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Wednesday 3 March 2010

Mercredi 3 mars 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 3 March 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 3 mars 2010

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTION STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 2, 2010, on the motion for second reading of Bill 231, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act / Projet de loi 231, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale et la Loi sur le financement des élections.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'll be sharing my time with the member from Burlington this morning.

I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak briefly this morning to Bill 231, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act. This act came about from the work of an all-party committee. I think the chair was the member from Vaughan, and there was one representative of each party on the committee: The member from Willowdale, the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, representing our party, and the member from Wel-land were on this committee. They made many recommendations to do with changing the way that elections are run.

With most of those recommendations, our party does support them. They're giving more power and discretion to the Chief Electoral Officer. There's the creation of a special ballot procedure, and voting by proxy will now be eliminated. There's really a depoliticization of the workers who work election day. It used to be that there were some archaic rules; I think that within 10 days of the actual voting day the parties had to submit lists of workers. That was in the day when I guess it was really a perk and a reward for people. Now the authority will be switching: The staffing of the polls will be the responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer, and I think it will be done far in advance so you don't get this last-minute kind of thing going on. There are also many changes to make voting more accessible for the disabled population. So there are many things in the bill that we think are positive.

I certainly would have to say that in terms of the special ballot procedure and the way that comes about, the details are not in the actual bill itself. I know that many municipalities in my riding use a mail-in ballot. I think when the province handed that responsibility over to municipalities they weren't specific in terms of the way those procedures were to be carried out. As a result we've had varied systems amongst different municipalities across the province. In the early stages of mail-in ballots we've also had all kinds of problems, where sometimes up to 40% of the ballots are not considered or are void because of problems with the procedure. So obviously there needs to be careful consideration of the way that's done so that we don't see that happening across the province.

I think the thing I'm most concerned about with this bill is what's not in it. I don't have it right before me, but I note that the representative from our party, the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, did file a dissenting report which focused on third party advertising, because this bill is all about election finances and the rules for election finance as well. They're pretty clear—and quite strict—for political parties.

What we've seen in the last couple of elections—the election of 2003 and the election of 2007—is that one party was spending millions of dollars through third party support outside of those rules, and that is the governing Liberal Party. Obviously, that and other forces have been successful, because they've been the government in the last two elections.

I think that with elections, you want to see a fair election; you want to see a level playing field. Right now that is not the case, because they have these groups in the Working Families Coalition. I note that the member from Simcoe–Grey listed who the members of the Working Families Coalition are. They're mainly unionized groups, like the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, who contributed \$9,720; the Ontario Pipe Trades Council, who contributed \$400,000; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, who contributed \$280,000; the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, who contributed \$100,000; and the International Union of Elevator Constructors and the operating engineers, who contributed \$150,000.

Unions that benefit from public money are spending that money—millions of dollars in the last two elections—to help one party win power. I say that's not a good thing for the province of Ontario, and that should be considered within this bill.

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: That's a good point. My colleague raises the point that other jurisdictions do have rules to do with third party advertising, and ours are very weak. I don't think it's an oversight by the government, because there was a recommendation by the committee—I think it was recommendation 26—that this should be an issue that is dealt with, and yet they have not dealt with it. It's to the government's advantage right now, but if you have an interest in free and fair elections, this should be considered.

In the 2003 election, the Working Families Coalition ran campaigns like “Not this time, Ernie”—big billboards and TV ads; there were probably radio ads as well. They're kind of the dirty work, I'd say, so that the government doesn't wear the nasty stuff; they're shifting that over to their supporters, who are spending millions of dollars doing the dirty work.

The member from Welland was talking about corporate donors and people making donations who are looking for a return on their investment; they want to see the goods delivered. We have bills like full-day kindergarten. If you have the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation donating \$100,000 toward electing or re-electing the government, they are looking for their interests to be looked after when we have legislation before this Parliament.

We've seen bills like Bill 144, going back to a card-based system for unionization, which I think some of the supporters of the Working Families Coalition very much wanted; and Bill 119, the workers' compensation bill, which some of these supporters very much wanted. You have to ask yourself what the connection is between these pieces of legislation and the Working Families Coalition support of millions of dollars in election campaigns for the Liberal Party.

I say that's not a good thing. If we're going to have free, fair and balanced elections, this is an issue that should be dealt with. It was recommended by the committee in its recommendation number 26, and yet it's not in the legislation. It's something of real concern to our party that this issue has been completely ignored. I think we're reasonably in support of what the bill does address, but third party advertising is a huge omission.

With that, I'll pass it on to the member from Burlington to continue with her comments. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the chance to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I recognize the member for Burlington.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'm pleased to speak to this bill, which will amend both the Election Act and the Election Finances Act. I guess this all began rolling out in June 2008, when a Select Committee on Elections began to meet. It was appointed, really, to study the effectiveness of our existing electoral legislation. The member from Vaughan chaired the group, and the member from Welland, the member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills from our caucus and the member from Willowdale participated.

0910

The committee's final report was delivered to this House in June 2009, and it really was a timely and very important piece of legislation. It was a real opportunity to modernize and improve our legislation concerning the preparation, administration and delivery of the Ontario Election Act. But in the pattern that this government has been evolving, this Liberal government that has gone astray, another lost opportunity has happened here; another lost opportunity to create transparency and accountability. This time, it's in the most democratic task that our citizens and residents are able to perform.

What concerns me and our caucus most about this bill isn't so much what's in it but what has been left out of it. This piece of legislation is totally silent on and does not address third party advertising. It's very vague on accessibility and totally fails to establish a permanent boundaries commission, making Ontario the only jurisdiction in Canada now that doesn't have a boundaries commission.

Let's go to third party advertising. This is something that kind of mushroomed in the night two or three elections ago and needed to be addressed. It's a serious issue in Ontario and it needed to be addressed, but there's nothing in this bill that speaks to third party advertising.

Third party advertising operates outside of the Election Act. There are no rules here; it's like the Wild West. It makes elections questionable, in my opinion. We all know what purpose third party advertising serves in elections and election results: It's to support a political point of view without identifying, really, who is doing it, why they're doing it or what their purpose is. They are anonymous. Is that democratic? Third party advertising distorts the Election Act and is very concerning to the democratic process.

The PC caucus is disappointed that the government has ignored third party advertising in this piece of legislation and endorses recommendation 26 of the Select Committee on Elections to limit third party advertising and spending in Ontario, but wants to make certain that this recommendation is implemented. It may have been the most important piece in the entire legislation.

Ontario has a law, but it is very weak in that it only requires registration and reporting of contributions for six months of the election year. As the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario, Mr. Essensa, told the committee, “This allows third parties to build advertising war chests”—war chests—“but not to report on the source of those contributions at an earlier time.” What's that about? Is that democracy? Is that transparency? Is that accountability?

Third party advertising has been recognized as a very serious problem in Canada by our federal Parliament and by no less than five provinces. British Columbia, Quebec, New Brunswick, Manitoba and Alberta have addressed it, but not Ontario. Some Canadian jurisdictions have enacted limits on third party spending; they range from a low of \$300 in Quebec to a high of \$183,300 federally. In Ontario, there is no limit.

In the last provincial election the third party advertiser—we all know who that is; it was called Working Families. Who are Working Families? Who are they? They spent more than \$1 million on advertising just during the writ period. They raised \$1.4 million solely from trade unions. Because of the way Ontario's election laws are written, it is impossible—absolutely impossible—to know how much was raised and spent during the issuance of the election writ.

We have to abide by different rules within our parties; the same should follow for third party advertising. Despite the Working Families Coalition scandal, the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer, the legislative initiatives in other provinces and our PC dissenting report, this Liberal government has not addressed the problems with third party advertising. It leaves you to wonder whether it's because it supports the party.

Third party advertisers have a legitimate role to play in the democratic process in a democratic way: transparent and accountable. They should be open, just like the parties here in Ontario, and should not have a freer hand to influence the political process than the individuals and the parties who are actually taking part in the election.

It is also so important to ensure that such third parties are truly independent and they are not subject to undue influence from any registered candidate or a political party in the conduct of their advertising campaigns. It's simple. This is a no-brainer. Money should not continue to influence our democratic process.

The PC caucus recommends, in concert with recommendation 26, that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario enact a law that—and let me tell you, there are four points—restricts third party spending; restricts third party contributions; requires timely reporting of third party contributions whenever donations are made; and provides for better enforcement of existing law to ensure that third party spending is not used to circumvent election finance laws, including stronger anti-collusion provisions.

We also recommended that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario establish an all-party committee, with equal representation from all three parties, to propose draft legislation to address these issues. The bill is silent on this. We were ignored. The residents—the voters—of Ontario have been ignored, and it seems like this act will continue for the next election. Shame on you.

Improved accessibility has been vaguely addressed in this bill also. This bill does say that the CEO of a campaign would be permitted to use new technologies, and those would include voting machines and that sort. That is to enable persons with disabilities to cast their ballot privately and independently, and the returning office advanced polls would also be included. There would also be adoption of special ballots.

Nonetheless, we must have full committee hearings. We must hear from the disabled community. They need to tell us what their needs are for accessibility. We don't know the answers; we can only assume what those answers may be. So we need to hear from the disabled

community so that we can effectively improve the tools that we give them and improve their accessibility.

With regard to the boundary commission, this bill should have created a boundary commission to ensure fair, transparent, democratic boundaries are created and people are equally represented. That's what democracy is about.

As a result of the Representation Act, 2005, Ontario's electoral districts are no longer tied to changes in the federal electoral districts. A permanent boundary commission was debated during the committee but not included in this piece of legislation.

What are the Liberals afraid of? Despite recommendations to create a boundary commission, this piece of legislation does not identify a process for redistribution of ridings. With growth occurring in some communities and decline occurring in some communities this would be a very valuable tool. Ontario is the only province in Canada without a boundaries commission.

0920

This bill is silent on several things that I think would have increased the democracy, accountability, and certainly the transparency of how elections are held in our province. How can anybody argue with that? What is being hidden? So debating this bill, which is an incomplete piece of legislation, only accomplishes part of what it set out to do; the rest of it is a waste of time for this House to debate.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I think I was the only member listening to the member from Burlington and the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I have to say, I agree with most of the comments made by the two members. I also agree that there needs to be stronger legislation dealing with third party advertising; I really do. When the member from Burlington says that money should not influence the political process, I agree with that. That is a direct connection to their desire to have better controls over third party advertising.

But I want to ask the same question to the member from Burlington: What you said about money not influencing the political process also applies to how unions and the corporate sector influence the political process in a way that some find, as you stated in third party advertising, is negative and that we need to check. But what is your opinion about ending corporate donations and union donations, as many other provinces have done? You made reference to other provinces having dealt with third party advertising. What do you think of that? Because in my mind it relates very much to the same argument that you were making, but your party hasn't taken a position in that regard. I was just interested to know whether or not you personally have an opinion on that or whether your party has a position on that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Is he talking to the member or you, Speaker?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You see how my eyes sort of go in both places.

Mr. John Yakabuski: At the same time, Rosie.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: At the same time. Which is an ability that very few have. But I wonder—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Now the very member who brought up who he is talking to is also talking to him, so you see, it goes on.

Questions and comments?

Mr. David Zimmer: I just want to highlight and speak to one reform in this act, and that is the new flexibility, authority and responsibilities given to the Chief Electoral Officer.

In past elections—and indeed before this legislation, if it's passed—the Chief Electoral Officer had a very prescribed authority as to how he could operate elections. This legislation gives the Chief Electoral Officer greater flexibility to take into account the needs of local ridings and voting boundaries. For instance, in the city of Toronto the requirements in terms of polling stations, hours that the polls are open and how the whole process works reflect a different set of demands than those of, say, northwestern Ontario, rural Ontario or other parts of Ontario. This, over the years, has been a source of discomfort if not downright annoyance to voters, particularly as we're applying the same set of rules in a set of rural boundaries, where people perhaps drove an hour or half an hour or long distances to get to the polls, as we are to downtown Toronto, where the issue is going to the local apartment building and getting all the people in the building down to vote.

When you read through this legislation, it does give the Chief Electoral Officer considerable authority to reflect local needs in his decisions about how the voting process is carried out. This, of course, is subject to consultation with all the political parties.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the comments of my colleagues from Parry Sound–Muskoka and Burlington.

The crux of this bill—I'm going to touch a little bit on the member for Trinity–Spadina; he wants to compare corporate and union donations to third party advertising. Well, donations are tabulated. If they go to a political party, the political party is responsible for spending that money within the limitations of the Election Finances Act, and they have to ensure that they fall within the spending limitations.

The problem with third party advertising, and that is what this bill has neglected to do, is that it's free game—wide open. To have a third party as strong as the so-called Working Families Coalition in Ontario influencing an election without a clear indication of the party they are supporting, or that they're opposing other parties, and not responsible for claiming that money as election expenses is categorically wrong. It tilts the playing field; it upsets the balance. That is why we were so disappointed in this government, which knows it is the primary beneficiary of that third party advertising.

If you look at the legislative record of this government, the Liberal government here in Ontario post-2003 election, when all that third party advertising—I remember seeing the signs go up all over the place in my riding the week before the election: “Not this time, Ernie,” with an insulting caricature of then-Premier Ernie Eves. You knew that that kind of advertising and those kinds of games in politics are wrong. This government could have done the right thing with this legislation. There are a lot of good pieces and a lot of good changes in this bill respecting elections in Ontario. But they could have done the right thing and eliminated third party advertising like so many other jurisdictions have done. It would have been the right thing to do, the fair thing to do—a level playing field for all.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. James J. Bradley: This is a change in position in the Conservative Party. I can remember in years gone by, when the National Citizens Coalition was spending all kinds of money and the taxpayers federation was spending all kinds of money, particularly to support the Mike Harris government, that I didn't hear a peep from members on that side. But it has changed now, because someone else is involved in third party advertising.

If they were in opposition to it in principle, one could say there's virtue in the argument being made. But it appears that it's only because the shoe is on the other foot that the members of the Conservative Party are now obsessed with third party advertising.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: So, Jim, is it okay now?

Hon. James J. Bradley: They don't think it's okay now.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But do you think it's okay?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm just looking for a matter of principle. Who knows what will appear in future legislation? There are so many virtuous parts of this legislation—you will recall that it was the result of an all-party committee. This is the kind of legislation I actually like very much, where all three parties who are represented in this Legislature get together and have some recommendations. Now, is everybody happy at the end? No, not necessarily. But I can say to you that this bill, on balance, will be well received.

I remember that our Prime Minister was part of the National Citizens Coalition at one time, and they were spending all kinds of money putting forward a very right-wing agenda, which was legitimate on their part to do. But I didn't hear any objections from the Conservative Party at that time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Burlington has up to two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I'd like to thank the members for Trinity–Spadina, Willowdale and Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the Minister of Municipal Affairs for commenting.

You know, this isn't a matter of what's good for the goose is good for the gander; this is a matter of what's

good for democracy here in Ontario. If, at that time, anybody felt that whatever was going on in previous governments was not correct, to take up on that and use it now because they have the power to do so is wrong. It's wrong. When you know what the right thing to do is, you do it. You don't do it to give yourself more opportunity to move your own agenda forward. You do things because it's right for the people of Ontario.

0930

This government has lost focus that they work for the people of Ontario. The people of Ontario want transparency. They want accountability. They want this government to be honest about everything they do. Third party advertising is through-the-back-door kind of government. It isn't good government. It isn't good electioneering. It isn't good campaigning.

So although this bill addresses some things that needed to be fixed, it sits silent on some very, very important principles: Elections should be open; they should be democratic; they should be transparent. We've fallen short with that in this legislation. So if the opposition feels that this is the time to change it, and the government felt 10 years ago that it was wrong to do, then this was their opportunity to do it, with the huge majority that they have. They've missed that opportunity.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 231. I just want to say, again, that I agree entirely with the comments made by the member from Burlington. I know my friend John from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke always gets sensitive when I ask some tough questions of them, but I did say that I agreed with much of what you said, and I still do. I think her comments that the bill does some good things but leaves some major things out apply. It is the case the member from Burlington makes that New Democrats make.

As it relates to the issue of third party advertising, the Minister of Municipal Affairs makes some good points, but then fails in his conclusion to actually understand what we are talking about. Because he's quite right: The Conservative Party had a third party, the National Citizens Coalition, that was doing the very same thing federally by way of third party advertising, and lending its support, weight, money and influence to lean people to the Conservative Party nationally at the time. So the Minister of Municipal Affairs makes a very strong case that we should deal more effectively with third party financing, but don't. In the end, while he makes a good argument, he fails to make the connection that the National Citizens Coalition was not very good for us and that there is another third party that obviously supported the Liberal Party in the last election and that perhaps—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Not the Ontario Federation of Labour, surely.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: We're going to get there in a sec.

There was a group that supported the Liberal Party and, logically, to link the arguments he was making, if

it's not good for the Conservative Party, it ought not to be good for any other group supporting the Liberal Party either. That is the logical conclusion I come to based on what I heard you, Minister of Municipal Affairs, say, and the member from Burlington. You both make the same arguments leading to reform of third party advertising. I just wanted to support you in that regard.

The Liberal government does what it always does: It gives a little and holds back a lot. It is in their nature to only provide just enough to say, "We've created major reform." In the old days, after they got elected in 2003, they would say "historic changes." They don't say that anymore. Mercifully, they don't say that these changes are "historic" or "never seen before" because they realize what a drag it is just to listen to that, right? So that's good. You've made some progress.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Full-day kindergarten—historic.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Just take a look at my speech that I gave the other day.

Mr. Jeff Leal: I heard it.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: You heard it.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was surprised your leader was opposed.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The point, Minister of Municipal Affairs, is that there are some good changes here; there are. The few little changes you made: Voters would be able to vote by special ballot, which includes voting by mail and taking a ballot to their returning officer in person. How could you dispute that? Member from Burlington, I think you made the same point. That's okay, right?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Yes.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: She agrees; we agree. We think—

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's historic.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Historic? Come on.

Post-secondary students would be allowed to choose whether they want to vote in the electoral district where they reside temporarily while they attend an educational institution or where they reside permanently. This has been a problem for a long, long time because you have thousands of students studying in other than where they live, and they have to make a choice: "What do we do? Do we have the time to be able to leave our studies, leave this city and go back to where we were to go and vote?" And then get back to your studies in the other city. This is the kind of decision-making process they had to engage in all the time.

My personal view is, the majority of students decided it's not worth the trouble: "It is not worth the trouble for me to have to spend the money, which I may not have, take the day to go there and vote, stay there overnight and come back the next day"—not worth the time, the effort, the money or the trouble to do that. We effectively disenfranchised a whole lot of students in the past, so this is another measure that we think is okay; it's good.

The third point is that the CEO would be permitted to use new technologies, such as voting machines, that would assist persons with disabilities to cast their ballot

privately and independently at returning office advance polls. I think this is okay, too. Given the experience we've had in the by-election in Toronto Centre, where one person with a disability had to, with great effort, get to the voting poll, had to descend five steps on his own with great difficulty because he's in a wheelchair—but he wanted to vote. With great difficulty, he went down those steps somehow and voted. That ought not to be the experience of people with disabilities in their right to go to vote and not have an inaccessible way to get to that ballot.

This is a right they should be able to enjoy without having to struggle to get there. This is a right they should be able to enjoy without having to say in the last 10, 20 or 30 years, "We need to have accessible voting stations." They keep lobbying—that is, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance—for entrenched regulations that would give them the right to be able to go to vote, as opposed to, in each and every instance where they've been denied that right, having to go to the Chief Electoral Officer and/or the ministry and/or the government to say, "This is happening each and every election. It has got to stop." And I agree with them: It should stop. It shouldn't be something that they have to negotiate every election. It shouldn't be something that every election, they go to the Chief Electoral Officer and say, "Not again," and to hear from them, "Yes, we're dealing with it," and then, every election, there's another problem. It ought not to be happening. So while some advances have been made, no permanent regulatory framework has been established to solve that problem for people with disabilities.

Obviously, they want hearings. They want to be able to come to talk to the committee about how we entrench in law accessibility for people with disabilities, and we're looking forward to hearing them give us their view on this matter vis-à-vis this particular bill.

The other thing that this government has done is to end the politicizing of poll workers. I think that's good, too. I think the member from Burlington might have mentioned that—I don't remember—but my suspicion is that they agree with this, that it isn't right that the member who is elected has the power to refer poll workers to the CEO, and by so doing, hire those individuals to do the job now. It doesn't mean that most of those people are not able—I'm sure that most of them are able—but they're directed there politically by the person elected. That's wrong. It's wrong for any political party to have that power to do that.

0940

The governing party, of course, has the majority of influence because they've got more members than the rest of us do. So they have more political influence by way of sending workers to that election for the few dollars they earn for the couple of days that they get those jobs. It's not a big deal; it's not like you're earning thousands and thousands of dollars. But, still, it's political influence exercised mostly by the governing party and, indeed, by all of us who are elected. I just think it's wrong.

My suspicion is that a lot of members don't even do it because they don't even know they can. It's quite possible that a lot of members haven't been doing it because they didn't know they could, but I suspect the governing party knows and that most of the government members would have been told that they could and should be doing it. I just think it's wrong. This ends that particular practice.

Some of these points in the bill that are positive are good, but as the member from Burlington said, what is missing is what is wrong about the bill; what is missing is what should be debated—strongly; what is missing tells us about what the party fears or is worried about and why they haven't done the things that I'm about to talk about. One of them was third party advertising, which has already been debated by Conservative members and I'm sure by my colleagues as well. My friend Michael Prue from the riding of Beaches—East York spoke for a whole hour in the last couple of days in this regard. He has covered that as well.

Third party advertising has to be dealt with, so the question I ask is, why hasn't the government done that? My answer is that they haven't done it because they profit from not having any strong legislation dealing with third party advertising. That is clear to me. The reason why you don't deal with it is because it must be good for the governing party not to touch it.

So when you hear the Minister of Municipal Affairs saying, "But look what the National Citizens Coalition did 15, 20 years ago," we say that's correct—exactly. And if you disagree with the politics of the National Citizens Coalition and what they did and what they were trying to do, why not end that particular practice by ensuring, through strong regulation, that no group can ever influence a political process unfairly or disproportionately?

The government takes advantage of something that exists because it brings to them political advantage. I think it's just wrong, and they don't have the courage to deal with that. I just think it's political opportunism and nothing less than that.

The other, more important thing for me is ending the practice of corporate and union contributions to political parties.

Mr. David Zimmer: Union contributions?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And union contributions as well.

Mr. David Zimmer: Oh, that's a surprise. You'd be in trouble with your base.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Not at all.

Mr. David Zimmer: Oh, you're going to be in big trouble with your base.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But you would be in trouble with the base, too, because 40% of union money comes to the Liberal Party. You would be in trouble, too.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The argument is that we're in trouble—

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Through you—

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I try to keep my eyes both on the left and the right here.

Mr. David Zimmer: Watch out for the middle.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The member from Willowdale says, “Oh, you’d be in trouble,” but they would be in greater trouble because 40% of their funding comes from unions and 40% to 50% of the other money comes from corporations. They’re in real, real trouble. The Liberal Party is so frightened to deal with that issue that they dare not even talk about it.

The member from Willowdale thinks he’s trapping me by saying, “Oh, the NDP’s lost without union funds,” without understanding that they’re the ones who are the big losers, because not only do they get a big, big chunk of union money but they get a big chunk of corporate money.

The point is that it’s political influence that we would like to end. The Canadian government has ended that practice. It was your Liberal government that did that. God bless them; sometimes they do the right thing.

Mr. David Zimmer: That’s Ottawa; this is Toronto.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Yeah. In Saskatchewan, in Manitoba and in Quebec they have ended the practice of accepting corporate and union donations. Other provinces have done that; the Canadian government has done that. Surely the Ontario government, through the Liberal Party, could take a stab at it. I don’t think it would be too hard. End the practice of influence on political parties.

Mr. David Zimmer: And where would the money come from?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: And where would the money come from? That’s okay; I can tell you. Here’s what the Canadian government did; here’s how it works: The federal government gives a 50% reimbursement to any party that gets 2% nationally or 5% in each district. So if you run a party and you get 5% in, say, eight or 10 ridings, then those eight or 10 ridings would be eligible for a rebate. What do you think? Is that a good thing?

Mr. John O’Toole: Through the Chair.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I think it’s a good thing, Speaker, through you to the member from Willowdale. I think it works. It’s the way to go. It’s what you’ve got to do to be able to give individual voters the right to say, “This is where my vote is going. This is my influence to that political party. They’re not beholden to the unions necessarily and they’re not beholden to the corporations necessarily. You are beholden; you, the government and the members, are beholden to me.” I like that. That is the democracy that we should want and desire and that we should be fighting for. That is something that Liberal members could champion and they would look good.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I think they would look good.

That’s what is missing in this bill. That’s why this particular bill is not very historic. That’s why it does a few nice little things but no more than that. It doesn’t take on the big challenges; it refuses to. It is afraid to do so, and they are afraid because doing what I’m recommending—or what the Conservative folks were recommending through third party advertising—would damage their political future, it seems.

It doesn’t have to. It shouldn’t have to. But if you look at the political influence, look what they are able to do in Ontario, both the corporations—they’ve got a few more dollars than I do—and the unions, to be fair, are able to contribute to each party \$7,500 per year times the indexation factor; to each constituency association, \$1,000 per year times the indexation factor; to constituency associations or any one party, \$5,000 per year times the indexation factor; to each candidate, \$1,000 per campaign times the indexation factor; to candidates endorsed by one party, \$5,000 total per campaign times the indexation factor. Do you see what I’m saying, John?

Hon. John Gerretsen: How about public financing?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Do you see what I’m saying? Do you see all that money that can go to a political party? Do you see how they buy influence? Do you think corporations give because they are magnanimous, that they are kind and responsible citizens? That they don’t want to influence Mr. Gerretsen, the Minister of the Environment; they really don’t want to influence him, but they just want to be kind to him by giving a few generous dollars because they love him, not to influence the kind of political direction that comes through the regulations and laws that he introduces by way of bills in this Legislature? John, please. They gave you the money. They give you money to influence you.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Where do I send my donation to you?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Send it anytime you want: any day, any hour. Give it to me in person; you don’t have to send it. Save on the stamp. Bring it across the way. I can take it just as easily, just to help out.

So you understand: Corporations give to take. They give to influence. And that is the way they dominate the political process. All the politicians know that if I get \$7,500 from someone, do you think I’m not going to watch myself when I introduce a bill in this place? Do you think I’m not going to be careful? Do you think I’m not going to give him the meeting that he requests and/or demands? Of course I’m going to give him that meeting. Because when \$7,500 plus \$1,000 plus \$1,000 comes my way, I’m going to have to have a meeting with that individual. But not John Gerretsen; he’s above it all. He transcends political influence. You’re so good.

0950

Hon. John Gerretsen: So are you, Rosie.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thanks so much.

It’s about influence. I want to end that political influence. I want to give the power back to individuals to be able to feel good about the choices they make vis-à-vis the vote they give to that political party. That is what

democracy ought to be about and that's what this Liberal government is afraid of. They want and need corporate donations. They want and need the union donations. They want both: union donations, which they get—

Hon. John Gerretsen: I thought you were getting union donations.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No, you get 40%. You get as much as we do, God bless you. I don't know how you do it. I don't know how unions could give you money when there's nothing in this House that you ever do for them. I don't know how they do it, but you get half from them and the other half comes from corporations. You benefit so much from both of those two sectors. It's time to end it, John. Time to end it. Time to be strong. Time to change this law, make this bill stronger than it is.

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

Mr. Rick Johnson: It's a pleasure to rise. I appreciate the comments of the member from Trinity–Spadina. When he was discussing the percentages of who gets what, we must be making pretty good use of our donations.

The Election Statute Law Amendment Act of 2009 would, if we pass it, modernize election administration and improve the voting process, making our election system in Ontario fair, more flexible and accessible to persons with disabilities. The initiatives contained in this legislation are based on the recommendations of the select committee of all parties. It will improve the voting process.

One of the things I know in my riding—we've got many seniors—is the accessibility issue: allowing these people easier access to vote. It will improve that and make it easier for them as we go forward.

The other thing that I'm happy about is that it will improve the voting process for students. One of the things is the lack of people voting; our voter turnouts have been dismal in the last few years. A 40% voter turnout seems to be standard, which means that a small minority of people are having huge influence: those that are going out and voting.

Inspiring young people to vote would be a good thing. Parts of this bill, by allowing greater access for students and some flexibility for them with different types of balloting, would be a good thing. If we can get more young people enthused in the process, it would be great. There was a process that was started a couple of elections ago called Kids Voting Canada, which is run by a fellow named Taylor Gunn, to inspire young people in our schools to move forward and get involved in the process. They've had great results with it.

I believe that this is a good step forward in improving the election process and getting more people involved. Anything that we can do to inspire more members of our communities to do so is a good thing.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I always attend, or try to attend, when the member from Trinity–Spadina speaks. He

brings passion and knowledge to the debate. More importantly, I completely concur with his remarks and sentiments on third party advertising.

Other issues: the permanent electoral list, the boundaries commission and special ballots. The special ballot, I approve of. The permanent electoral list, which eliminates the enumeration issue, is quite important as long as all parties have access, whenever, to this list and the system that it's going to be updated on regularly. The boundaries commission: The Liberal Party is inconsistent there as well.

I'm looking at the actual, official list of the contributions on the third party advertising report. I'm looking at one at random here out of a list of many pages. Arrow Communications Consulting: I'd like to know the principals, the names involved. Here's this one company, Arrow Communications. Look it up; see who they are, who the people are. They must be connected to Premier McGuinty somehow. They contributed to the Liberal Party. Here's the number of contributions: \$9,600; \$108,000; \$46,000; \$318,000; \$212,000; \$4,000; \$4,800; \$55,000; \$4,000. I'm quoting an actual report that this company, Arrow Communications—if they're involved in eHealth scandal or other consulting, we have the link.

What we're asking for is to do the right thing and put an end to this third party advertising. This is political patronage at the worst and most obvious phase. So I commend the member from Trinity–Spadina. I'm pleased to share this list with him.

One more comment: The CAW contributed \$300,000—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: This is a quite an interesting discussion that's going on today. I see certain groups are leaving out certain things. My friends from the official opposition are not talking about corporate donations, which is probably the base to their whole fundraising. And the Liberal member from Toronto said, "What are you going to do if you don't get union donations?" Well, our union-based donations are probably less than what the Liberals get.

I also think that if you look at the federal rules, the NDP federally now has more money than they ever did because they dropped these union and corporate donations, and they get \$1.58 per voter in Canada as a rebate. We have more money in our coffers than we ever did. So, of the three parties, this rule would probably be more fair to us than anybody because we don't have access to the corporate donations or some of the union groups that back the Liberals.

Really, I think it would be a fair playing field for everybody if you got per voter what you're entitled to. A lot of times, when we're second place, we lose a riding maybe by 200 votes, and if you based it on how much you get per voter, we'd have a lot more money in our coffers and be able to compete fairly instead of being financially burdened all the time because of the situation we are in.

I think this would be a good thing overall for everybody. It may affect the other two parties more so than us because of their great reliance on donations from corporations. Trust me, we don't get a lot of donations from corporations, and that's the way it goes. Unfortunately, that's the way it is, but we do get donations from individuals.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Oak Ridges–Markham.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's a pleasure to enter into this debate and make a few remarks, in particular about the comments made by our colleague from Trinity–Spadina—always with great passion, but today I found a certain lack of logic in some of his remarks.

He states that 40% of union donations come to the Ontario Liberal Party. He claims that such donations may lead to some sort of influence or some potential favouritism towards those who donate to the democratic process. But then he goes on to say that in fact we do, as a Liberal Party, nothing for unions. Somehow I don't quite understand how you can have it both ways.

In terms of Bill 231, there are some aspects that I'm particularly happy about. As my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock has stated, the issue of seniors and those with disabilities is particularly troubling. I will remember the last couple of provincial elections visiting polling stations and seeing the issue of several steps being required to go up or down in order to cast one's ballot. Certainly, there have been stories of individuals leaving their wheelchairs at the top of the stairs to somehow stumble down to, in fact, cast their ballot. This is a very difficult situation for many of those with disabilities and for seniors. Obviously, voting by proxy for many people is not an option that they wish to exercise.

These changes will in fact increase access. We know that we've had some really low voter turnout in the last few elections—only 53% in 2007. So all these actions will in fact boost the opportunity to cast a ballot.

1000

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Trinity–Spadina has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I thank all the members for their comments. I want to respond to my friend from Oak Ridges–Markham because she thought there was a loss of logic at some place. I want to explain that loss of logic, because the loss of logic isn't mine. The loss of logic relates to the contradictions that I have to deal with as they relate to unions. Many unions, of course, support the Liberal Party because they're in power. They're hoping that, by supporting them, some benefits will accrue to their members—not because they often do, but because they feel they could. That contradiction has always hurt me a little bit. It's not my contradiction; it is inherent in the way unions operate, trying to protect their members in the best way they can. The best way they can is sometimes to support Liberals, and I could never, never accept that. I've been here for 20 years, and Liberals do very, very little for unions and union members. In spite of that,

they still—many of them—send their money to the Liberal Party, and that has puzzled me for ever so long.

But I want to say, with respect to the bill—it's a nice bill. It really is. It won't hurt. Some of these elements are really nice, and we should be doing it. I already commented on that. But the Liberals are not bold; they never will be. They're always tepid in their approach to politics. They're always cautious. They're risk-averse. They never want to do something that ought to be done. What we ought to do is make sure we deal with third party advertising, and they refuse to do it. What we ought to be doing is making sure we end corporate and union donations to political parties to end their influence on parties. This is where the government fails to do the right thing. That's the problem with the bill.

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased in the time remaining this morning to be able to enter into the debate on Bill 231. I'm going to spend most of my time probably talking about what's in the bill rather than what is not in the bill.

I think the member for Trinity–Spadina's final comments were about the Liberals not being bold and being tepid and risk-averse. I think we truly reflect, to a large extent, what the people of Ontario want, and thus we have a fairly significant majority in this place. They want people who are going to be cautious, who are going to think about what they do and act accordingly.

To the bill itself: I'm very pleased to be saying—actually, yesterday, I spoke for just two minutes when we were making some responses, and I want to pick up where I left off. I was telling you a little story, which, for me, bears repeating, and I think it bears repeating for a number of people, on at least one or two aspects of the bill, particularly as it relates to the issues of proxies and special ballots, and as it might relate similarly to post-secondary students having the option to choose where they cast their ballot.

When I was in municipal governance—I think it was probably my second or third election as mayor; it was subsequent to my being in that office—a gentleman came in with his daughter. She had turned 18—I don't think she was 19 at that point—and it was her first-ever opportunity to vote. There hadn't been a provincial or federal election. But she couldn't be in the municipality to cast her ballot. As a matter of fact, she was away at school, if I recall.

We had a nice conversation, her and her dad and myself, in the office. I thought at first that her dad had brought her in to meet the mayor face to face, see what municipal politics was about, what the issues were and help her to get educated about the political process. Certainly that was part of it, but when we finished the conversation, she said that since she was going to be unable to cast her ballot for herself, she asked me if I would cast her ballot as her proxy.

I must say, at that time that was an honour, and it remains an honour, that a young person in my constitu-

ency—at that time, municipally—would come to me, hear what I had to say and ask if I would cast her vote for her, not only for myself. She said to me at that point—because I asked her what she would like me to do in regard to a regional position and a local position. She had a candidate on one of those two positions that she wanted to have the ballot cast for, which I was happy to do. In the third choice that she had available to herself at that point, she said she would trust my judgment to cast the ballot on her behalf.

As nice as that was and as proud as I was to do that—I remember it so distinctly—the provisions of this bill would allow that student, that young person, or anyone else at least one of two options. One would be, if they just simply couldn't be there for some reason to cast their ballot, to have a special ballot. That's not only for students but also for those who can't vote, who can't get to the polls on the day available or in any advance poll that might be available. It reminds me as well of those who are hospitalized. I recall collecting ballots of people who wanted to vote but wouldn't have the opportunity, and proxy voting for people in the hospital.

Special ballots would allow those people to cast their ballots effectively when they're hospitalized and might not otherwise have the opportunity. The list in that regard would go on to all of those people who, for whatever number of reasons, cannot cast a ballot at the time available to them but have the opportunity, through a special ballot provision, to do that.

As I understand it, we're the only jurisdiction provincially and nationally, in essence, that doesn't have that provision within our legislation. It seems appropriate that we effectively catch up with the federal government and every other jurisdiction in the country.

Mr. Mike Colle: What's the distinction between a special ballot and a proxy?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: The member from—help me—

Mr. Mike Colle: Eglinton—Lawrence.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: —Eglinton—Lawrence was asking, "What's the distinction between the proxy and the special ballot?" The proxy is where when you ask someone to vote on your behalf. In the example, the young person came and asked me if I would vote on her behalf. In that instance, we were allowed to cast one ballot for someone else in addition to ourselves, on a proxy.

A special ballot is a ballot that the individual gets to cast, a mail-in ballot, for that particular purpose on a special provision. They get to vote themselves, on behalf of themselves, for whomever they want, but they don't have to do it through a proxy provision, and they don't have to do it at the location of the ballot box to which they would otherwise be prescribed or necessarily on the day of the particular election. It gives to the individual the opportunity to cast their own vote for their chosen candidate, as opposed to allowing someone else to do that on their behalf.

I can say, speaking of the young people who are at university—I was mentioning that—those who will then be given a choice as to where they want to cast that

ballot—and that's always a bit of a contradiction. They live in one jurisdiction, and have for some time, with their family, yet they're attending school somewhere outside of the municipality, and they spend most of their time there, for two, three, four or more years. It becomes their home in that locale. Their residence with their parents, presumably, in their hometown no longer really is the place to which they are connected.

When they're casting their ballot, not only do they want to cast their ballot in the context provincially of a government, they want to cast their ballot in the context of the member who will be representing their interests in this place. Their interests at that point in time are not necessarily the interests of their hometown. Their interests are where they are going to school, the community in which they live and the issues that affect them in that community.

There are a number of provisions within this legislation. Those are just a couple that I think are important provisions.

Certainly, increasing access for those with disabilities is an important part of what we're doing. As we move through the process of making this an accessible province for all, it's important in this process that we ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that there are no hiccups in the system. We've heard, so eloquently put forward during the debate, about an incident in the recent by-election where an individual with a disability could not access the polling booth in the basement of a building and, as I understand the conversation, had to be assisted in one fashion or another from the ground level into the basement. That's not an acceptable standard in Ontario today, and it's one that we have to be ever-vigilant about. Provisions within this legislation that will increase access for persons with disabilities are important provisions.

The use of electronics for the purpose of voting, at this point now, is increasingly well established. Municipalities throughout Ontario have been using voting machinery effectively without problem for a number of years. They have proven to be accurate when there have been concerns about a ballot, when they've had to be recounted in some fashion. I would suggest that 100% of the time, the machines have proven to be an effective and efficient means by which people can vote. It's time we started to use the same provisions. It's time we started to look more carefully at opportunities to use technology effectively.

I think this will be a step, and there will probably be future steps in which we will look more intently at using even more current technologies: the Internet systems that are available to us for voting purposes. That is not a provision in this legislation, but at least it takes us down the road of starting to think about technology as a strategy, as opposed to hard pieces of paper in the tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, or millions of pieces of paper that have to get counted on election night.

There are provisions in here that provide some additional flexibility for the Chief Electoral Officer. This is far more administrative than the public would see, but I

think there are important provisions that remove from the capacity of the system for primarily the governing party to have a greater degree of influence on the appointment of officials in each of the ridings for the purposes of the electoral process. I think those are good provisions. Those are provisions that the public—although they won't see them on a day-to-day basis, they certainly would appreciate knowing that this is a process of selection that is removed from the political body having the opportunity to influence in any particular fashion.

The work that was done on this select committee by virtue of having members from all three parties—and I understand that there were dissenting opinions, but that's the nature of this process too. When you don't have a standing committee per se, often select committees provide provisions for a dissenting opinion when there's not full and 100% agreement. It gives the opposition parties—primarily the opposition, but I suppose it could be a government member too—the opportunity to express their dissent with what's being proposed.

Having said that, I know that the member from Willowdale and the member from Vaughan were, from the government side, active and experienced members. I know that the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills has a long history in this place and has brought a tremendous amount of expertise. I'm sorry, but I don't know the member from the third party who sat on the select committee. I just don't have that in front of me.

Interjection: Peter Kormos.

Mr. Mike Colle: The member from Niagara.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: The member from Niagara, from Welland—regardless, people with considerable experience in this place brought to bear in the process of bringing this legislation forward. I know they gave it full and due deliberation. It's been said broadly that the provisions in the legislation are provisions, if I understood it right, that are generally agreed upon around this place. There are always matters not in legislation that opposition, in particular, would like to see in legislation, and that's certainly part of their role. They've articulated that succinctly over the course of the debate. That being said, I believe this to be good legislation in the context of reform that will serve well the electors in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, with that, if there's time remaining for questions and answers, and if not, then I presume you'll advise us accordingly.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 10:15 of the clock, pursuant to standing order 8, this House will recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity, on behalf of page Arusa Mithani and the member from Mississauga–Brampton South, to welcome

her mother, Nadia Mithani, and her grandmother Badra Mulk Ashraf Ali to the Legislature today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

I take this opportunity to welcome to the Speaker's gallery my brother, Joe Peters. Welcome, Joe.

ORAL QUESTIONS

DIABETES REGISTRY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. Ontario families are finding that the McGuinty Liberals can't be trusted to keep their throne speech commitments. On page 9 of his last throne speech, Premier McGuinty said he would introduce a new comprehensive diabetes strategy, and in budget 2008, you ramped up funding for the flagship project, a diabetes registry to be created by the now infamous eHealth Ontario. You made the promise and you spent the money, but still, no Registry. Why make throne speech commitments you don't intend to keep?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm delighted to take the question.

Interjection.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Why don't they listen to us sometimes?

Let me just tell you a little bit about the 2007 throne speech and the achievements that followed from that. We talked about full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds; my honourable colleague knows that starts in September. We talked about further improving the graduation rates; they continue to go up. We talked about investing in public transit with MoveOntario 2020; we have done that. We talked about continuing to raise the minimum wage; we continue to do that. We talked about putting in place the Ontario child benefit; we have done that. We talked about expanding our wait times strategy for emergency rooms and tracking hospital infections; we're doing that. We talked about putting in place nurse-practitioner-led clinics, the first of their kind in North America; we're on our way to 25. We talked about banning trans fats in our schools; we've done that as well.

There's more to be done, but we have done a lot working together.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: With respect, my question was about a diabetes registry, and I didn't hear anything about that in the Premier's answer.

Premier, Ontario patients weren't excited about the "promise" of a diabetes registry; they expected a diabetes registry, and you said that they would have one by this time last year. In an October 2008 eHealth Ontario presentation, you told everyone, "By the spring of 2009, Ontario will have a diabetes registry actively used by patients and physicians...."

The billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle showed us there wasn't a lack of money involved. So what's holding

up the creation and operation of a fully functioning diabetes registry?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, this is something that my honourable colleague and her party opposed, but now she's demanding that we do it.

Let me just tell you how far we've come on that score. We've nearly tripled diabetes funding since 2003. We have now created 153 diabetes education teams across the province. We are the first province to fully fund insulin pumps for children and youth with type 1 diabetes.

These are all initiatives that my honourable colleague and her colleagues stand against. We will continue to move forward with our diabetes strategy.

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Again, back to the registry: Ontario patients right now see a Premier who would rather make a bunch of new promises than make good on his existing promises, which is what we're seeing with this registry. It took until May 20, 2009, before Infrastructure Ontario finally got around to posting a request for proposal to create the diabetes registry, but this means the RFP was posted after the registry was supposed to be up and running. The infrastructure minister responsible for the RFP was George Smitherman.

Did you break your promise to deliver a diabetes registry now because George Smitherman left or because you put him in charge of it in the first place?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Putting in place a diabetes registry, the first of its kind in Canada, if not North America, is not an easy thing to do; I want to say that right now. But I think my honourable colleague must acknowledge the progress that we have made, and I outlined some of that, including tripling the diabetes funding since 2003, our new insulin pumps for children and youth, and our 153 new diabetes education teams. There is more work to do.

I know that my honourable colleague is not sometimes fond of how ambitious we are on behalf of Ontario families when it comes to putting in place a diabetes registry, but it's something that we will continue to work on, and we're determined to get there. We're determined to succeed on their behalf.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: My question is for the Premier as well. Here's proof that Dalton McGuinty's throne speech promises can't be trusted. On page 9 of your last throne speech, you said you would hire 9,000 new nurses. But as the Ottawa Hospital has just learned, you're firing nurses, 190 of them, not hiring them. Now you say you'll hire more nurses by 2011. Why should patients of the Ottawa Hospital believe you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to speak to this as well. My honourable colleague is a representative of a party which, when it was in government, closed the Riverside Hospital in Ottawa and the Grace Hospital in Ottawa. They tried to close the Montfort Hospital in

Ottawa and they tried to kill the children's cardiac unit at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. That's just so we're clear as to what their record is.

We have provided a 44% increase in base funding since 2003 to Ottawa hospitals. I'll contrast that with their \$58-million cut. We're up \$408 million; they cut by \$58 million. In supplementaries I'll talk about what we're doing specifically to hire more nurses in Ottawa as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Yet again, Ontario families are seeing that Premier McGuinty makes promises that, because of his wasteful ways, he can't deliver. Here's further proof of his misguided priorities.

This afternoon, the public accounts committee is going to hear about the waste in the assistive devices program, which costs Ontario taxpayers \$350 million a year. The auditor tells us the abuse in this program is in the tens of millions of dollars.

Assistive devices cost Ontario twice as much per capita as other provinces, so this program could be cut without compromising any service to any Ontario patients. It could be cut because of the waste. This means that there is money available to hire nurses at the Ottawa Hospital.

Why should Ontarians believe you, Mr. Premier, that you will be able to keep any health care promises in the next throne speech?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I see that my honourable colleagues in the Conservative Party can't talk about health care and not reference cutting in the same sentence. Nothing's changed.

I want to come back to nurses, though, because my honourable colleague made reference to nurses in Ottawa. Since 2003, there are more than 650 new nurses working in Ottawa hospitals, I'm very proud to say. Today, there are 200 vacant nursing staff positions at the Ottawa Hospital; 650 new nurses hired and 200 nursing staff positions available in the city of Ottawa right now through the Ottawa Hospital. So again, when it comes to whether it's our investment in nurses, building a new medical school, investing in more MRIs, CTs, getting wait times down, putting in place nurse-practitioner-led clinics, I like to think in Ontario we are leading together.

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

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: The Premier's pattern of saying one thing and doing another just doesn't stop. The waste in eHealth, the billion dollars there, the waste in the assistive devices program is astonishing. If we saved this money we could hire the nurses we need in this province.

Last year, we heard about the \$1-billion eHealth slush fund that paid Liberal friends instead of going to health care like hiring nurses, like keeping 190 nurses that are being fired from the Ottawa Hospital. With priorities like that, Premier McGuinty, how can anything you say about health care be trusted by the public of Ottawa?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well, I've outlined, I thought, in some detail the progress that we've made: 650 new nurses working in Ottawa hospitals, a 44% increase

in base funding since 2003. That's \$408 million, in contrast to their \$58 million cut.

I can also say that when we came into office there were three MRI machines in Ottawa; now there are eight. That's 20,000 more scans every single year. Again, I contrast that with my colleague's and his party's determination to find ways to make cuts to health care. We're not going there; we need to continue to find ways to improve the quality of health care that we provide to all our families.

1040

PATIENT SAFETY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Laurie Johnston's tragic story has made all of us, especially women, question our health care system. Ontario families need reassurance that the current investigation in Windsor will do some good and actually protect patients from further tragedies. They need reassurance because the last time this happened, it seems that not much at all was learned.

In April 2008, Grey Bruce Health Services found that one pathologist made the wrong diagnosis 36 times. Why didn't the ensuing investigation, which took place two years ago, prevent the problems we are now seeing in Windsor?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. First of all, I want to take this, my first opportunity in the House to speak to this, to express my sympathies to the women affected by this horrific development of events and to provide reassurance to women throughout the province. These are our mothers, our wives, our sisters and our daughters for whom I know we all care a great deal.

I think the Minister of Health is doing exactly what's needed in the circumstances. She has launched an external third party review. Three expert doctors are going to focus on surgical errors and pathology results in the three Essex county hospitals. I understand that the hospital and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario have also launched their formal reviews. We look forward to acquiring this information at the earliest possible opportunity and taking whatever steps are needed to ensure the continuing safety of women when it comes to their health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The error rate for the Grey Bruce pathologist was six times the average; 30% of his cases were cancer diagnoses. Grey Bruce Health Services dismissed the pathologist and initiated an internal review that found that cancer cases were misdiagnosed. This triggered an external investigation that combed through tens of thousands of records.

In the wake of that investigation, what action did this government take to ensure that the same thing would never happen again?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can't speak specifically to that particular matter, but what I do want to say to my

honourable colleague, and to women in particular, is that we are very determined to find out what has gone awry in Essex county hospitals.

I also want to provide some reassurance to all Ontarians that we have in place a surgical safety checklist protocol that ensures that operating room teams are following the appropriate steps and actions. That has proven to reduce rates of death and complications for patients. It's required in all Ontario hospitals as of April of this year, and we will have public reporting on compliance rates starting in July. That's a practical step that we're putting in place to ensure there is a special protocol that's involved, that's followed and that makes sure the physicians and the nurses are doing everything they need to do to reduce our rates of complication.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, the answer to my actual question is that this government did virtually nothing two years ago, because the similarities between Grey Bruce and Windsor are striking. It's as if the Grey Bruce investigation never even happened. In both cases, hospitals found potentially serious pathology errors.

How many more investigations need to take place in this province before this government addresses the systemic problems in pathology and reassures Ontarians that their health care is actually in good hands?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I would argue there is considerable wisdom to be found in the statement of the NDP health critic, who recently said: "The last thing you want to do is send panic or send messages that say the system is not safe." There was also, "Right now, I agree with what they are doing. Let's take it one step at a time. Let's look at what's happening in Windsor."

I think that is the appropriate thing for us to do in the circumstances. I think we ought to be deliberate, thoughtful and thorough, and that's exactly what we intend to do through our external third party review. Understand that we're doing that in supplement to the hospital and the College of Physicians and Surgeons with their own independent review as well.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is over to the Premier as well. Ontarians are soon going to have some answers about the terrible tragedy that took place on December 27 in the Niagara region. The coroner's inquest into the death of Reilly Anzovino will determine whether this young woman's tragic death may have been prevented had the emergency room of Fort Erie not been forced to shut its doors last year.

In the face of growing health care cuts, Ontarians are looking to this government for assurance. If the coroner's jury determines that the ER closures in Port Colborne and Fort Erie contributed to Reilly Anzovino's death, will the Premier commit to reopening them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I don't think it would be appropriate for me to comment on the outcome that my colleague is speculating about.

But let me just say, on behalf of the government, that we welcome this review by the coroner's office. We look forward to receiving the jury's recommendations, and we look forward to acting on those in any way that serves the interests of the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Certainly none of us would want to prejudge the outcome of the coroner's investigation, but Ontario families tell us this tragedy has left them worried. They're looking for reassurance and they're looking for it now. They want to see responsible planning to ensure the health care system is there when we need it. Instead, we're seeing reckless, random cuts that leave people without the front-line services they need.

The question is a simple one: Will the government reconsider the closure of these ERs if the coroner finds those decisions played a role in this tragic incident?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Of course, I have to take issue with my honourable colleague's characterization of the approach that we've brought to health care. We have more nurses. We have more doctors. We have more medical technologies than ever before. We're building hospitals, we're expanding hospitals. Some 900,000 more Ontarians now have access to family physicians. We have the first nurse-practitioner-led clinics in North America. We're funding more drugs than ever before.

I know that my honourable colleague would admit in her heart of hearts that to characterize this as a series of cuts is just, well, nonsensical. The fact of the matter is that we're moving forward and making considerable new investments in health care with a view to ensuring that we provide better quality health care to all our families. That's what we've done and that's what we will continue to do.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Notwithstanding the Premier's claims, families across Ontario actually want to see a government plan to ensure that our health system will be there when we need it and when our children need it. Instead, what they're really getting, and what they're seeing day in and day out, are random cuts that leave communities without front-line health services.

With surgeries being cancelled, services being cut back at hospitals across the province, all Ontarians want is assurance, and they expect that assurance to come from the top. Will the Premier today stop hiding behind the LHINs and take some responsibility for health care in Ontario and assure Ontario families that ERs will be there for them when they need them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will take this opportunity to ask Ontarians to take a close look at our record of new increases—in fact, dramatic new increases—in their health care services in all our communities. I want to reassure them that we will always hold uppermost in our minds the tremendous value that they attach to health care in their communities. That's something that has always informed our government policies and will continue to do so long into the future.

1050

PATIENT SAFETY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is again for the Premier. It's gone from hard to impossible to trust that the McGuinty government is going to honour their campaign and throne speech promises. On page 8 of your last throne speech, the Premier said, "We can measure a society's depth by how well it treats" its ill. Well, Ontario is not measuring up well. As a result of the problems at the Windsor hospital involving unnecessary mastectomies, pathologists are raising alarms. They say they are reviewing 30 to 35 cases a day and that one said case can be 30 slides or three slides, but that "You are expected to have a fast turnaround time.... The physicians need their reports." Well, the last time Ontario patients witnessed the Premier's need for speed, we got the eHealth boondoggle. How many pathologists could have been hired with the billions of dollars that you wasted in the eHealth boondoggle?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the question on the issue of pathologists. As the member opposite knows, we are taking the situation in Windsor very seriously. We have appointed three physicians to go to Windsor to examine and understand what happened there so we can learn the lessons that need to be learned from this situation. The three physicians are very highly regarded: Dr. Barry McLellan, the CEO of Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, who was previously the chief coroner for the province of Ontario, will be coordinating the investigation. Dr. Robin McLeod is a surgical lead in the surgical oncology program at Cancer Care Ontario; she will focus on surgical errors in this investigation. Dr. John Srigley is the clinical leader of the pathology and laboratory medicine program at Cancer Care Ontario. He's also the current president of the Ontario Association of Pathologists—

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Clearly there's a much bigger problem here that needs to be addressed, other than the isolated case in Windsor. The Premier has promised in past throne speeches that Ontario patients will get the care they need when they need it, but the problems in Windsor reveal that he's failing on that commitment, too. A media report last evening revealed the case of Paul Renaud of Windsor, whose first pathology report said that his lung cancer had not spread. Fortunately for Paul, his wife had private insurance that allowed him to go to the United States to get a second opinion, which showed that in fact his cancer had spread. Why do you say you'll deliver care based on need, not on the size of your bank account or station in life, when Paul Renaud had to have private insurance to go to the United States to get the medical care he needed when he needed it? Why?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite has raised the issue of the number of pathologists that we

have and the workload of pathologists. That is one of the questions that we hope to get answered through this review. But I think in fairness, it's important to know that we have quadrupled the number of pathologists who are practising every year. When the party opposite was in charge of the system, there were seven pathologists graduating every year; we have now increased that to 29.

We've made the right investments. We're rebuilding a system that was on very shaky ground when we took over in 2003. I think the member opposite, if she were actually being honest with herself and with the people of Ontario, would acknowledge that we have made tremendous progress when it comes to health care in this province.

TAXATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Earlier this week, the not-for-profit Greater Toronto Hockey League announced that annual team registration fees will double to \$2,000. That's at least \$60 more per player. The GTHL says the increase is due to the harmonized sales tax, which will increase the cost of ice rental. The budget promised that the HST would be fiscally neutral for non-profits. Why is the minister breaking his budgetary promise?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I can't comment as to why the particular fee that the member referenced has doubled. I can assure him that it's not as a result of an 8% provincial sales tax that's part of a broader tax cut package. I remind him that there are a variety of sales tax credits for families and for individuals. Non-profits are largely exempt, absolutely; the numbers are detailed in the background document. Again, to attribute a doubling of those fees to the HST is just inaccurate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Perhaps the minister could look at other situations where non-profits have problems with his new tax. The minister promised that his rebate system would leave non-profits no worse off. In the minister's hometown, the Windsor Minor Hockey Association is saying that the HST will cost them \$30,000 for ice rental alone. Other recreational programs like the family summer swim pass will jump 10 bucks. Can the minister explain his broken promise? Can he justify taxing families for encouraging their kids to be active? Perhaps he can give us some detail on this.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I'd be happy to. In fact, 93% of Ontario families will see a decrease in the taxes they pay as a result of the tax package. There are generous sales tax credits. I'd refer you to the work of the centre for public policy, a well-known left-of-centre think tank, about how this is not a tax grab. Even more interestingly, I'd refer him to the NDP candidate in the riding of Ottawa West, who, at a March 1 all-candidates debate, said, "Speaking of the HST, it makes sense on an international scale to do it for international trade in the long run. This will create jobs. It will cut taxes for families."

Try to get your facts straight. Try to tell the whole story, because when people see and understand the whole

story, they realize it's about lower taxes and more jobs, and that's what will guarantee Ontarians a much brighter future.

AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Ma question est pour la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. L'Ontario est une province inclusive qui accueille des gens des quatre coins du monde et de nombreuses minorités. La diversité est notre force. Les francophones, notamment, sont une minorité historique en Ontario.

Pouvez-vous nous dire, madame la Ministre, ce que le gouvernement fait pour les francophones?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci au député de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell pour sa question. Notre gouvernement, depuis notre arrivée au pouvoir, a fait énormément de progrès pour améliorer la vie des francophones.

On se souvient tous de la menace qui avait été faite par un gouvernement précédent de la fermeture de l'Hôpital Montfort. Le gouvernement Harris avait laissé des traces dans la communauté francophone.

Nous avons fait des investissements massifs en éducation afin de freiner le phénomène d'assimilation et de permettre à nos jeunes de travailler et de réussir leur carrière en français chez nous en Ontario. Depuis 2003, notre gouvernement a versé plus de 360 millions de dollars supplémentaires dans le système d'éducation en langue française. Au postsecondaire en français, nous avons augmenté le financement de 57 %. Nous avons fait aussi des investissements importants en matière d'immobilisations. Pensons à nos campus à Hearst, à Timmins—

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

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Merci, madame la Ministre, de nous rassurer sur la position du gouvernement. On entend parfois des gens critiquer le bilinguisme en Ontario. Certains disent que cela ne devrait pas être une priorité ou que c'est un gaspillage d'argent. Un député de l'opposition officielle avait même dit, il y a deux ans, lors de la journée du drapeau franco-ontarien, que le drapeau franco-ontarien était une source de division en Ontario.

Pouvez-vous nous dire ce que vous répondez à ces critiques?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Oui. L'Ontario n'est pas officiellement bilingue, mais on sait qu'en 1986 il y avait une loi, la Loi sur les services en français, qui avait été adoptée à l'unanimité ici par les trois partis. Alors, le gouvernement a une responsabilité envers les 600 000 Ontariens dont le français est la langue d'usage.

J'étais très déçue ce matin d'entendre que la candidate conservatrice d'Ottawa West–Nepean ait eu une entrevue à CFRA où elle a dit ceci : « Bilingualism can be extremely expensive. I do not believe ... that bilingualism, at the moment, is a priority. » I'm very disappointed that the candidate in Ottawa West–Nepean—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. I remind the members that we're not fighting election campaigns here.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Shurman: To the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry: There's a large difference between what McGuinty Liberals say and what they do.

Yesterday, I suggested Grant Forest Products could improve its bankruptcy proposal and keep jobs in Ontario if the Premier and his minister would immediately remove the red tape around the forestry fund that they created. The response of the Acting Premier and minister was insulting or even shameful to me, to Grant Forest Products and to the 1,500 employees who may soon lose their jobs. It was the usual dodge, that they don't want to interfere in matters before the courts.

Can the minister explain to northern Ontario families why Dalton McGuinty had the political will to intervene in the bankruptcy proceedings of Chrysler and GM in southern Ontario but won't lift a finger for a northern Ontario company?

1100

Hon. Michael Gravelle: We're working very, very closely with the forestry sector to provide incentives and supports in a number of ways.

The member does understand that Grant Forest Products is in CCAA and it is a court process. I appreciate he does not accept that, but that is indeed a fact.

The more important fact is that our government has been incredibly supportive in a number of ways. We've flowed over \$614 million to the forestry sector in the province of Ontario. That is an unprecedented amount of support that has come to the industry. It's helped keep mills open, it's helped reopen mills that were closed, and it's helping us through a very challenging situation right now. I can give you many, many examples of that. Certainly, we've provided \$205 million to our forest sector prosperity fund. The northern pulp and paper electricity rebate program, an extremely significant one that has given rebates back to the industry and the large pulp and paper companies, has been remarkably helpful in reducing their costs.

Indeed, we could not be more supportive. We'll continue to be supportive of the forestry—

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: Dalton McGuinty has been untruthful with the people of northern Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable—

Mr. Peter Shurman: Withdraw.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: The proposal Grant Forest Products could put before the court would look very different if they had access to the loan guarantees that you created for this very purpose. The forest sector loan guarantee program still has \$307 million in it, but Grant Forest Products can't access it because of the red tape created by the McGuinty Liberals.

You say you care about northern Ontario families and jobs. Prove it today by granting a homegrown company the loan guarantees it requires to save 1,500 jobs.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: The member is aware that with the sale of Grant Forest Products Englehart and Earlton facilities to Georgia-Pacific, they've guaranteed and committed they will keep the Englehart facility open. Our goal, indeed, is to maintain jobs in the forestry sector, and that will be the result.

The court monitor process is an important one. I know there is a consortium of northern business leaders that has put a proposal before the court monitor, and that will be considered, I'm sure, very seriously.

The fact is that we are committed to finding the best way we can to help the industry. That is why we've got a wood supply competition going forward that is going to put Ontario's wood to work. That is why we are getting a forest tenure review in place: because we believe there is a significantly improved way we can allocate, license and price our crown resources in the province. This is a huge commitment from our government, one that we are very much continuing to maintain—over \$614 million in investments—and certainly one that—

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

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Minister of Education: Niagara's school board is getting ready to shut down Crowland Central school. Crowland is a rural school, and its closure is going to leave a large area without service and force students to be bused into the urban area.

Will the minister intervene to protect Crowland, the rural community and the families and children who depend upon this school?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The honourable member knows that when it comes to decisions within our communities, we do have faith in our locally elected trustees. They are tasked with establishing accommodation review committees. Those committees are to engage people in the community to talk about the additional investments that we've been making with school boards and where best to stream those investments. We do have faith in the people in the communities who are tasked with this responsibility, and I think it would be totally inappropriate for anyone in government at this level to become involved in that. We have provided additional dollars to school boards in the face of declining enrolment, and we have faith in the decisions that are made locally.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Kormos: This is about the inadequacy of this government's funding of public schools. Let me tell you what Connie McCutcheon's got to say: "Crowland Central's more than a school ... it's a community hub that everyone in Cooks Mills relies on. When you don't have a Tim Hortons or grocery store, the school becomes

the central meeting place where everyone gets together. The school is the heart of our community.”

Why is this government going to facilitate the gutting of the historic and vibrant Cooks Mills/Crowland community? Why is it going to tear the heart out of that community?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it's unfortunate that the honourable member would make those kinds of comments about the results of the hard work of people in the communities who have made decisions for the best interests of their students. I would also remind the honourable member about the responsibility that we have as government. That is to provide additional resources that are needed for programs and for students, and that is what we have done with the school board for Niagara.

I want to point out here for the members of the assembly that funding has increased for this school board. The honourable member might want to know that funding has increased since we've come to government by 21.7% in the face of declining enrolment of 12.5%. The work that we do with school boards, we recognize that they continue to play an important role—

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

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Ontario's child care system faces the loss of over \$63.5 million in federal government funding, which is running out this month. Without a new commitment from the federal government, many families who depend on much-needed subsidies will be seriously affected. Working families depend on affordable child care. That's why our government stepped in with a provincial investment of \$18 million to provide stability and stretch the subsidies through the end of the 2009-10 school year and into the summer.

The cancellation of the federal agreement will affect approximately 8,000 children across the province and over 2,000 in the city of Toronto. The highest-needs neighbourhoods will be the most affected, including my riding of York South–Weston. Can the minister please share with this House—

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

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank the member for her advocacy on this important issue on behalf of her community. I, too, share concern about and disappointment with the fact that the federal government has cancelled the historic early learning and child care agreement, which our government entered into in 2005 on behalf of the families of Ontario. The child care agreement cancellation resulted in the loss of \$1.4 billion over three years for Ontario's families.

On behalf of the thousands and thousands of Ontario families and children, I call upon the federal government to redress this issue when they have an opportunity to do

so this week as they talk about the jobs of the future in their throne speech today, and to recognize that, for Ontario's kids to be ready for those jobs of the future, we need to give them the quality child care they deserve here in Ontario today.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: The potential loss of child care spaces for low-income families is of great concern to parents, local organizations and child care providers. They look to us to take an active role in calling on the federal government to do its part.

Parents in my riding welcome the move towards full-day early learning and understand that continued support for child care is essential to the success of full-day learning, as it will provide a continuum of services for families and communities across Ontario. However, there have been some concerns about the potential effect it may have on existing child care programs, from changes to the age groups of children accessing child care to the potential impacts on staffing.

Could the minister please explain what our government is planning to do to minimize the impact to existing child care programs and ensure that we can maintain and enhance child care services across the province?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Bringing forward the vision of Charles Pascal into our province is an exciting opportunity for Ontario's kids, to make sure that our earliest learners are given the educational foundation they need to succeed tomorrow. We know that this historic change is one that we need to work on closely, and have been working closely, with child care operators across the province, with the College of ECE and with municipal service providers to find the answers to transition to this important new world, where Ontario's children begin learning at the earliest stage of entering into child care, early in the morning, and that continues late into the afternoon, when they might be getting homework help from their child care provider.

We continue to work closely with our partners to bring this important initiative to fruition and we continue to call upon the federal government to also be a partner in delivering on education for Ontario's very earliest learners and those who will take the jobs tomorrow.

1110

ELECTRICAL GENERATING STATION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Yesterday, I asked you to justify your decision to put a gas-fired power plant in the middle of an Oakville community. You brushed off my question and the health and safety concerns of Oakville residents.

At the same time, by the hundreds, these residents rallied together at Queen's Park, demanding clean air and a safe community to live in. You said that you will listen to the people of Oakville. The question remains: Did you hear the people of Oakville?

Minister, the people of Oakville want an individual environmental assessment. Will you give it to them?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I was pleased to answer the question yesterday and I'm pleased to answer it again today. Of course we'll listen to the people of Oakville. Yesterday, I indicated—and I will today as well—that the MPP from that area, Kevin Flynn, is doing an incredible job. He's bringing the voice of his community to this chamber. He's bringing the voice of the community to me. I met with him. Mayor Burton—I've had conversations with him as well.

It's very important that we pay respect to the people of Oakville and that we listen to their concerns. We will ensure that we do everything we can to address each and every one of the concerns that are raised with regard to this. We take their concerns seriously and we'll continue to listen; we'll continue to work with them.

There is a need for power in that part of the greater Toronto area; that cannot be denied. We're not going to do what they did when they were in office and ignore the realities of the need to build power. We're going to take tough decisions sometimes today to ensure that we have power—

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'll take it that you did not hear the people of Oakville or that they don't want that power plant—and it sounds to me like you're going ahead with it.

It was ironic when the minister mentioned dirty coal yesterday, since his government has repeatedly broken its promise to shut down coal-fired power plants. He went on to say that we need to diversify our energy supply, but he ignored the health and safety concerns that must be attached to any power energy plan.

Minister, why on earth are you putting a power plant in an area with poor air quality, and beside Ontario homes, schools, daycare centres and seniors' residences? Why are you doing that, Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: One of the things that our government has to deal with is the party opposite's love affair with coal and the fact that all through their years in office, they continued to rely on dirty coal as their source for energy.

The people of Ontario expect better of their leaders than that. The people of Ontario care about the health and safety of their children and their grandchildren. They know that we have to plan ahead. They know that we have a responsibility to clean up our air and our environment, a responsibility to do what we can to deal with global warming. That is precisely why we've taken tough decisions today to move away from coal. As we speak today, we have the lowest level of coal emissions in this province that we've had for 43 years. We're proud of that.

We've had to take some tough decisions to replace coal. By 2014, we're determined to ensure that coal—

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

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health. The Liberal candidate in Leeds–Grenville—Speaker, this is a legitimate question to the Minister of Health; it is.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment. As I have reminded in previous by-elections, we do not need to be fighting the by-elections here. If you want to ask a general question about an issue in a municipality—

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Minister of Finance—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just say to the honourable member from Renfrew, please don't be argumentative. I took the government member to task as well on this.

Ask a general question. Please continue.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Liberals in Leeds–Grenville say that they're going to fix local health care problems by bringing the health minister to that riding within 100 days if they elect their candidate. It's not a bad idea, but in the event that the Liberals aren't victorious in Leeds–Grenville, will the health minister still commit to visiting Brockville to discuss her health care cuts with the people there within 100 days of that by-election?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I can tell you that one of the most rewarding parts of my job is travelling throughout this province and meeting people who are on the front lines, meeting the workers who make our health care system as terrific as it is. It is absolutely the most rewarding part of my job. It's where I learn from people who are actually on the front lines. I look forward to travelling throughout the province, and wherever I have the opportunity to go, I welcome that opportunity.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think that the Liberals in Leeds–Grenville really are on to something, and I agree wholeheartedly that the Minister of Health should be visiting that riding; she should be visiting Brockville. She should be visiting Brockville to talk directly to health care workers who have been laid off and told not to return to work.

Whether she visits or not, will she at least commit today to putting a moratorium on the cuts to health care jobs in that community that have left local residents extremely worried?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are committed to improving the quality of health care in this province. Our track record is as strong as a track record can be. We have made tremendous progress in rebuilding the foundation that was left in a crumbled condition when we took office six years ago. Those investments are showing the results and we are now in a position where we have built a stronger foundation. Now what we have to do is work toward creating a sustainable health care system that will be there for generations to come.

We do have to look at ways to offer care in different settings. We have to reorganize how we deliver health

care. It's hard work. One option would be just to cut spending altogether; one option would be to just do more of the same. We're taking a different approach. We're going to be doing things—we are doing things—differently in health care. We're really focusing on—

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

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is also for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Recently, we have heard that there has been an increase over the past few years in the number of patients receiving health care services outside of Ontario, services that are paid for under OHIP. There is no doubt that this is sometimes necessary for special procedures or analysis. When a new and innovative approach is discovered elsewhere, it can help Ontarians. However, I think we all share a desire to limit these occurrences and keep as much care as possible in the province.

Some have linked the increase in services provided outside of Ontario to funding challenges faced by our hospitals. Can the minister please address out-of-country services and how the government plans to decrease the amount spent on these services outside of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: First, let me thank the member for his question. I want to say that our government is committed to providing the best quality health care for people in Ontario, within Ontario, whenever possible.

We have seen an increase in out-of-country services. Over half of the volume of out-of-country is actually due to genetic testing. In that case, of course, it is the specimen, not the patient, that is leaving the province.

We're working on a number of initiatives that will reduce the number of services that are delivered out of province. We're bringing them back home. We're working on a plan to repatriate the five most common genetic tests. We expect these services to be up and running in the next few months. That will significantly reduce the number we have to send outside the province.

We're investing \$75 million in bariatric surgery right here in Ontario. We're creating centres of excellence around the province for these—

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: This issue requires action, and I look forward to hearing from the minister about progress being made.

It seems one of the key indicators of how our health care system is working is how long people are waiting to get service. It's also one of the reasons people would need to go outside of Ontario. In a single-payer system like we have in Canada, it's crucial that we take action to reduce wait times so that people can get access to the health care services they need when they need them and where they need them.

Can the minister please tell this House the status of the government's wait times strategy and how this is impacting residents in my community of Ottawa Centre?

1120

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Wait times are clearly a key priority for this government. For the first time, we're measuring wait times; we're reporting publicly on wait times. And wait times are coming down in every one of the areas where we are reporting on them.

The Fraser Institute reports that Ontario has the lowest wait times in Canada. We're the only province that gets straight As from the Wait Time Alliance for meeting the targets across all five types of surgery: hip, knee, cancer, cardiac and cataract.

In the Champlain LHIN, which includes the member's riding, we've had tremendously significant results: cataract surgery down by 212 days, hip replacement down by 102 days, and knee replacement down by 273 days. We're making the necessary investments to bring down wait times for MRIs. We added a new MRI at the Ottawa Hospital in January of last year and another is coming to Montfort. Together, these will increase the number—

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

DISABILITY BENEFITS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. In December 2008, you announced that you would adopt my private member's bill to prevent the clawback of Ontario disability support program payments for people who set up a registered disability savings plan.

Minister, why are families being told that RDSP contributions will be clawed back from the ODSP payment?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: C'est une excellente question. This is an excellent question. I wanted to say that this government is very proud to support the RDSP as a way to help families with children and adults with disabilities, and to help people with disabilities plan for their future needs. No, we are not going to claw back the help that we are already providing to these people. It's part of their income and it's put there for a good reason. We're very pleased to support this benefit, and I encourage all people who have someone in their family with a disability to take advantage of the RDSP.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Minister, thank you for clearing up the confusion, but the reality is my office has been fielding phone calls from concerned families because they are being told by ODSP regional offices that, in fact, they will be clawed back if they set up an RDSP.

Will you commit today to notifying staff and families across the province of the RDSP program and that their ODSP payments will not be affected?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, I will. I will make sure that all our offices know about it. But sometimes people are confused because there is a limit for people who are on OW or ODSP. On OW, they can receive gifts

in the form of payments of up to \$6,000 a year. So they may be confused about that. I'll make sure that we send a note to every office to clarify that. Thank you for asking the question.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. This government speaks a great deal about its investments in public transit, but the reality on the ground is that transit is becoming less and less affordable for Ontarians. Transit fares are increasing faster than inflation right across the province. The situation in Ottawa is particularly dire. This week, Ottawa transit users are dealing with another 7.5% increase in fares, only eight months after a 15% increase in the price of bus tickets. Ottawa transit fares of \$3.25 a ride are among the most expensive in all of North America.

Why is the McGuinty government standing by as transit becomes less affordable in Ottawa and right across the province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think it's quite clear, if you look at our record in terms of investments in public transit, that we are very, very committed to increasing the ridership across the province. First of all, if you look at the gas tax, two cents of the gas tax that has been allocated across the province is dedicated to increasing transit ridership.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Seven years in a row.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Exactly: We've been doing that seven years in a row. A hundred and eighteen communities in the province, 92 transit systems, are the beneficiaries of that money. We've invested more than \$8.9 billion in public transit, including \$3.7 billion in GO Transit and \$11.5 billion for MoveOntario 2020, which is the largest transit investment in Ontario's history.

I know that the member opposite is engaged in a political process vis-à-vis a by-election that's going on in the Ottawa region right now, but I think you have to look objectively—

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Like most Ontario municipalities, the city of Ottawa uses the province's gas tax transfer to cover capital necessary to provide public transit to a growing population. The gas tax transfer does not help deal with the rising cost of fuel and other operating costs. When the operating of transit is underfunded, people drive more, increasing greenhouse gases, and low-income transit users can't afford the fares.

Why won't the McGuinty government commit to a return to funding 50% of operating subsidies to ensure that transit is affordable in Ottawa and right across Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows perfectly well that the gas tax money can be used for operating expenses—she knows that—and she knows that there are thresholds above which the municipalities can use that money for operations.

We're looking forward to Ottawa's detailed plan for transit. We've earmarked \$200 million for rapid-transit funding. We're working with the city to improve public transit. Almost \$500 million, since 2003, has gone to the city of Ottawa. That includes \$155 million in gas tax, \$37 million in gas tax just this year, and \$54 million to repair or upgrade 274 buses.

I think if you look objectively at what we have done—gas tax plus the other funding increases and contributions that we've made to public transit—it is very, very clear that we are committed to public transit in Ottawa and across the province.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Consumer Services. This past weekend, Toronto experienced quite the snowstorm. In my own riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, we've been under snow since New Year's. A number of my constituents are turning their minds to travelling south to get away from the snow shovels and the snow blowers, but then we heard the story about a travel provider that had gone out of business and had left their clients not only without the trip but, in some cases, without their money as well.

So my question to the minister is: Please, could the minister tell the House what the government is doing to ensure that consumers are protected when they plan trips away and outside the province?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: I would like to thank the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for that question. She is a great advocate when it comes to consumer protection in her riding.

I highly recommend that when Ontarians are choosing a travel agency or a travel website, they ensure that they're registered with TICO, the Travel Industry Council of Ontario. With TICO, Ontarians are protected with something that's called the Ontario travel industry compensation fund. Ontario is one of only three jurisdictions in Canada that have this compensation fund. There are over 2,400 registrants with TICO that provide travel services, and I would encourage that all Ontarians make sure the TICO logo is on their site.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you very much, Minister. I really do appreciate the fact that it's important for people to register with a TICO-registered travel provider, but I guess the question I really want to know is, in this case, how do we inform our consumers about TICO, and what other things should they be looking for when they are travelling and booking with travel agents?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: As the Minister of Consumer Services, I'm happy to advise the member that my ministry is doing a great job when it comes to telling Ontarians how to protect their travel investments.

Some of the things that we've done—in fact, just on February 18, I was out at the travel information centre at Yonge and Dundas here in Toronto to talk about some tips when you're purchasing a vacation.

Five of the smart tips include: (1) choose your travel agent carefully; (2) ask questions and research your destination; (3) ask about non-refundable fees; (4) get health insurance if you're travelling out of province; and (5) get it in writing and check your receipt.

The other thing that I would highly recommend is, if you are going to be travelling, please visit our website: ontario.ca/consumerservices.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, you're aware of the energy-from-waste project in my riding of Durham. In fact, I've met with you on this and asked for you to monitor it very closely; as you know, my constituents are quite concerned that public health may be at risk. Dr. Jefferson and Wendy Bracken, as well as Linda Gasser, who are constituents of mine, convened a meeting last night in the riding. They are suggesting that only a handful of pollutants will be monitored as part of this project.

Minister, can you assure my constituents and all of the people in my riding of Durham that this project will have the highest and best standards, that they will be monitored and reported publicly and, more importantly, that the penalties for exceedance will be severe?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'd like to thank the member for the question, because I know it's a big issue in that part of Durham. As the member well knows, the ministry has done a review. It has been posted on the EBR. The comment period goes from February 26 to April 2. At that point in time, we will be considering all the comments that have been received to make sure that the right decision is made in the long run.

We want to make sure that it not only meets but passes the tough air emissions standards that we currently have in the province of Ontario—and the member may recall that we have upgraded about 57 of these standards in the last four years. We want to make sure that this facility meets all of those tough standards before it will ever be approved.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you, Minister, and again, let's put public safety first, not the politics. What we need here is a clear commitment by you that there will not only be the standards but the enforcement provisions, as well as the penalties. We're concerned that the proposed proponent operator has been under some charges in the United States. Are you aware of the proponent's record in the past to make sure that we have the best and safest operation in my riding of Durham for the province of Ontario?

Hon. John Gerretsen: As the member well knows, from the Ministry of the Environment's viewpoint and from the government's viewpoint, air quality standards and high water quality standards are an absolute essential of this government's mandate. We want to make sure that these kinds of standards will be met in this kind of facility, and you can be assured that all comments will be taken into account before a final decision is made.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to correct the record. In my answer to the member from Parkdale–High Park I noted that our government had earmarked \$200 million for rapid-transit funding in Ottawa. In fact, that was the initial commitment. We've actually committed \$600 million to Ottawa.

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

The House recessed from 1133 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

OLYMPIC ATHLETES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The Olympic cauldron has been extinguished and the flame transferred to Russia in preparation for 2014, but I would be remiss to not stand and share with the House what an experience the 2010 Vancouver Olympics has been. From the first gold of Alex Bilodeau to the final gold, Sunday night in men's hockey, we truly were blessed to host a great Olympics, a games where Canada earned 14 golds—a record for any country in the winter games.

I'm proud of the many athletes from across Canada and Ontario who worked so hard to compete. As a proud aunt of one of those Olympians, I've seen the sacrifice and commitment of these young athletes, who give up a great deal to have the opportunity to compete under a Canadian flag on Canadian soil—or should I say, ice and snow. We all enjoyed the past 17 days of events, watching our athletes achieve medals and personal bests, but keep in mind the many years of preparation that went into those performances.

To the athletes who represented us so well, thank you. Thank you for your commitment to your sport. Thank you for showing us all what amazing individuals we have representing us every year at the nationals, the world cups and ultimately, the Olympics, and thank you for being such wonderful ambassadors for healthy living and showing us how to set and achieve goals.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Bill Mauro: About nine months ago in Ontario, we announced the amalgamation of about 20 isolate boards in our province. In my riding, in Atikokan, the former Atikokan Catholic board, which was responsible for St. Patrick's School, has now been joined with the Northwest Catholic District School Board. These mergers are important. They will ensure that resources and programs offered by the larger boards will have an opportunity to flow down to some of the smaller boards.

Since the announcement, we've been working on ensuring that proper and appropriate representation is afforded to the people of Atikokan, and I'm pleased that

with the support of the former Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, and the current Minister of Education, Leona Dombrowsky, we've now ensured that Atikokan is going to have a voice at the table. Through Bill 177 and with the support of those ministers; Anne-Marie Fitzgerald, the chair of the board; Mary-Catherine Kelly, the director; and through exercising the legislative authority that is vested with the minister, we've ensured that this particular board will see its number of trustees go from seven up to eight. So we're very pleased with that.

I've had discussions with the chair of the board, the director and the other trustees. We're hoping that the board will continue with what has been its historical practice of electing trustees by geography, so that we can ensure the people of Atikokan will have not only an additional trustee on the board but a trustee who is dedicated to and responsible for the interests of the people of Atikokan.

I want to thank the ministers, the chair and the director once again.

SCHOOL IN CAMBODIA

Mr. Norm Miller: On February 18, the Muskoka School opened in the Siem Reap district of Cambodia, thanks to the tireless efforts of Lisa McCoy of Gravenhurst. With the help of and fundraising by the Rotary Clubs of Muskoka, the Ontario-based Cambodia Landmine Museum Relief Fund, the Trailblazer Foundation and generous contributions by the people of Muskoka, over \$20,000 was raised. This money allowed 400 Cambodian children to have the opportunity to continue their education in a brand new school.

The inauguration of the school was met with much excitement and Muskoka was thanked for its generous contributions, which not only went to the construction of the school but also provided over \$2,000 for 400 new school uniforms and sandals. Over the past few months, Lisa McCoy has also distributed over 140 bicycles, which were purchased with the help of the Rotary Club of Bracebridge-Muskoka Lakes and the Rotary Club of Orillia. These bikes represent access to an education for the children of the rural villages of Cambodia.

Education is the key to unlocking hope and prosperity, and for generations to come, the children of Cambodia will benefit from the inspirational efforts of Lisa McCoy.

I want to also extend my sincere appreciation to the many Muskoka residents who volunteered their talents and time to make the Muskoka School in Cambodia a reality.

MADEIRA

Mr. Charles Sousa: A tragic natural disaster has recently befallen the Portuguese island of Madeira. Madeira is known for its exotic foods, beautiful vacations and its world-renowned Madeira wine. Unfortunately, this beautiful island situated off the African coast was

struck by torrential storms and a devastating series of flash floods on February 21.

The devastation brought about deadly mudslides, destroyed homes, claimed lives and threw the island into a state of crisis. The death toll is rising, and many people are still missing. As a Portuguese Canadian, I am deeply distraught by this terrible tragedy. My thoughts are with the people of Madeira, as well as their friends and family.

Yet, in the wake of this catastrophe, the display of solidarity and resolve among the Portuguese-Ontarian community has been inspirational. In particular, I would like to recognize the tremendous efforts of Mr. Frank Alvarez, president of CIRV Radio and Festival Portuguese Television, who, together with many volunteers, hosted a full-day radio telethon and raised over \$225,000.

As with other extraordinary efforts that support victims around the world, the people of Ontario and Canada do not idly sit by when disaster strikes abroad. Authorities say it will take a decade for Madeira to recover and an estimated 1.4 billion euros to rebuild the island.

This once pristine island faces a daunting challenge, one that must be met with perseverance, courage and co-operation. The people of Madeira are suffering, and they need our help.

Valiant efforts are ongoing to raise money and collect essential materials to help rebuild the lives of those who survived the aftermath of this tragedy.

I commend the hard work of Ontario's Portuguese community, as well as others who have devoted their time and money to this important humanitarian cause.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to pay tribute today to citizens from the township of Scugog who have received the Ontario Heritage Trust volunteer recognition award.

Brandon and Janna Guido were recognized for built heritage as a result of their meticulous restoration of the former Crandell home.

The Prince Albert school 50th anniversary committee was recognized for cultural heritage.

The 41 Port Perry Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps was recognized in the category of youth volunteers in cultural heritage. The cadets had chosen the Dr. Herbert Bruce tartan for their new pipe and drum band. Dr. Herbert was born in Scugog in 1868. He was the founder of the Wellesley Hospital in Toronto and was the 15th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

Joyce Kelly received a lifetime volunteer recognition award from the Ontario Heritage Trust. She has made an outstanding contribution to the success of agricultural fairs in my riding and indeed throughout Ontario.

Congratulations to everyone who works to preserve heritage in Durham and throughout Ontario, and a special thanks to the mayor and the council for Scugog for recommending these worthy recipients.

With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also recognize that today was the greenbelt's fifth anniversary celebration with Friends of the Greenbelt. There was an awards presentation at the Royal Ontario Museum, which I was unable to attend, but my colleague did attend and informed me that the Honourable David Peterson, former Premier of Ontario, presented to Eric and Jennifer Bowman from Gallery on the Farm an award from Friends of the Greenbelt. They were recommended by the Durham region economic development and tourism department, as well as the Durham agricultural advisory committee. They're well-respected and worthy recipients of this esteemed recognition.

NAGARATNAM SIVALINGAM

Mr. David Caplan: Yesterday morning, I learned with some sadness of the passing of Nagaratnam Sivalingam. For those of us lucky enough to know Siva, we know he was a simple but humble human being, a man who was honest, fair and always determined and motivated to do the right thing day in and day out.

Siva was a transformative force in Canada's Tamil community. He arrived in Canada at the age of 25 and, over the course of 45 years in this country, he built one institution after another. Most of them stand tall today as the servants of our community.

It is difficult to sum up all of his accomplishments in a few sentences, but I'd like to take the opportunity to mention a few of his many achievements.

1510

Siva was the founding president of the Tamil Eelam Society of Canada, which is an advocacy agency turned social service agency serving our community for over 30 years now.

Siva was also a founding trustee of the Hindu Temple Society of Canada, the largest Saiva temple in North America.

In between building these institutions, I can proudly say that he was a true Canadian who believed in the Canadian values of democracy, transparency, peace and justice.

He was engaged at every level of civil society. He took his citizen responsibilities to heart. He would not simply vote in every election; rather, he would sit with his fellow community members in seemingly endless meetings in order to understand the issues from various points of view.

I'm sad to see my friend go, but I'm inspired by the life that he lived so well.

Our condolences go out to his wife, Jegajenany, and daughters, Sivajini and Harini, grandchildren, siblings and extended friends and family.

May his soul rest in peace.

PROROGATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Before I start my statement, I just want to say that I am so pleased that talks are taking

place between Vale Inco and Local 6500 of USW. They have been on strike for eight long months. This is way too long. Let's hope that a resolution can be found.

Today I want to speak about the McGuinty government following Mr. Harper's lead to prorogue this House, an action that will kill important bills and erase a lot of work of a lot of MPPs. Prorogation, for example, will kill my private member's bill, Bill 156, the Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating Act, which received second reading in this House. That bill would force large restaurant chains to list calories on their menus and menu boards so that the epidemic of child obesity can be worked on. Prorogation will also kill another of my bills, Bill 229, the Day Nurseries Amendment Act, which would ensure that children in daycare are provided adequate protection from the sun.

It will also kill bills from the Liberal side, like Bill 83, An Act to help prevent skin cancer, which would ban children from tanning salons to decrease cancer risks among our young people.

Prorogation will also kill Bill 89, the Ombudsman Amendment Act, which would allow Ombudsman oversight of hospitals in order to make sure that patient concerns are being addressed.

Prorogation erases the hard work of individual MPPs. It is disappointing.

RIDING OF HALIBURTON-KAWARTHA LAKES-BROCK

Mr. Rick Johnson: I know you may find this hard to believe, but this Friday marks the first anniversary of my election to the Ontario Legislature. It has been a busy and rewarding year and an honour to serve the people of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. Over the past year, I've had the pleasure of meeting many people throughout the riding and attending a variety of spectacular events.

As we enter the spring and summer tourism season, I would encourage you and your constituents to join me in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for outstanding entertainment, exciting festivals and magnificent hospitality.

Included among the many events in my region are the 4th Line summer theatre season in Millbrook, the Lindsay Country Jamboree, the Buckhorn Fine Art Festival, the Haliburton Sportsmen's Show, the Canadian Power Sports Festival, the Coe Hill Wild West Weekend, Fiesta Buckhorn, the Haliburton Highland Games, the Lindsay Lilac Festival, and countless county and agricultural fairs, including, of course, the Kinmount Fair and the Lindsay Fair.

In addition to the many events we have to offer, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock is blessed with spectacular scenery and abundant natural beauty. We have crystal-clear lakes, pristine forests, miles of marked wilderness trails and several provincial parks.

You don't need to venture far from home this year for a great holiday or a quick getaway. Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock has it all: cultural events, festivals, resorts,

cottages, outdoor and natural activities. There's something for everyone. I encourage all Ontarians to visit us this year and experience the great hospitality of the region I am proud and honoured to represent.

DIGITAL MEDIA

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Over the last couple of weeks, students and staff from Sheridan College in Oakville have been doing this province proud and receiving quite a bit of attention from tourists in Vancouver. It's been great news for our province as Sheridan staff, students and partners were in Vancouver to promote Ontario as a great tourist destination and to demonstrate Ontario's leadership in digital media innovation.

Late last year, Sheridan College was approached by our Ministry of Tourism to develop a 3D game for the Vancouver Olympics. In under 12 weeks and on budget, Sheridan, along with partners Spatial View and Research in Motion, created the world's first real-time auto-stereoscopic 3D game that does not require 3D glasses. The game allowed tourists who visited Ontario House pavilion to piece together 3D puzzles that depicted 20 of our tourism hotspots, using BlackBerry phones. The school is partnering with McMaster University, Atomic Energy of Canada and the great municipality of Ottawa to develop similar projects.

I'd like to congratulate the people involved in the project, specifically Sheridan College. Once again, they've demonstrated leadership in developing world-class digital media.

I want to thank them for their efforts in promoting Ontario as a great place to visit. I want to thank them as the member of provincial Parliament for Oakville. I'm really proud to represent a community that's got such a wonderful institution within its borders.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Standing order 63(a) provides that "the Standing Committee on Estimates shall present one report with respect to all of the estimates and supplementary estimates considered pursuant to standing orders 60 and 62 no later than the third Thursday in November of each calendar year."

The House not having received a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates for certain offices on Thursday, November 19, 2009, as required by the standing orders of this House, pursuant to standing order 63(b), the estimates before the committee of the Office of the Assembly, the Office of the Auditor General, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer and Ombudsman Ontario are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Pursuant to standing order 61(b), the 2009-10 estimates of these offices not having been selected for consideration are deemed to be received and concurred in.

Report deemed received.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 248, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 / Projet de loi 248, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The intent of this bill is to protect unionized workers from having work moved out of unionized units into non-union units, focused primarily on protection of media in this province.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to rise and read yet again another petition from my riding of Durham, which 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; and

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy" and use "every day. A few examples include: coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; 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;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the" dreaded "health tax, which costs upwards of ... \$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 ... hard-working families and businesses."

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to Max, one of the young pages here.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario entitled “Ontario Must Address Child Care”—hundreds of thousands of signatures from Windsor CAW child care services. It reads as follows:

“We are urging the provincial government to commit to base funding for child care providers to support operations and wages and commit to saving the current number of child care spaces for ages zero to three.

1520

“We call on Premier McGuinty and Finance Minister Dwight Duncan to:

“(1) Ensure the province provides sufficient funding to maintain existing levels of child care service and recognize cost-of-living and other legitimate increases in operating costs.

“(2) Provide all necessary tools to support the transition to an early learning program, including base funding for child care programs to support operations and wages comparable to the full-day learning program, in order to ensure that the child care system remains stable and sustainable.”

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and send it to the table via page Colin.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Espanola in the riding of Algoma–Manitoulin, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients ...; and

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

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

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

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

TAXATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people in Nickel Belt, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas Ontario has lost 171,000 jobs since October and over 300,000 manufacturing and resource sector jobs since 2004; and

“Whereas many families are facing the threat of layoffs or reduced hours; and

“Whereas, rather than introducing a plan to sustain jobs and put Ontario’s economy back on track, Dalton McGuinty and his government chose to slap an 8% tax on everyday purchases while giving profitable corporations a \$2-billion income tax cut”;

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows: They “call on the Legislature to cancel the scheduled implementation of sales tax harmonization.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the clerks with page Christopher.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has taken an important step in its decision to implement full-day kindergarten; and

“Whereas children between the ages of six and 12 years continue to suffer from a lack of accessible, quality programs; and

“Whereas unlike youth and children in their early years, more than one million children six to 12 years old across Ontario are being left behind because of a lack of dedicated funding for accessible, quality middle-childhood programs; and

“Whereas failure to increase middle childhood programming threatens a child’s safety, education and social development as they prepare to face the challenges of the approaching teen years; and

“Whereas implementing effective middle-childhood programs increases self-esteem, improves school performance and enhances quality of life for both children and their families; and

“Whereas Charles Pascal, in his 2009 report With Our Best Future in Mind, provides a framework and strategy for implementing a provincial structure for middle childhood programs across Ontario; and

“Whereas investing in middle childhood programs is part of Ontario’s economic stimulus strategy;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest now in children six to 12 years old across Ontario and implement the recommendations made in the With Our Best Future in Mind report.”

I agree with this petition, I affix my signature and I submit it with page Ava.

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 23, 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 Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much for letting me continue the debate on this very important issue we were talking about, the pension reform bill. I took some time the last time I was speaking on this issue to talk about the importance of pension reform in the province of Ontario and the kinds of things we need to do in order to make sure that, as we are getting through this economy, we have a viable pension system. And not only a pension system, but I think we need to put more focus on retirement incomes, because that's where we're heading, to make sure that those who do not have a defined pension plan are still able to have retirement income. I talked about my circumstances as somebody who has never had a pension. The focus is on retirement income and how necessary it is that we engage in some sort of a national summit, as the Premier has called for and as has been endorsed by the Council of the Federation. We need to make sure that nationally, collectively, we're sitting down and talking about the issues around retirement income.

One of the other things—and this is where I stopped, I believe, last time when I was speaking on this issue a few days ago—is the issue around Nortel pensioners and Nortel pensions. As I had mentioned, in my riding of Ottawa Centre, there are a lot of Nortel pensioners. I've been engaged with them since last year trying to work through some of the ins and outs around Nortel pensions, both at the federal level, because there are some issues around bankruptcy and insolvency legislation federally, but also at the provincial level. I've had numerous meetings with people like Don Sproule, who is actually heading the Nortel pensioners group with Rob Paterson, who lives in my riding, and with David Jeanes as well, who has been very instructive to me on this particular issue. Over these numerous meetings, we've talked about things like the pension benefits guarantee fund, PBGF, a very valid issue around the windup of Nortel pensions, if it comes down to that.

On the issue of PBGF, I had the opportunity to write to the Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan, on July 14, 2009, when I urged him that the government look at its responsibility of ensuring the funding of PBGF so that Nortel pensioners, if they need a top-up of up to \$1,000, that money is available. I was very pleased to see, just in February, the minister making the announcement that the government will be putting aside money to allow for that top-up of up to \$1,000 for Nortel pensioners. That is good news for Nortel pensioners in my riding of Ottawa Centre. I have made sure they know that that commitment has been made as well.

Now the bigger issue which the Nortel pensioners are concerned about is around the windup. I just wanted to go through some of the submissions they have made to ensure that it is on the record in this Legislature as to what Nortel pensioners are looking for in terms of ensuring that their pensions are protected in some way.

The Nortel Retirees and former employees Protection Canada, which is an umbrella group created to deal with this particular issue, have written to me, and I'm sure they've written to other MPPs as well, to talk about some of the issues. Essentially, what they're looking for is a fiscally responsible win-win for the province of Ontario and for the group of 17,500 Nortel pensioners which they represent.

What they're looking for is—and I'll endeavour to summarize. They have articulated an orphanage concept which is based on the following principles:

- that pension plans continue with initial benefits at a supportable level;

- that PBGF supplements Ontario benefits on a monthly basis—that's something I talked about earlier, and it's already taken care of;

1530

- funds asset allocation consistent with a conservative investment profile;

- benefits adjusted biannually based on investment program returns;

- government assures that minimum benefits are not less than conventional windup—any surplus above original plan benefits absorbed by PBGF;

- Nortel estate settlement integrated to improve benefits when claims materialize; and

- PBGF benefits could be combined with the estate claim and other government support to annuitized pensions so it's beneficial to all parties.

Essentially, an orphanage concept has an impact on pensions approximately half of windup; a biannual pension adjustment is dependent on fund investment success, its participation in improved PBGF benefits, and if fund equities have time to recover from a market slump.

According to the Nortel pensioners on this particular proposal, they estimate that in a conventional windup, the PBGF estimates an immediate impact of about a \$277-million payout to the pensioners. In an orphanage concept, according to the pensioners' group, there is no immediate infusion of \$277 million of PBGF funding. According to them, PBGF supplements are much smaller and payments are spread over multiple budgets. There's about a \$1-million to \$2-million contribution per month, decreasing as participants decline. As such, they argue that there's minimal societal and economic impact caused. There's a slight risk that fund investment will not support minimum benefits long-term. There's improved public confidence in a provincial retirement income system. That will allow, according to them, a phase-in of full Arthurs report benefits. So, less costly with minimal risk is what they're talking about.

That's the submission they have made. Essentially, they argue that winding up defined benefit pension plans is punitive under prevailing market conditions because we know what has happened with the market and where those pension plans sit right now. The orphanage proposal represents an alternative to offset these future

financial losses with minimal risk. It's a win-win for both pensioners and the province.

I have been learning from the Nortel retirees in my riding. I've advocated to the Minister of Finance to look at this proposal, to engage in a dialogue—as I understand, the minister is engaged in a dialogue with Nortel pensioners—and to give due consideration to the Nortel proposal around orphanage.

There is another issue that I want to discuss—just mindful of time—which is an important issue. That is an issue which is slightly different from this particular issue around Nortel pensioners and the pension plan, and that is the benefits for Nortel pensioners with a long-term disability. It's a different issue. It's a different class of people who will be impacted. Again, I've been engaged with a constituent of mine, Sylvain de Margerie, who has been very good and instructive to me on that issue. On November 6, 2009, I wrote to the Minister of Finance on the issue around LTD benefits and how they are different. The key difference for LTD benefits is that they're not insured, which makes them even more vulnerable to the current situation and climate. It's important that the Minister of Finance look at LTD benefits and the impact on beneficiaries separately, because they really impact people who have long-term disabilities and need the support necessary.

These are some very important issues, I think, in the current economic climate that we need to really pay attention to. This particular legislation, which amends—or “reforms” probably is the better word—the Pension Benefits Act, is an important first step. I think the minister has indicated that there will be more legislation coming out in the spring—after, I'm assuming, the budget—which will speak to some of the other recommendations that are made in the Arthurs report. But in today's economic climate, it is extremely important that we do consider the issue around pensions. Most importantly, I again assert that we need to look at the broad issue around retirement income. That is a very important issue, because there are a lot of Ontarians—in fact, there is a majority of Canadians—who do not have a defined pension plan, and they still have to determine where their retirement income will come from. That's why I think a national dialogue on that very important issue, as we define our destiny for the 21st century, is extremely important.

Thank you very much for the time.

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: The member for Ottawa Centre has offered some interesting points this afternoon with respect to this debate on Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act. Like him, I have met with constituents who are retirees from Nortel. Actually, on Monday of this week, I met with Ron Lovegrow, Harry Durham and Jim Delaat in Georgetown. They gave me information about the proposed Ontario pension plan orphanage that the member for Ottawa Centre made reference to in his comments at some length.

I would just like to add my voice to the suggestion that the Minister of Finance should seriously and carefully evaluate the suggestion that's being made. Certainly, the Nortel pensioners have very serious concerns about their retirement security, and having listened to what has been happening with their particular circumstances, I certainly empathize with them and would hope that this solution might be something that the government could seriously consider, as I've said, and adopt.

The orphanage concept is based on a great deal of research. They contend that the risks are manageable; individual and societal costs are reduced. Benefits could be guaranteed at conventional windup plus upside potential, and they suggest that the impact for the province would potentially be less costly under their proposal than the other way of going about it.

I note that the government of Ontario made a commitment to Nortel pensioners with respect to the pension benefits guarantee fund recently in February, just last month. I'm not sure if it had anything to do with the pending by-election which takes place on Thursday in Ottawa; I suspect there might have been some connection. Maybe the member for Ottawa Centre would further enlighten us on that. But the fact is, we do need to stand with these pensioners who are in this situation and do what we can as a provincial government to support them.

Again, I would strongly encourage the government to look at this particular orphanage proposal.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Let's face it, folks: Only 35% of Ontarians have an occupational pension plan. I'm part of the boomer generation. We in this House don't have a pension plan. Most of us are going to retire and we're going to be completely dependent on our RSPs. Quite frankly, my eyes glaze over at this stuff. I'm sure that for most people listening, their eyes glaze over when you start talking about pension plans and what all these figures mean.

The bottom line is that we're going to have a huge, huge number of people who cannot pay the rent, cannot feed themselves and cannot pay their mortgages, and it's going to happen soon if we don't do something.

You compare us to Europe. Let's take the example of France, where, if you retire in France, they have a national system that grants 50% to 55% of the income that you earned if you've worked 40 years—and not at the same company; this is not company-based; this is nationally based. This is called a reasonable system, where people are guaranteed a dignified retirement.

Are we guaranteed a dignified retirement in Ontario? Absolutely not. And even if you're diligent, even if you invest the maximum RSP amount every year, if the stock market takes a nosedive, you're sunk. Come on; we've got to do something.

Does this bill deliver? I'm going to talk about it in my 10 minutes, but the simple answer is “something”; it delivers something. Does it deliver what we need? No; it

delivers something. It's so classically Liberal: It delivers an inch when you need a mile. We'll talk about the mile when I get up for my 10 minutes, but the bottom line is, we should be very, very worried, we in this House who are on the Freedom 95 plan and those outside who are watching.

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

Mr. Charles Sousa: The debate around pensions is crucial, especially in these economic times when we've seen the downturn. In our discussions with a number of those affected, like those from Nortel and otherwise, we have to do what's necessary to protect those who are in a pension plan and we have to encourage those who aren't to become part of one. We certainly need to amend some of our acts.

1540

The process going forward is proactive, especially now. We must update our employment pension system; that's why we are bringing this forward. We also know that the orphanage account that my colleague spoke about by the Nortel folks is important to recognize, because what they're saying is that they don't want to go into a windup at the expense of possible increases. That's why we have taken some steps in this proactive nature to ensure that we fund the pensions and enable the guarantee that is unique to Ontario.

I would say that since March 2009, Ontario has taken a number of important steps to modernize Ontario's employment pension system. We've introduced a temporary solvency funding relief program to protect jobs and families. We've worked to simplify pension divisions when marriage ends. We've initialized and initiated the first-ever actuarial study to examine the future of the pension benefits guarantee fund. And we've established an advisory council on pensions and retirement income.

We're also actively participating in a broader national discussion about improving the Canadian retirement income system. In this regard, Minister Duncan recently met with his provincial counterparts in Whitehorse, where they had productive discussions about the future of pensions for all Canadians. We plan to continue these discussions early this summer.

But this bill, Bill 236, the Pension Benefits Amendment Act—the specific reforms that are included in the act would, if passed, provide for the restructuring of pension plans affected by corporate organizations while protecting benefit security for plan members and pensioners.

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

The member for Ottawa Centre, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank my colleagues from Wellington–Halton Hills, Parkdale–High Park and Mississauga South for their comments.

I just want to talk a little bit more about the issue around LTDs, the long-term disability benefits, and how they are different from the Nortel pension. In particular, I

want to highlight the remedy they are seeking from both the federal government and the provincial government. I think it's important that on the provincial government side, the Minister of Finance consider those remedies, because these are unique circumstances.

In terms of the federal government, what the beneficiaries are asking for is:

(1) a law to take effect immediately allowing the government to ensure the continued income replacement and other benefits of LTD beneficiaries, whatever the fate of the employer;

(2) an immediate and retroactive amendment for the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to provide privileged creditor status to LTD beneficiaries;

(3) an immediate intervention by the Canadian Human Rights Commission to monitor the CCAA and BIA proceedings for Nortel; and

(4) special tax treatment for individuals on LTD invoking the fairness rules regarding whatever they may recover as creditors.

In terms of the provincial government, the remedies they are seeking are as follows:

(1) insurance laws must be amended to include so-called self-insured plans;

(2) pension laws must be clarified, amended or expended to deal with pensions other than retirement pensions;

(3) corporate and employment laws need to ensure all directors be explicitly responsible for LTD benefits; and

(4) given their large part of responsibility, provinces must be prepared to complement whatever can be obtained from federal or other resources to ensure the continuation of LTD benefits at their fullest.

Of course there's a lot there, both from Nortel pensioners and in terms of the long-term disability beneficiaries. What we need to ensure—and of course the Minister of Finance and his staff will know better as to what's possible and how best to work on these circumstances—is that we pay attention to these.

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak very briefly on this—actually, I guess I've got 20 minutes.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Okay. The previous Liberal speaker had 10 minutes, it would appear—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It was left over—

Mr. Ted Arnott: Okay. I appreciate the clarification. Thank you very much.

I'm glad to have this opportunity to speak slightly longer on this Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We'll see how you do.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'll be graded afterwards. Certainly my constituents will want to grade me, as they do every four years.

The fact is that this is important legislation, and it's a very important issue for the people of Ontario and my constituents in Wellington-Halton Hills. When I start talking about this for 20 minutes, I want to begin with informing the House of some of the serious concerns we have about pensions. Pensions to people mean retirement security. If you have a pension—a good pension—it means peace of mind over the long term as to how you're going to pay your bills in your retirement years.

I think it's important to point out and note that the vast majority of Ontarians have no pension whatsoever, save and except perhaps having paid into the Canada pension plan. There are a huge number of seniors in my riding whose only income is old age security and the guaranteed income supplement from the federal government, possibly topped up a little bit by CPP. The fact is, that's the income that a substantial number of the households in my riding, particularly seniors, have to make do with.

I think it's also important to point out that our pension laws and regulations must be fair, they must be understandable and they must lend security to the investments under management. That's a very important principle too: to ensure that the pension fund can meet its obligations over the long term.

It was pointed out earlier in the debate this afternoon that members of provincial Parliament do not have a defined benefit pension plan. I think that's worth noting as well, because I think, Mr. Speaker, you would probably agree that the vast majority of our constituents believe that we have a very generous defined benefit pension plan. Of course, the members of Parliament in Ottawa have those sorts of arrangements. We had that here up until 1996, when the government of the day—I think with the support of the opposition parties, if I'm not mistaken; my recollection is that the Liberals in opposition voted for the pension reform bill, as did the New Democrats. The fact is, we scrapped our so-called “gold-plated” or defined benefit pension plan and replaced it with something very different: I would call it a defined contribution retirement savings plan. The way it works, of course, is that the employer, the Legislative Assembly, puts aside a certain amount of money every month into a registered retirement account for members. Most of us have additional room to top it up, like people would do with RRSPs. Those of us who are prudent and concerned about our retirement—most cases, I suspect—do top up those monies to ensure that our maximum RRSP contribution is realized. But the fact is that we don't have a defined benefit pension at the present time.

I think it's also true to say that most Canadians do not save enough for their retirement. We see this from time to time: accounts in the newspaper about people who are leaving RRSP room without making the contributions. Obviously some people, at the end of a year, just don't have the means to make those kinds of contributions, but I think it's true to say that we are not saving enough for our retirement in general in our province.

This bill, Bill 236, of course—if we listen to the government—is intended to respond to some of the problems which have been raised through the Expert Commission on Pensions, established in 2006, also known as the Arthurs report. The report made some 142 recommendations, and the government, in response to the Arthurs report, has brought forward Bill 236.

When this bill was first introduced in the Legislature back in December, the government told us that this bill was intended to clarify the benefits of plan members affected by layoffs and eliminate partial windups. A partial windup occurs when only part of a pension plan is closed. The bill was also intended to facilitate the restructuring of pension plans affected by corporate reorganizations, while protecting benefit security for plan members and pensioners; to increase transparency and access to information for plan members and pensioners—always obviously desirable—and to enhance regulatory oversight, improve plan administration and reduce compliance costs. Those were the objectives of Bill 236.

Some of the key elements of the legislation that I think it's important to point out are as follows: Pension benefits will be immediately vested if this bill is passed, instead of being vested after two years of participation in a pension plan. I understand that this is similar to the legislation that currently exists in Quebec. We understand this may be beneficial in many cases for some employees. It would also add to the administrative burden for employers, particularly for those in industries with high employee turnover. We believe that this may lead to a trend toward longer eligibility periods for membership; I very much suspect that that will be the unintended consequence.

I know that the bill is intended to extend grow-in benefits—and this is a controversial provision in the bill. Currently, I understand that in the event of a partial or full windup of a pension plan, members with 55 or more age-plus-service points are entitled to grow into a pension plan's subsidized early retirement provisions. The grow-in pensions will be extended, if this bill is passed, to all terminations of employment for members who meet the 55-points requirement except for termination for cause, with or without a plan windup. We've heard that this aspect of the bill will be costly for plan sponsors and may be administratively burdensome. Apparently no other jurisdiction in Canada, save and except Nova Scotia, has such rules. The pension review panel in Nova Scotia has recommended against making such rules mandatory. I understand that the Association of Canadian Pension Management also opposes this provision.

1550

As well, I have information that was provided to us by the law firm Osler, Hoskin and Harcourt. They express concerns about this aspect of Bill 236. They make an interesting argument as to how this is going to be very costly. I think it's something that all members would want to consider.

I'm also aware that Bill 236 deals with the concept of phased retirement. It would, if passed, limit phased retire-

ment measures in this bill. They would be permissive rather than required. Plan members who are at least 60 years of age, or 55 or more and entitled to an unreduced pension, and whose pay is reduced, may enter into a written agreement to receive a partial pension not to exceed 60% of the member's pension. As I understand it, these rules are restrictive, but many consider that this is a move in the right direction.

With respect to partial windup of pensions: As is the case in the province of Quebec, partial windups will be removed from the legislation, as I understand it. There are traditional provisions for partial windups in process. In the interim, plan administrators will not be required to purchase annuities for members affected by a partial windup. I understand that this is consistent with a recent decision of the Financial Services Tribunal in a case which is known as *Imperial Oil Ltd. versus Superintendent*, which was released in December 2009.

Another important provision of Bill 236 is the issue with respect to sale-of-business provision. The procedures in the legislation, I understand, in respect of asset transfers, mergers, division of pension plans and divestitures are being simplified with Bill 236. This will be subject to prescribed rules.

Under Bill 236, in most circumstances, approval of the superintendent will be required. In addition, in certain circumstances, plan members will be permitted to consolidate their benefits in one pension plan.

Another interesting provision of Bill 236 is it deals with small benefits amounts and it increases those amounts. Small benefits amounts will be increased. The legislation currently permits a lump-sum cash payment of a pension if the amount of pension payable upon the normal retirement date is less than 2% of the year's maximum pensionable earnings under the Canada pension plan, which, in 2009, I understand, was \$46,300. We're told that this is being increased to 4% of the year's maximum pensionable earnings—or if the commuted value of a member's pension is less than 20% of the year's maximum pensionable earnings. With immediate vestings of pensions, there may be a higher frequency of small benefits being cashed out. We're told that increasing the limit may make sense in these circumstances.

Bill 236 also deals with surpluses and the sharing of surpluses on full windup. Under Bill 236, surplus payments to a plan sponsor upon windup of a pension plan will be permitted, even where the documents do not so provide, if there's a surplus-sharing agreement with plan members, former members and beneficiaries.

Bill 236 also has provisions related to the notice of plan amendments issue. The legislation currently differentiates between ordinary amendments and adverse amendments. In the case of an adverse amendment, 45 days' notice must be provided to members. The reforms require 45 days' advance notice for all plan amendments. This will be administratively burdensome and costly, particularly in the case of routine amendments.

While this pension reform bill, Bill 236, generally expands the notice requirement for pension plan amend-

ments, amendments relating to the transfer of assets authorized by sections 79, 80 and 80.2, or the amended section 81, are specifically exempted from the requirement.

Another important provision of Bill 236 is the issue of electronic communication. Pension legislation will explicitly permit members' statements and other communications to be sent electronically. Exemptions to the general rule may be prescribed, and this should reduce costs and administrative burdens for employers. Certainly, in 2010, we should be able to communicate electronically, and if there's a requirement to change the legislation to make that possible, that's something that makes sense to me.

Restructuring and insolvency is another important issue that this bill deals with. The superintendent under this legislation will be empowered to approve agreements in restructuring proceedings under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act or under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act.

Our caucus believes that there are a number of things that are missing from this legislation that we need to point out during the course of this debate. In Bill 236, there is no mention made of extending protection of pension benefits of bankrupt employers, nor the provision of a public retirement savings option, nor the relaxation of fund requirements.

We're also pointing out that plan members seeking to transfer or consolidate their split pension assets to one plan—as in the case of MPAC workers, who were affected by past divestment—want to retain their previous Ontario public service, or OPS, employment and credit from the original pension plan. They are not able to get confirmation that this legislation will provide this. So here's a case of a number of employees who have moved from one employer to another and would like to be able to transfer those pension opportunities, and unfortunately, Bill 236 does not give them the assurance that they are asking for.

Again, I would like to point out the fact that I had a meeting with constituents in my riding in Georgetown on Monday. These gentlemen who came to see me are retirees from Nortel and they are very, very concerned about their future retirement security as a result of the bankruptcy of Nortel some time ago. They proposed to me what they call the Ontario pension plan orphanage, a home for stranded defined benefit pension plans. I had met with them previously, but this opportunity came up and it was helpful to get an update on the situation. As we know, Nortel's support for both of its defined benefit pension plans is tenuous. My understanding is that major asset sales will be completed by March 2010, and therefore the issue is very, very urgent because, as they said to me, the train may very well be leaving the station very soon.

The Financial Services Commission of Ontario—or FSCO, as we call it—starts a windup when Nortel withdraws support and immediately crystallizes fund assets and moves to annuitize, which, as I understand it,

means that whatever money is left in the pension fund is taken to create annuities for the pensioners. As we know, annuities are being sold at historically expensive levels because of interest rate levels at the present time. Pensions immediately and permanently may be reduced by up to 30% or more. These pensioners would have no opportunity for their assets to recover. Even if the stock market goes up, they wouldn't be any better off. There would be no effective or fair way to build in a Nortel estate settlement that might be forthcoming, and there would be no chance to benefit from key aspects of the Arthurs report; i.e., the agency for stranded pension plans, and improved pension benefits guarantee fund benefits. The point they made to me is that there is a need for immediate government action to prevent the windup and create this home for stranded plans immediately.

The orphanage concept is based on a number of principles, including:

- the plan continues with initial benefits at a supportable level;
- the pension benefits guarantee fund supplements Ontario benefits on a monthly basis;
- improved pension benefits guarantee fund benefits could be integrated into the future;
- the funds asset allocation would be consistent with a conservative investment profile;
- benefits would be adjusted biannually, or twice a year, based on investment program returns;
- the government would assure minimum benefits not less than the conventional windup;
- any surplus above the original planned benefits would be absorbed by the pension benefits guarantee fund;
- the Nortel estate settlement would be integrated to improve benefits when claims materialize; and
- the pension benefits guarantee fund benefits could be combined with the estate claim and other government support to annuitize pensions if beneficial to all parties, as has been done in some cases in the past.

1600

They conclude with the fact that, under this proposal, the risks would be manageable, and individual and societal costs would be reduced.

Under the conventional windup, which, if action isn't taken, will most likely be what will happen, their pensions will immediately be reduced and frozen at up to 30% less than what they would normally expect to get.

Under the orphanage proposal, the impact on pensions would be approximately half of windup, and there would be biannual pension adjustments, as I said earlier, dependent on fund investment success. In other words, if the funds invested did well, hopefully, there would be more money for the retirees. There would be participation in an improved pension benefits guarantee fund benefit, hopefully, up from \$1,000 to up to \$2,500 per month.

Fund equities would have time to recover from the market slump. As we know, the stock market started to tank in the fall of 2008, and it has rebounded con-

siderably. We would hope that there will be continued strength in our equity markets in the months and years ahead, which would mean that this would be a much better solution for the Nortel pensioners. I believe it would be.

The Nortel estate claim integrated into recovery of pension benefit levels would be another attractive aspect. The benefits would be guaranteed at conventional wind-up plus upside potential—again, another conclusion that would be advantageous to the pensioners.

Comparing the impact for the province, if there is a conventional windup of their pension plan, the pension benefits guarantee fund will likely need \$277 million to meet the obligations that will be required. That's a lot of money. There would be increased societal and economic impact costs over the long term.

However, under the orphanage proposal, which is, again, what we're advocating here, there would be no immediate infusion of \$277 million into the pension benefits guarantee fund. The pension benefits guarantee fund supplement would be much smaller and payments would be spread over multiple budgets. It is estimated that the cost would be \$1 million or \$2 million a month and would be decreasing over time as the number of participants were to decline. There would be minimal societal and economic impact costs.

There is a slight risk that fund investments will not support minimum benefits over the long term, but it is hopeful that that would not be the case.

There would be improved public confidence in the provincial public retirement income system—and this is something that I think all of us would hope would be the outcome.

There could be a phase-in of the full Arthurs report benefits.

In conclusion, this proposal for the province would be less costly with minimal risk. The impact on the typical Nortel pensioner, I think, is something worth looking at. Certainly, for the typical Nortel pensioner, this would mean more money in the bank, more retirement security and greater peace of mind for these workers, who have given many years of their working lives to build a company that, through no fault of theirs, failed in the last couple years. Again, I would suggest that it's important that we look at this issue from their perspective.

I would encourage the government to carefully consider the proposal and the recommendations. It's interesting that members of the government side have brought these concerns forward during the course of this debate, so I think this is something that we could work together on across party lines to try to address this serious issue to provide income security to more Ontarians in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Just before questions and comments, pursuant to standing order 47(c), there having been six and a half hours of debate on Bill 236, the debate is deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

Hon. John Gerretsen: In light of the fact that this is such a stimulating debate, we would like it to continue.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I have to say that the member from Wellington–Halton Hills, despite the fact that he spoke twice as long, did a very good job.

I don't want to play the gender card, but when people start talking about pensions and vesting, my eyes do glaze over. I'm going to try to make this a little bit more interesting.

The bottom line here, folks who are watching at home, is that most people in Ontario are going to retire with very, very little. Their CPP plan is a thousand bucks a month—\$1,000 a month. Try living in Toronto, for example, on \$1,000 a month. I can tell you, you will barely pay your rent if you live in a bachelor apartment. You will be at the food bank. You will be going to a place to take cast-off clothing because you will not be able to survive.

Our financial planners tell us to set aside a little. I'm sorry, folks—set aside a little of what? Most Ontarians, almost 300,000 of them, have lost their jobs. Most Ontarians live paycheque to paycheque to paycheque, and they don't have extra money. My goodness, it's tax time, folks. It's tax time, and even I—most of us have to borrow to put the maximum into our RSPs and pay that off. Come on.

These are people who make a good salary in this place. Imagine everybody else out there. And what do you get for your RSPs? You're at the vagaries of the stock market. Maybe you're lucky; maybe you're not. Maybe you retire when the stock market's up; maybe you don't. The problem is vast, and we have to do something.

I'm happy to talk to this bill. I'm happy to also talk about what happens in other jurisdictions because, my goodness, it's so much better. I live for that moment.

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes on what is obviously a very important issue that has seized all members of the Legislature. I'm happy to have a couple of minutes on it.

I must say, I do remember very clearly some time ago when the Premier first began to speak on this issue. He talked very clearly about the fact that he felt there needed to be a national strategy developed when it came to pension and pension reform in this country. It wasn't suggesting for a second that here in Ontario we stop doing the work that we needed to do, but he did speak very clearly about how we needed a national strategy.

I thought it was interesting, when the member of the third party spoke in the last two-minute round, she spent a bit of time bemoaning the fact that things are not better on pension issues in the province of Ontario, which we all agree with, and that's fine, but she offered as a solution France, which, of course, is a country. So here we were criticizing what's going on in Ontario—and we all believe that more needs to be done to make it better—but there was the country of France, which has a national plan, apparently, offered as an example of an opportunity

for improvement. I'm happy to hear that, and it sounds like there is support for the idea that we need a broader, macro view of what we need to do in this country.

Bill 236, as you've heard, is just a start. The finance minister has been very clear. As a result of the Arthurs report, we're implementing some of his recommendations, but there is more legislation that will come on this issue.

We also, of course, need to be very mindful that there are two thirds of people in this province who do not have access to a pension plan. We need to be cognizant of their concerns when it comes to this work. But I must say, I've heard others in the Legislature today talking about Nortel, and I will tell you that in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan there is a significant number of AbitibiBowater pensioners who find themselves in a similar circumstance, and as a government, we're working to see what it is we can do on their behalf.

I know that the federal government has been drawn into this discussion as well. The province of Quebec is engaged, and we're working very diligently to see what we can do for those AbitibiBowater pensioners, not only in northwestern Ontario but in Quebec and southern Ontario as well.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened intently to the member from Wellington–Halton Hills. I think he covered pretty well everything, including the Nortel debate, which I think is important.

But if you look at the bill, there are a few things here that are worth putting on the record. One of them is very important, actually. I had an opportunity to participate, when I was assistant to the Minister of Finance back in government—and this is the partial windup. I did attend some of the meetings on the Monsanto case, which, in pension law, is very much a precedent. This whole idea of a partial windup would be repealed upon proclamation of this report. I personally think that's a good idea.

But there's also a supplementary part, which is very interesting. Some of this stuff is quite boring until you get drilled down on it. One is the surplus-sharing agreement; that's another one. What is a surplus of a pension at any given point in time, or a deficit, for that matter, as we're experiencing today? The key thing here is, it would really come down in real law to asking who the contributor was. If the contributor has, under a contractual arrangement, some obligations to fund to a certain level, obviously the surplus should belong to the person who's contributing. That's not the case, because sometimes—it's really called a deferred gratification for a non-contributing pensioner to a pension fund, and they want to share in the surplus. In that case, they should also share in the liability. Today, we have the case where there's a liability because the market is down and all pension fund valuations are down; they're off the table. So I think that's a very important one as well.

1610

This bill is typical of what has happened. If the government assumes interference, they assume liability.

The NDP in 1993 provided the opening here. The too-big-to-fail agreement with Algoma created the problem, and they now own the liability. That's the real truth of why pensions are screwed up today. There is a deficit because they allowed them to not completely fund them. It was a government order that did it, and now we're all in trouble.

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

The member for Wellington–Halton Hills, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to respond to the members for Parkdale–High Park, Thunder Bay–Atikokan and Durham. As I was making eye contact around the chamber while I was making my remarks, I was pleased to see that all three of those members were listening quite intently. I'm sorry I wasn't able to command the attention of the Minister of the Environment in a way that would have made him more impressed, but I'm glad he's here too, and I want to express my appreciation to him for his intervention, which allows the debate to continue.

Let's go back to some of the fundamental principles that we talk about that inform this debate. I think it's important that we all remember that pensions mean retirement security for Ontarians. I think it's important that we also recognize, as was said a minute ago, that about two thirds of Ontarians do not have a pension at all, and we've got to be concerned about their interests as well. We've got to make sure that pension laws and regulations are fair, they must be understandable—and, of course, as we know, this is a highly technical issue that is, at times, a bit tedious as we go through it line by line, but I think it's important that we make an effort to make these complex concepts understandable to the people of Ontario, especially the pensioners themselves. We need to make sure that our laws and regulations lend security to the investments that are under management so as to ensure that the pension funds can meet their obligations over the long term.

This bill, Bill 236, as I understand it, is the government's response to the Arthurs report. I look forward to the continued debate on this issue. I would hope that this bill is going to committee. Even though we prorogue on Thursday, it will most likely be sent to a standing committee of the Legislature. Most likely, there will be public hearings on the issue so that we can hear a little more from some of the experts. Hopefully the government will be interested in listening to the possible amendments that might come forward from the opposition and the government members themselves to improve the bill, make sure that we get it right and make sure that it is in the public interest as we go forward to protect the pensions of the people of Ontario.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to rise and speak about this. First, I wanted to just comment on a couple of comments that I heard out there, one about the Bob Rae

government. As you know, Bob Rae is no longer a member of the New Democratic Party; he's, in fact, a Liberal—and we would argue that he always was. I'm certainly not going to defend the actions of the Rae government, so that's number one.

Number two, when the member across the way talked about federal versus provincial, I would absolutely agree. There's no doubt that the best solution to this problem would be a federal one, an expansion of the Canada pension program, and to do it now. I want to win the lottery, but the reality is, I'm not budgeting on it; I'm not budgeting on winning the lottery. I would like the federal government to act, but, hey, I'm not counting on it. That's exactly why the New Democratic Party put forward their own program, and I'm going to talk about that program in a minute.

I want to start with where we should always start from in politics—this is a philosophical point here. You can start from where you are and then just hope to get re-elected, maybe tinker around the edges in a populist kind of way, looking at the polls all the time, or you can start from principle. I would assert that in the instance of speaking about pensions, the principle we should speak about always is a dignified retirement for everyone, just as we speak about health care for everyone in the province. The aim of any pension program should be that no senior, no retired person, goes without. That's the aim. We start from there, we look at where we are now, we examine the chasm that exists between the two and then we try to fill that chasm in. I would assert that what is proposed in this bill is, you know, a little tinkering around the edges, a couple of good things. We're in support of the good things, no problem, but the chasm remains.

When I spoke about the situation in France—and I could have spoken about the situation in Sweden. By the way, in Sweden you get to count the years you spend at home raising children toward your retirement, you get to count the time you spend in school toward your retirement, and you're still guaranteed a dignified retirement in which you receive a living wage. Hey, a living wage: There's another great theme that we will speak more about in the ensuing years, I'm sure. But know that the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK all have better conditions for their seniors.

Interjections.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again I can hear my friends from across the aisle say, "But they're federal governments." Do we wait on the federal government for everything in this Legislature or do we act now? Do we do something now to make a change? For those who are tuning in at home, we're talking about pensions. Only 35% have an occupational pension plan in this province, and within that 35% are not included the members speaking here.

The member from Wellington–Halton Hills spoke about that a little bit. People are shocked by that, quite frankly shocked. People who get elected to this chamber, who take years out of whatever their career was before—

usually their most productive years, quite frankly. They serve for who knows how long, since of course it's at the behest their constituents whether they get elected or re-elected, but then what happens? I was only half joking about the Freedom 95 plan. I mean, nobody in this place can afford to retire. Nobody out there can afford to retire either. Just 35%; think about it. That means that the rest of all Ontarians cannot ever afford to retire unless they have independent means or unless, like our parents' generation—and this is why I think we haven't really come face to face with this issue. The generation that went before the boomer generation tended to be—and even, quite frankly, many of the boomers are—house-rich. But let me tell you, if you're counting on your house—if you're one of the lucky ones who owns one—to fund you in your retirement, think again.

I have a story about that; it's about a congregant. She had a beautiful house near High Park. She counted on her house because she had been a homemaker all her years; she had worked, but very little. She was of that generation where women mainly and mostly, in the city of Toronto, stayed at home. She sold her house, and the house paid for her retirement in a retirement home, a very nice, private one. It cost her, toward the end, about \$5,000 a month. By the way, people don't know that: If you're going to pay for retirement homes, because of course we don't have universal care that's of the level that one would want for our seniors, because—hey, another issue, but we don't have those 3.5 hours per day for senior care in our subsidized homes.

So she had the means to pay for a private home. It was a good one. It was a caring one. It cost, toward the end, \$5,000 a month to stay there. She literally—

Interruption.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Excuse me. Someone has a BlackBerry near an open microphone. I won't point out who it might be. Is there one lying on a desk? It bothers the interpretation.

Okay, we'll continue.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I happily gave up a few seconds for that.

Anyway, to go back to her story: So what was her problem? Her problem was that she outlived her equity. She outlived the money from her home to pay for her retirement. This happens all the time, and those are people with means. Those are people who are equity-rich, who have homes. I also know people in my constituency and had people in my congregation who worked hard all their lives, had two incomes, raised their children, put them through college and retired but didn't have occupational pension plans and counted on CPP—or, rather, didn't think about it. That's that reality: Most people don't think about it. They sort of assume that something will be coming to them from all their years of hard work. Well, they were mistaken. So now, between the two of them, they can't afford to pay their rent, they can't afford to eat, and they're in their 80s. They use a food bank. After years of working, is this what we're looking forward to? That's what we're talking about.

That's the meat and potatoes of what we're speaking about here: What are we going to do?

1620

Quite frankly, other jurisdictions around the world, whether provincial or federal, do it so much better because they start with the principle, the moral, if you will, that we all deserve a dignified retirement, and they work back from there: How are we going to get it?

The New Democratic Party has a plan. It's a plan that was acknowledged by the Toronto Star editorial board. They acknowledge that it's a good plan; it's a very good plan. Why don't we do it? Or, better yet, why doesn't the government come back with a suggestion that mirrors it? It's called the Ontario retirement plan, because for New Democrats, we don't wait for the federal government to act before we look after people—again, principle before polls. We don't wait for those in Ottawa to look after our seniors in Toronto or in Thunder Bay, because we actually feel a sense of responsibility for the people in our constituencies who are suffering right now.

I know we all share these stories. We hear them, I know we do, of people who live and cannot afford—literally cannot afford—the basics, because they're seniors and because they don't have pension plans other than CPP. I know we hear these stories.

My friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke told me about the days when it was expected, truly cultural, that children would look after their seniors, that they would take them into their homes. That's assuming that they have homes. Now, with 300,000 unemployed and the economy in the tank, I don't know how realistic that is for a lot of people in our communities. But let's assume that even that is the case. The burden on the sandwich generation, in that case, is immense. We know that. Again, usually it's a generation that has children in university—the worst-funded universities per capita, per student in Canada here in Ontario. So you're paying a ridiculous amount to send your children to post-secondary education, and you have your parents at home. Is this the ideal that we're striving for? Is this what we're looking forward to? Hopefully that isn't the solution, but it has to be the solution if nothing else is forthcoming, if it's only this bill that we have to look forward to.

I don't know about you, but the reality is that when you look demographically, each successive generation in Ontario is worse off than the one before it. They used to be better off. It used to be that an immigrant family came to Canada, settled and worked really hard, worked three jobs—you know the story—paid for the kids' way through university, paid for their houses—often with cash, in those days—bought a car, and the kids did better, way better. The kids of that generation bought the house, bought the cottage, and had the car as well. But the next generation isn't doing as well.

Now if you ask young people, “On one salary, could you afford to buy a house in Toronto and a car?”—never mind a cottage; forget about that—they will tell you, “Absolutely not. It takes two salaries.” And even with two salaries in the city of Toronto, you cannot afford to

buy a house unless you get some help from somewhere or you save or you're really lucky and have really good jobs. Then it takes two people working full-time. Then, of course, if you do that, when it comes time for children, you're going to have to pay for daycare and over \$1,000 a month per child. This is the new economic reality.

What's really quite frightening about this situation is that, whereas we boomers are a little bit hesitant about retirement—quite frankly, the question really does exist: If we did have a retirement plan in this place, how many people would be left? I'll leave that to the individual imaginations of all of us, but how many of us are here because we can't retire?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Nobody.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Ah. Okay.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Everybody's here because they want to be here.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Okay—and, quite frankly, we're the privileged ones; we're the privileged ones. You look at our children and you think: When they get to retirement, what are they going to look forward to? Unless they inherit significant amounts of equity, they are going to be worse off than we are.

This is a significant social and cultural change. It's a significant social and cultural change when the rich get richer, the poor get poorer and the middle class gets emptied out. The ramifications of that scenario upon retirement are dire; they're absolutely dire. That is the economic reality of our province. Like it or not, rail against it or not, that's the economic reality of our province.

So into this chasm, between what should be and what is, falls this bill. There are a couple of good things in it, but boy, oh, boy, will this bill make the difference to someone of my generation in terms of retirement? Will this bill stave off poverty? Will this bill even protect, to the degree they'd need to be protected, those with occupational pension plans, or will it not? I would suggest that it will not.

Will it make a little bit of a difference? Yes, it will. In investing? Yes, it will. But when the goal, when the principle is a dignified retirement for all people—all people, not just some people—then this bill falls, I would suggest, quite woefully short, and it needn't, because again, we're not walking into the promised land here; we're not talking about utopia. All we need to do is look at other jurisdictions—across the ocean, mainly and mostly—to people who do it better, and find out how they do it and what they do. Quite frankly, you'll find that what they do is, the governments—not just the federal government, all governments—step up to the plate and make it a priority, just like we make health care a priority.

Might I remind you that universal health care—which, boy, oh, boy, sets Canada apart, and North America certainly, and made Tommy Douglas the most celebrated Canadian of all time, according to a CBC poll. Why? Because of medicare—did not come in with a whimper? It came in with a bang. It came in against strikes and

opposition. It came in on principle, not on polls. It came in because—and by the way, he never, ever ran a deficit, 17 times—Tommy saw that what was needed was universal health care. He started with that precept, worked back and dealt with all the hurdles that lay between the principle and the reality of his “then,” now.

Our reality now calls for us to look ahead to the principle of a universal pension plan in Ontario. I know that my friend from Toronto—Danforth will tell you—because I'm running out of time—about all of the intricacies of the New Democratic Party's proposal for an Ontario pension plan—and they're not revolutionary; they're not radical. They're something the editorial department of the Toronto Star supported. Here's a very simple solution. Why isn't it there? In fact, Arthurs himself had a number of very simple solutions—again, a step forward, not enough to leap across the chasm from here to there, the principle of a dignified retirement for all—but some sensible suggestions. Even all of those are not in this bill.

How sad is that? How sad is that moment lost? How sad is that moment lost not only for ourselves, not only for our seniors if our parents are still alive, but also for our children and our grandchildren? Again, we're going to struggle. We're going to struggle, even with two salaries, to buy that house and struggle, even with two salaries, to make all the contributions we're going to need to make, if we're not one of the lucky 35%, to actually retire at all.

1630

To those who are watching, this is that time of year when you should think about these things. Think about it. Think about what it's going to look like in your life if you do not have a pension lined up and, quite frankly—the example of Nortel and AbitibiBowater—even if you do have a pension plan at work, because those pension plans can fail. Those are the examples that we're faced with in Ontario.

The thing is you can't do it alone. This is one of those many instances where we in the New Democratic Party feel the government has a role to play. It has a significant role to play—not just tinkering around the edges and not just keeping one eye on the polls and doing as little as possible to ruffle feathers, as little as possible to get any excitement worked up by anybody, to look good but not necessarily be good. No, that's not going to cut it for your retirement.

For your retirement, my friends who are watching, you are going to need dramatic steps to cross the chasm between what we have now in Ontario—a huge majority of the population is going to retire without a pension, except for CPP of \$1,000 a month, i.e. in poverty, or not. That's the question before us, and it's coming up fast. It's coming up quickly.

Lord forbid, for those of us who are property owners, the real estate market take a dive just when we turn 65—hey, there's a rhyme there—because if you're counting on your home to pay for your retirement, think again. Witness the story I told. Think also, on the bright side, of all of those jurisdictions, travel—look at documentaries if

you can't afford to, if you're like most Ontarians and can't afford to travel anywhere. Look to Europe. Look at what they do in Europe. In Europe, they have a dignified pension scheme for all in most countries. That's not so here and, quite frankly and sadly, not so even with the passage of this bill.

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

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to make a few additional comments to Bill 236, on pensions. I made some comments the other day as we went through this particular rotation.

The issue of pensions really had not been brought up to me in my many years here until recently. There are a lot of people I know who have pensions, and they seemed to know the exact date of their retirement, looked forward to it and felt quite comfortable about that situation. But in recent months and years, with the calamities of financial breakdown etc. and the recession around the world, people have taken a much more keen interest in their pension, and, indeed, others have looked at the fact that they don't have a pension at all.

This bill really is quite technical. We're looking at the restructuring of pension plans affected by corporate reorganization while protecting benefit security for plan members and pensioners. That's what we're hearing from constituents now, concern in that regard.

What would the technical issues be within this bill? I'm reasonably sure it will go to committee; most of our bills do.

It would look at the requirements for asset transfer between plans as it relates to defined benefits. It would be clarified and simplified. That's just one example of what is in this bill. A prescribed portion of any surplus related to the assets being transferred from the previous employer's plan would be transferred to the successor plan. It would clarify the benefits of plan members affected by layoffs and eliminate partial windups.

Those are just a few of the very technical aspects contained within Bill 236, and I fully expect that it will go to committee and have public hearings.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I can always account that the member from Parkdale-High Park, as a minister and a caring person, will always hope that we are all well taken care of. I ask for your prayers. I mean that quite sincerely, because quite honestly, when you look at how the economy and all this works at the macro level, we often argue that these profit-driven companies, these bad companies—all of the pensions from teachers and the public sector are invested in companies. It's not in a box somewhere. If those companies fail because of John Gerretsen's tough rules and red tape, then there's no money in the pensions. You see, it's all dependent on the economics of it all. So let's just get to the fundamentals here.

We need the private sector to be prosperous so that we can have a prosperous quality of life. That's perhaps an

oversimplification, but if we look at the problems, the guidelines at the ministry, Mr. Dwight Duncan, through FSCO—they actually set the rules. You can't have everything invested in RIM. So there are rules about how much in each sector, and those rules are very important. When the government sets these rules, they assume some of the liability for the outcomes. This is where the government has a responsibility.

But all of this discussion is kind of a moot point, because the only pensions that are guaranteed are public sector pensions. Stelco, Dofasco and Vale Inco are all unresolved companies going into CCAA because of the pension liability issue. Stelco is still arguing in the courts. Inco, Air Canada, Dofasco—all of them.

The employer of record for the public sector is the taxpayer. They are funded differently, and there are different sets of rules. They're the only ones that have "Freedom 55." There is no other plan that's funded to the 55 level.

I'm surprised—

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

Hon. John Gerretsen: I cannot let the last comment go by without saying something—when the member talked about my tough rules and regulations. The best way that we can secure a healthy future for the next and future generations is to make sure we have the cleanest water, the cleanest air and the cleanest soil conditions out there, and all of the rules that our Ministry of the Environment has are about that, to make sure the environment that we all live in is the best that it can possibly be.

At the same time, he may be interested in knowing that, just yesterday, we posted on the EBR a modernization-of-approvals document, in which we hope to take a risk-management approach with respect to the approvals the Ministry of the Environment is involved in, because we realize full well that in a lot of cases, time is money. If we take a risk-management approach, it means that we will be looking into those situations that present the highest risks, as far as the environment is concerned, in a much more conservative fashion than in the lower-risk situations.

Getting back to the member from Parkdale-High Park, let's talk about Bill 236. Bill 236 is all about creating a level of fairness to ensure that those pensioners are protected when restructuring takes place within corporations. There are many other points that she's made that I agree with her on: that only about 35% of the people of the province of Ontario have any pension plan at all and something should be done about that, and both the provincial and the federal governments should be doing more with respect to the 65% of the people who don't have a pension.

The other thing is, we do not have a defined pension here. What we have is an RRSP program that we all contribute to. The general public quite often thinks that the pension plan we enjoy here is the same as the lucrative pension plan at the federal level, which you and I know is not the case.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments. No, the member for Durham, you've had yours.

Questions and comments. The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: My friend from Durham always has more to add, and we probably will hear that later on.

I come to this debate from a northern constituency where incomes have not been robust, as we might say, in the last while, but I also come from a constituency that is most proud to have provided this nation with, I believe, the greatest Prime Minister who ever served the nation, Lester B. Pearson. He was the one—and people will remember. I know my friend from across the floor spoke of universal health care. Mr. Pearson brought universal health care to the nation. Mr. Pearson brought the Canada pension plan to the nation.

1640

What has that meant for folks? It has meant that seniors in this province, 80% of them now, have incomes above the poverty line—80%. A generation ago, it was the opposite: 20% of seniors had incomes above the poverty line. It makes a remarkable difference to Canadians as we speak.

I take the member's point, that we have to look at the generations that follow us. The demographics are not totally in our favour. As someone who represents a demographically older population in my constituency, I know full well the difficulties that seniors have in coping with some of the day-to-day costs of just living. We can't represent Manitoulin Island and places like Elliot Lake and Dubreuilville and not understand that some of the challenges of our folks are quite real. But they will not be fixed today.

This bill before us is a modest effort, but an effort that will fix some of the problems in our pension system.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Parkdale-High Park, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you to all of those who weighed in on this debate. To my friend from Algoma-Manitoulin, speaking passionately about his own constituents—and I trust that he is passionate about them—I would basically offer that there was a little bit of a blip there between the statistics of 80% and 20%. It was a particularly rich, shall I say, economic period in the history of North America. I think you're going to see in the long run, as you suggested yourself, that things are going to get a lot worse.

My friend the Minister of the Environment: always a pleasure. I always like the fact that the Minister of the Environment laughs a lot and smiles, don't you think? That actually makes the environment in here a lot more bearable. At any rate, he suggested that this is just a modest bill making modest proposals. That's what I said; I absolutely agree. But the problem is, we need so much more than a modest bill with modest proposals—and we could do so much more in this province; we don't have to wait for the feds.

To my friend from Durham, who is always entertaining, always interesting, suggesting that it is in fact the private sector that bakes the pie that we slice up, might I suggest to him that he look again across the ocean at social democratic countries, where not only the pie is bigger but the slices are bigger too; not only is the economy more robust in terms of private enterprise, but guess what? You get a dignified retirement, universal child care—even free post-secondary education. And why? Because, yes, the pie is bigger, but it's more fairly distributed.

Thank you all for weighing in. Again, this is not earth-shattering. We need earth-shattering where retirement is concerned in this province. And yes, of course, the federal government should do more—much, much more. That we agree on. Should we do more? I think yes.

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

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have—is that correct, Mr. Speaker?—9:55 left of my 20-minute talk?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Just for clarification: After the six and a half hours, the debate continued, and then after seven hours, you're down to 10 minutes per speaker.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I just said that tongue in cheek, Mr. Speaker. Thank you ever so much. I know that when it has your ruling, it also has your blessing.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to rise today to speak about Bill 236, the Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2009. But before I begin, I would like to thank the very hard-working ministry staff and the Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan himself, for the amount of time and energy already invested in this pension bill.

Finance Minister Duncan introduced Bill 236, the first of two major pension bills, this past December 9, 2009. This is a major step in our government's plan to make critical improvements to our province's pension legislation. Bill 236 will address the needs of pensioners, plan members and sponsors in our province.

Since the introduction of this bill in December of last year, there has been a wealth of debate on Bill 236. The MPP from Pickering-Scarborough East and PA to the Minister of Finance, as well as Yasir Naqvi, the revenue PA and member from Ottawa Centre, along with many other government and opposition members, have contributed a great deal of constructive dialogue. Thank you to everyone who has debated this bill to this point in time.

In a previous debate, my friend from the riding of Pickering-Scarborough East spoke about the recent economic downturn. This cannot be stressed enough. Some members in the opposition and the third party want to ignore or downplay the impact of the global financial crisis, and would have us believe that instead we're helping certain pensioners, such as Nortel's, because there were by-elections called in Ottawa West-Nepean and Toronto Centre. This certainly is untrue. It is perhaps inappropriate to speak to that and, as a potential pensioner in Ontario, I think it was totally inappropriate.

The fact of the matter is that the finance minister and his staff have been working tirelessly on this bill for about two years.

Let's return to the facts and deal with them. It cannot be ignored that it was confirmed in the 2009 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review that the current global downturn has had a significant impact on Ontario families and businesses, as was put forward by us previously. The fact is that we remain in the midst of the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression, almost 80 years ago. The market meltdown experienced worldwide has been felt here in Ontario and has put pension plans in jeopardy along with it. This is why our government has been taking proactive steps to ensure that when the economy stabilizes, Ontarians will be better positioned to lead the rest of the world in recovery.

I'm glad our government knows that we need to take measures to improve the pension system in Ontario, and I support Bill 236, which will do just that.

The Expert Commission on Pensions, chaired by Mr. Harry Arthurs and put in place by our government in 2006, has done a great deal of work leading up to the pension bill we have before us today. The commission held 11 public hearings attended by between 700 and 800 individuals, received 120 submissions and commissioned 17 research projects. Two years later, in 2008, the commission produced its final report, entitled *A Fine Balance: Safe Pensions, Affordable Plans, Fair Rules*. This report is a wealth of information on the topic of pensions in Ontario. There is a lot of historical background on pensions in this report as well.

Taking a historical scope on pensions, we know from the report that Ontario workers have been receiving occupational pensions provided by their employers since the middle of the 19th century. Historical reports and studies on the pension system go back at least as far as 1889. It has already been noted in this debate that the crux of these historical pension studies, and more recent studies as well, focuses on whether pensions should be provided directly by government or by employers acting either voluntarily to reward faithful long-serving employees, making the employer more attractive to a competitive workforce, or to satisfy collectively bargained agreements with their unionized employees.

Since my 20 minutes is nine minutes and 55 seconds, we'll just skip right ahead; we gained about five minutes at that point.

In the past two decades, there has been little review of the pension system, says our Expert Commission on Pensions. Our province has participated in the global economy and therefore has been subject to its financial ebbs and flows. The expert commission's report comments that in the past 20 years efforts at pension reform have been largely ad hoc or reactionary, based on current climate. The report is not necessarily criticizing this observation; however, we know that times change and the economy and demographics shift.

Our government has addressed the changing times in a number of ways, and our new pension bill is a perfect

example. We are faced with new challenges. One of the most glaring challenges is our aging population of baby boomers, who are now reaching retirement age. Some have workplace pensions, and some do not. I'll speak on pensionless workers in a minute or so.

1650

Some Ontarians have had the ability to contribute to their own life income fund for retirement savings. Our government is helping these people by doubling the amount they can access from 25% to 50%. We also have Ontario workers contributing to defined benefit pension plans in the workplace, which typically define an individual's retirement income based on factors such as years worked and, of course, the income level.

The commission's report says that "public policy in Ontario ought to maintain and encourage DB pension plans." These plans should be encouraged and protected, and they have been in decline for many, many years.

Further, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I'd just like to tell you that the quality of life that retirees are going to have for the rest of their lives is going to be very dependent on the success of what we do here.

In conclusion, fellow members, the Premier and the Minister of Finance are driving forces of pension reform and are leading the way with this legislation. Nationally, Premier McGuinty and Minister Duncan are driving national discussions on pension coverage in general. We are going to see more security for workers with pensions in Bill 236.

Moving forward, we are going to see increased attention to pensionless workers in our province. And we know that there needs to be more dialogue with the federal government, too.

I would like to thank our Premier for his national vision and our finance minister for his active participation at the national summit in Whitehorse, as has been mentioned earlier. Their ongoing commitment to Ontario's workforce, our pension system and our rapidly growing retired population is obvious.

I look forward to further debate on Bill 236. I certainly support it, and, I must say, with the varying opinions in this Legislature the past few days, it is important to know that there's support for the future of pension protection and our aging population in Ontario. I have to tell you that we'll all continue working together. I thank both the opposition and the third party for assisting us to strengthen the pension system and to support our aging population and improve the quality of life for all Ontarians as we move forward with this bill.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and all members here. We look forward to your continued support and unanimous approval when this bill does finally come to completion.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I do also appreciate the member from Ajax-Pickering, who himself is an employer who probably provides a pension for his employees, as many good employers do. But the point has been made that probably 70% of the people don't have a pension. So it's

worthy of saying that government policy has to be fair to all people where possible.

There are three assumptions by the actuaries when you look at pensions. The three assumptions basically are that the return on equity, the return on investment, should be in the order of 7%. The second assumption is life expectancy. Years ago it used to be 74; now it's probably 94. People are living longer and collecting longer, so the pool has to be bigger. The third is the contributors. This is the most profound change, the number of contributors. Most companies used to be shaped like a pyramid: two retired, 10 working. Now it's the other way around: There are two working and 10 retired. That's the problem. The assumptions—that's why they don't work anymore. They have to redesign it.

This bill does not do any of that. These are very, very minor administrative changes—mostly in language.

The lead debate on this issue is from Jim Flaherty, the federal minister. He's the one who's trying to convene changes to the CCAA as well as the CPP contribution. I can assure you that if you look at pensions, it's very important—and I'm surprised that even here in this House, people really don't have a grasp of how important this really is to the security that underlies all of our aging adults. We talk about the aging strategy, aging at home and the poverty discussion. This is all linked to it, because those liabilities for people living longer will become all of our young people's liabilities. So, if we don't get this right and work collaboratively with the federal government, forget the politics—and the individual has a personal responsibility in all of this. Nothing is free, and we have to plan for the future. Those are the rules, and I think people should be well educated to make some improvements in their own ability to look after themselves.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I listened with interest to the member from Ajax–Pickering. It reminded me of going to West Toronto Support Services—and a shout-out to them; they do phenomenal work—and asking the seniors there what they would like me to bring forward here. It's amazing how modest they were in their proposal. They said, "It would be wonderful if we went back to the time when seniors could get into art galleries, museums and public institutions for free."

There's a suggestion for the government. That's not radical. That isn't revolutionary. It's a motion that's on the order paper that's going to be lost in a few minutes, but hey, I'll bring it back. Why don't you do that for our seniors? It would be a wonderful gift to them. It doesn't cost that much. You could reimburse the institutions. It would be a good thing.

We come back to the principle. The principle is, everyone deserves a dignified retirement. In France, the interesting system there is that they don't vest anything. They basically redistribute wealth there. Basically, 50% to 55% of your income, if you work 40 years, that you receive on retirement is paid by young people working now. They pay into the plan. The plan is immediately

disbursed to seniors. The seniors have a dignified retirement.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I hear the member from Durham—not enough young people working, not making enough money to support all the people retiring. But it works moderately well in France and they have the same demographics we have.

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I know it needs revamping, but hey, it's way better than being here. I just suggest that this government look at other jurisdictions, not reinvent the wheel. Look at what works better and don't wait for the federal government. Of course we have to push them. Of course the best solution is through the CPP program.

The New Democrats have proposed a system that would work quite well. It would double people's income if they're interested in an opt-in. A suggestion: Let's do it. Let's move forward. Let's not tinker around the edges anymore.

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

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I just want to add a couple of comments to my good friend from Ajax–Pickering. I know he's disappointed because he really wanted to talk for about 20 minutes or probably even more, because I was talking to him beforehand. He wanted more than 20 minutes, and then he was really let down when he only got to speak for 10, because I know how much this is important to him.

Pensions, for me, are quite complex, and I'm certainly not an expert, but it seems that whenever we have economic turmoil within the country, within our province, within our communities, pensions raise their ugly head, for lack of a better word.

The only thing I understand about pensions, and I will admit it, as I said before, is that we in this House don't have a pension. Contrary—and I think you've heard that before—to what some of my constituents say, and I guess all of our constituents when we're out there: "So, you've got your fat pension." I go through the process of telling them, "No, no, that's my federal counterparts," but in many cases I'm not sure I get through.

But we do get, and we're thankful, an RSP contribution which, in the last couple of years—frankly, I should have put the money under the mattress and I think I would have been a little bit better off. Nevertheless, we should be thankful for that because a lot of people don't have that.

I just want to say that what we're doing here today—and I think the finance minister made it very, very clear when he introduced Bill 236. This is a first step. It is very complicated. It's a first step, so let's do it step by step. Let's look at it more as a national objective because, regardless of where we live, as Canadians we need to plan for our future.

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

The member for Ajax–Pickering, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Just on a final note, I would like to thank the very thoughtful legislators from Durham constituency, Parkdale–High Park, and my good friend from Northumberland–Quinte West. Actually, I consider them all my good friends. Their participation in this fruitful debate on Bill 236 is very much appreciated. Varying opinions will give us all a better overview of what is needed to support the future of pension protection and, more particularly, our aging population in Ontario.

Although it appears that all sides of the Legislature may have different ideas on how to help better, it's important for Ontario pensioners. I'm certainly glad that all sides of the House view the pension issue as critical. It's critical to Ontario's future. It's critical for our seniors. We all will continue working together.

I would, once again, thank them for their efforts and for their input over this time frame. We will strengthen the pension system to support our aging population and improve the quality of life for all Ontarians as we move forward with this bill, Bill 236. Thank you again. I look forward to further debate on Bill 236 in the near future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? Does any other member wish to speak?

Mr. Duncan has moved second reading of Bill 236. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I believe we have agreement that this vote be deferred until tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Things may work out.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I just have to go by the process; just be patient.

Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I have a request that the vote on the motion by Mr. Duncan for second reading of Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act, be deferred until Thursday, March 4, 2010, during deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Orders of the day.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I move adjournment of the House.

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

This House is adjourned until 9 o'clock, Thursday morning, March 4.

The House adjourned at 1702.

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Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

Continued from back cover

School in Cambodia

Mr. Norm Miller9698

Madeira

Mr. Charles Sousa9698

Volunteer service awards

Mr. John O'Toole.....9698

Nagaratnam Sivalingam

Mr. David Caplan.....9699

Prorogation

Mme France G  linas9699

Riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock

Mr. Rick Johnson9699

Digital media

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn9700

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DES COMIT  S**

Standing Committee on Estimates

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....9700

Report deemed received.....9700

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
D  P  T DES PROJETS DE LOI**

Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2010, Bill 248,

**Mr. Tabuns / Loi de 2010 modifiant la Loi sur les
relations de travail, projet de loi 248, M. Tabuns**

First reading agreed to.....9700

Mr. Peter Tabuns.....9700

PETITIONS / P  TITIONS

Taxation

Mr. John O'Toole.....9700

Child care

Ms. Andrea Horwath9701

Diagnostic services

Mme France G  linas9701

Taxation

Mme France G  linas9701

Middle childhood programs

Mr. Peter Tabuns9701

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

**Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2010, Bill 236,
Mr. Duncan / Loi de 2010 modifiant la Loi sur les
r  gimes de retraite, projet de loi 236, M. Duncan**

Mr. Yasir Naqvi9702

Mr. Ted Arnott9703

Ms. Cheri DiNovo9703

Mr. Charles Sousa9704

Mr. Yasir Naqvi9704

Mr. Ted Arnott9704

Ms. Cheri DiNovo9708

Mr. Bill Mauro9708

Mr. John O'Toole9708

Mr. Ted Arnott9709

Ms. Cheri DiNovo9709

Mr. Pat Hoy9712

Mr. John O'Toole9712

Hon. John Gerretsen9712

Mr. Michael A. Brown9713

Ms. Cheri DiNovo9713

Mr. Joe Dickson9713

Mr. John O'Toole9714

Ms. Cheri DiNovo9715

Mr. Lou Rinaldi9715

Mr. Joe Dickson9716

Second reading vote deferred9716

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 3 March 2010 / Mercredi 3 mars 2010

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2010, Bill 231, Mr. Bentley / Loi de 2010 modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne les élections, projet de loi 231, M. Bentley

Mr. Norm Miller	9677
Mrs. Joyce Savoline	9678
Mr. Rosario Marchese	9679
Mr. David Zimmer	9680
Mr. John Yakabuski	9680
Hon. James J. Bradley	9680
Mrs. Joyce Savoline	9680
Mr. Rosario Marchese	9681
Mr. Rick Johnson	9684
Mr. John O'Toole	9684
Mr. Paul Miller	9684
Ms. Helena Jaczek	9685
Mr. Rosario Marchese	9685
Mr. Wayne Arthurs	9685
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	9687

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters)	9687
---------------------------------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Diabetes registry

Mrs. Christine Elliott	9687
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	9687

Health care

Mr. Norman W. Sterling	9688
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	9688

Patient safety

Ms. Andrea Horwath	9689
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	9689

Hospital funding

Ms. Andrea Horwath	9689
Hon. Dalton McGuinty	9689

Patient safety

Mrs. Christine Elliott	9690
Hon. Deborah Matthews	9690

Taxation

Mr. Peter Tabuns	9691
Hon. Dwight Duncan	9691

Affaires francophones

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde	9691
L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur	9691

Forest industry

Mr. Peter Shurman	9692
Hon. Michael Gravelle	9692

School closures

Mr. Peter Kormos	9692
Hon. Leona Dombrowsky	9692

Child care

Mrs. Laura Albanese	9693
Hon. Laurel C. Broten	9693

Electrical generating station

Mr. Ted Chudleigh	9693
Hon. Brad Duguid	9694

Health care funding

Ms. Andrea Horwath	9694
Hon. Deborah Matthews	9694

Health care

Mr. Yasir Naqvi	9695
Hon. Deborah Matthews	9695

Disability benefits

Ms. Sylvia Jones	9695
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur	9695

Public transit

Ms. Cheri DiNovo	9696
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	9696

Consumer protection

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel	9696
Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis	9696

Environmental protection

Mr. John O'Toole	9697
Hon. John Gerretsen	9697

Correction of record

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	9697
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MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

Olympic athletes

Ms. Sylvia Jones	9697
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School boards

Mr. Bill Mauro	9697
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Continued on inside back cover