I don't say it first they will, because that's the way I see this. This is a job that I find paradise. But I want to say that for many

people who struggle in a manufacturing sector, in an office with all its politics, and in places where they are simply going to make a living, it's much more difficult.

So what we have to do on behalf of all of those boomers, what we have to do on behalf of all those people in generation X and the ones to follow as well, is look and say, how is the system going to work for them? How are people going to be able to look to the future and say, "I have security. What I wanted to do when I was 55, *Freedom 55*, or *Freedom 65* or *Freedom 75*, is to have enough money to carry out the balance of my life in a meaningful and constructive way, to be able to travel, to be able to visit with my grandchildren, to be able to live in my own home till I die, or any other thing that comes to be"?

We in the New Democratic Party believe that this is doable. It's a difficult task; I'm not saying for a moment it is not. But it is no more insurmountable than all those years ago when the federal government sat down and came up with the Canada pension plan. There were people at that time who thought it was impossible. There were people at that time who thought, "How can you propose a pension? You're going to bankrupt the entire country."

It did not bankrupt the entire country. We simply learned to adapt and get used to it and pay out those funds. I have not heard of an Ontarian or a Canadian in the last 10 or 15 years who begrudges a single penny that is paid to the pensioners of this province. We look and we understand that those people have made a contribution. They have made a contribution while they worked. They have made a contribution in times of war. They have made a contribution in terms of how they brought up their family in difficult circumstances and put them through school and higher education. They have made a contribution to the economic livelihood of this province, and it worked.

All we are saying is that we have to look at the next generation. We have to look at the Canada pension plan and determine its adequacy. Is it any longer adequate to pay people \$1,000 or \$1,500 or \$1,200 a month and expect that they're going to live comfortably and securely on that basis alone? Quite frankly, it is inadequate. More and more pension experts, from Mr. Arthurs on up and on down, are saying it is not sufficient.

Only 35%—or we've heard some statistics at 38%—of the people of Ontario have a pension. We need to try to make sure that that is 100%. Is it doable? I think so. Is it a priority? I think so. Should the government be doing more in this regard than I've seen them do to date? Yes, I do think so. If it is not entirely 100% the best economics in terms of what you are thinking, I am asking the government members opposite to look at what is the best politics in what you are thinking. What is the electorate going to demand in the next few years? What are they going to say they want the politicians to do? I am absolutely convinced that those people between the ages of 45 and 65 today, those boomers who are coming up in rapid numbers, those boomers who, by and large, have an

80% or 90% turnout at the polls, are going to insist that this is something that needs to be looked at. We in the New Democratic Party believe that those 35% who have a pension need to be increased.

We would increase the benefit levels of the Canada pension plan. This would draw on the existing economies of scale, risk-sharing and administrative efficiencies of the plan.

We believe that a whole lot more can be done. I watch in dismay and I listen in this House when the government opposite, who are Liberals or purport to be Liberals, keep quoting Stephen Harper. They keep quoting their partner Stephen. They keep talking about how the government in Ottawa and the government in Toronto are one and the same, how they're on the same wavelength. Well, I can only ask, please don't be on the same wavelength when it comes to pensions.

In this morning's newspaper there was a picture of Stockwell Day, all smiles—I'm sure they picked the picture on purpose—in the Toronto Star, talking about what they are hoping to do in terms of pensions. They are zeroing in on those people who are federal public employees. They are saying that the federal public employees' pension plan is too rich and they want to claw back some of those monies. Well, I have to tell you, I am dismayed at that. All of those people who would stand up and say, "Yes, let's claw back those civil servant pensions," as they say sometimes here in the province of Ontario, simply don't understand how those pensions came to be and what they are.

1600

For some 21 years before I became a full-time elected politician, I worked for Her Majesty's government in Canada. I worked in the immigration department throughout that entire period—21 years—and I was involved in the life of the immigration department: doing what I was told to do, working within the union, advocating on behalf of many things, often getting my name in the paper for some of the positions that I took. But one of the things we did and we understood and was instructed to us was that we were required, on a monthly basis, to pay 8% of our gross salary into the pension plan. That's what I paid; I paid 8% of my gross salary into the pension plan.

I only spent 21 years in the federal public service. Many, many people spend 35 or 40 years before they retire; I worked there about half that time. But I remember throughout all of that period that I worked that I paid 8% of my gross salary into a pension plan that was going to be indexed.

People made a lot more money than me in those days. You can look at it and say, "Look at all those civil servants in Ontario or in the federal government who make more money than the public sector today"—but this is very cyclical. During most of the period that I worked there, I made less money than people in the private sector. I was offered on several occasions double my salary to leave the federal immigration department to go work for law firms advocating on behalf of immi-

grants on the other side of the Immigration and Refugee Board—to stop on this side and go to that side. I didn't do it, in part because of my pension, in part because of what I had come to believe was in lieu of the salary, which was not as high, and of which I paid 8%.

For all those people who today want to somehow stand up there and say, "You ought not to have that pension" after I paid into it—it's disgraceful. For the Harper government to look at that and say they're going to take it away is not only illegal, it is disgraceful. I have no doubt in my mind that if this is challenged in any court of the land, the people who have paid 8% of their salary for 20, 30 or 40 years are going to win, because no court is going to say they can just take that away. It's not even their money to take away. It was part of the collective agreements; it was part of what people paid in; it was part of what the government paid in order to ensure that the civil service salaries in those days were consistently lower on a daily payment basis than one could have made in the private sector. That may not be true today, but it was true throughout the entire time that I worked there, until 1993.

I have to laugh when I see politicians standing up and talking about doing that kind of thing. Occasionally, I hear that around this chamber: taking away the civil servants' pension. I would be the first to acknowledge that we don't have one here in Ontario. I think the mistake of the Harris government, the first, number-one mistake, was the amalgamation of the cities against their wills across this province. The number-two mistake was to take away the pensions of the people who work in this room.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I agree.

Mr. Michael Prue: There is my colleague from Thornhill. We don't often agree; he agrees. That was the number-two worst mistake that government made. I would only hope that the government, this government, a future government will look, even if it doesn't benefit me, at the men and women who serve the people of Ontario and say that something has to be done, because we are working here.

I'm 61 years old. I'm going to retire with absolutely no pension from this place, other than the defined benefit—I can't even remember the name—anyway, the little pittance that is put in every month. It isn't even enough to pay for one year of salary, by the time I retire after 10 or 15 years of service. That's all it is. It is not a good pension.

I digress. I'm looking at what the federal government is saying. In the paper today, they are looking at targeting the federal civil servants' pensions. I have to question: A place like the House of Commons in Ottawa, if you want to know about a gold-plated pension, if you want to know about people who are getting a lot of money for their service, take a look at what the people are going to get.

They did identify some of those who were in the former Reform Party, which morphed itself into the Conservative Party of today, who were opposed to the pensions. Now they are eligible for \$120,000, \$130,000,

\$140,000 each. They're not backing down. I don't hear Chuck Strahl talking about taking away his pension. I don't hear Stephen Harper saying that the pension is too rich—he'd get \$140,000 or \$150,000 today. I don't hear any of those people who were there—Diane Ablonczy or any of them—saying that it's not good for them, but what they're saying is, it's not good for the people who paid into them.

What I'm saying, quite frankly, is that when people pay into a pension, when they have an expectation, they ought to get it. And what I want for me, I want for everyone in Ontario. What I think is fair for politicians, I think is fair for everyone, from the person who pushes a broom inside this building, who cleans the toilets, who works in the kitchen—I think that every single working Ontarian, every single Ontarian who is unable to work due to disability, is deserving of a pension.

I believe that we need to develop an employment-based pension for all working Ontarians so that those 65%, myself included, who don't have a pension, will have one at the time that they reach 65 or 70 years of age, when they're starting to think about their retirement, about their inability to work, about the inability to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning every day and work until seven or eight o'clock at night to make ends meet—and many, many do. We do.

Mr. Peter Shurman: We do.

Mr. Michael Prue: My colleague from Thornhill and I have found two agreements today.

We need to reward those people who are working in Ontario, and who are contributing, with a realistic pension at the end of their working lives. We need to deal with those 65% of Ontarians who presently have no workplace-based pension coverage.

We think that the Ontario retirement plan that we are proposing is a good one. We think that the band of income—that phrase—that the contribution rate would be assessed against would be different from the current CPP, so that the band of income would allow people who earn more money than the CPP will presently provide for to have a better pension.

We are suggesting that a higher benefit, a broader band of income, would allow for a higher benefit for plan members earning over \$47,000 a year. When you think about this, most Ontarians—not all—\$47,000 is what most Ontarians would earn, around that rate; some more, some less. But \$47,000 is not a huge amount of money. We think that the pension benefits should reflect that.

The old pension benefits from Canada reflected a much lower income from a much different era, which has long since come and gone. We think that a pension benefit based on the average income in Ontario of \$47,200, in 2010 dollars, is the right adequacy for today.

We think that the number of pension plans are too difficult; they're too widespread. There are some 6,500 workplace plans across the province of Ontario. Some are very successful. The teachers' appears to be very successful; the civil servants', in large part, federally and provincially, appear to be very successful. But you see a

whole bunch of the smaller plans that are not successful. You even see some of the big ones, like GM and Nortel and Stelco, that had to be bailed out. You see these plans are attempting to—they're failing. These plans are failing, and the governments are having to step in.

We think that the time has come to have the big dream of Leslie Frost. We all remember Leslie Frost—at least, some of us who are old enough. We remember, even it's only from a history book, the grand old man of Ontario. He proposed a pension plan for all Ontarians before the federal government enacted one. He was going down the road of having an Ontario pension plan for the people of Ontario, until such time as the Canada pension plan became greater than the gleam in the eye of some of the Liberals in Ottawa. He had this great dream, and he let it slip away—not unrealistically, because the Canada pension plan came in to take its place.

1610

But it's time to resurrect that dream. It's time to look to the people of Ontario and what they need and what the government can afford and what people are willing to pay in. We think it should be a voluntary plan. We want to make it available to all Ontarians. We want to have the security that when you go from one job to another job to another job, when one factory shuts down and you get a job working in the service sector, or you go from a job in the service sector to working in business or in some small business unit, your pension plan can go with you. We think that all of the past service should be allowed to be bought back. We believe that in order to maximize the participation, every employee not enrolled in a workplace pension plan would be automatically enrolled in the Ontario pension plan. If we do that—and I'm out of time—

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm privileged and honoured to stand up and comment on the speech by the member from Beaches–East York.

I listened to his speech for quite some time, and it made sense, and I'm sure—the member referenced the federal government a lot. Of course, we're not going to follow the federal government recommendations. That's why we're introducing this bill in this House. Hopefully this bill, if passed, will create a protection mechanism for many different people who have worked hard in their life to save for their pension, to protect the people who are facing layoffs and to create some kind of flexibility and transparency and allow members who are pensioners to have access to some information about their pension. As we know, so many people in these days are worried about their future, especially when they lose a job. It will also create transparency to allow those people to live comfortably and be assured that the government will look after their pension and also make sure that transparency is in place and the pension plan will be administered very well for the safety of many people across the province of Ontario.

That's why our Premier, many different times, asked for a national strategy to create a pension plan for all

Ontarians, for all Canadians, because it's very important to allow people who worked hard in their life to live comfortably and know exactly that there's a government looking after them and that their future will be safe and protected.

I think our government is taking the right approach, and I think it's very important to continue in this direction to make sure all the pensioners in Ontario are looked after by a government and also make sure all the people who administer those plans have enough funds and the funds are overseen by the government of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Just in response to the member for Beaches–East York, I thought Mr. Prue was quite eloquent, and I wish him well. While I won't be voting NDP any time soon, in my lifetime, I certainly appreciate it, as one of all of us that doesn't have a pension. I gave up \$2.73 million. I was pensioned out at 42 years of age, so I would have had \$78,000 a year the rest of my life starting at 42; that was my 15th year. That's how gold-plated the old gold-plated pension plan was. If I live to be 73, that adds up to \$2.73 million.

Back home, they still think we all have pensions. The only time I was ever able to mention it publicly is when the teachers were acting up in the 1999 campaign. I remember there was a whole pile of them at the all-candidates' meeting in Collingwood lined up at the mike, monopolizing the mike and crapping on me. I finally got up and said, "I gave up \$2.73 million for the deficit. What have you done?" They sat down and they were very polite, and I've never heard from them since.

Having said that, my interest and my support of this government pension bill comes from—and I hope to get a chance to speak either later today or when it's next up for debate—my private member's resolution of June of last year in which I called upon the government to correct what had been an inadvertent mistake when we divested services from the province of Ontario or from, in my case, the paramedic services in Simcoe county from the Orillia hospital to the county of Simcoe. Overnight, their employers changed but they had to start over when they went into the OMERS pension plan. They couldn't bring their HOOPP or their OPSEU trust pension plans over, and that was very unfair. I had one paramedic who will retire soon—they're just starting to figure this out, even though the transfers were done years ago, as they're doing retirement planning—who will have two pension cheques. This act will make sure he can have one pension cheque, and a \$30,000-a-year difference. He earned that money, he contributed to it, and I thank the government for correcting what was an oversight of the past.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I would just like to make comment on the speech by my colleague from Beaches–East York. It was quite well thought out and he did his homework on it. All I can say from my perspective is that the situation in the province is the way it is because the government

has failed to address the main problem, which is to beef up the present plan, the guaranteed benefits plan, which is there now. It's underfunded and has been for a long time.

A lot of the defined pension plans in North America have been under attack. The economy has played a part, the market has played a part, there's no doubt about that, but it's the lack of contributions—companies have been allowed to take sabbaticals from putting into the plans—that has got us in the state we're in.

If you look at most of the other situations throughout the country, the percentages of the plans, other than Ontario, are higher with the amount of money that is in the plans. The situation here is that a lot of these companies are not following through on their donations; they're folding up, they're leaving the country and they're leaving these plans floundering with nowhere to go.

Some of the things the government is bringing forward are—I would call it basically changes to governance, accountability. That's good, but they're not really addressing the financial end of it, and that's the main thing that people are facing today. They're afraid to lose their pension plans; they're afraid that they're going to be cut in a third, as witnessed by Nortel. Now the government is touting, "We're going to give them \$1,000," but some of those people are entitled to \$3,500 or \$4,000 a month. To work all your life and hear, "Okay, we're going to give you 25% of what you're entitled to" is not what I call a good thing. So they have to make drastic changes, and quickly.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: What are pensions all about? Pensions are all about dignity, pensions are all about security and pensions are also all about being able to sleep at night.

If you take the text of any pension bill and you read it, you'll find that it's a really effective non-prescription sedative, but if you really want to lie awake all night worrying, then worry if this bill is not passed. Because what is this bill really all about? As the members of all three sides have said here today, this bill is about ensuring that private sector pensions can get combined, assets can get transferred and those people who are beneficiaries, who have paid into a pension all of their lives, when the time comes that they need the pension, (1) the pension will be there for them, and (2) the provisions governing the pension mean that it can't be raided, that the funds can be transferred from one plan to another and, as several of the speakers have pointed out, instead of having multiple smaller pension cheques, you can have one larger pension cheque.

When we've worked all of our lives and the time comes to hope that our savings have allowed us to live a retirement of comfort and dignity, it will be the work that the members in this House did here on this bill in the year 2010 that will determine what so many members of the baby-boom generation will look back at and say, "We

were well served by our government. We were well served by the members of all parties who stood up and voted for this bill and helped make a difference in our pension cheque to allow us to be able to live in comfort and in dignity and in security well into the 21st century.”

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Beaches–East York has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to my colleagues from London–Fanshawe, Simcoe–Grey, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and Mississauga–Streetsville, and I thank them for the comments that they had to make.

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Quite frankly, when I stood up here and started to speak, I was trying to speak on behalf of a generation of people of which I am one, a generation of people who have come to expect that the government will look after them in their old age—a government who will do the necessary legal and political paperwork to ensure that pensions to which they have paid are paid out to them—a group of people who have worked hard to build and continue to build this society, who are hoping, in the end, to receive some of the fruits of the benefits to which they have contributed so handsomely over all of those years.

I listened to my friend from Simcoe–Grey, and although I acknowledge he is never likely to vote for my party, any more likely than I am ever likely to vote for his, the reality is that we both understand that the pension system is broken, and where it can be fixed, the government must take those necessary measures to fix it. But they have to look beyond that to the larger picture. We are going to have millions upon millions of people who are going to retire in the next 20 years. It is the biggest boom in the history of this country, and it is in fact absolutely unique to Canada. There is no baby boom in the United States of comparable amount. There is no baby boom of comparable amounts in Britain or anywhere else in Europe. We are uniquely positioned and we have to do something. I am imploring the members of this Legislature to look down to those 20 years and to start taking the necessary steps, of which this is one small, baby step, to make sure that pensions are there for everyone who has paid into them.

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

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I’m pleased to stand today and take a few minutes to join what appears to be a conversation about pensions as opposed to any kind of a debate, because I think there’s a great deal of agreement amongst all of us here on the need for pensions, for pension planning, and the severity of the situation in the province and all across Canada, for that matter, when it comes to pensions and planning for our future.

I want to say that the member for Beaches–East York mentioned retirement at 55, and that you’re six years beyond that magic number. Well, if we’re into admitting things today, I’ve worked for 53 years; actually, some would say 36 because I’ve spent 16 years here. So I’m

approaching the 55 mark working, and I know exactly what you mean.

I come from a generation that I can remember, when I was young, when I was in my teens—my grandmother I think worked for a few years seasonally at a tobacco company in Leamington. My grandfather worked for many years for what was then Dominion Gas and eventually became Union Gas, but it was back in a time where company pensions weren’t very prevalent. So what happened was, when it came time for my grandparents to retire, and they had then used what little money they probably had saved over the years, we moved in with my grandparents in order to care for them, partly because they had become frail, but the other part was that the family had to rally around in order that my grandparents could live in dignity.

As much as we wanted to do that—and there was never any hesitation that we didn’t—I wouldn’t advise it in this day under circumstances where a young family has to move in with their grandparents because, quite frankly, it changes your life and it changes your lifestyle.

That, again, is another reason for the importance of pensions—it has been mentioned here earlier today—so that we might live in dignity when we retire and that we might be able to certainly afford the necessities of life, but hopefully we would even be able to enjoy a few things beyond that.

When I say that I’ve been around this place for 16 years—I should say that when I arrived here, what some would call one of the conditions of employment was a pension plan. It was a pension that certainly wasn’t quite as good as the ones that have been referred to that are received by our members of Parliament in Ottawa; it wasn’t quite that good. Nevertheless, it was a pension plan that the taxpayers of Ontario and I contributed to. I thought that if I were fortunate enough to be in this place for any number of years, I would benefit from that pension plan.

One thing I might interject here about pension plans is that even for those who have pension plans, too many don’t really understand what the plan is and what it’s about.

Let me give you an example. The question always asked of me when we had a pension plan in this place was, “You only have to get elected to two terms and then you get one of those golden pensions.” That wasn’t the case. It was a defined pension plan. Over 15 years at 5% a year, you would earn three quarters of your earnings as a pension. That plan wasn’t vested until you had been here five years, but at that point it was only 25%.

My point is, if you were elected to two terms at that time, that would be roughly eight years, so you would get 40%, not a full pension. The two terms were so that it was vested. If you weren’t elected for two terms, you then received from the pension plan the contributions you had made to it, and off you go.

Here I am into my 17th year here, and I, like my colleagues around, don’t have a pension plan. It’s a defined contribution to RRSPs. The taxpayers of Ontario

share in that contribution. We all know, of course, what has happened to RRSPs in the past year and a half. I'm one of those ones who's sticking around and keeping my investments, hoping that they will recover and that when either I've decided that it's time to retire or those folks back home decide it's time I retire, those RRSPs have built up a bit.

Of course, in the last year and a half, pension plans themselves, be they defined contribution, be they purchased or be they defined pension plans—what you receive from it—have all taken a hit because the whole idea behind pension contributions is that they will be invested and that, over time, historically, those pension plan investments made money. In fact, it was even referred to that, on some occasions, there was a contribution holiday not only by employers but in some cases by employees. In retrospect, I'm sure that those who were involved in that kind of decision are sorry that they did because the contributions that could have been made through those years when they were given the holiday from contribution—that decision has come back to bite us.

What I'm trying to get at by describing what the situation was like with my grandparents is not unlike the situation with a lot of people today across Canada and Ontario who don't have a pension plan of any kind. Those who, of course, work have the Canada pension plan, but there's some question from time to time of whether it's properly funded. There's also, I think, the bigger question: Is the benefit that you receive from the Canada pension plan going to keep you comfortable and with dignity in your retirement?

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So pensions are something that you don't think about a lot when you're young because—like life—you're going to live forever. But as time goes on, they certainly become more important. I think there comes a time when you need to understand what your pension plan is; what the details of your pension plan are. Like we always say, it's what's in the small print that really counts.

I know—unfortunately, through having to deal with some situations down our way, down the Essex-Windsor way where manufacturing has taken a particularly hard hit over the last year and a half—why there are some who are now coming to us and saying, “Well, I took a buyout and a reduced pension,” but now the company has encountered some trouble, or the pension plan itself has encountered some trouble, and there's some question as to whether they're actually going to continue to receive the pension that they thought they were going to receive over the rest of their lives. That, I think, along with losing your job, has to be one of the more devastating points in one's life. If you were fortunate enough to be employed all your working life, that's one thing, but then to find out that your pension is not going to be what you thought it was going to be—and what, frankly, at a certain point in time was promised to you—why, that's got to be very devastating. That's what we're trying to start to deal with in this bill. The Minister of Finance, the

Honourable Dwight Duncan, has said that there will be a second pension bill that will come along and that we will try to address some of the concerns that we're all experiencing today.

Now, it's one thing to identify the problem and another thing to get everyone concentrating on what that problem is, but my concern is that pensions in Ontario and in Canada are in such a state today that the recovery, bringing these pension plans up to date, is going to be a huge task that we're all going to have to share in. As was mentioned in some of the earlier debate, the—which generation is it? The next generation is Generation X, so the boomers are coming along to retirement age now. It's going to have a huge effect, not just on pensions in Ontario but on our health care system as well. So we can't take the issue of pensions by itself and say, “Well, we'd like to correct that. Here's how we're going to do it, and here's what it's going to cost.” We also have to at least acknowledge some of the other costs that are going to be involved in our society.

Interjection.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: It's just being said next to me here: I can hear that it's the young guys. It's the London-Fanshawes, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Minister of Industry, Trade and Development, Ms. Papatello and some of the others over there. You're the ones—the member for Ottawa Centre and the member for Kitchener-Conestoga—the young ones, who are going to have to deal with these issues as our population ages. It's no mean task, believe me. It was described earlier as the bubble going up, and there are going to be fewer people at the bottom to provide the services and for the needs of that.

So from a social point of view, we have a lot of work to do, and the sooner we start that, get at it and try to resolve some of these problems, the better off we'll be. My advice to anybody out there today, whether you have a pension or whether you don't, is to consider what your employment future is and what your retirement future is and to begin thinking about it early.

I would even suggest that it's good to say, “Well, what if? What if it doesn't work out exactly the way I see it today? What if some of these issues become problems?” I would also recommend that you do your very best to plan a little on the side as well, because this idea of retirement and the idea of pensions in your retirement is a very, very complex issue.

We're dealing today with the first of two bills, we're told. It's often referred to that the size of a bill is the number of pages it has, but this has 45 pages—and these are just amendments to the Pension Benefits Act itself. So you can see that it's a very complex issue and that the steps we take today are going to have their effect down the road. We can look back and say what we should have done—this is a term I use sometimes because I happen to be a pilot, and my pilot friend will appreciate this: The runway behind you is of no value whatsoever. It's only the runway ahead that counts.

Interjection.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Oh, the member for Timmins–James Bay is a flyer. He probably flies more than any of us in here.

Interjection.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: He's still flying?

But anyway, my point is this: It doesn't matter what it is we have or have not done in the past, whether we've prepared adequately in the past or whether we have not; it's the runway ahead that we have to be concerned about. It's looking ahead that we have to be concerned about.

One of the initiatives that we here in Ontario are taking is to try to get together with the finance ministers across Canada and the federal finance minister to take a serious look at pensions and what the needs of our citizens are—because we are going to have to do that kind of planning today in order to provide for the future. It has been mentioned by my friend that you can't do this in isolation. It's something that's going to affect all of us.

That's my advice to those who have pensions, those who do not and even those who have some savings: You have to be careful where you put those savings, take the best advice you can and, to some extent, take responsibility yourself. Don't always rely on someone else to provide that for you. We're going to try to plan as best we can, we're going to try to protect the citizens of Ontario as best we can, but there's always that chance that it might not work exactly the way we want it to.

I know that there's the energy and there's the desire by every member in this Legislature to protect the employees, the working people of the province of Ontario, to protect the money that they've set aside for their retirement. I know that by working together, we'll be able to do that—

Mr. Peter Shurman: If I had your money, I'd burn my own.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Yes, yes; I'm sure you would. It's really too bad that the folks who do happen to watch this can't hear all the interjections, because every once in a while, there's a good one.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Not often enough.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade says, "Not often enough."

That's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: I thought that was a good set of remarks from the honourable member from Essex. If I had the member for Essex's money and the member for Thornhill's money, I would certainly burn mine, and—

Interjection.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm sure the people at home, with us all moaning about our financial woes, don't believe a word we're saying about any of it.

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I'm not going to get a chance to speak today, because there are others in the rotation ahead of me. This bill's section 80.1 does respond to my private member's resolution of June 4, 2009.

Originally, I thought there were 30 paramedics in the county of Simcoe that—somehow we didn't transfer their pensions properly when we changed their employers from, in a couple of cases, the Orillia hospital. The new employer became the county of Simcoe. There were a number of transfers like that. "Downloading," I think, is what people have called it in parties other than my own.

Then I started to hear from Frontenac county, where 100 paramedics have been ripped off their pensions because inadvertently—

Interjection.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Peterborough—the member for Peterborough mentions Hastings; Quinte; Prince Edward county—110 paramedics. And this is just paramedics. Leeds–Grenville, 60; Dufferin county, 20; Grey county, 28. This bill will bring some fairness back, and properly transfer the pensions if they wish to do so.

I thought it was just paramedics. Then I find out it's community care access workers. Then I find out, from a letter from OMERS in response to my private member's resolution, that there were thousands of people affected. In fact, the expert pension commission that the Liberal government set up—I'll read the quote when I do get my 20 minutes, probably another day. Up to 10,000 people are affected.

So, good for the government to correct the sins of the past, and I hope members will support this legislation.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to say I appreciate the comments that were made by the member opposite. I know him to be an honourable, hard-working member and I don't want to in any way impugn motive, because not only would that be against the standing orders, it's just not the way I am.

The issue, to me, is: Is this terrible, what you're doing? Absolutely not. It is a step in the right direction. But is it dealing with what the problem is? The problem is, there's a huge percentage of people in this province who don't have pensions. And you know what? At the end of this legislation, they're still not going to have pensions. That, to me, is the issue.

Yes, we need to do things in order to try to protect those who were lucky enough to have pensions by doing some of the things in this legislation. But we need to find a way to challenge ourselves, as all members of this House, from all sides, to basically look at what can be done in order to allow people, after a reasonable amount of time at work, to retire with some dignity.

You see in it your constituency, as I do. How many people come into your constituency office who are now retired, who are living on very little income, because they worked hard all their lives, wherever they were, but they happened to be unlucky enough not to have a pension plan at the employment that they had all those years. They retired on what little income they'd put away, and probably the equity in their house. If they're lucky, they've got no debt. But really, all they've got for income is Canada pension and the old age pension. When you

add those two things together, they're lucky if they're retiring at somewhere around \$1,600, \$1,700 a month.

It's pretty difficult to make ends meet, even if the mortgage is paid, when you're trying to pay the utilities and the cost of your house—you have to have a vehicle in many communities that we live in—buy groceries and do the things that you need to do just to keep yourself afloat.

I think we need to challenge ourselves, and that's why Andrea Horwath has put forward the idea of an Ontario pension plan. I think this is a useful debate, but I think we need to challenge ourselves to do something that is much more substantial for those people who don't have pensions.

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

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to make some comments in regard to what was stated by my colleague and good friend from Essex, Mr. Crozier.

This issue of pensions: Some are more wealthy and have greater benefits than others, and have been about for a long, long time. My grandfather—commenting on grandparents, as the member for Essex did—worked for the New York Central Railroad here in Canada. They had a line here; many lines. It later became the Michigan Central and then the Penn Central. That was American-owned but they had a presence here in Ontario and they had a pension plan that was probably adequate at the time.

My grandfather passed away in 1944 at the age of 64. He was relatively young. There was a provision within that particular pension that my grandmother would get survivor benefits. I don't know how great they were, but I suspect, as a percentage of his gross pay it was reasonable in those days. I'm sure that someone in New York was really wondering about this, sending his cheque to Canada time and time again, the survivor benefit, because my grandmother lived to be 99, and her husband had passed away in 1944. They really did probably have the auditors look at that once in a while.

We need to, through this bill, provide for the restructuring of pension plans that are affected by corporate reorganization. There has been much of that here in Ontario, and indeed around the world. We need to look at the United States. We see restructuring happening there throughout all sectors of their economy, so we're not immune from that here in Ontario.

This bill will go a long way to assist folks with their pensions, to give clarity and transparency and give regulatory oversight to ensure that their pensions are safe.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I do want to compliment the member from Essex, because just by listening to it out in the lobby I could tell, and I know from his past, he knows of what he speaks, and I commend him for that—his very general comments, but also quite reflective of the kind of person I know him to be.

I liked his catch-phrase of "Look ahead, young man," because it really is a good starting gate for people in the workforce today. The changes in work that we're seeing are evidence that a career might only last 10 years, and you may have to change for various reasons. That's the future. I agree some of the literature, not just by Richard Florida but others, of the changing nature of work itself is very important.

But to put on the record a couple of things that I think are important, if you look at what we think of as the federal plan, it has three parts to it: the OAS part—old age security—and we have the GIS, the guaranteed income supplement, and then you have the CPP.

Now, that basically is not enough to sustain yourself, so 38% of the population today, in one form or another, public or private, has a pension that we're referring to here—maybe less than that as we go forward. What the big issue here is—and he gave credit to the federal government for taking a role here, and others had mentioned it—to roll it into some kind of an engaged CPP. But that's deferred income for the government. Do you understand? If they're going to give you tax relief to shelter income, then they are going to get less revenue. But in the long term they will have less expenditures where they're going to have to increase these other support plans that I talked about, the three plans.

Employers themselves, in fairness, are going to work in jurisdictions where they assume less liability over the long term—not that I think they should or shouldn't, because all the pensions are invested in those companies. They're shares in equities and bonds. So they have to be healthy environments for investment, and this—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. The member from Essex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the members for Simcoe–Grey, Timmins–James Bay, Chatham–Kent–Essex and Durham for their comments.

I agree, and in fact I think the member for Durham and the member for Simcoe–Grey were kind of hitting on the same issue, when the member for Durham says that in your lifetime these days, under these circumstances, you may work for two or three or four employers. So as the member for Simcoe–Grey has brought up, portability, I agree, is important. We should address that and make portability among pension plans a very high priority.

The need for a pension for everybody: I agree with the member for Timmins–James Bay. Less than 40% of the people in the province of Ontario, and I suppose the same statistic for Canada, have a pension plan. So it's that other 60% to 70% who are sitting there saying, "What about me, and where did I get left off?"

That leads me to just point out that, along with all the other social issues that we have to deal with, obviously the costs, in the end, have to be borne by us, by people—by people working, as a matter of fact, because the money just doesn't come off the trees.

So we've defined some of the problem, and I don't disagree with any of my colleagues, but it's going to be a

huge effort on our part—and, I think, some of those who follow us—to resolve some of these issues.

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The bottom line is that we all agree that everybody in this province and in this country deserves to live out their life in dignity, and we all are working to see that that's done.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm pleased to rise in the Legislature today and add my voice to what my friend from Essex called, quite correctly, a conversation. This is probably right up there with the most civilized debate that I've participated in since I've been here, because it seems that, on some level, people who are joining in this debate, and the comments and questions afterwards, are all, to some greater or lesser degree, on the same page. I think there's a consensus here that says we need pension reform in the province of Ontario.

I think it's unfortunate that we're not dealing with the whole piece yet, because as I recall, the finance minister has said that this would be one of two bills. So what Bill 236 does is address some issues pertaining to pension plans that exist, but it doesn't talk about what happens for the rest of us—and the rest of us, in this particular case, are the many, as opposed to the few.

I go back a little while—I get into these stories every once in a while that sound like “when I was a boy,” but in this Legislature, a lot of us tell those stories because a lot of us have some years to look back on. I hope some of that experience rubs off on some of the younger people who are watching us today.

My first job that involved a pension plan goes back about 45, 46 years. At the time, as a young man, barely more than a boy, I remember that there was a deduction on my pay slip that said I had contributed to a pension. I was told that in some esoteric, abstract way my employer had also contributed to that pension. It wasn't abstract; it was real. But when you're 18 or 19, you don't think of what might happen when you're 65, which was the mandatory retirement age at that time.

If you joined, as I did at the time, Bell Canada or a company like that, pensions were just a part of the plan. Forget about what they might mean when you reach that age. Forget about whether or not they would cover your needs at that point in time. They existed, and they existed in companies of that stature and still do today.

I had pensions in the first couple of jobs that I had. They were known as registered pension funds. Ultimately, when I went into business for myself, I had to transfer those funds out as registered retirement pension funds, which were locked in and still exist on my behalf today. I assure every member of this Legislature—every one of you, I'm sure, is capable of relating to what I'm going to say—that they will be insufficient to supply me the style of retirement that would be even a remote match with the style of life that I've been fortunate enough to lead.

I look back, by way of comparison, to my dad. My late dad was in the insurance business. He worked for a

company that still exists today, called Empire Life. He had a pension and collected the pension when he came of age. As I recall, it was probably in the vicinity of \$200 a month. Even then, what was that going to do?

I think, in a very real way, those stories are related to what we're talking about now, and that is the supply of sufficient funds for us to live in some dignified way when we get to a point where we can no longer work or where we no longer wish to work.

Again, to talk to the people who are probably paying the most attention to what I have to say today, what we all have to say today, if you're young or if you can appeal to people who you love or you care about who are young, the words that you want to say are, “You will not be 20 forever.” The 50-, 60-, 70-year time frame will come very quickly, and so the time to save isn't 30 years from now. That's what pensions are about. If I had known that then, I'd be much better off today. I'm not complaining, but there are things that you have to know when you're young that you don't want to listen to when you're young, and those can be lessons coming out of a debate like this.

Let me make a couple of comments about pensions in general and Bill 236 in particular. Most Ontarians, and we've heard it previously—about two thirds—do not have any pension at all. They just don't have a pension. I happen to be one of them. I think many people in this Legislature are amongst them. Most people believe, as my colleague said earlier, that we have pensions, and not only do we have pensions if we're members of this Legislature, but we have whopping, big pensions. We don't. People are surprised to discover that we don't, and I'll have a little bit more to say about that shortly, but the fact is, MPPs' pensions aside, most Ontarians just plain don't have pensions, period.

Why? The answer is that small business, something that all of us like to call the engine of the economy and the largest employer, collectively, in the province, doesn't have the wherewithal to provide for people in the style that they might like to. I owned and operated a small business for about 15 years. You talk a good game on small business, but the truth is that in the overall scheme of things, nobody much gives a damn about small business in terms of allowing them the latitude to do those kinds of things.

In the Ontario that we live in today, the costs pile on to small business, restricting their ability to even make a profit much less provide a pension plan for their employees. Examples in the today world: WSIB for construction, which we've just gone through, and who knows what yet to come; the Smoke Free Ontario Act and its impact on retailers while you don't close illegal smoke shacks. That has an effect of robbing them of revenue and robbing Ontario of taxes and robbing young people of their health. These are things that are being faced by small businesses today: general red tape and, oh yes, the taxes.

So we, the two thirds of Ontarians without pensions, pay for pension bailouts but we get no benefit except that

the recipients don't have to go on welfare because we've paid for the benefits in advance, rather than pay for the welfare. We are, in effect, taxpayers who are providing for bailouts, but we're the taxpayers paying for people to have pensions while we don't have them ourselves. It's a bit of a Catch-22 in terms of how we operate.

I paid, we all paid, for the General Motors bailout, about \$4 billion as I recall, and basically all of that was used to top up pensions for General Motors workers whose contract had actually, by the time we got to it, eliminated any need for them to pay into the pension plan at all. How strange is that? I don't have a pension and I helped bail out people who do have a pension, and now I'm here to talk about a bill that adjusts pensions to make them more equitable for the some 30% of people who have pensions that I don't have access to. That's a little strange.

Nortel workers were out in the cold until you realized that you might lose a by-election in Ottawa West-Nepean. So you took the money and you fixed the pensions. Let's be honest about it. You weren't talking about those until that point in time.

This is not just my tax money; it's your tax money, it's all of our tax money that we're using to bail people out. I'm not saying that the Nortel workers don't deserve some consideration. I'm saying that there is nobody out there who is going to bail me out—with my own tax money or anybody else's. So when do we get a bailout? That is what we haven't covered in Bill 236. And let's not call it a bailout. When do we start to participate in something that provides a degree of equity for all people in the province of Ontario?

I have RSPs. I paid into them diligently, and the question that I have to ask myself is, are they enough? We have to get real. The answer is absolutely not. We all know the answer. We're creating, in effect, with the system that we have, a new class of people, and I will call them the retired poor. We have an aging population. Bill 236 will fix pensions, but the bill only fixes pension plans that exist and it fixes them with dollars, I say again, belonging to those who are members of the biggest pension plan of all, which I will call the "go it alone" plan. That's the one that I'm a member of.

So I have a problem with discussing Bill 236 in isolation. While, in essence, I don't think I have too much problem with Bill 236—we can talk technically about it in a few moments—it is only a piece of a very large puzzle, and that's the sense that I'm getting from the debate in the Legislature today.

1700

I just came back from touring the province with a couple of my colleagues from all sides of the House during pre-budgetary submissions. We had a chance to hear from a number of groups, not least public sector unions. I want to put this on the record, because there was reference made by the likes of CUPE, OPSEU, ETFO and others about their entitlements, their collective agreements and, very particularly, their benefits—their pension plans—amongst other things.

My very favourite was ETFO, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, and its unsmiling president, Sam Hammond. I had a chance to question him personally, and I regretted later that I didn't actually jump over the desk, grab him by the lapels and say, "What is wrong with you? What you are thinking?" He said, "You can't touch our entitlements. You can't go near us. We're inviolate. It doesn't matter what's happened from an economic point of view." I accept that fact, but he has to accept, and the public sector unions have to accept, that they are in a very unique position. They're the only ones who haven't been affected. Even private sector pension plans have been affected detrimentally, and we've seen the results of that by the economic recession, but the public sector pension plans not so.

So I generally have to make the comment, because we've seen it in those hearings and we've seen it across the board, that we're dealing with anything but a level playing field here. That's why when we talk about this bill—a bill that looks to address existing problems with existing pension plans—that it simply isn't enough.

So here's my first bottom line: The bill, in and of itself, is a reasonable attempt to adjust existing pension plans. But how do you adjust pension legislation for greater fairness while allowing people—like the two thirds, like most of you, like me—to foot the bill? Because right now, the offer that's on the table for us is basically nothing.

I mentioned MPP pensions, and I want to put this on the record: We don't have them, and colleagues have alluded to that fact. We used to, but not any more. The previous government—let's not discuss what party—thought we didn't need pensions. Wrong; we did need pensions, and I'm the first person to say it. Everybody needs pensions, however they are created.

British Columbia, as many of you—I dare say all of you—know, has addressed this problem for their MPPs by doing something that I will admit for any government must be pretty difficult: to turn around to the population in these times and say, "You know what? MPPs are like anybody else. They need pensions. We're changing the situation, and British Columbia is restoring pensions," something that we should be doing here. You can quote me.

Normally, when a bill is debated—I speak for myself on this one, I have to say, Speaker—MPPs stand up and talk about what's in the bill. What I've been talking about for the most part is what's not in this bill, and I think that that's the biggest single aspect of this bill that jumps out at me. First and foremost, what's not in the bill; secondly, that this bill is completely irrelevant to the two thirds of people in Ontario who don't have pensions.

To my first point: They didn't listen or act on the Arthurs report. Time and money was expended, and the question is, for what? This is typical—no plan, no solution. This bill does not address the following:

What happens to the pension benefits of bankrupt employers? It doesn't fix the problem that the Nortel

retirees found themselves in or find themselves in today. It took a by-election in Ottawa to fix that. The only hope, then, for retired pensioners of bankrupt companies is if their MPP resigns and a by-election that Dalton McGuinty cares to win is held. That's when we'll have pension reform for those people. That's not the way you do it. You do it by changing it legislatively, and this bill doesn't go far enough.

There are elements of this bill that are worth alluding to. We talk, for example, about grow-in benefits, which some people say are a good idea. The province of Nova Scotia is one; most other provinces do not. In a commentary by a legal firm that specializes in pensions—and I'll read this into the record: The bill proposes to extend grow-in benefits to all members who are involuntarily terminated by an employer, other than for cause, on and after January 1, 2012. "Jointly sponsored pension plans and multi-employer pension plans may elect to opt out of this requirement.

"This proposed change is part of a general initiative in the bill to treat plan members uniformly regardless of the circumstances of their termination.... Such consistency is a worthwhile goal, since it makes little policy sense to provide this benefit to employees terminated in a special situation"—like a plant shutdown or reorganization—"but not those terminated in the normal course." Then, in bold type, it says, "But consistency of treatment among plan members could also have been achieved by abolishing mandatory grow-in rights."

Grow-in rights have to do with benefits that might have accrued to somebody who had stayed in a situation that is no longer available to him or her. Now, if you want to talk about abstract, that's pretty abstract.

What it basically says is, at the time that a pension plan folds, full or partial windup, if your age plus your years of service total 55, you have the right to grow into the pension plan and receive benefits as if you had continued to contribute. So it's pretty strange stuff to be considering, even verbalizing it. I'm trying very hard still to understand it, and for people at home, what does it mean?

The point that I'm trying to make here is that the bill has a number of technical aspects to it, but it doesn't really get close to the real question, and the real question is: What are we going to do about all of Ontario over the fullness of time?

The 60% of Ontarians who don't have pensions and who are solely responsible for providing for their own retirements have worked very hard, have worked diligently, have worked prudently to provide for their futures, and all they hear from the government is that we all need to tighten our belts, and all we see from this government on a go-forward basis is waste.

I want to talk for a moment about people who did do what they had to do to provide for their own retirements—not the people like me who are still working, who are 62, who have some investments and are relying on the market to return sufficiently so that those investments will yield a reasonable retirement 10, 15 or

20 years down the road—or 30, if we live that long, and some of us are; let's talk about the people who are today 10 years older than I—72, 73, 74, 75, who had retired—
Interjection.

Mr. Peter Shurman: There's somebody over there—who had retired, who had the investments, whose investments were yielding the style that they wanted to live in, to be able to pursue their leisure, their pastimes in whatever way they wanted, and then got hit over the course of the past year because they were individuals with a variety of things, not the least, a great big recession. Now, that recession hit me, too, in terms of my investments, but I'm not drawing on those investments, so I have a chance or I've had a chance to have the investments recover. So I have a future to look forward to, in terms of my ability to draw on them, that that 72- or 75-year-old doesn't, because he or she got hit and continued to need that money to draw down. That's a very major problem, and there's no fallback position for those people.

That's what we're talking about. We're talking about people who have been hit very, very hard. This bill only adds to that anxiety. Compare the amount of time that the Liberal government will be devoting to this bill to the amount of time given to the HST bill that will absolutely impact each and every person in this province. I raise the HST again by way of saying that people who have been hit very hard over the course of the past year, who are living on investment income that has been necessarily reduced over the course of that time period, are being hit again by—what was it we heard the other day?—\$225 average per household per annum just for heating.

It's really difficult for each of us to go to the constituency office, and I would say the government members at the very least have got to admit that when you get into the constituency office and you hear about these problems, you've got to take some level of responsibility, and when you want to talk about pensions, you have to be ready to address these things on a go-forward basis.

We're all getting older. Society in general is getting older. We need pension reform, nobody argues with that. This bill is a reasonable bill—nobody argues with that—but it doesn't do anything near addressing the fullness of the question. I hope that over the course of this debate one conclusion will be reached, and that is that we have to do much, much more.

1710

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I'm in agreement with what was said by the honourable member, because although this bill does address some of the issues and deals with some of the concerns with regard to those people who have pensions, it does little to nothing to deal with the issues of people who don't have pensions. That's the majority of Ontarians. I think most people in this debate are agreeing on that.

I'm going to get a chance in a few minutes to debate this in fuller detail. There are things in this bill that deal

with everything from vesting to the rules about how the pension administration system should work. Some are a step in the right direction. Does it go as far as I'd want? Probably not, but I'll get a better chance to debate that later.

I just want to echo in on the point that the honourable member makes, and that is: The real challenge that we have is how we are able to make sure, especially in this current economy and the economy that's going to develop as we move forward, that we give people an opportunity to have a pension after 30 or 40 years of work. There used to be a time, when I first started working, when you went knocking at the door of the local employer, whoever that might be, and you got a job for life. That was the case in Windsor. That was the case in Oshawa. Certainly it was the case in Timmins. Those places had defined pension plans. Some of them may not have been very rich—unfortunately, the one I worked for was very meagre—but most people had defined pension plans. So there was a certain understanding; there was a covenant that, if you went to work for the employer and you committed to long service, at the end of the day you'd never get rich but you'd be taken care of. You would have benefits. You would have wages in the time that you worked, and in the time after you retired you would have some form of pension plan.

Well, that has all been turned on its ear. I think the too-big-to-fail debate that we had two years ago and last year proves the point that nothing is safe out there. Who would have thought 20 years ago that Nortel pensions would be in question of being insolvent? So we need to do something to allow people who work every day in this province to have a pension when they retire, and I'll speak to that a little bit later.

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

Interjection: It's a long one.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: The riding with the longest name, because our people have the biggest hearts and the biggest hopes, Madam Speaker.

I just want to compliment the member from Thornhill for his excellent remarks. I thought they were timely, balanced and fair. He—

Interjection: Not all of them.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Well, most of them were. He went to some length to, I think, prudently describe the current lay of the land and to make some helpful suggestions.

In that context—and I don't profess to be a pension expert, although in my previous role as Minister of Government Services I did have some engagement with some of our employee pensions, which are very good, by the way; just as an aside. But pensions are basically about security, and a lack of a pension or a lack of security in one's older years is not a pleasant situation or prospect.

I know there has been talk at the federal level about Canada pension plan supplemental plans, individual plans. Perhaps it could be created. There has also been some talk about portability, and I note my colleague's comments that pension reform in isolation certainly doesn't enhance portability. Portability would have to be national, which of course is why we're not only moving on aspects of the Arthurs report with this bill but why the Premier has talked repeatedly about the need for a comprehensive federal-provincial discussion about this. Portability requires—I'd suspect that people would be vested right from the get-go. That's another aspect that we need so that that fund can continue to be built regardless of the number of jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Simcoe—Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I think our honourable colleague from Thornhill did an excellent job. He focused, really, on those people who don't have pensions, like himself, myself and many members of this House.

Ourselves aside, we are going to have to do something, and the NDP has picked up on a good issue that I know strikes the hearts of many Ontarians. Whether their approach in terms of an Ontario pension plan is the right way to go—I say to the government, you have to accelerate your conversation with the federal government. If you don't want to adopt something like an Ontario pension plan, Mr. McMeekin, the parliamentary assistant, just talked about an enhancement, perhaps at the national level, to the Canada pension plan.

We are in serious doo-doo with respect to people who are 55-plus now, who will retire in the next few years and who have no pensions. The economy won't recover that quickly. There won't be jobs for those people while they're still in their working years and still have good health, so government, collectively, we're going to have to do something or at least get on the right track. This issue has been ignored for far, far too long. When the honourable member from Thornhill said that this bill is nice and it corrects a number of technical issues that have been outstanding for many years, he also said that it doesn't address the fullness of the question, and the question, of course, is, what are we going to do? And we'd better start doing it sooner.

I don't buy the government—I get really worried when McGuinty uses the federal government as a crutch or an excuse not to do something. You've been in long enough that most Ontarians can read through your coat. If you don't want to do something, you blame the federal government. We had this silly motion about the federal government's budget that was voted on this morning—debate collapsed yesterday because the government couldn't get enough speakers to talk about their own motion—but that was another smokescreen to divert attention from the real issues. The real issues today are jobs, job security and, of course, pensions.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Thornhill gave a very definite survey of the landscape in terms of the

pension issues from his perspective and from the broader perspective. I think the most important comment is that when he's talking about people's preparedness for quite a different future, it's a good warning sign for all of us. This bill is part of the two parts of pension legislation that have been promised by the McGuinty government. This part is more or less tinkering, as has been said by a few, but it's important. Also, the second part, working with the federal government, will bring some of these portability and stability issues forward.

I hope the two levels of government are able to work collectively and co-operatively, because when you start messing around with the Income Tax Act itself under the CPP rules—I really do believe that the province's rate is usually set as a percentage of the federal rate. It's an important place to begin because there will be revenue implications in the short term.

I think it's important also for the individual to shoulder some of the responsibility, and that could be done through income tax as well, through tax provisions, to patriate some of the dollars of income into sort of mandatory—if that's not too strong of a word—retirement planning.

I think having transparency in all of the changes that are made—the predictability of the market itself becomes the real question. I don't know if anyone really knows what the market will be in two months, let alone two years or 20 years. That's fundamental to all of this planning and tinkering: What is the future of the global economy and the monetary system as we know it today? That's fundamental to all of this. Otherwise—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Thornhill has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Thank you to my colleagues from Timmins–James Bay, Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale, Simcoe–Grey and Durham for their comments. The comments actually lead me to conclude the way I started: Saying that there was a fair amount of collegiality on this certainly is holding true. There are ideas coming from all sides, because at the end of the day, this Legislature is about nothing if not the security of Ontarians today and on a go-forward basis, security and dignity in being able to live out our lives having the appropriate chronic care facilities and the appropriate health care. And the appropriate means with which to live in that dignified way has everything to do with how we deal with the question of pensions in this province. This is ultimately about coping, because we are becoming, at least for the next 50 years or so, a seniors' society.

1720

I want to put a couple of things on the record with respect to the HST and its impact on seniors at this time because it impacts on retired persons' abilities to go forward with dignity as well. Our research is estimating that the average senior couple could expect to pay approximately \$2,762 more per annum due to the HST on costs associated with daily activities, recreation and their savings. That's a very, very big deal.

We've had a lot to say in this Legislature on all sides with regard to the HST. It does come into effect on July 1. It does impact seniors in that way. In so doing, it does deplete the savings and, where possible, the pension income of those very same seniors, and we have to be cognizant of it.

The Canadian Association of Retired Persons, CARP, has conducted a survey of its members, and 69% of them believe that the extra costs caused by the HST will be offset by the government's so-called tax cuts. I don't believe it will, and that's a big deal.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to say I'm glad to be able to participate in this debate, although just 20 minutes' time is allocated, but there are the rules. Live and die by the rules, as they might say.

I just want to say up front that this is an interesting debate in the sense that we're trying to deal with what is a real problem in our society. There are all kinds of people, some 60% to 70% of citizens who work hard every day, who go to work in the morning, who toil every day at their job and come home at night, who are without a pension when they come home at the end of the day. They can do that for 30 or 40 years and have nothing to show for it pension-wise after 30 or 40 years of work. That is a real travesty in a society such as Ontario and in an economy such as ours and in a society that counts itself as something progressive.

The question becomes, why is that? Why have we not moved towards dealing with making sure that we have adequate pensions? Well, I'll tell you what. We can point fingers at each other in this Legislature, but I think in society we can probably point fingers as well.

For example, when I was working at the McIntyre mine for Noranda, I remember going to bargaining committee. One of the things that I wanted to do in bargaining was to put pension front and centre in order to increase the amount of pension that people would get on retirement, because we did have a defined pension plan. But my own members would say, "Oh, my God, no. Give me my money now. Don't give me my money 20 years from now because what I need now, I need now." So they would give their bargain committees instructions not to put too much emphasis on the pension and to put money up front in the collective agreement. I always thought that was very, very short-sighted on the part of workers because I understood, like most people, that people do not plan for retirement.

I remember my mother, who passed away a year and a half ago, God rest her soul, told me when I first started working my very first job, "Gilles, I'll give you a piece of advice, and you're not going to listen because I didn't listen to my mother. If you took 10% of your income from today, and you put it aside and you basically learned how to live on 90% of what you make, you're going to be able to retire a very comfortable person at age 50." She said, "I know you're not going to listen, but that's what you need to do." I remember thinking back

then, when I was a young guy in my teens, “Is she nuts? I’ve got all my life to build a pension. I’m not going to think about that today.” Well, God, was mother right! Madeleine Bisson, God rest her soul, figured it out when I was a kid, far, far sooner than I did.

The reality is, we never start to think about pensions until when? Until you’re five or 10 years away from retirement. That’s when people start thinking about pensions.

This is how they start to think about it: “Oh, I’m 50 some-odd years old. Hmm, retirement is not that far away; I’ll be 65 in 10 years”—or eight years or whatever. “Oh, boy, I’m really looking forward to that retirement date. Maybe I can do it earlier.” Then they start to do the math, and they say, “Well, the house is paid, and I don’t have much in the way of debt. If I really hunker down, I’ll be able pay off that debt in a few years and I’ll be in a position to retire.” Then they go, “Well, I don’t have a defined pension plan, so I have to live on Canada pension at age 60, so I have to take a reduction in my Canada pension.” Then you do the math on that, and you say, “I’m entitled to the full amount of the Canada pension,” which is about \$900. Take the deduction that you take at age 60, and you’re somewhere around \$600. You go, “I’m going live on \$600 for the next five years until age 65?” Who in this House and who in this society is able to do that?

So then you say, “Well, maybe what I can do is, if I had an RSP or something, I would be able to make ends meet.” But the reality is that far too few people in our society—and not because they’re not well-intended—plan for retirement and don’t put that money away. Yes, there are opportunities to put RSPs away in regards to saving for retirement, and there are some very good rules about being able to get some tax help in doing that, but how many people actually do that? I would ask, how many people in this Legislature give above what we get in RSPs for our pensions in this House? I bet you it’s less than 80%. I would bet you: There are more people in this House who don’t put away money for their retirement than there are who do, and we’re no different than anybody in our society.

The problem is that we’re all very busy in our lives doing what we’re doing. So when you’re younger, you say, “Boy, if I only could save up the down payment for the house.” Then you finally buy the house and you say, “If I could only pay down the mortgage.” Then your kids get to college and university level, and you say, “God, if only I could give my kids what I didn’t get and put them through university or college with no debt.” You finally get that through, and all of a sudden they’re getting married, and you say, “If only I could help them out with a nice wedding,” and after that, they’re buying their first house. And then you’ve got grandchildren. You know, it’s life. So the reality is that we don’t take care of our retirement.

So the question becomes, what should we be doing? I’m going to say this—and I know I’m going get some mail and emails on this: What can we do to protect

ourselves from ourselves—if you follow what I mean. I think that’s where the issue of defined pensions is really, really important.

There are a couple of approaches, and I favour what Andrea Horwath, our leader, has brought forward, because I think it’s a fair compromise. There are those in our society who say that we should mandate that all workers in Ontario have a defined pension plan, and that there be vehicles created for employees to have pension plans that are portable from employer to employer, so that if you work for contractor A for six months, employer B for three years, and then you go work wherever, you would bring your pension with you. It would be a defined pension plan, where your employer and you are both paying into your pension plan. There are those who favour that. However, that’s difficult to do. When you go from having 70% of people with no pensions to that, it’s a huge step. Many people in the employer community—and, I would argue, many workers—would have a problem with that. Many employees would say, “What do you mean? You’re going to take how much from my paycheque every month? No. Get away from me.” Employers would be complaining as well.

Or you could have RSP-based pensions of some type. Well, let me ask how many people in this House like RRSPs; put up your hands, please. GICs? I don’t see too many hands going up. Because, like everybody in our society, in North America and Europe, we took a whack on our investments. We saw a devaluation of anywhere from 30% to 50%, depending on what you were invested in, when there was a market correction. Have you ever noticed that there’s always a market correction at the time that you’re actually investing in those pensions? So you get into an RSP-based pension and you basically plan, “If I put so much money away every month and every year, and it grows at—I’ll be very conservative—an average of 4.5%, I will be able to retire after so-many years with X amount of money,” and all of a sudden there’s a market correction. I’ve had two of them in my short little lifetime, and both of those market corrections have probably wiped out whatever gains I made in the market. Quite frankly, I think that’s the reason why we have market corrections: to make sure that people like me don’t get too far ahead, and those people with lots of money on Bay Street and Wall Street can take the money and run away to the Cayman Islands and do what they do. The market is not game for workers; the market is game for the large investors.

The question becomes, what do you do? I think what Andrea Horwath has put forward as the provincial leader of the New Democratic Party is a reasoned first step, and that is to basically mirror what we have in the Canada pension plan here in Ontario so that every worker in province of Ontario would basically default into an Ontario pension plan unless they ask to get out because they have their own defined pension plan. For example, if I’m a worker where there is a defined pension plan, I would be able to say, “Listen, I’ve already got a defined pension plan that will give me \$1,500 a month, or \$2,500

a month. I don't need the Ontario pension plan. I default out." It would be their choice. Because you have to recognize that there are 20% to 30% who have adequate pensions in our society. But for the rest of us, we would be able to at least opt into a system that allows us to have a pension that is somewhat equal to the Canada pension plan.

1730

The Ontario pension plan that is being put forward by Madame Horwath for the Ontario New Democratic Party deals with giving people an opportunity to at least have a decent income on retirement. When you retire at age 65, you would have three pensions that would basically top on to each other. You would have your old age pension at age 65. You add your Canada pension and your Ontario pension plan—at age 50 if you go early. The combination of the three would give you somewhere over \$2,000 a month.

I'm the first to agree. Is that enough for some? Probably not. But at least it's enough to be able to pay the taxes, the insurance on your home, the utilities, the gas in your vehicle and the groceries on the table and the basic things that you have to do. The rest of it, you try to do yourself from your own savings and whatever means are available to you. I think that is a fair compromise.

I would hope, in a debate such as this, that the government would use the opportunity to say, "You know what? Andrea Horwath and the NDP are on to something. There's a good idea here. Maybe we should do it." You know what? God bless. If you want to take Andrea Horwath's and the NDP's idea and you want to wrap it up in a Liberal bill, go for it. I think it's a fair compromise, and that's how this House should work.

Instead, what have we got? We have the government that introduces Bill 236. Bill 236 deals only with those people who have a defined pension, which is around 30% of our population, and deals at the margins with the problems that people are having on pensions.

For those people who have seen their pensions being devalued by the fact that their employers have gone bankrupt—AbitibiBowater, for example; Nortel and others; Pamour, the place that I used to work—those who have had their pensions devalued, are we responding to the issue of insolvency? At the margins only. We're not dealing with making whole those pensioners who are going to be losing part of their pension as a result of what has happened in the market, as far as the stock market, or what has happened with employers. Is that fair?

I see here that the president of the CAW local, Monsieur Dennis Couvrette, who's here—a good friend of mine, who is a member of the coalition to save Xstrata. He understands as well as I do that there are a whole bunch of people in our community who find themselves in the situation where their pension is being devalued because the employer has gone bankrupt. We had that happen with Royal Oak. We have it with people at Nortel who live in our community. They have come to us at our own meetings and talked about this particular issue and said, "How are you going to make me whole?"

These people worked all their lives—30, 35, 40 years for an employer. They were told that if they'd take less wages every year and they put more money in their pensions, they would be able to retire with a decent income. And what do they find? The vagaries of the market, and the individual company strategies that have basically put some of these companies under, and the overall economic situation have made their pension less whole than it should have been. This bill doesn't deal with making sure that those people are made whole.

I think at the very least, what the government could have done, if you're going to deal with those people who have pensions, is to have a mechanism to allow that to happen so that we can make whole those people who have lost value on their pensions because of a reduction of the stock market or because of investment decisions on the part of a company.

Again, I say it wasn't the worker, be it either staff or union, that basically said, "I want to make this pension less valuable." It's the marketplace, as far as the stock market, and in some cases, decisions of the company, such as we're seeing with AbitibiBowater.

So I say, are you dealing with that in whole in this legislation? No. You're taking a step forward but you're not dealing with that in whole.

I hope, during the time that we get into committee on this particular bill, that we're able to hear from people and able to make some amendments in order to deal with the issue of insolvency within pensions.

The other issue is this surplus-sharing agreement that you're putting inside the legislation. One of the things that I have always been opposed to is allowing employers to use the surpluses in the pension to their own benefit.

You know what? If the investment of that pension has meant that there is a surplus, that surplus should remain within the pension and be there for the benefit of the people who have paid into the pension. That's not the money of the company. That is the deferred wages of workers who have said, "I will take less on the hourly rate in order to get the money on my pension." In some cases, when the market is high, some of these pensions have made some extra money as a result of their investments. Well, those are not investments that the company made. That's not the money of the company. Even if the pension was 100% paid by the employer, that is the money of the workers. The workers are the ones who have said, "I will defer income in order to get a pension." Those surpluses should not in any way, shape or form be subject to any benefit of the employer, period. Does this legislation deal with that? No, it doesn't. It makes some changes, but it doesn't deal with that.

We should get into a proper debate about how we deal with surpluses in a pension. One of the things that I would say upfront is that the surplus in the pension should be protected to a degree, so that when there is a correction in the marketplace, as we saw a year and a half ago, that correction would be somewhat buffered from the losses that happened in the marketplace or, if it is sufficient enough, would benefit the workers who are

going to be retiring or who are in retirement. That would be the very least that I think we could do. Again, the details of that you need to work out in committee, but I think that is a fair discussion that we should have in committee in order to deal with those issues that are important. At times, pensions do have surpluses, and we need to make sure that we have a mechanism that deals with those surpluses so that they in fact are of benefit to those people who retire.

The other issue is the superintendent's powers. In the legislation it says, "The superintendent is authorized to approve agreements in restructuring proceedings under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act ... and under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act." What that means, the long and the short of it, is that if I'm a worker—and that's what happened to me; I worked for Royal Oak and, before that, Noranda. When they went under, we, the workers, ended up at the end of the line. We ended up having our pensions somewhat protected by the \$1,000 a month insurance that is there from the pension insurance commission of Ontario, but the issue is that if anything over that is not funded, the employees end up at the very end of the line, and that's what happened to the Nortel workers. That's probably what's going to happen to AbitibiBowater, if that happens the way we think it might.

So in this section of the law we need to ensure that we have a way of making sure that workers are protected when it comes to bankruptcy, so that if there are assets left at the end of the bankruptcy, there is some mechanism to allow workers to share in whatever those assets are. Am I arguing that all of the money should just go to the pensioners? No, because there are other creditors. But I think we need to have a saner and more fair way of approaching who is able to access the assets of the company that are sold on the windup of the company, at the end of the bankruptcy. I think, again, those are debates that we can have and those are discussions that we can have in committee that would be of use.

The point that I want to end on—I've only got a few minutes left—is to go back and say this is a step that doesn't bring us to where we need to get, and that is to ensure that workers in this province, all workers—management, hourly rated, politicians, people who work at McDonald's, people who work wherever, you name it—have an opportunity to have a pension in their 30-, 35-, 40-year work cycle.

It is unsustainable as a society that we have so many people who are retiring without pensions. We see it, I would say, almost on a daily basis in most of our constituency offices. People come into the office and say, "I can't make ends meet at the end of the month. What have I done wrong? I've worked all my life. I've paid my bills. I've raised my family. I've done everything and played by the rules. At the end, I'm not able to make ends meet because the cost of living is outstripping what I'm getting in my retirement on CPP and on old age pension," especially single incomes, women or men who are left widowed, who have to live on their own once the

spouse is gone and there isn't the second pension kicking in. Far too often, in all of our constituency offices, we are in the situation of having to deal with the retired poor who have to face that challenge every day. So I think we need to challenge ourselves to deal with that.

The last point I would make is this: We need to deal with those issues in our communities that allow us to keep people in their jobs. I just want to say in the last two minutes I have that we have an opportunity here in Ontario to do what is right. Xstrata has announced the shutdown of the refinery and smelter in the city of Timmins for mid-May. I have brought, on behalf of the New Democratic caucus, a bill that basically says what Newfoundland does, which is that any ore that is extracted has to be processed in the province of Ontario. I think we in this Legislature owe it to the people of Timmins—James Bay and the people, some 3,000 of them across this province, who benefit from this mine to be able to have those jobs as a result of the extraction of ore that we do in the city of Timmins. I think at the end of the day—and I hear my good friend Mr. Zimmer laughing.

1740

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, it's not laughing about that. I will correct—

Mr. David Zimmer: No, no.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay, very good.

Mr. David Zimmer: I respect what you're saying.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay, very good. He was reading a good article. That sounds pretty interesting.

Anyway, we have an opportunity to do what's right. At the very least, if the government is not going to support that, then what is their response? I would just say that we in northern Ontario support wholeheartedly what both the federal and provincial governments tried to do and have done in order to support auto workers in places like Oshawa, Windsor and others when that industry was in trouble. The only thing we're asking is not for bailouts; we're asking for this government to assist us in finding a way to get Xstrata to keep its doors open because, at the end of the day, is this a company that's losing money? Was it \$2.7 billion last year? A \$2.7-billion profit on the part of Xstrata. Certainly to God \$2.7 billion is not a short amount of money. If we can find some way of being able to entice and get this company to do what's right and keep people working at the smelter refinery in the community of Timmins, I think it doesn't just benefit the workers but benefits all of the people of this province.

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

Mr. Glen R. Murray: I've got to say that I was completely perplexed by the member from Thornhill. Here's a fellow whose government eliminated pensions for members of this assembly, cashed out hundreds of thousands of dollars, and then had the government pay the taxes for members here. Now he comes before us

today saying, “We should reinstate pensions for members”—

Mr. Peter Shurman: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I don't know what this member is talking about. His questions and comments are relating to a speech I made about half an hour ago, not to the speech that has just taken place from the member from James Bay.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask the member for Toronto Centre to confine his comments to the speech that was just given.

Mr. Glen R. Murray: It's interesting that they don't want to hear the truth. That's helpful.

There's some consistency in my friend's position from Timmins–James Bay that hasn't been from some previous speakers as well. You can't have a system where you attack us in government for wanting to be all things to all people, which has been the tone of the debate to this point. We bring forward a piece of legislation that corrects an existing problem in a—

Interjection.

Mr. Glen R. Murray: Madam Speaker, as soon as we have order, I'll continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We have order. You have eight seconds to continue.

Mr. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will just say that given the inconsistencies of my friend, I will promise to extend him greater courtesy when he speaks, but that has been the pattern on his part.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: The member from Timmins–James Bay, I believe, got it right when he was talking about the opportunities here.

It's the real thing here. We should look at the pension benefits guarantee fund—it's not in this, but that's an important fund—at who can be members and who cannot be members of that and what is the amount of the entitlement. In fact, it's very little. It's up to \$1,000, and that fund itself is in a deficit position.

The key thing that I think is worth mentioning—there are three parts to the legislation that I think are critical. One is the grow-in provision, the grow-in benefits, and I'm just going to take the time here to read them, if there's anybody paying attention.

The phased retirement option is an important option, but more importantly the “consolidation of benefits under a single pension plan”—I want to commend the member from Simcoe–Grey, who almost a year ago brought this up as a private member's bill. What this allowed is that members who were disenfranchised, if you will, with changes in the government's delivery model of service—and the case in point here were the CCACs, community care access centres. Many worked in hospitals and settings who could not transfer their pensions to the new organization, the CCAC. Also, ambulance drivers—at one time in this province, they worked for municipalities, they worked for the province and they worked for the hospitals themselves. They were in three different pension groups. Many of them became disenfranchised

from their original pension. Section 80.1 of the act corrects that problem for perhaps 10,000 individuals in this province. I think that's a worthy comment from the member from Simcoe–Grey and to the minister.

We are not being tokenistic here. There are some significant and important changes, and I think if people take the time, in this technical discussion, to follow up on the grow-in, the phased-in retirement options and section 80, the consolidation of benefits, they'll see there is some substance. However, this is not the easiest—

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: I did listen intently to the comments from the member from Timmins–James Bay. He hit on something that I think is very important: the idea of savings. It's interesting to look at Hansard from the mid-1960s from the federal Parliament of Canada when the Prime Minister of the day, Mr. Pearson, introduced the Canada pension plan and the Quebec hybrid, QPP. If you look at that discussion, they did talk about the baby boom generation eventually retiring—the baby boom generation typically defined as those born from 1946, 1947 through to 1961, 1962—and it's interesting to look at that debate to see how people were looking ahead through that CPP debate. I think that's very important, the issue that was touched upon here by the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Indeed, the member from Simcoe—and I found out just recently, and I actually talked to his office, about the number of people in Peterborough that were formerly enrolled in HOOPP's pension plan, who were then transferred into OMERS because they were EMS people who worked for a hospital, worked for the municipality and now found themselves transferred to the county of Peterborough because of the change of responsibilities.

Indeed, this bill, Bill 236, is the first bill as a result of the Arthurs commission, which looked into the future of pensions in the province of Ontario, and this is a start.

I personally found out about the pension issue when a small company in Peterborough went into bankruptcy, Peterborough Paper Converters. I worked with the local union, the communications workers, to try to resolve a number of issues with regard to the pension benefits guarantee plan to make sure that they would have the \$1,000 in place.

So the member from Timmins–James Bay touched on a lot of good points. This is a start, and, collectively, we'll move forward.

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

The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much to the speakers who commented on what I had to say.

To the member from Toronto Centre: I don't take exception that you were trying to speak to somebody else's debate. You're new here. It'll take a little while to get the steps and how this place operates, but I hear what you're saying.

I just want to say again that it is really an opportunity that we have here as legislators to actually do something

that's right. I've got to say, I'm quite pleased and proud that our leader, Andrea Horwath, has put forward this proposal that would allow people to have a basic pension such as CPP to be topped up to their own income as an Ontario pension plan. I think that's a reasonable step, and I think it's one that the government should be thinking about. If not, I can guarantee you that we will be talking about that in the next provincial election.

As for Bill 236, I want to make sure that my honourable friend, the whip on the other side, my co-whip, as we would say, understands that I am not giving support to this legislation. I want you to understand that, at this point, I am not supporting it. I think that, yes, it is an attempt to deal with some of the issues; I'm not going to say it's not. But it ain't dealing with some of the major issues, and the big one is insolvency. You have all kinds of workers who have had their pensions devalued because of insolvency, and we're not dealing with that in this legislation. On that alone—and that's an issue for many. I've got many people in my constituency who are at risk of losing their pension with AbitibiBowater. I have other people who work for Nortel, and I have other workers who have already been affected by issues of insolvency, and I think that's one issue that we need to deal with.

I look forward to this bill going into committee, and I hope in committee that we're able to do the kind of work that we should be doing, and that is to try to find some reasonable way to deal with these issues so that workers are able to retire with a decent pension when they decide to retire.

1750

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important issue. I've been here this whole afternoon listening to the debate that is taking place. It's interesting to hear the perspectives that are coming out. I'll be very honest with you that I've found the whole debate to be quite educational, from my perspective, because I think we've been hearing from a certain demographic thus far. People have been talking about their pension plans in the past or how it may be impacted today. I come from an age group where, honestly speaking, I don't know much about pensions, because I never had a pension. Most likely, I won't have a pension. Prior to being—

Interjections.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Well, there are no pensions for MPPs, so the member for Timmins–James Bay is correct, and folks out there do think that MPPs get pensions; they don't. Members of Parliament get pensions but not members of provincial Parliament. But even in the private sector, where I was before, practising law, there was no pension. It's interesting to look at that issue now, especially with the uncertainty that exists in our global economy, how the issue of pensions has surfaced, because those pension plans have been in serious jeo-

pardy. I think we've had quite a few illuminating comments about that.

The important question is, "Is the way we have known pensions in the past going to be the trend in the future?" Pensions are expensive. Public pensions are very expensive. If you look around at the status of governments right now federally and provincially, all governments have major deficits. I think, for the foreseeable future, it's going to be difficult for governments to be able to really implement or put in place rich pension plans. That becomes a serious issue. Again, from my generational point of view—and I'm among friends or talking to constituents who are young parents and having a discussion around pensions—it's something I don't think we even think about much, because that's not something we're expecting. We obviously try to save money and invest that in RSPs etc., but I think we have come to the reality that really we will not have a pension. But I think what's important is that the discussion that comes around is about retirement income. Okay, I might not have a pension, but what kind of support would I have when I'm 65, 70 or 75? I think at that time we'll probably be working longer, as many people work longer today. What kind of retirement income would I have? Would I have retirement income to be self-supporting, that I would be investing, as I do in my RRSPs, and hoping that there would be enough money in place for me to live sufficiently in my retirement?

I think that is why it is extremely important that we in Canada engage in some sort of debate about retirement income. We need to make sure that collectively we say—and not just at the provincial level, because I think this problem is bigger than only one province dealing with it. Again, money is a big issue because all this stuff costs a lot of money, and with all the competing priorities we've got in terms of health care and public education, we have to be mindful as to where we invest our scarce resources. So I think it's imperative that we do engage in a national dialogue, that we do sit down nationally—all provinces and territories with the federal government—to have a discussion about retirement income, to have a discussion about what kind of system we can put in place, especially for those people who already live on a low income today, so that they have some sort of support available to them when they retire. Not everybody is like us in this Legislature, making \$116,000 or more and having the luxury to save some money on the side in the hope that the market will bode well in the long term and we'll have some sort of nest egg. So that type of discussion is extremely, extremely important.

In my riding of Ottawa Centre recently, of course, with the economic downturn, this issue around pensions became extremely important because I have a lot of Nortel pensioners who live in Ottawa Centre. I have had many, many meetings with those Nortel pensioners to better understand what kind of pension plan exists, what kinds of regulatory regimes, both federal and provincial, exist when it comes to bankruptcy protection for Nortel and what it means in terms of the possible windup of

those Nortel pensions. I've had the privilege of working with Don Sproule—quite a few of us have heard from Don. He's actually a constituent of mine. He represents the Nortel pensioners. Rob Patterson is another gentleman in my riding whom I'm in constant dialogue with—and David Jeanes, who has been very instructive to me in terms of bringing issues for Nortel pensioners forward.

Obviously we've been engaged in a dialogue with them. I've been working with the Minister of Finance to highlight some of the concerns for Nortel pensioners. Again, these are pensioners who have worked very hard. They contributed to a defined pension plan, and now, with the economic downturn and the potential bankruptcy of Nortel, they're facing a very stark reality—that is, their pension plans may not exist. After working that much, being able to contribute and being at the age they are, that is a tough reality to face.

I'm really pleased that most recently, a few weeks ago, the Minister of Finance announced that the government of Ontario will be funding the pension benefits guarantee fund, the PBGF. I've been working on that file for some time along with the Nortel pensioners in my riding of Ottawa Centre. To get the commitment that that money is being put aside, if needed, to ensure that under PBGF up to \$1,000 will be paid out to the Nortel pensioners is an important step, because it allows a level of surety or certainty to Nortel pensioners.

We still need to do more work. Obviously, the next step for Nortel pensioners in my riding is to work around the scenarios: If there is a windup of Nortel assets, how do we deal with the pension plan as it relates to the Canadian pensioners? We've heard about the assaults that are taking place with Nortel pensioners in the United Kingdom right now and with the American Nortel pensioners because they're looking at Nortel assets here in Canada, which highlights the need to strengthen the pension system. We need to make sure that we reform the pension system, and Bill 236, as it has been tabled, is a first step in that direction.

The Minister of Finance has been quite clear that there will be another piece of legislation coming forward to this House to further reform our pension benefits system, but I think this economic climate—the way the market crashed, the kind of recession we just lived through in 2009 and are finally getting out of and moving towards recovery—has highlighted that the rules that were put in place are perhaps outdated—which happens, because you cannot create rules and regulations that will be good for all times, and we need to adapt. Bill 236 is trying to do that: adapt the pension benefits system to what is needed today.

If I look at some of the key things that have been brought forward through this legislation, I see that the Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2009, Bill 236, will extend the benefits of plan members affected by layoffs and eliminate partial windups. It means that more people will get more pension benefits in more circumstances. If this bill is passed, it will be easier to restructure pension plans affected by corporate reorganizations so coverage

can continue for affected workers. Also, this bill, if passed, will increase transparency and access to information for plan members and pensioners. These are important steps so that we can start reforming our pension plan system.

There's also some short-term relief that's embedded in this bill. There is the need to preserve a system that protects the retirements of pensioners while ensuring that pension plans are affordable for employers—you always have a balance to reach between the cost to employees and employers, and that's an important thing; extension of solvency and amortization periods from five to 10 years, with the consent of active members; deferral of catch-up payments to provide one year of cash flow relief; enhanced notice to active and retired plan members etc. Again, these are important things.

Like I said earlier, I'll confess I don't understand the ins and outs of pensions because I've never had one, so I never had to deal with one. But I think what is highlighted is that we need to deal with the issue of pensions, we need to look at current pension plans and we need to reform them, but what we also need to look at, which is a bigger question that is valid for all ages—including mine—is to have a system for retirement income in Canada.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

1800

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

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

LABOUR DISPUTE

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given on Thursday, February 18, by the Minister of Labour. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. As you've pointed out, I do wish to express my dissatisfaction with the answer to my question given to the Minister of Labour last Thursday with respect to the layoff and lockout at US Steel in Nanticoke. Dissatisfaction is born from the fact that the labour minister made no attempt whatsoever to provide any information to what really were some very direct questions that I was putting forward.

That question again, and I quote myself: "What have you personally done in the past year to get a thousand steelworkers back to work?" That's a pretty straightforward question, and I sincerely hope somebody has picked up the phone since then. I would have been satisfied with an answer to any of a series of other

questions that I raised in this Legislative Assembly: “Have you or has your minister met with the company?”—I directed that to the Premier. “Have you met with the steelworkers? Have you taken any steps whatsoever to save these jobs?”

Check the Hansard. You’ll find no answers to these questions. I’ll add another question that has been asked before: Has the Premier or the Minister of Labour met with the Canadian or the US government?

We have a situation. We have US Steel Canadian plants vulnerable to foreign competition from US Steel American plants: Gary, Indiana, for example. I sincerely hope that, as a result of my questions last week, Ontario’s labour minister or perhaps the Premier has picked up the phone and talked to US Steel and, ideally, picked up the phone and talked with Local 8782.

While we’re on the subject of unanswered questions, I can also report that those out at the front gates outside of Lake Erie Works at Nanticoke have enough questions to fill that idled steelmaking facility down there. This Saturday I was asked by some of the fellows out front to try and find out how this government thinks the investment of \$150 million into the former Stelco pensions has gone over. Has US Steel returned the loan or is this just seen as another incentive to keep them doing business in Ontario? So my question there is: How is that one working out? How is it working out for well over 1,000 people suffering the impacts of close to one year now where we have had a layoff and a lockout? It’s not a strike; it’s a layoff and a lockout. Again, the question is: Is this government speaking with Ottawa about this?

Steelworkers also wonder if this government has simply chalked up Lake Erie Works and this massive workforce as out of sight, out of mind—a world-class steelmaking facility out of the eyesight of Queen’s Park, obviously. The worry is: Are they prepared to continue just to forget about what’s going on down there? We’ve seen this with Caledonia, just up the road.

I do visit the plant gate. Instead of workers heading back and forth, I see wild turkeys, I see deer, I see raptors. We hear coyotes at night when we’re down there at the line. I just wish somebody would come down and take a look at a facility that once anchored the regional economy.

I hope the minister is on top of his own file, to let us know about a recent meeting his staff had with union officials in February. Again, this wasn’t mentioned. Either the minister didn’t know about it, or he knew but realized nothing was accomplished, or he knew but in contrast to his statement—and again, I quote. He stated, “My focus and the Ministry of Labour’s focus is always to work with the parties so that they can put their differences aside.” However, at that meeting, Ministry of Labour staff recommended the union file bad-faith-bargaining charges. I find that somewhat divisive.

I spent a lot of time in this mill, back when it was Stelco. I consulted to that company. It’s time this government—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member from Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: The member for Haldimand–Norfolk has expressed dissatisfaction with the Minister of Labour’s response to his question during last Thursday’s question period. As parliamentary assistant for the Ministry of Labour, I welcome the opportunity to speak to this issue. It allows me to reiterate the minister’s response that the Ministry of Labour has been working closely with both sides to help them reach a collective agreement and end this labour dispute.

As you know, the Minister of Labour cannot discuss the specifics of any labour dispute. As he explained last Thursday during question period, Minister Fonseca is not interested in splitting the parties further apart by intervening in a private labour dispute. Rather, our government believes in a fair and balanced approach to labour relations, and our system works.

Our labour relations record is the best it has been in several decades. Over the past few years, approximately 97% of negotiations have resulted in settlements, with no work stoppages. This is an outstanding result.

In this specific dispute, the Ministry of Labour’s mediation team has worked closely with both US Steel Canada and United Steelworkers of America Local 8782. They have assisted the parties at the bargaining table and remain available to continue these efforts when the parties decide to resume negotiations. The Ministry of Labour mediation team is made up of highly skilled and extremely professional individuals. They work hard, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to find ways to assist the parties to resume negotiations and reach an agreement.

As Minister Fonseca explained last Thursday, our ministry’s focus is on ensuring that our mediation services are doing everything possible to support the two parties and the negotiation process.

Our ministry has met with the executive of United Steelworkers of America Local 8782, as they approached us with a number of questions related to their members’ ability to access certain government programs. As they would with any other stakeholder who has questions and concerns, the ministry sat down with the local executive and listened to what they had to say. There were discussions about employment insurance, the Ontario Works program, upgrading of trades qualifications and a number of other matters. We also facilitated meetings between the steelworkers and other ministries, specifically the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities as well as the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

We are also working with the federal government to support Ontario’s workforce. Minister Fonseca has just returned from the annual meeting with the federal labour minister and his labour counterparts in the rest of the provinces and territories. He made special arrangements to sit down, one on one, with his federal counterpart, Minister Raitt, to discuss better protection for Ontarians who are not working. He also raised the need for better protection with all provincial and territorial Ministers of Labour at the annual meeting.

But it seems that I need to remind the member for Haldimand–Norfolk that it is ultimately the responsibility

of the employer and the union to resolve their differences at the bargaining table.

During this difficult and frustrating time for the people of Nanticoke, it is imperative that the two sides think about their position and the position of the other party. While bargaining can be difficult and stressful, they must ultimately set aside their differences and work toward a compromise. Only then can a lasting agreement between US Steel Canada and the Steelworkers be reached.

It is the agreements reached by the employer and the union through the negotiation process that are the best agreements, the most stable and the most productive. That is why my government supports the collective bargaining process.

I would also like to take the opportunity to remind the member from Haldimand–Norfolk of his government's

labour relations record when they were in power. There were twice as many work stoppages under the Harris government as under the McGuinty government. That's an average of 1,194,786 person-days lost per year under their government.

To conclude, I'd like to point out that it's quite ironic that the member opposite is holding himself up as a friend of union members. When his party was in government, there were toxic relations between our province's unions and the government.

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

The House adjourned at 1810.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Aggelonitis, Hon. / L'hon. Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
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 Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
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 Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism and Culture / Ministre du Tourisme et de la Culture
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough–Centre	Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
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, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Hoy, Pat (LIB) Hudak, Tim (PC)	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, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham Brampton–Springdale	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Johnson, Rick (LIB) Jones, Sylvia (PC) Klees, Frank (PC) Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock Dufferin–Caledon Newmarket–Aurora Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB) Kwinter, Monte (LIB) Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB) Leal, Jeff (LIB) Levac, Dave (LIB) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton York Centre / York-Centre Glengarry–Prescott–Russell Peterborough Brant Nepean–Carleton Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
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)	Parry Sound–Muskoka Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Hon. / L'hon. Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Moridi, Reza (LIB) Munro, Julia (PC)	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	
Murray, Glen R (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
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 Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
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	
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 Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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	
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 Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	
Vacant	Leeds–Grenville	
Vacant	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	

**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
Norm Miller, Charles Sousa
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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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**

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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, Michael Prue
Khalil Ramal
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
France Gélinas, Phil McNeely
Jerry J. Ouellette, David Ramsay
Liz Sandals, Peter Shurman
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craitor, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Clerks / Greffiers: Trevor Day (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Sophia Aggelonitis, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Linda Jeffrey
Sylvia Jones, Jean-Marc Lalonde
Carol Mitchell, Shafiq Qaadri
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions / Comité
spécial de la santé mentale et des dépendances**

Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Bas Balkissoon, Christine Elliott
Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
Jeff Leal, Liz Sandals
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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