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**Official Report
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Wednesday 10 March 2010

Mercredi 10 mars 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 10 March 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 10 mars 2010

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 9, 2010, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I would like unanimous consent to stand down our lead.

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to have a few minutes this morning to make my remarks. I'll mention right at the beginning that I will be sharing my time with the member from Oak Ridges–Markham.

I would like to begin today, in my response to the throne speech, with I suppose a bit of a reminder of where I feel like we were, before I talk a little bit about where we're going. The throne speech represents to me, and I think to other members of the Legislature, a bit of a jumping-off point in terms of where we are today and where we will move on a go-forward basis.

I think that most of the people in the province of Ontario are very familiar with the fact that the global community has been struck by what many describe as the greatest recession since the 1930s. We also are aware that, as a result of that recession, the revenues of the province of Ontario have significantly declined and we find ourselves in a significant deficit position.

I think it's important to mention, however, that while Ontario represents about 40% of the Canadian economy, when you contrast our deficit with that of the federal government you will find that they are closely related in terms of their percentage of the Canadian economy. So in fact when you compare Ontario's position—while it's not one we wish to find ourselves in—on a relative basis to other jurisdictions around the planet, where we are now just provides us with more work to do going forward.

How we in the province of Ontario responded to the recession is something that's worth reminding people about before we talk about what we're doing to move forward. As many people will know, one of the approaches we took in Ontario was significant investments in infrastructure and retraining. That's where we sort of planted our flag, so to speak, and I would say we did that before the recession had even hit.

Many people will recall, going back to our election in 2003, that we had made a commitment to significant infrastructure spending, I would suggest even before it was fashionable to do so. We came to that election in 2003 with a very clearly articulated piece of our platform speaking to the fact that we felt that in the province of Ontario there was a significant infrastructure deficit existing at that time.

One of the ways that the previous administration had decided they were going to pay for their income tax cuts—a series of tax cuts in the province of Ontario—was, we believed, through a lack of investment in infrastructure. As a government, we invested heavily in the first three or four years, from 2003 to 2006 or 2007, \$30 billion in infrastructure in that three- or four-year period. And as many members here in the Legislature today will know, we continued with those investments—\$32.5 billion in the following two years, \$28 billion of that, again, being provincial money. That was the approach we took after having identified what we felt was a serious infrastructure deficit in the province of Ontario back in the election of 2003.

As I like to remind people, we've been doing this for a long time, not only when the recession hit, but we seriously increased and continued our investments in infrastructure once the recession did in fact take place.

We throw the word “infrastructure” around in a very loose fashion, but I think it's important to remember the significant impact that those investments can have. I represent a riding, Thunder Bay–Atikokan, that has within its geographic boundaries many very, very small communities; not only small in population, but small in tax base. Oliver, Paipoonge, O'Connor, Neebing, Conmee, Gillies, Atikokan: These are all small communities by population and small communities by tax base. But one of the things they all have as a common denominator is very large geographic land masses and small tax bases with which to support that large land mass.

These major infrastructure investments we have been making for five, six or seven years now have a disproportionately positive effect, I would say, on these smaller communities that are contained within my riding, and I'm

sure that most members of the Legislature could tell a similar story if they chose to. Tens of millions of dollars have been invested in these small communities. Not only have we, through those investments, significantly increased job creation in those areas where infrastructure investments have been made, but we have allowed them to go forward with projects that they would otherwise not likely have been able to do. In many cases, they simply do not have the tax base to do that.

Not only in the small communities, but even in my home of Thunder Bay, which is a larger municipal centre of 110,000 or 120,000 people—by standards in my riding, obviously the largest community by far—we have made huge infrastructure investments. It has created a tremendous amount of tax room in the city of Thunder Bay, and has allowed them to go forward with projects, I would suggest, where they otherwise might not have.

I would just flag two examples of that on the books right now, already begun in Thunder Bay: our commitment to a brand new courthouse, part of our infrastructure and capital regeneration programs, somewhere north of a \$100-million project; and a long-term-care home project that I'm sure is also going to approach somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$100 million when it's online. Those two projects alone—\$200 million—both of which are ramping up now, are providing brownfield regeneration, downtown south core revitalization, tremendous job opportunities in the building trades and construction work for people in the city of Thunder Bay. All that is coming.

0910

The other half of what we did when the recession hit was to invest heavily in retraining. We knew that as a result of the recession, there were a lot of people who found themselves out of work, and what we did primarily, but not only, through our Second Career retraining program was set a target of 20,000 or 21,000 that we wanted to get into that program. In fact, we exceeded the program targets significantly. I think we topped out somewhere in the neighbourhood of 26,000 people.

I can tell you that I have witnessed and experienced first-hand the effect of those retraining dollars in many communities in my riding. I have to say that I do notice, from time to time, that when we talk about our investments in retraining and education, members of the opposition seem to dismiss these investments as being insignificant, but I can tell you that I have witnessed first-hand the effect of those investments.

I remember very clearly a visit I paid to the Atikokan adult literacy group in my riding. We invested in that small organization in Atikokan and had an opportunity to hear one, two or three different people speak about the impact that those retraining dollars have had on their ability to find themselves a capacity to get back into the job market.

Many of these people are laid-off forestry workers. We know that in Canada alone, somewhere north of 200 pulp and paper and sawmills have closed over the last six or seven years. Members of the opposition would like to have people believe that this is only a problem in On-

tario, or more specifically northern Ontario. People who are paying attention to this issue of course know that's simply not the case. This is all across Canada; in fact, it's all across the planet, I would suggest, where we're seeing these closures. Many of those people who are in my riding are laid-off forestry workers, and these retraining programs have allowed many of them to find a capacity to get back into the workforce. I'm very, very proud of that.

Once you've seen one of those stories—a first-hand testimonial by some of these people affected by those retraining dollars—it really commits and sends home to you the importance of programs just like it. I want to thank the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, John Milloy, for his continued commitment to that program.

As we go forward now—that's sort of the history of where we've been. We heard in the throne speech two or three themes that I'm very excited about. One is that the Premier has very clearly articulated, on behalf of our government, that we are going to continue to maintain our commitments to what have been our priorities over the last six or seven years—that's health care, education and creating jobs for the economy in Ontario.

I can tell you that the list of improvements in the health care situation in Thunder Bay–Atikokan is too long to mention here. I could easily do 20 minutes just on what we've been able to manage when it comes to health care improvements in my riding, and I know that all the members that I'm honoured to share this Legislative Assembly with would probably have the capacity to do the same thing in regard to what has occurred in their home ridings.

We heard, on education, our commitment to fund 20,000 more spaces in post-secondary education, beginning, I think, with the fall intake coming up in 2010, and health care commitments continue to be at the base of what we plan to do.

In my riding, as I've said, there are many, many examples that I could list, and I think I'll use my last 30 or 40 seconds here to highlight what we've clearly articulated in our throne speech, such as the commitment we have in terms of resource development. The throne speech speaks very clearly to the Ring of Fire. I know that people in northern Ontario and northwestern Ontario are very much looking forward to what that project is going to yield to the benefit of all northern communities and of all people in the province of Ontario, including our First Nations communities, as we go forward. I know, without a doubt, that we are going to do everything we can. I know that several ministers are involved in this project. We're going to do everything that we can to see that move forward to create jobs in northern Ontario.

My time is up, and I'm happy to yield the floor to the member from Oak Ridges–Markham.

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

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I appreciate the opportunity to follow the remarks of my colleague from Thunder Bay–

Atikokan and also to speak in strong support of our government's speech from the throne.

The five-year Open Ontario plan will aid us in expanding and strengthening our economy through exploring new opportunities. It will create an Ontario even more open to new ideas, new people, new investments and new jobs. Open Ontario means a greener Ontario that will build upon our successes from the Green Energy Act by developing a Water Opportunities Act. I'm going to be focusing my remarks on this aspect of the speech. I'm sure that during the 12 hours of debate, we will have time to explore all the aspects of the speech.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment, I have been hearing a great deal about water conservation, efficient use of water and new treatment technologies from many stakeholders over the last few months. This is an area of great interest to the constituents of my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham. The Oak Ridges moraine is the headwater of so many rivers and streams that flow into both Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe that we've taken this apparently abundant supply for granted. But with our rapidly growing population, even we have had to limit lawn-watering in summer, and the realization that water is a precious resource is gradually dawning.

Of course, the rest of the world is far more keenly aware of the situation. One billion people worldwide lack access to clean water, and almost 50% of the world's population will live in water-scarce areas by 2025. In the next 20 years, worldwide demand for water is expected to be 40% greater than current supply—a crisis in the making if the world does not act.

Compared to other jurisdictions with similar living standards, Ontarians consume large amounts of water. On average, the per capita residential use of water is 260 litres per day, close to twice the amount used in many European countries, including the United Kingdom and Germany. While we are surrounded by the largest lakes on the planet, a closer examination demonstrates that Ontario's water resources are not as abundant as we perceive. The Great Lakes are essentially a relic, a one-time gift of the glacial melt that occurred at the end of the last ice age. They replenish at an average rate of only 1% per year and are a fragile ecosystem in delicate balance.

The conservation of the world's most precious resource is at the very heart of the Open Ontario plan. It will strengthen our economy, create jobs, further protect our health and put our educated professionals to use. By managing this resource responsibly, there is an opportunity for the province to translate our water expertise and stewardship into economic growth. We want to make Ontario a world leader in water conservation technologies and services, and establish a global presence in a sector that the Conference Board of Canada has valued at \$450 billion worldwide per year, a value that will be doubling every five to six years, reaching nearly \$1 trillion by 2020.

Water shortages will drive the need for innovations that emphasize efficiency, reuse and source diversifi-

cation. With the right encouragement, Ontario's water technology sector is poised to seize the opportunity. A number of leading-edge water and waste water technology companies, nationally renowned research organizations and several water modeling software companies already call Ontario home. The water industry is the largest subsector of Ontario's environment industry, generates \$1.8 billion in sales per year, and currently involves some 1,000 firms and 22,000 workers. This existing network of expertise in innovative water solutions, particularly in water recycling and reuse technologies, presents a pivotal opportunity to expand Ontario's technology sector.

Ontario is already home to several water efficiency networking organizations, including the Canadian Water and Wastewater Association, the Ontario Waterworks Association and the Canadian constituent of the binational organization Alliance for Water Efficiency. An economic study conducted by the latter organization states that investment in water efficiency as a form of economic stimulus can be quickly deployed to yield 15,000 to 22,000 new jobs for each \$1.2 billion invested. These jobs could be right here in Ontario, in service sectors such as plumbing, landscaping, engineering, construction and design, and in manufacturing sectors involved in supplying everything from rain barrels to water-efficient appliances.

A growing number of water efficiency consultants and technology firms are also setting up shop in Ontario. Examples include businesses that advise on municipal water conservation programming; internationally recognized experts on water efficiency standards for fixtures; and technology firms offering innovative rainwater harvesting, grey water recycling, and waste water reuse technologies. Green innovations mean good, green jobs for Ontarians and a more prosperous, globally competitive Ontario.

When the global recession struck, things became very difficult for many Ontarians; many people lost their jobs and homes. A Water Opportunities Act has the potential not only to provide job opportunities for the people of Ontario, but also to save costs in the future.

0920

According to some estimates, \$25 billion is needed over the next 15 years to repair and update the province's aging water infrastructure. Public funds are therefore needed to focus on maintenance. With water efficiency measures, we will be able to stretch the capacity of existing infrastructure, deferring the costs of future infrastructure expansion and resulting in considerable long-term savings for citizens.

Water and waste water treatment systems are energy-intensive, and therefore the power required to operate them is a major cost for municipalities. Water efficiency and conservation therefore also present a significant opportunity for reducing energy uses and the costs associated.

A Water Opportunities Act will also further the Green Energy Act in helping to protect our environment. Keep-

ing sufficient water in watersheds, wetlands and aquifers is critical to ensuring ecosystem function and health. Less power use for water treatment systems will lower greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to the global effort to slow the progression of climate change.

In fulfilling a political commitment to water conservation and efficiency, Ontario has a number of existing instruments and policies that we could build on. The Green Energy Act makes the link between energy and water and enables minimum standards to be set for water-efficient appliances such as toilets and clothes washers. Environmental farm plans offer an existing mechanism to encourage the adoption of water conservation and efficiency best practices for agriculture. The Safeguarding and Sustaining Ontario's Water Act amends the Ontario Water Resources Act to enable volume-based fees for highly consumptive commercial and industrial water users. Adopting the Water Opportunities Act will help to encompass all of these existing instruments and policies that have served Ontario well and help us to build upon them to create an effective provincial strategy.

The provincial government's lead on water conservation can serve as an example to many other communities in assisting them to also make changes. We can certainly learn also from many other jurisdictions that have to date enacted some of these changes themselves. Some ways the government of Ontario could promote water conservation would be to implement rainwater harvesting and grey water reuse systems in government buildings and use them as demonstration sites. Many of the industry leaders whom I've had the opportunity to meet over the last few months have said that there's an irony in that they are able to sell their expertise globally, and yet they do not have the opportunity to use this technology in Ontario. The opportunity for demonstration sites would be extremely useful to help our municipalities understand the potential in all these conservation and water efficiency measures.

The throne speech lays out a path for Ontario to develop water conservation and efficiency strategies and represents an enormous opportunity to propel our province into the 21st century of water management. A Water Opportunities Act has the potential to bring growth to our economy and bring jobs into our communities. After all, the word "Ontario" is believed to be derived from the Iroquoian word that means "sparkling, beautiful water." That is our brand, and it is time to sell our ideas, expertise and technology to the world.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Nepean—Carleton.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be back here with all of our colleagues on all sides of the House.

It is important indeed that we debate matters of the day. This throne speech was a big disappointment for many of us on this side of the chamber who expected a

visionary throne speech that would talk about three things: jobs, jobs, and jobs. It was a disappointment for us in the official opposition to note that only 24 words in the entire throne speech were dedicated to the economy, the debt and the deficit.

Indeed, these are challenging times. That is why we had been calling for a credible jobs plan from this government. Unfortunately, we did not see that in the throne speech. It was quite disappointing, particularly for those of us who have been calling for that type of plan.

Look, it all comes down to what we're most concerned about here in the official opposition, and there are two things: What promises did they make in the throne speech that they're going to break, and what didn't they include in this throne speech?

Let me just give you a couple of examples of things they have never put in a throne speech that Ontarians have had to pay for. The \$3-billion HST didn't make it into last year's throne speech. The \$15-billion, and counting, health tax never made it into a throne speech. The \$1-billion Samsung deal never made it into a throne speech. The \$358-million LHIN bureaucracy never made it into a throne speech.

What has been a broken promise? Well, investments in long-term-care beds have been promised and never materialized. The promise to bring more nurses online never materialized. And their promise to eliminate the coal plants by 2009 never materialized but, interestingly enough, popped into this throne speech.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I appreciate the comments made by the members from Thunder Bay—Atikokan and Oak Ridges—Markham, but I do want to ask a question of both of them—they may not have the time in the two minutes remaining.

I was intrigued by the Open Ontario plan as it relates to the post-secondary education system, because the government, through the throne speech, suggests that bringing 16,000 more international students might presumably solve the fiscal problems we face in our post-secondary education system. I want to put to my two friends that I don't believe that that economic strategy or political strategy or policy strategy is going to solve the major problems we have in our post-secondary education system.

I want to say to both of them—and to many members of the government here today—that we are number 10 in per capita funding in the country. We are still one of the most powerful provinces in the country, and we are number 10 in per capita funding for our post-secondary educational system. It's not a legacy to be proud of.

We have the highest teacher-pupil ratio in the country; it's one professor to 27 students, and it used to be one professor to 18 but a short 15 years ago. So the ratio is increasing. We have \$1.7 billion of deferred maintenance, and that number increases every year. We have pretty well close to the highest tuition fees in the country, meaning that students are more indebted than ever before.

I put to the two members: Do you believe this open strategy is going to solve some of these fundamental problems we have in our post-secondary educational system? That is a simple question that I put to them.

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: First, I want to congratulate both colleagues, the members from Thunder Bay–Atikokan and Oak Ridges–Markham, for their speeches on the throne speech.

It's very important that the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan mentioned our infrastructure in the province of Ontario, because it's fundamentally important for many different municipalities, like my riding of London–Fanshawe. This initiative gives us a chance to repair and widen many different streets and bridges which have needed it badly for many years.

Also, he spoke about the education and training of our people to prepare them for the future. It's very important. The Open Ontario plan is incredibly good, because so many people around the globe want to come to Canada and study and get educated here. I've had a chance to visit many different nations, and all the time they tell me that they want to come to Ontario. They want to study at the universities of Ontario because they believe strongly that we have the best education in the world. That's why it's important for us to open up and increase our capacity, not just for our students but for people from around the globe, because it's important to connect us with every part of the globe through our education system.

I listened to the member from Oak Ridges–Markham speaking about water technology. I come from the city of London. We have a lot of companies, like Trojan, and they work very hard to produce the best technology to purify water and treat sewage water. It's important for all of us to introduce our technology, not just for Canadians but for the world, because we have technology that we can offer. We can help the whole globe treat their water and conserve their water.

I think the speeches fit very well in our agenda and explain our visions for the future and for this province. We believe strongly, as many members said before me, that we have work to do. We are the leader in this country and we can be the leader in the whole world.

0930

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I did listen to the members from Thunder Bay–Atikokan and Oak Ridges–Markham. They did read the speeches very effectively, I would say, that were presented to them, as did the Honourable David Onley in his speech from the throne.

What I tend to look at is what the people are saying and what was the response. I'm using third party commentary here from the media, basically, and this is just a small survey of what the media have said.

The first one here is the day after, March 9: "Two Throne Speeches, Two Divergent Courses." They're trying to drive a wedge, if you read the article—it's worth

reading—between their vision of Ontario and the reality of Ontario.

The next one is an article also from the ninth: "It's Dalton in Wonderland," yes, which is quite remarkable. Wonderland: That means he doesn't really recognize, in the remarks in the throne speech, the dilemma of families in Ontario that are out of work.

The next Ontario politics message here is, "McGuinty Trades Bleak Messages for Talk of a Bright New Future." That's the wonderland, that's the dilemma and that's what he's trying to do. He's ignoring the reality and trying to deal with some promises, which I think we all agree with, to the largest extent. But how does he fund them?

I'm just going to continue here in the limited time: "Double-Talk Dalton McGuinty." I'm not making these up. These are from the media.

"Canada's Greece? Ontario Better Get Its Act Together." In this one, David Dodge says that Ontario is spending more money and the spending is increasing faster than the growth in the economy.

There's trouble on the horizon. They can't possibly afford all—

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for sharing the time with me today, as well as the members from Durham, Nepean–Carleton, Trinity–Spadina and London–Fanshawe for their comments.

From those who have responded in their two minutes, there's a bit of a common denominator: some complaining about what was contained in the throne speech. I would suggest perhaps to them that there's a bit of confusion around what a throne speech contains and what a budget contains. I think we're all aware that in the not-too-distant future, the finance minister, on behalf of our government, will present in the Legislature our budget. We're all going to be seeing, contained within that document, a little bit more of the detail that some of the members perhaps thought should have been contained in the throne speech.

I think we all are aware that the throne speech represents a bit more of the macro direction, the broader strokes, in terms of the direction the government is going to be taking over the next five years. More of the detail will be contained in the budget, and we will see that presented here in due course.

I do want to restate a couple of the points that I made in my opening 10 minutes.

Contained within the throne speech, we've seen what will be a continuing commitment on behalf of our government to what have been our main priorities since we were elected in 2003 and what will remain our priorities on a go-forward basis: job creation, health care and education. I thought the throne speech spoke very directly to those.

We have seen incredible investments in health care on behalf of our government since we were elected in 2003.

The throne speech continued to articulate that that will remain a priority of our government, as it is a priority for most, if not all, of the people of the province of Ontario.

We have made record investments in health care over the last six, going on seven, years. While the rates of increase that we're able to funnel and channel into our health care system are not likely to remain as robust as they have been in the first six or seven years, I think it's very important that we speak to the people of the province of Ontario and remind them and suggest to them that this will still remain a priority for our government.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to offer a few comments on the throne speech.

I think that it's interesting—I listened to the last speaker and his comments, and I think we would share the same comments with regard to the purpose of a throne speech. It's an appropriate time for the government to introduce a throne speech, as it is halfway through its mandate, and people, then, are naturally looking for a statement of vision, a statement that gives some confidence and purpose to the last half of this government's current mandate.

There are, however, on the part of the public, certain expectations: expectations that the throne speech would reflect the concerns of Ontarians, that the throne speech would assuage people's fears, that it would provide a road map to give Ontarians comfort that its government had a vision and a plan that confronts these concerns and fears.

While I listened to the throne speech, I was thinking about the kinds of fears, concerns and expectations that my constituents have. There's quite a significant reaction in my community amongst those who are the recipients of CCAC care and have noticed dramatic cuts in their service from the CCAC. So this would certainly be something they would be looking for. They'd also be looking for the comfort of a government that has a very clear plan on the issue of job creation. A number of them have also indicated, as they have to me, their concerns about infrastructure, because they look at even half a highway—the 404 between Mulock and Green Lane, and all the jobs that are there on that highway—as a way in which jobs can be close to home and they can be assured of the kind of economic productivity that every community needs. But there isn't any action or any plan in the immediate future on those kinds of initiatives.

They also represent a great many small and medium business owners, some of whom have told me that they are on the verge of simply closing the door because of the cost and the time and the expertise that continues to plague them on the issue of red tape. They have to provide that in-house time and expertise to be able to deal with an ever-growing amount of red tape.

They question the level of accountability of the government. They look at scandals like eHealth and other scandals and the approach of government to those, and they are in despair.

There are many who look at July 1 as the time when suddenly they're supposed to find 8% more in their pockets for such a wide variety of services that they depend on. Many seniors have commented to me about the fact that they're not going to get an 8% increase. They don't know where the money is going to come from to pay for the hydro, the heat, the gas in their cars. Many have suggested to me their concerns about, "What are we doing for our children and grandchildren when we leave behind for them a debt, a debt that has doubled in recent times, a deficit that is the highest in the country?"

Those are the kinds of things that are part of their vision, part of their concern, part of what they hoped the throne speech would include. Obviously, they instead heard a throne speech that followed, I would say, this government's tradition: making promises—some we've heard before, and some that are met with skepticism, from a past history of broken promises.

I want to take a few moments and look at some of these issues that we've heard before. In the throne speech of November 20, 2003, the government included an excerpt on education:

0940

"Your new government's first and most important priority will always be excellence in public education.

"Its goal is to make Ontario's public education the world's best education....

"Your new government will work with schools to make real improvements in children's reading, writing and math skills."

It went on to say, "We need to work together to accelerate that progress, to strive toward the ambitious goal of at least 75% of our children reading, writing and doing math at a high level by age 12."

In the November 2007 throne speech, the Liberals continued this monologue. The Liberals promised to improve achievement, but the truth is that we're paying more and getting less. Despite \$5 billion in extra funding, 33% of children in grades 3 and 6 failed to reach the provincial standard in reading, writing and math last year.

In 2003, McGuinty promised that 75% of students would achieve a B average on province-wide tests for reading, writing and mathematics by 2008. The Premier guaranteed this would happen. However, the Premier has failed to achieve his goal. Progress has stalled.

According to Ontario's Auditor General, "Further increasing the percentage of students achieving a B average on the EQAO literacy and numeracy tests will be a challenging undertaking."

Additionally, the Liberals' no-fail policy is failing students over the long term. The Liberal government's no-fail policy does not accurately reflect realities of the real world.

The Liberals promised the funding formula would be reviewed by 2010. It's now 2010 and the funding formula has not been reviewed. The Liberals promised to equip our children for the hypercompetitive global economy of the 21st century. However, according to Dr. Miner, "Ontario is on the verge of an unemployment crisis that

could be far more destructive than the 2009 recession.” If the current trends continue, hundreds of thousands of people will lack the necessary skills to find any work. Dr. Miner indicates that more than 700,000 people in Ontario will be unemployed by 2021 due to inadequate skills and education. That means that more than 1.1 million Ontarians will be unemployed in just 11 years and will have “no prospects of finding work.” Other experts predict that “75% of Ontario’s population will require post-secondary education and training in order to be employable” by 2021.

This might seem more academic than anything else, except that in today’s papers we have an announcement and a glimpse into the findings of the joint effort of the College Mathematics Project. It was released Tuesday. It examined 31,000 first-year math students across the province’s 24 community colleges. The findings are really in stark contrast to the kind of information that the throne speech provided us with. This is from the Toronto Sun:

“Many Ontario college students are in danger of flunking business and technology courses because their math skills don’t add up, a ... study says.

“The Seneca College-led College Mathematics Project notes as many as one third of students in first-semester mathematics are at risk of not completing their diplomas because they just can’t do the math.”

So I think that when you look back at these quotes of the government with regard to its commitment to education—a Premier who guarantees the kind of results he would like to see—it has then come up sharply with the kind of reality that this college test suggests.

I think there are two things we need to link together here. One is to go back to the point I made a moment ago about the Liberals’ no-fail policy. Put that beside comments made from the conclusions of the math study. Many students identified as being at risk of failing math have a poor grasp of basic functions taught in elementary school, such as fractions, ratios, proportions and percentages. So students should be provided more practice in these.

The second conclusion: College and school staff should hold a round table discussion on how to streamline which high school math courses are required for admission to college courses and not have such a disconnect from school to school.

The third suggestion is that schools should convince parents and students to focus on time management and self-discipline.

I find it really interesting that on the one hand, the government clings to this no-fail policy and on the other hand, a report comes out and says that families must focus on time management and self-discipline. Well, usually you would expect that these notions would be reflected both between families and schools, but not in the McGuinty world of education.

While I have many other issues I’m going to try to highlight, it seemed to me that the most important message today should be the fact that while the Premier in his throne speeches, going back over the last few years, has

clung to this process of the EQAO and the urgency of making the numbers better and the guarantee that he has offered us, it would seem that this is not the reality when you look at this math project, when you look at Dr. Miner’s caution about how seriously far behind we are and will continue to be unless there is a radical change in the direction and the expectations in terms of student achievement.

So while the Premier is offering to open Ontario’s colleges and universities to the world—this seems to be the most ambitious part of the throne speech—I would say that looking after our own and making sure that, in fact, they have the adequate skills to be employable is certainly an important initiative and one on which the throne speech, this time, is silent.

I think it can’t be understated that it’s most important that people understand how serious this is. And of course, I think we would all remember that the Premier self-described himself as the education Premier. When you look at the record of past throne speeches, when you look at the reality that is facing us today, I would suggest that he has a great deal of work to do in a very short time.

0950

In the brief time I have left, I would just like to remind viewers about the other kinds of promises that the government has made and the kind of situation we find ourselves in; that is, a big gap between those promises and where we actually are at the present moment.

That would take me into a discussion about energy. In the throne speech of October 12, 2005, your government would replace coal-fired electricity generation with cleaner forms of energy, with the last coal-fired plant slated to close in early 2009. We know that there is only one coal-fired plant that has been shut down to date, despite the fact that this target of 2009 has become an ongoing moving target as time passes.

Another aspect of this is that, in the speech of November 29, 2007, your government would “replace coal, double renewables, double conservation and modernize our nuclear capacity.” We certainly have seen a great deal of action on the renewable side, but the question of modernizing nuclear capacity has gone back and forth on new-build nuclear, so much so that it might be completely scrapped. Again, “modernize our nuclear capacity”: This means, by anyone’s common sense, new nuclear. But in the summer of 2009, George Smitherman abandoned Ontario’s RFP process to build new nuclear, pushing the difficult decisions off onto a future government. On February 16, OPG announced it would spend \$300 million to keep the Pickering nuclear station open for another decade and would spend an undisclosed amount to refurbish the Darlington nuclear station. In other words, modernizing our nuclear capacity is merely repairing our existing capacity. The Premier has abandoned the nuclear file in favour of subsidizing Korean renewables.

There are many other examples of the promises that have been made in various throne speeches, including this one. But it’s important to remember that a lot of the

things that people are really concerned about, as I mentioned earlier, are not there. I think it's understandable why people begin to feel a certain amount of abandonment by the government, a certain amount of frustration and a great deal of skepticism. It's that skepticism that is most unfortunate, because people do have an inherent respect for leadership. They understand that people have to make tough choices. What they really want is to know that when people make a commitment, that's what they're going to do.

As a member of the former government open to, obviously, a hot program of decision-making, one of the things that even the most critical was always able to say is, "You did what you said you were going to do." That is what is missing in the throne speeches when we look at the last three throne speeches.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to thank the member for York-Simcoe for her commentary and I want to add some remarks of my own about the throne speech.

The throne speech was not quite a momentous document at all. One of the things that one would think the government would address would be climate change, and the only thing that really was in there was the whole question of urging the federal government to take a leadership position. The reality in this province is that this government has a climate change plan that won't even meet the targets that it states are necessary to meet. There's no commitment in this throne speech to actually address the failures in its plan and to put this province on track.

In terms of our credibility on water: Our leader, Andrea Horwath, said quite rightly in the media that we have people in this province right now on boil-water advisories. That's leadership? We have a Minister of the Environment who won't take action on site 41. He says that he's leaving it up to the municipality, when, in fact, that minister has the responsibility for protecting the groundwater resources of this province. He isn't taking the action that he is required to take. Politically and morally, he is not acting the way one would expect—demand—governments should act, and he is rightly being criticized by all those who are concerned about the future contamination of groundwater at site 41.

This speech from the throne is putting forward a very 3-D, Avatar-like picture of privatization of major assets of this government. The bundling of key assets of this province into a holding company is irresponsible—something one would expect from the Wall Street consultant Goldman Sachs, but not something I would expect the government of Ontario to adopt.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate and add some comments on the throne speech that we heard the other day. I think, like any large organization that wants to compete in a global economy, such as

we're facing today, we need to set out a strategic direction, and that's the intent of the throne speech.

I'll tell you that the people in Oakville were very happy with what they heard the other day in the throne speech, because it gives them some hope for the future; that as we emerge from the recession that we've all faced here in North America, Ontario has a plan to emerge from the recession as an even stronger jurisdiction than before the recession took hold.

When you look at some of the details that are in the throne speech, you see things like fresh water technology. That clearly is something—when you look at the competitive advantages that Canada has, that the province of Ontario has, you will look at clean, fresh water. Our growing ability to be able to clean that water up for use over and over again is something that the province of Ontario is already very good at. Businesses in the province of Ontario are already very good at something that, obviously, we can get better at in the future, and something where there's a real appetite for that on a global perspective.

When you look at more student spaces, that's a sign of a government that is looking to the future, that realizes that the future of our economy lies in the education of our young people. To invest in education is a difficult choice right now because the economics of the province aren't, perhaps, what everybody would like them to be. However, we've chosen that strategic move to invest.

We're also starting to get into online education in the province of Ontario. If you look around the globe today, you realize that education itself is changing. The province of Ontario is on top of this issue. All in all, this is a great throne speech. It sets out, I think, a very strong, strategic direction for the province.

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

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I don't think it was a great throne speech. I think it was a total rehash of old ideas that haven't worked. That's the part that was so shocking to me. Those ideas didn't work, and they're bringing them back as though they have been working.

People aren't stupid; people are worried. People have lost their jobs. People can't get retrained. People have put their families' lives on hold. Some kids can't go to university, waiting for their parents to get another job. What is this about? Old ideas that didn't work, brought back again.

Let me quote from the throne speech—"We don't want to compromise our future by moving to balance the budget too quickly." Too quickly? We've done nothing in the time that I've been here. In three years, I haven't seen this government move forward with an initiative that has worked. How much more quickly? Anything, any movement forward, would look quick right now.

We're not moving forward too quickly because this government has no ideas. It's in a desperate mode and it doesn't know what to do. So families are on hold.

Here's another quote from the throne speech—"Those international students who graduate can stay here and

help us grow our economy, or go back [home] and work as a partner with us in the global economy.”

What does that mean? We're making a deal with other countries to bring students over here? How does that make our students—potential university and college students—feel here at home? They've lost hope. They've lost hope in our province.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you to the members from Toronto–Danforth, Oakville and Burlington for their comments.

I thought it was just a perfect juxtaposition when the member for Toronto–Danforth talked about the boil-water advisories and the member for Oakville talked about our water technology. It just seemed to me that there we have it in a nutshell. I actually wondered about the sale of the water technology that was mentioned in the throne speech, because even in this building we have lead pipes.

The people who are involved in the business of water and sewer main construction plead with the government all the time to talk about renewing the water and sewage system. They estimate that in some areas, as much as one third of all clean water seeps out of the pipes. I was fascinated to find out about this water technology that is going to capture the world market when Ontario goes out there. It will be interesting to see.

I think it's also one of the thrusts of the throne speech, again mentioned by the member from Oakville, on competing on the world stage. You juxtapose that with the comments by the member from Burlington and I get it: It means that all the problems at home aren't things we need to worry about. We need to have a bigger stage. That's what the Premier is looking for. He is clearly trying to sell hope, hope that we're going to catapult on to the world stage, even though we can't pass the math exams.

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

Hon. John Gerretsen: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Gerretsen has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour?

All those opposed?

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Debate adjourned.

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

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'm very pleased to call the next order of the day, and that is that there is no further business at this stage.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. I think we have it all worked out now. This House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1004 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: C'est avec plaisir que je souhaite la bienvenue à 60 étudiants et étudiantes provenant des quatre coins de la province. Ces étudiants sont avec nous aujourd'hui afin de participer au quatrième Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario. Ils proviennent des quatre coins de la province, comme je disais, et de leur école secondaire francophone respective de la région.

J'aimerais aussi souhaiter la bienvenue aux jeunes de la FESFO ainsi qu'aux enseignants et enseignantes qui les accompagnent.

Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Il me fait plaisir de souhaiter la bienvenue à deux élèves d'une école de ma région. Ce n'est pas souvent que j'ai de la visite d'Ottawa–Vanier : Anya Marcelis de l'école De La Salle, et Patricia Mugenzi de l'école Samuel-Genest. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Hon. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to announce today on behalf of our page from the riding of Huron–Bruce, Colin Jansen, that his father, Steve, and his brother Travis are in the House today. Welcome.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of legislative page Matthew Kostuch, from Dr. Roberta Bondar Public School in Ajax, to welcome his father, Jim Kostuch, and his uncle Brian Nurse, sitting just directly south of the pillar in the west public gallery. We welcome them here today.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome to Queen's Park today Philippe Giguère, who lives in the Glebe in Ottawa Centre. Welcome to Queen's Park.

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

I would like to welcome to the Speaker's gallery Gilles Morin, the member for Carleton East in the 33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th Parliaments, as well as Deputy Speaker from 1990 to 1997. Welcome back, Mr. Speaker.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Could I get your indulgence to introduce people from Nickel Belt?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Yes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you. It's Julie Dugas, Chantal Renaud and Cassandre Bergeron.

Mr. Paul Miller: Sorry, Speaker; I wasn't quick off the start.

I would like to welcome Maria Matuvanga from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

ORAL QUESTIONS

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question for the Premier. Ontario families can't trust a Premier who is prepared to saddle their children with record deficits and record debt. You, sir, are on course to double the provincial debt in two

years' time, but sadly, your throne speech—the same-old, same-old throne speech—contained merely three lines, just 24 words, about what you plan to do about the deficit and the debt. Premier, is 24 words really the best that you could do?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. I think my honourable colleague understands that the budget will speak in detail to our plan to eliminate the deficit. I think he understands the difference between the budget and the throne speech, where we placed before the people of Ontario a five-year plan, our Open Ontario plan. I think he would also want, given the Conference Board of Canada's report released yesterday, to take this opportunity to express his regret for his opposition to our heavy investment in infrastructure, which is supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, 24 words and a \$25-billion deficit: That's more than \$1 billion of deficit per word. When Finance Minister Duncan announced his record deficit, he admitted at that time that they didn't even start thinking about a plan to get the books back in balance. I remind you, Premier, that you famously said at that time that you were going to retreat to your thinking place. You've now spent five months in your thinking place and all that has emerged is 24 short words about balancing the books. Why should Ontario families trust Premier McGuinty when he won't make sparing their children from even more debt even the remotest priority?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think I've spoken to that. I think my honourable colleague understands, notwithstanding his statements to the contrary, that the place for us to lay out our plan to address the deficit is in the budget.

I want to return to this Conference Board of Canada report because I think it is very important and good news for the people of Ontario. It confirms independently that our heavy investments in infrastructure in 2009 created some 183,000 jobs. More than that, it specifically says that, if not for our investment in infrastructure last year—2009—Ontarians would have lost another 70,000 jobs.

So our infrastructure plan, which this honourable member continues to oppose, last year accounted for 253,000 jobs. That's part of our plan. It's going to keep working for the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: While the Premier slipped off into his thinking space after the fall economic update, the Ontario PC caucus announced our small-business jobs plan to restart small business as the engine of job creation in the province of Ontario. We've called for an immediate payroll tax holiday. We've called for a suspension of residential land transfer taxes to help make home ownership more affordable. We've called for modernizing our apprenticeship system, including a one-to-one journeyman-to-apprentice ratio to keep young, talented people here in the province of Ontario.

While you've disappeared to your thinking place, will you at least move ahead with these reforms to help small

business hire and create jobs in the province of Ontario once again?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the fact that my honourable colleague is now doing more than just offering criticism but is actually thinking of some proposals on his own, and I commend him for that. We've got our own plan. We continue to move ahead with that plan.

More good news: CIBC recently put out a report which said that Ontario's full-year growth rate this year should exceed the national average for the first time in eight years. It says that a harmonized sales tax—my friend opposes this—alongside cuts to corporate taxes—my friend opposes this as well—will boost competitiveness and help lure jobs. A focus on emerging sectors such as green power also looks to pay dividends. Finally, growth in Canada's banking sector stands to benefit Ontario disproportionately.

Those three aspects are specific parts of our Open Ontario plan, I am proud to say. We have many more things we're doing through Open Ontario to grow this economy and create more jobs.

GOVERNMENT ASSETS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think Ontario families are going to look askance at the Premier's five-year plan after the disastrous six-year plan of higher taxes and runaway spending that you've foisted upon Ontario families that saw a job loss of 140,000 positions in Ontario last year.

Premier, another initiative that did not appear in your throne speech was your megacorporation proposal. You are proposing to bundle the LCBO, Hydro One, Ontario Power Generation and the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. into one big, super selloff. Premier, are you so desperate for cash to pay for your runaway spending that you're willing to pawn off the future of our children and grandchildren?

1040

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We will avoid the 407 debacle perpetrated on the people of Ontario by the Conservative government.

I know there's been a lot of speculation in the media about this, but I think it's important for me to help Ontarians get a better understanding what we're considering. We think we have a responsibility to take a look at some of our historic assets here in Ontario to determine whether or not it would be in the long-term public interest for us to find a way to get some money out of those assets, without giving up control over those assets, and invest that in a new foundation for prosperity and jobs. That's what we're talking about; that's what we're thinking about. No final decisions have been made in that regard. If my honourable colleague has any specific, positive proposals with respect to what we might do and how we might do it, we're open to that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: The problem is, we've seen where our taxpayer dollars have gone. They've gone down the drain in the billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle that helped

Liberal-friendly consultants get fat and rich. We saw them handed out in billion-dollar sweetheart deals to foreign-based Samsung corporation, ignoring legitimate businesses here in the province of Ontario.

Premier, we understand that you have paid Insight Research Canada to poll Ontario families on your plan to sell off a 20% stake in your megacorporation, half to a private company and half to a large pension fund. Premier, I ask you: If you have nothing to hide, will you release that polling information and the full list of questions to the general public?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague says he resents the investment by Samsung because it's a foreign company. Should we tell Honda that they should remove themselves from Ontario? Should we tell Toyota that they should remove themselves from Ontario? What about Ford and GM? What about any foreign direct investment coming into our province and creating jobs for our people? Should we reject those as well?

This speaks to an outdated, antiquated, neanderthal, protectionist ideology reminiscent of Conservative governments of years gone by. We are an open province now: open to new investment, open to new ideas, open to new jobs, open to new growth.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: While the Premier supports a buy-Korea policy, the Ontario PC caucus stands for a buy-Ontario policy to support job creation in the province of Ontario, not exporting jobs abroad.

Premier, we know you're on track to double Ontario's debt, and now you want to mortgage our crown assets by selling off a 20% share to fuel your runaway spending and your frivolous ideas. The problem with your megacorporation fire sale, Premier, is that you're going to hamstring the assets that we're going to need to pay back Dalton McGuinty's runaway debt.

So I ask you, Premier, again: Will you table your polling information, and will you tell us today what company and what pension fund you have in mind for your fire sale of 20% of Ontario assets?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to reassure my honourable colleague that we will not do with our assets what his government did with the 407. I want him to take some comfort from that commitment.

Again, my colleague stands against the Samsung investment in Ontario—\$7 billion, 16,000 jobs. I just want to remind my honourable colleague of an announcement made by the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure earlier today. He talked about 510 renewable projects that now have gotten the go-ahead because Ontarians are going to keep on working in this program. That's 510 Ontario-based business ventures, 510 new sources of clean electricity and all kinds of jobs making this new equipment—wind turbines, solar panels and the like—installing it and maintaining it.

We are open to investment, whether from outside of Ontario or inside of Ontario. But working with Ontarians and working with the world at large, we're going to create new prosperity—

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

POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Mr. Peter Kormos: This is addressed to the Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. The members will please come to order. The member from Brant will please come to order. The member from Sault Ste. Marie will come to order. The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan will come to order.

The member from Welland.

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Premier, please: It is reported that on May 29, 2008, the Premier sat down to a dinner with a group of individuals who paid \$5,000 apiece for the privilege. Can the Premier tell us who was at the dinner and what was discussed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can't say I recall exactly what my honourable colleague is talking about, but I do say that as leader of my party I have a responsibility to help raise funds for my party. That contributes to the strength of my party and overall contributes to the strength of our democratic system. I will not apologize for that. It is the responsibility of each leader, of every party and of every individual member of provincial Parliament to participate in this democratic process by helping to raise money for their party so that we can be stronger competitors and more committed to our democratic system. That's what it's all about, and I'm proud to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Local news indicated that a dinner took place, and Elections Ontario records show that companies named L.M. Holdings, D.G. Pratt Construction, Blue Sky Private Equity and BEMP Holdings joined the Premier. Can the Premier tell us who attended on behalf of these companies and just what was discussed?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague presents this as if this is some grand revelation. This information is accessible to him because we've changed the law in Ontario to provide for real-time disclosure of political contributions, a process that was under the table and we now have put on top of the table so that all Ontarians can better understand our collective responsibility to raise money for our parties. That's why my honourable colleague has this information.

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: In a truly remarkable coincidence, all of these companies hold land in a significant parcel of property that was, at the time, just outside of the city of Barrie and off-limits to development.

However, after this dinner, the Premier introduced legislation that would hand the land over to Barrie, lifting the freeze on development and making these properties very, very valuable.

Did the Premier discuss this at his dinner meeting with these companies?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will continue to meet with people of all kinds, on all sides of all issues, whether in business or in labour. After I've had these meetings, I will always do what I have always done, which is to ensure that the greater public interest is upheld, notwithstanding what the issue might be. I've been proud to do that throughout my political career, and I'll continue doing that.

POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Mr. Peter Kormos: To the Premier: These companies that wined and dined with the Premier on May 29, 2008, bought land, nearly 1,000 acres, in an area south of Barrie that was forbidden to development. They bought it for as little as \$26,000 an acre. Now that that land is part of Barrie and the freeze on development has lifted, land is being sold for an astonishing \$75,000 an acre. If these values hold, that's a \$30-million profit.

Surely the Premier can at least agree that his dinner companions have benefited from moves that the government has made since their dinner meeting.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I understand where my honourable colleague is going on this matter, and I reject his allegations and his not-so-subtle accusations completely and thoroughly.

I will continue to meet with Ontarians in various capacities, as Premier and as leader of my party. I will continue to keep myself open to all representations, because I think that's an important responsibility that we all must assume here at Queen's Park. At the end of the day, when we make a judgment call, we will always do everything we can to ensure that we are upholding the greater public interest.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Irrefutable facts: Developers meet with the Premier, they fork over \$5,000 a plate for dinner, and within a year the government has made an extraordinary intervention that doubles and triples the value of their properties.

Now, what prompted the Premier to make this intervention? More importantly, was it discussed at the private dinner for these Liberal donors?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My friend is, I gather, unhappy and is looking for ways to express his unhappiness with the changes that we made to the Simcoe county growth plan. I can say that Simcoe county has adopted a new official plan. They sent it to the ministry for a decision. The Barrie-Innisfil Boundary Adjustment Act, 2009, was passed by the Legislature; the annexation became effective on January 1, 2010. It will ensure the continuing success of our growth plan. It is based on solid growth and planning principles. We stand by that, and we're proud of the decision that we made in that regard.

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: It seems it's also going to ensure \$30 million in new profits for these developers.

Once again, the facts: Developers own land that they couldn't do much with; they pay \$5,000 a plate to sit down and meet and wine and dine with the Premier; within a year the government introduces legislation that makes those developers' problems simply go away.

I think that people would be curious about what happened at that dinner. We certainly are. These developers have registered Liberal-friendly lobbyists already working on their behalf. They're not just generous Liberal Party supporters. This stinks.

Why won't the Premier tell us the real story?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is grasping. He is overreaching. Frankly, given his lengthy record of public service, it is unbecoming.

I have met with all kinds of people, and I will continue to do so. They will make representations of one kind or another with respect to how we might do things in government. I will continue to provide this reassurance to the people of Ontario, to an objective audience: that we will always work as hard as we can to uphold the greater public interest, to do what we believe is in the interest of Ontario families. We've always done that, and we will always continue to do that.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, when he was asked about 40 contracts the McGuinty Liberals negotiated and signed with US clinics and hospitals, the procurement minister hid behind the Minister of Health. Minister Takhar is not only responsible for procurement, but he is also your point person for transparency legislation, accountability and integrity.

Why would integrity czar Minister Takhar evade questions about the 40 deals you've cut to send Ontario patients to American hospitals?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know my honourable colleagues in the Conservative Party have been raising their concerns about Ontario patients who are getting health care in the US. It's important to understand that we don't have the highest levels of expertise in all areas of medical specialties, and we think it serves the interest of our patients from time to time that they access that expertise south of the border.

Again, I'm not going to be defensive about that. I'm not going to apologize about that. I think it's about assuring ourselves that, from time to time when we lack that subspecialty expertise here in Ontario, we avail ourselves of that for Ontarians where that might be found south of the border. We've done that in the past, as have many other governments. We'll continue to do it in the future as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: We need to continually raise this because we keep hearing from this government that they are all things to all people in the health care system,

and increasing numbers of patients going to American hospitals show that that's simply not the case.

At least 40 contracts were signed to send Ontario patients to American hospitals since last spring. Those contracts were signed. You refused to release them in the past, and now you don't really want to talk about them too much, other than the acknowledgement that we've had today. Why won't the McGuinty Liberals release the contracts before tomorrow's question period if they have nothing to hide and they're free to talk about it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, my honourable colleague would have us believe that we're the first government ever to fund procedures for our patients south of the border. This has been common practice for quite some time—likely decades. I see no reason to believe why it won't continue long into the future—likely decades as well.

Again, if there are subspecialties, areas of expertise that we don't have here in Ontario, which we believe our patients should have access to, then that's something that we'll continue to do south of the border.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Over the past week, Ontarians have been hearing of this government's plan to drastically redesign our home health care system. Ontarians want to know whether the minister has consulted with health care providers and their patients, they want to know what options were considered and they want to know why this plan seems to be adopting strategies that have failed elsewhere. Will the minister answer those questions, please?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very happy to talk about some of the initiatives that we have to take in our health care system as we move forward.

We've spent the last six and a half years building the foundation of our health care system. We have enormously increased access to primary health care. We've brought down wait times for important procedures. We've got almost 10,000 more nurses working today than we did in 2003.

The health care system has addressed some of the access issues that were so in need of being addressed when we took office in 2003. We've been focusing on access. We're focusing increasingly on improving quality of care for patients, and, as we move forward, we simply must address the issue: Are we getting the very best value for money when it comes to our health care system?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ontarians are hearing that hospital funding will be directly tied to economies of scale, placing smaller and community-based hospitals at a permanent disadvantage.

Yesterday, I was in Welland listening to residents, physicians, nurses, the union and municipal politicians from across the Niagara region. These people were angry.

They were outraged, they were furious, they were livid that no one—no one—consulted with them before their emergency rooms were closed and their health care services were gutted.

Will this government build a health care system that works for all communities or only urban centres?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think the member opposite knows that it was the throne speech we had that lays out in broad strokes where we want to go next.

I can assure the member opposite that we will engage all of the people who are involved in our health care system, and that actually includes the people who fund our health care system—that is, the people of Ontario.

Of course we will be consulting with the people of Ontario, people concerned with health care systems, as we move forward in our plan to make the changes we simply must make if we want a health care system that's strong and healthy for our children, our children's children and our children's children's children.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care as well. We know how important it is to Ontarians to have a place to get the care they need outside of a hospital. Families want assurances that their loved ones have a comfortable setting where they can get the best care for their specific needs.

I know that the government's working hard to provide seniors with supports through the remarkable aging-at-home strategy, but we need to know how the government is supporting patients who require long-term care. My constituents want to see better access to long-term-care beds through quality improvements, a better living environment and increased staffing capacity.

To the minister: Could you please tell this House how the government is addressing the issue of long-term care in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very happy to have the opportunity to talk to the House about some of the investments we've made in long-term care. We've increased funding for long-term care by over \$1 billion—that's 55%—since we took office in 2003. We've funded over 6,000 new full-time staff in our long-term-care homes, including 2,300 nurses, who are delivering almost 12 million more hours of hands-on care. This year, we funded 1,200 registered practical nurses in Ontario's long-term-care homes, ensuring at least one new nurse in every home. We've already invested \$23.5 million for personal support workers.

It's our government that has opened almost 8,000 new long-term-care beds, including 32 at Crown Ridge Place in Trenton and 32 more at Trent Valley Lodge. We've committed to adding another 2,000 beds in 10 communities—

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

1100

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I'm happy to hear that so many new long-term-care beds have opened or are currently

under construction. I also know that many older long-term-care facilities need to be renovated in order to provide the best quality of care to Ontarians. More modern and comfortable facilities will bring many homes up to date in design and give residents better access to modern standards of physical comfort, privacy and dignity. In fact, many of these older homes will substantially increase the availability of long-term-care beds in Ontario if they are properly developed. Could you please tell this House how the government plans to improve older long-term-care facilities?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Just last month, we announced that residents in long-term-care homes can look forward to more modern, more comfortable living. We're rebuilding almost 4,200 existing beds, and we're updating facilities at 37 long-term-care homes. This is part of our government's plan to redevelop 35,000 older beds over the next 10 years, to help improve access and quality of care at homes throughout the province. The redeveloped homes will meet the most modern design standards and will feature greater wheelchair access for residents in private and public spaces.

The redeveloped homes are expected to be completed as early as 2012. This phase of our government's renewal strategy will help create or sustain approximately 4,000 jobs in Ontario. We know that for residents and their families it's all about comfort and it's all about safety. I'm very pleased we're able to redevelop these long-term-care homes and give residents a more comfortable—

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

LAND REGISTRY SYSTEM

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is for the Minister of Government Services.

Minister, buried in the Consumer Protection and Services Modernization Act, 2006, was the provision that gave Dalton McGuinty the power to cancel rights-of-way and easements with the stroke of a pen. Dalton McGuinty used that power, cancelling rights-of-way at easements registered before 1967. Minister, this has meant that Barrie Richardson and others legally don't have access to their own property. The question is: What motivated the McGuinty Liberals to take away rights-of-way of families who have owned cottages and recreational property for generations?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Actually, I'm very much aware of that issue and the changes that we are making. It has been brought to my attention, but the changes that we are making actually do not impact this issue at all. It is basically the status quo that exists right now.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Minister, once again you knew about it and did nothing. A lot of people in Laurie Scott's riding have brought this to my attention. It's also affecting constituents of the member from Peterborough, Jeff Leal, as well as the member from Prince Edward—Hast-

ings, Minister Dombrowsky, not to mention families in Minister Smith's riding, so I'm surprised about what you are saying to the House today. You eliminated these rights-of-way for Ontario families. It was completely arbitrary and unprincipled. Anyone who wants to stand up for their rights now has to pay a lawyer \$2,000 just to put back in place what they enjoyed before your action and intervention. Did you take away the rights because you're so out of touch with Ontario families that you didn't realize what you were doing to them? Or is it that you're indifferent to ordinary people in Ontario? Or, more importantly, did you do it to benefit your Liberal lawyer friends?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think this member needs to do some real research once in a while, and he needs to understand what my responsibilities actually are once in a while as well.

I just said that the changes we have made do not impact at all, so there's nothing that needs to be done. I don't know what you want me to do. If the issue doesn't really impact, then—

Interjections.

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

Continue, Minister.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: This law has existed since 1929. What I'm suggesting to this member is that the changes we have made do not impact at all the records that are manual right now. The same records will actually be automated. There will be absolutely no changes that will be required in the legislation we have in place right now.

GOVERNMENT ASSETS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is for the Premier. According to the New York Times, Goldman Sachs, your Wall Street privatization consultant, set up a garage sale of Greek government assets to deal with their deficit earlier this decade. You're moving to give away decades of future revenue for a quick cash influx. When you say we won't have a fire sale of Ontario assets, does that mean we're going to have a Goldman Sachs-supervised garage sale of Ontario assets?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question and the opportunity. I can once again speak to Ontarians about what it is that we are looking at here. Again, we think the responsible thing for us to do in our circumstances, being in the second decade in the 21st century, is take a look at the assets that we've built up together over time and ask ourselves whether the money in those assets is best deployed in its present state, or whether we should be investing in ways to build a new foundation for growth and prosperity. That's what it's all about. It's about making sure that the money is deployed in a way that best serves the long-term interests of the people of Ontario. We have no preconceptions. There are no particular ideologies or biases that we're bringing to this enterprise, but we think it's responsible that we take a look at this.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, that's certainly not the approach that this Premier took when he opposed Ernie Eves's sell-off of Ontario's assets. This Premier is starting a process towards full privatization of Ontario's key assets.

Premier, you're desperately looking for cash in the run-up to the election. Why should anyone believe that you won't do another deal as bad as the 407?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: As I recall, I thought there were at least a few NDP fingerprints on the 407 deal.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: There were. They were there.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I thought there were.

But fortunately, actions count more than words, so I'd ask Ontarians to judge us on the basis of what, if anything, we do with their assets, and they can apply the test themselves as to whether or not it serves their long-term interests. We look forward to engaging with them further on that score.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. For several years, Ontario has been a hotbed of mineral exploration and there are several and many exciting opportunities in exploration projects happening right across the province. In 2008, Ontario smashed previous records for exploration expenditures in the province, seeing nearly \$800 million being spent, and much of that, I don't mind saying, in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan. Further, in 2009, even with the economic downturn, Ontario still increased its market share of exploration expenditures. It's only through the work of these people on the ground taking these risks that the next big things are discovered, such as the De Beers mine that officially opened in the summer of 2008.

Minister, could you please tell us more about the Ring of Fire and about how it's going to benefit northerners and give them hope as they deal with these challenging economic times?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much for the question. As the member knows, representing as he does Thunder Bay–Atikokan, there is a tremendous amount of excitement in the north about the mineral potential of a number of discoveries in the Ring of Fire. May I say, that excitement is spreading all across the province. Certainly, it's one of the most promising development opportunities in almost more than a century.

1110

This plan is also part of the Open Ontario plan, which makes us very, very excited as well. It's about taking advantage of opportunities like the Ring of Fire. That's what the Open Ontario plan means. It's about building a stronger economy; it's about creating jobs. Our information suggests that there is the potential, in the Ring of Fire, for more than 100 years of chromite production, as well as significant production of nickel, copper and platinum. This means jobs for First Nations communities and

many thousands of jobs as well for communities all across the north. We could not be more excited. Thousands upon thousands of jobs—a great economic development opportunity that we're looking forward to working on.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Minister, thanks very much for that. This mineral potential will be a significant driver for the north, supporting regional and community infrastructure development, without a doubt.

Amidst all of this excitement, we've also been hearing some news stories that express some concern around this development and its ability to move forward. They raised several environmental concerns as this project is in Ontario's Far North, as well as concerns by First Nation communities who are going to be impacted through the development of the mine itself and through the construction of associated infrastructure. I think it is important that we, as a government, speak publicly to these considerations, along with the economic ones, and how they are being factored into this exciting development.

Interjection: Fair question.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: It is a good question, and I appreciate the concerns that have been expressed.

Let me just reiterate how excited everyone is about the opportunities that are presented here. There is, quite frankly, billions of dollars' worth of material in the ground that we can tap into, and it will put thousands of northerners to work. But there are legitimate concerns around environmental protection and aboriginal consultation and engagement, and we are dealing very specifically and directly with that.

As we move forward with this Ring of Fire development, my ministry and this government are fully committed to working with northerners, with aboriginal communities and with all the mining partners to fully realize the potential. Also, we're determined to see that the Ring of Fire's success story, from an aboriginal perspective, an environmental perspective and, of course, an economic perspective, is done in a very managed way.

We are committed to getting this right. It's a tremendous opportunity, but we're going to do it right.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is also to the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. Twice last week, Minister, I asked you to intervene with a no-cash investment to save 1,500 jobs at Grant Forest Products in northern Ontario. We are still awaiting your answer.

At any hour, a bankruptcy court is going to make a decision about who gets to buy the assets of this historic made-in-Ontario business. Minister, will you commit to a loan guarantee, where the funds are already available, that would give Grant Forest Products' bankruptcy proposal the boost it needs to compete with other bidders like Georgia-Pacific?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Indeed, I was asked about this last week. It is important to remind the member that

Grant Forest Products is in CCAA protection, which is a court process. It would be absolutely inappropriate for me or for us to interfere with that process.

We are certainly aware of the sale of Grant Forest Products' Englehart and Earleton facilities to Georgia-Pacific, and I know that Georgia-Pacific has been meeting with local municipal leaders in the community. They are committed to running the Englehart facility at full capacity. There is no question: We are keen to see as many jobs as possible in the forestry sector, which is why we're making some of the moves that we are and the decisions that we are to see those opportunities come forward.

Ownership changes are, quite frankly, a normal part of the business life cycle. We know it's unsettling, but we see some real opportunities in those facilities. We're going to continue to work to see an improvement and an increase in economic activity in the forestry sector all across the north.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Shurman: It's unsettling indeed—to the families most of all.

In Monday's throne speech, the McGuinty government said that it would support northern families. Well, Minister, the 1,500 families in Englehart and Timmins whose lives are hanging on your decision are not feeling that support.

There's no time left for you to consult your ministry officials or your cabinet colleagues—the same cabinet colleagues, I might add, from southern Ontario who didn't bat an eye at giving an \$80-million boost to Ford last week. But when it comes to northern Ontario, you're still sitting on your proverbial ring of fire. Well, it's D-Day for 1,500 families and the communities they live in. Will you give Grant Forest Products a loan guarantee or not?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: We know that there was a consortium of northern business leaders who put forward a proposal to a court-appointed monitor. We know and expect that that will be given due consideration. This is a process that indeed has to go forward the way that it is moving forward.

We are absolutely committed to a revival of the forestry sector in northern Ontario and, in fact, all across the province of Ontario. There are many opportunities that are presenting themselves. I spoke last week about the wood supply competition that we have out there in the public, almost 11 million cubic metres of fibre that's out there available for the companies that are in place right now and some new entrants as well. We are working very actively on a review of our forest tenure system, which is an opportunity for us to look at how we can better make fibre available to those companies that can bring jobs to northern Ontario. We are absolutely committed to it, working as hard as we can, and looking forward to seeing the right decisions made in northern Ontario.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This question is to the Minister of Housing. Monday's throne speech completely ignored

the housing crisis faced by millions of Ontarians. In Ontario today, more people than ever are stuck on waiting lists for affordable housing—over 72,000 families in Toronto alone. Last year, we put forward a bill, which will be re-tabled in May, that would allow municipalities to pass inclusionary zoning bylaws to address this crisis. That bill passed this House unanimously on second reading.

Will the government, I ask the minister, be acting on inclusionary zoning?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I always commend the members of the Legislature for putting forth pieces of legislation that are very important to them. As a member of cabinet, I hate prejudicing what happens when bills are put before the House. The member has indicated she is going to reintroduce a bill; I think I heard that news from you. I know you wouldn't want me to make a bias against or in favour of the bill. I like seeing a full and complete debate on legislation of this kind. But I want to commend the member for coming forward with that legislation. I don't want to influence the Conservatives or members of the Liberal Party or the NDP on a private member's bill. I'll be interested in listening, I think as all members will, to the debate as it flows from the member and those who decide that they're going to contribute on a Thursday afternoon to the—

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Unless the developer is at dinner with the Premier and changes the Minister of Housing's mind, I assume that the vote will be the same as last time. I hope it will be.

Municipalities around the province are demanding that the province allow them to pass inclusionary zoning bylaws requiring a minimum percentage of affordable units in new buildings. Inclusionary zoning has been endorsed by cities as diverse as London, England; Thunder Bay; London, Ontario; Milton—mayors and numerous city councillors in the GTA and Ottawa. Inclusionary zoning has proven successful in jurisdictions in the US, including Massachusetts, Washington, Virginia, California and the metro New York area. Inclusionary zoning would cost the government nothing and would create up to 12,000 desperately needed affordable homes per year.

Again I ask: Will the minister confirm that inclusionary housing will be part of Ontario's long-term affordable housing strategy when it's released in—

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: Again, I hate to release it in dribs and drabs. You will know all of the contributions we've made. Unprecedented amounts of money have been dedicated to affordable housing by this government. You will recognize that for me to release the full report step by step, point by point wouldn't be nearly as effective as releasing it as a package.

Having said that, our ministry staff are analyzing carefully and consulting with people about all of the recommendations which have been made during that affordable

housing strategy consultation that took place. When we have been able to put the package together, we will be releasing that package. I know the member will be anticipating it with great enthusiasm because she has an interest in this field. But I don't want to give that information away before the full package is released to the public—

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

IMMIGRANT SERVICES

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Minister, there are many reasons why Ontario is a great place to invest, to live and to work. One of our province's strengths is undoubtedly our diversity and the contributions of newcomers from around the world. My riding of Oak Ridges–Markham is a great example.

We know that in order to equip our newcomers with the tools necessary to succeed, they must know what government programs and services are available and where to locate them. But often enough, newcomers are not made aware of what is available to them, both before and after their arrival in Ontario. To help newcomers find success, we need to ensure that they have complete access to information on settlement services and programs.

Minister, can you please tell this House what the government is doing to assist current and prospective newcomers this regard?

1120

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to thank the member from Oak Ridges–Markham for her question. Our government is committed to helping newcomers succeed, and that is why we've invested more than \$700 million since 2003 to help newcomers settle, get job-ready and get licensed to work.

The member does raise a very important point, and this is that newcomers may not be aware of what services are available to them, both before or after they arrive in Ontario. That is why we are partnering with our federal and municipal partners to create municipal immigration websites. These sites provide prospective and current residents with a full understanding of what programs and services are available in municipalities. These online immigration portals also provide municipalities with opportunities to attract newcomers with much-sought-after skills and experience.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm happy to learn from the minister that our government is working with its partners to develop these online portals. There is no doubt that settlement services need to be supported by all three levels of government. These sites not only provide essential information to newcomers; they also support our municipal partners.

However, we must do more than simply provide information. We need to help newcomers access the tools and

opportunities necessary for success. Minister, can you please tell this House how we are assisting our newcomers?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I want to thank again the member for this important question. Let me be clear: Immigration is part of Ontario's long-term plan for economic growth. We need the global education and the skills and experience that newcomers bring to build a strong and prosperous economy, and that is why the government of Ontario is taking a multi-faceted approach to assist newcomers in our province.

To help newcomers apply their skills and support their families, we have invested over \$145 million in nearly 200 bridge training programs. To ensure that newcomers have the language abilities they need to be job-ready, we have supported adult language training programs with funding of nearly \$60 million each year. And to break down barriers to employment, we passed the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act.

Our government is working with newcomers to build a stronger Ontario.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. Minister, is your government engaged in bait-and-switch activities here? Yesterday in a CBC radio interview about the Ring of Fire, you stated: "I've been sort of trying to get those people who are very excited to dial it back just a bit." But in Monday's throne speech, you called the Ring of Fire "the most promising mining opportunity in Canada in a century."

Minister, why are you speaking out of both sides of your mouth on the Ring of Fire?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Indeed, we are very excited about the potential opportunities, and the fact that it is part of our Open Ontario plan is extraordinarily exciting.

I certainly would invite the member to join us. I know that you were at the Prospectors and Developers Association convention in the last couple of days. We appreciate you being there—one of the most successful in years. The fact is, you heard from many people who were speaking about our government of Ontario's plan to support and promote the Ring of Fire development. So indeed, we want to have you onside for this.

This is something that needs to be managed in an appropriate fashion. In terms of our opportunities that we have, we are going to be working with our First Nation communities, working in terms of making sure it's environmentally sustainable. But there is no question—you can go down to the convention and meet with the many aboriginal leaders who are there. They're also very excited about the opportunities that are there.

This is about finding a way to take advantage of an opportunity that we haven't seen in the province of Ontario in 100 years, and I am just thrilled that our government is promoting its development.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Minister, your government is so tired and so confused, you can't remember from day to day what you're saying and who you're saying it to. Who exactly are you trying to get to dial it back? Who are you trying to calm down? Who shouldn't get excited? Is it your environmentalist friends, to whom you promised no development, or is it the miners whom you promised more development, or is it the people of the north, who know the only shaft they're going to get is from this Liberal government?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: This is unquestionably one of the most exciting opportunities that we've seen in the province of Ontario, let alone northern Ontario, in a large number of years. It will be managed in a process that will help us move forward to make sure that the appropriate economic benefits come to First Nations communities and the many communities—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Hon. Michael Gravelle: There is still much work to be done in terms of moving the project forward, but what's important to understand is that all groups, our First Nation leaders, our Métis communities, our aboriginal leaders all across the north, the communities—obviously all those representing northern Ontario are very excited about this. Len Crispino, president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, was speaking about what great opportunities it could have not just for northern Ontario but for all of Ontario.

We need you on board, quite frankly. We need everyone on board. This is an opportunity that our government and the Premier see as a very exciting opportunity, which is why that is part of the Open Ontario plan. We need your support; we need your help.

Quite frankly, I'll be going up to Marten Falls, Webequie and a few other communities next week to—

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

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Right now, the Sudbury Regional Hospital has 89 beds occupied by alternate-level-of-care—ALC—patients. Meanwhile, six patients are stuck in the emergency department because they can't find a bed for them. Many of the people who are now ALC patients could have been safely looked after at home if we had a robust home care system.

The throne speech made no mention of fixing home care. Instead, the government is continuing competitive-bidding privatized home care delivery. When will this government fix our home care system?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very proud of the improvements we've made in our home care system over

the past six and a half years. We've dramatically increased the investments we're making in home care. We've lifted the caps so that people can get the home care they need. We've invested over a billion dollars in our aging-at-home strategy, designed exactly to take the pressure off the hospitals.

We know there are too many people in hospital who actually do not need to be in hospital. That's why we're working very closely with our LHINs, with the CCACs and with our hospitals to find those right solutions so that people get the appropriate level of care as close to home as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: This money is not fixing our home care system. On Monday, the workers in Sudbury held a protest to deliver a message that our home care system is broken. The workers work mainly on call. They make just over minimum wage. Competitive bidding makes it impossible for home care providers to recruit and retain a stable workforce.

The government is wasting health care dollars treating patients in hospitals across this province who could be taken care of more humanely and effectively at home. This is a huge problem—17% of all our hospital beds.

When will the McGuinty government realize that fixing home care means getting rid of the competitive-bidding privatized home care model and that the most effective and humane way of meeting the health care needs of our aging population is a robust home care system?

1130

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me repeat: We are absolutely committed to making the right investments so that people who need care in this province get the care they need in the most appropriate place.

We are actively working to strengthen the continuum of care so that people can move back home from the hospital when they have completed the acute episode of care that they need, with the right supports; they can move into supportive housing; they can, if necessary, move into long-term care.

I can tell you that our government has made addressing the alternate-level-of-care—ALC—pressures that our hospitals face a top priority. We're making the right investments, and we're making progress. It's critically important for our hospitals; it's also critically important for the people of this province, particularly our seniors.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question today for the Minister of Labour. Minister, lifting equipment is used across a variety of business sectors in my own community of Oakville and throughout Ontario. Many employers and workers see them just as a simple way to move materials. They use them as a routine part of their jobs.

All members of this House would realize that their improper operation poses real dangers to our province's workers. Forklifts and other lifting devices continue to be

a significant cause of potential serious worker injury and sometimes death. Would the minister tell this House, and workers and employers in Ontario, what his ministry is doing to ensure the health and safety of forklift operators in the province?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank the member for Oakville for the question.

At the Ministry of Labour, we are always working to make our workplaces in the province that much safer. For example, we've just recently completed a blitz of forklifts and other lifting devices. During this enforcement campaign, inspectors visited various sectors, including retail, warehouses, wholesale, transportation and the automotive sector, where forklift-related incidents have mostly occurred. This is the second blitz. We did one last year; we targeted forklifts. During last year's blitz, industrial inspectors made almost 1,300 visits to workplaces in Ontario.

I look forward to reviewing the results of this year's enforcement blitz campaign. With this blitz and with every blitz, we're reaching more Ontario workers and making our workplaces that much—

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: That sounds like a comprehensive approach that Ontario workers want.

Ontario workers and employers need to know that your ministry is striving to protect and look out for the health and safety of Ontario workers. Our workers deserve jobs that allow them to not only take care of their families but also to return home safely at the end of each day.

I understand that this blitz is only one of the many that the ministry is conducting and that it's part of a broader workplace health and safety strategy. In fact, I've been told, Minister, that this is the 18th blitz conducted by the Ministry of Labour since you launched your Safe at Work Ontario campaign in June 2008.

Would the minister please expand for the House upon other safety blitzes that are currently taking place in Ontario?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Again I thank the member for the question. The member is absolutely correct: This blitz is one in a long line that the ministry has conducted in our proactive approach to workplace safety.

There are more to come, because blitzes work. Our blitzes heighten awareness for workers and for employers. They're instrumental in identifying hazards before they turn into disasters and tragedies. Our inspectors' proactive enforcement encourages everyone to evaluate the risks in their own workplaces.

Safe at Work Ontario is not only about enforcement and compliance; it's about a partnership with employers, workers, health and safety associations, governments and all Ontarians as we work to improve the health and safety of—

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

LAND REGISTRY SYSTEM

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of Government Services. Minister, earlier today you gave a very dismissive response to my question dealing with Bill 152. You suggested that owners did not have to take any action dealing with rights-of-way registered on title prior to 1967. I have letters from your members in your caucus saying quite the opposite.

Minister, will you stand in the House today and commit and promise that the owners of properties who are questioning these rights-of-way registered on title will not have to pay one cent to your Liberal-friendly lawyers to re-establish their rights-of-way to their properties?

Will you stand in the House today and answer that question? That's all I want.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: Let me be very clear about what we are trying to do here. The land registry records are manual right now and we are trying to automate them. Whatever is in the records at this point in time is exactly what is being automated—nothing less, nothing more, so the records stay the same. That's what our position is right now. That's what is in the legislation. If anything is registered in the manual records right now, it will be automated the same way.

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

The House recessed from 1136 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It is my pleasure to introduce on behalf of page Haleigh Ryan from Palgrave her grandparents, Alice and Steven Ryan, her mother, Barbara, and her little brother, Steven. Thank you very much for coming this afternoon.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to introduce my wife, Pari, my daughter, Michelle, and my granddaughters, Sabrina and Sara, who are visiting the House.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DEFIBRILLATION EQUIPMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I'm proud to rise in the Legislature today to recognize individuals and organizations in the riding of Cambridge who have made it possible to save lives by having defibrillators placed in 76 elementary schools in Waterloo region.

Dr. Shekhar Pandey of the Cambridge Cardiac Care Centre, together with representatives from the Ontario Heart and Stroke Foundation, Philips Electronics and the region of Waterloo emergency medical services shared this gift of life at a press conference last Friday, all done without federal or provincial funding.

There are now a total of 211 of these life-saving devices in public buildings across Waterloo region. In the past two years, they've been used six times after people collapsed at an arena or a public event. Three lives were saved. Were it not for the defibrillators, the survival rate would probably have been nil.

I congratulate and commend Dr. Pandey and the others involved in expanding this important life-saving initiative in our community.

UNITED WAY OF LONDON AND MIDDLESEX

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I would like to commend the United Way of London and Middlesex for raising over \$7.6 million in donations for the London-Middlesex community. The United Way had exceeded their projected target of \$7.4 million and plans on investing the funds in organizations and programs that will benefit our communities.

I would like to note that over 100% of the money raised by United Way has come from unionized workplaces, the manufacturing sector and communities that have borne the brunt of the recession. It is inspiring and heartwarming that our community always helps those in need under any circumstances.

The United Way will make a contribution of \$6.5 million to various London-Middlesex service providers this year. A number of these organizations include the Boys and Girls Club of London, the children's aid society, the Daya Counselling Centre and Community Living London.

Their success in mobilizing the community and giving back to those in need is truly amazing. They are an example and an inspiration for other community organizations, and I commend and congratulate all those involved for a job well done.

I want to thank all the people who participate and donate for a good cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to read this statement.

GROVES MEMORIAL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Mr. Ted Arnott: On Monday, just before the throne speech, I retabled a very important motion, the very first motion introducing this new legislative session:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should acknowledge the strong and long-standing community support for a new Groves Memorial Community Hospital in Centre Wellington and immediately provide the hospital with its requested planning grant, and allow it to move forward to the next stage of approval."

This motion makes a direct and specific request. It says that something reasonable and sensible needs to be done now. We have the LHIN's endorsement, which arrived just before Christmas. As long ago as last June,

the Premier was talking about releasing a 10-year construction plan for hospitals, but last week when I asked during question period when the government would unveil this plan, they refused to answer. Do they actually have an honest planning process, or are they just giving communities the runaround?

Our community expects to see progress, not hear excuses. We all know about the deficit, but we also know that they spent \$1 billion on eHealth with little to show for it. Groves needs the go-ahead. It's obvious that this government has trouble setting priorities, but maybe it could change its ways. It could start by recognizing the need to support local health care and undertake to do what my motion asks.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I stand in the House today to recognize the victims of Chile's earthquake and tsunami and to call on Ontarians to support the rebuilding efforts.

As many of you already know, the destruction in Chile was immense. The tsunami destroyed port cities, villages, homes and fishing boats along a 1,000-kilometre coastline. The main industrial corridor of Concepción, Huachipato, Lota and Coronel, which includes mining processing centres and factories, was hit hard. The north-south route—the main transport road in the country—was severely damaged. Thirty-nine hospitals were destroyed.

My wife, Evelyn Murialdo, is Chilean-Canadian, and many members of our family live in Chile. We've heard from them about how the people of Chile have come together and are undertaking tremendous efforts to rebuild, but they can't do it alone.

I've been working in collaboration with the Consul General of Chile, with Scadding Court, an outstanding agency known for its community development work in Toronto as well as their international work, and with the coalition Chile CAN Rise. Together, we would like to extend an invitation to all MPPs and civil servants to join us at 7 p.m. tonight outside here at Queen's Park for a candlelight vigil. Speakers will include the Consul General of Chile and Pablo Vivanco of Chile CAN Rise.

However, I would like to encourage everyone here to consider donating money to the relief efforts. Donations can be sent to Scadding Court to the attention of the Earthquake Relief Fund. Scadding Court will collect the donations on behalf of Un Techo para Chile, a key organization in the rebuilding efforts. The Chilean consulate in Toronto will acknowledge your support at an event it will be hosting with Scadding Court on April 29 at the Plaza Flamingo. For further information, go to chilecanrise.ca.

WARDEN WOODS COMMUNITY CENTRE

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I rise today to speak about an organization that is doing wonderful things for the people of my riding of Scarborough Southwest. Warden Woods Community Centre has been an integral

part of community life in Scarborough Southwest for some 30 years.

This agency was created to serve the local community by providing services and support to help residents deal with the challenges of daily life while providing a place for all to gather and participate in many activities that help foster a sense of community.

Warden Woods Community Centre is largely supported by the United Way. It's primarily focused on making a difference in the lives of people in both small and big ways.

I'm proud to stand here today and say that the McGuinty government has been a strong supporter of Warden Woods. In six separate locations, programs range in scope from children's hip hop classes to Meals on Wheels, support for seniors and drop-in programs for the homeless.

Presently Warden Woods Community Centre, like the Scarborough Southwest community, is changing to accommodate and support the changing ethnocultural character of the community. This resulted in the creation of programming geared to reach out to new Canadians who otherwise would have nowhere else to turn.

In addition to this, greater programming focus has been placed on providing activities that cater to the needs of individuals with physical challenges, by offering them the opportunity to partake in activities that serve to address their needs for recreation and fun.

Lastly, I would like to express how fortunate my riding of Scarborough Southwest is for having such a fine institution, which does such noble and necessary work.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. John O'Toole: My riding of Durham is encouraged to learn that the GO train service could be extended east to Bowmanville by 2013. The problem with this is that we've heard similar promises before and we're still waiting. In fact, I have grown rather skeptical of the Liberal promises. Residents of Durham riding want to take public transit; however, this is difficult without a permanent commuter rail link to the rest of the GTA.

The throne speech promised \$32 billion in infrastructure funding. I would urge the government to ensure that a fair share of transit funding is allocated to the GO Transit east extension to Durham.

Metrolinx estimates that traffic congestion costs their area \$6 billion every year through delays and lost productivity. Extending GO train service to Durham means more jobs, more opportunities and reduced gridlock. This government needs to put the east extension of GO transit on the fast track.

1510

One additional suggestion I might make to the Minister of Finance is to implement my private member's bill that offers a transit tax credit for those receiptable expenses for the purpose of using transit. Just adopt it, as the federal government has done. This will make transit affordable and assure more ridership.

When you see these plans that are offered in these throne speeches, you have to have confidence that the Premier is going to deliver. We just ask him to make sure that Durham gets its fair share of transit funding in the next budget.

MEMBERS' CONDUCT

Mr. Dave Levac: On Monday, the Lieutenant Governor performed an important function in our Legislature: He read the speech from the throne, which outlined our government's vision for our province. The role of the Lieutenant Governor in reading the speech from the throne is a long-standing, time-honoured tradition in our Legislature, and he and his office should be treated with the respect and esteem due his role as the vice-regal representative of our province. He represents the Queen.

Unfortunately, some members of this Legislature chose to ignore this, and behaved in a way that I believe embarrassed our Legislature on Monday. I was deeply dismayed to see some members laughing and heckling while the Lieutenant Governor read the speech from the throne.

It should also be noted that this regrettable behaviour was entirely unnecessary. Yesterday, the official opposition was accorded time to state their views and give their official response to the speech from the throne in the House, and they also had media studio time immediately following the Lieutenant Governor's delivery of the speech to express their views. There was no need to resort to such disrespectful behaviour.

That's why I am calling on the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition to instruct his members who behaved so rudely to apologize to the Lieutenant Governor, to all Ontarians and to all members of this House for their disrespectful actions. Unfortunately, based on the actions of some, I won't hold my breath.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Durham, it's not helpful.

Members' statements?

ANNIVERSARY OF LITHUANIAN INDEPENDENCE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I rise to ask all members of the Legislature to help us to celebrate a very special day in the history of a country called Lithuania.

Twenty one years ago, in 1989, two million people linked hands across the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to form a human chain spanning over 600 kilometres. This captivating and stunning campaign for freedom, organized by the Baltic pro-independence movements, was known as the Baltic Way, and has been documented in a photo exhibit by the same name. The peaceful protest resonated globally as a remarkable

demonstration of people and their power. Six months later, Lithuania became the first Baltic state to declare independence from the Soviet Union.

Ambassador of Lithuania Gintė Damušis and Consul General Paul Kuras can be proud of the accomplishments of Lithuanians right here in Canada, because they have never forgotten their homeland and what it meant to be a Lithuanian in the diaspora.

I can remember, 32 years ago, as a young councillor of the city of Toronto, standing in the snow and seeing tears streaming down their eyes and down their cheeks when they saw the flag of an independent Lithuania being hoisted. It left an impression on me, and the impression was that I will always stand with them until I can no more and until the independence of Lithuania has been achieved.

Tomorrow, as we raise the flag of Lithuania, I would ask all members to please come and join with me to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Lithuanian independence.

VU PHAM

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I rise in tribute to the OPP officer, Constable Vu Pham, who was killed violently in the line of duty on Monday. I want to express our deepest sympathies to Constable Pham's wife and three young sons.

Constable Pham served as an OPP officer for 15 years in Cochrane, Parry Sound and Huron county, daily doing his best to keep our communities safe. Living in the small town of Wingham, Constable Pham was a well-known member of this close-knit community. Those who knew him best—his friends, neighbours and colleagues—remember him as a wonderful friend, a gentleman, but most as a devoted husband and father.

He was respected not just for his duties as a police officer, but for his many contributions to the community as well. Constable Pham was a dedicated volunteer and coach of his sons' hockey and soccer teams, a deacon in the Wingham Pentecostal Church, and an avid outdoorsman who loved to spend time with his three sons hunting and fishing.

I also want to send our condolences to the officers of the Huron OPP detachment and police officers from across Ontario as they mourn the loss of their colleague, and also to thank them for the risks they take each day to keep Ontario safe.

The following is A Police Officer's Prayer:

Lord I ask for courage

Courage to face and
Conquer my own fears ...

Courage to take me
Where others will not go ...

I ask for strength

Strength of body to protect others
And strength of spirit to lead others ...

I ask for dedication

Dedication to my job, to do it well
Dedication to my community
To keep it safe ...

Give me Lord, concern
For others who trust me
And compassion for those who need me ...

And please Lord

Through it all
Be at my side ...

Speaker, I would ask for a moment of silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask all members and our guests to join us in a moment of silence in tribute to the fallen officer.

The House observed a moment's silence.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Pat Hoy: I beg leave to present a report on pre-budget consultation 2010 from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Pat Hoy: I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE AND ELDERLY PEOPLE FROM ABUSE ACT (POWERS OF ATTORNEY), 2010 LOI DE 2010 SUR LA PROTECTION DES PERSONNES VULNÉRABLES ET DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES CONTRE LES MAUVAIS TRAITEMENTS (PROCURATIONS)

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 3, An Act to amend the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992 with respect to powers of attorney / Projet de loi 3, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur la prise de décisions au nom d'autrui en ce qui a trait aux procurations.

1520

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. John O'Toole: The bill is intended to protect vulnerable and elderly persons from abuse by the misuse of the power of attorney. The bill amends sections 10 to 48 of the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992, and strengthens the continuing power of attorney for property and personal care. Its intent is to protect vulnerable people from being misused in terms of misappropriation of their care or resources.

OMBUDSMAN AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'OMBUDSMAN

Mr. Kormos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 4, An Act to amend the Ombudsman Act / Projet de loi 4, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'ombudsman.

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 Kormos: Of course I use the explanatory note attached to the bill for this statement, as has been agreed upon by this House. Currently, under the Ombudsman Act, the Ombudsman's term of office is five years and the Ombudsman may be reappointed for further terms. The bill amends the act to provide that the term of office is 10 years and to prohibit reappointment.

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR PUPILS WITH DIABETES, 2010

CHARTRE DES DROITS DES ÉLÈVES DIABÉTIQUES DE 2010

Mr. Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 5, An Act to establish a bill of rights for pupils with diabetes / Projet de loi 5, Loi établissant une charte des droits pour les élèves diabétiques.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Dave Levac: In the spirit of the member from Welland, if passed, this bill would set out various rights that a pupil with diabetes disabilities has with respect to caring for his or her diabetes while at school.

CLIMATE CHANGE AWARENESS ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LA SENSIBILISATION AUX CHANGEMENTS CLIMATIQUES

Mr. McNeely moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to increase awareness of climate change / Projet de loi 6, Loi visant à augmenter la sensibilisation aux changements climatiques.

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. Phil McNeely: This bill is intended to name April 21 of every year, the day before Earth Day, Climate Change Awareness Day. The indicators include the lowest level of Arctic ice cover for the year, the population of polar bears in Canada and the greenhouse gas production of our province and our country. Our youth understand climate change and the need to take action, and this report card to our youth will help them inform their parents and take leadership in the decades to come.

CONSUMER REPORTING AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RENSEIGNEMENTS CONCERNANT LE CONSOMMATEUR

Mr. Ruprecht moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 7, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act / Projet de loi 7, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements concernant le consommateur.

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. Tony Ruprecht: The crime of identity theft is rolling across North America at an ever-increasing rate. This bill is entitled to do something about this, and it provides that, were a consumer reporting agency and any other person, such as a bank, to whom a consumer report has been provided to discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information or that such information has been lost or stolen, they shall immediately inform the affected consumer. I hope that this bill will stop identity theft in its tracks.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

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

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 5 be waived.

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

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the meeting times of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding the order of the House of May 1, 2008, respecting the meeting times for committees, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs shall be authorized to meet, in addition to its regular meeting time, on Wednesday, March 31, 2010, from 12:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. and from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings on Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act.

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

Motion agreed to.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FEMME

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allocated to each party to speak on International Women's Day.

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

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I rise today in the House to acknowledge International Women's Day, which we celebrated on March 8 as part of International Women's Week, occurring this year from March 7 to 13.

Ontario is filled with accomplished women. Women are the backbone of their families and of Ontario's communities.

On International Women's Day, countries around the world celebrate women—past, present and future—and together we raise awareness about the continuing struggle for women's equality and vow to break down the remaining barriers.

The global theme of International Women's Day 2010 is "Equal rights, equal opportunities: Progress for all." In Canada, we celebrate "Strong Women. Strong Canada. Strong World."

Pendant la Journée internationale de la femme, des pays un peu partout dans le monde célèbrent les femmes : celles du passé, du présent et de l'avenir. Ensemble, nous faisons prendre conscience des luttes qui se poursuivent pour l'égalité des femmes, et nous faisons vœu de briser les barrières qui subsistent.

Au Canada, nous célébrons le thème « Force des femmes. Force du Canada. Force du monde ». En 2010, la Journée internationale de la femme a pour thème « Mêmes droits, mêmes chances : progrès pour tous ».

But no matter what the theme, International Women's Day is a symbol for change and progress. It's about the social, political and economic advancement of women; raising awareness about issues of gender inequality and the work that remains to be done; and being pragmatic about the opportunity to achieve more.

While we reflect on the progress already made to help women achieve their full participation in society, we recognize and appreciate the important work that women do every day, and we take pride in what has been accomplished and take action on what is yet to attain.

While we have come a long way, there is much more to do. Many issues, such as violence and poverty, remain unresolved.

Bien que les femmes se joignent au monde du travail en nombre record, élèvent des enfants et participent au sein de leurs communautés, il leur reste encore aujourd'hui des barrières à surmonter.

Today, as women join the labour force in record numbers, raise families and participate in their communities, barriers remain.

On the same note, I am proud of our government's accomplishments in advancing the well-being of women in Ontario, especially for victims of violence and those who face financial hardship.

We have taken steps to ensure that women have the opportunity to gain skills and jobs in all sectors of the economy, learn new skills, change careers and get higher-paying jobs. Our government is helping with supports that enable them to enter the workforce knowing that their children are well cared for. We have expanded access to child care and are moving forward on full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds.

Further, we will be able to provide wraparound care, making it easier for parents, and women in particular, to balance their responsibilities as mothers while ensuring that they are able to enter the workforce.

Our government is undertaking a number of initiatives that will increase awareness and improve supports for women who are the victims of violence, including initiatives specific to Ontario's aboriginal women.

For women to reach their full potential and obtain economic independence for themselves and their children, the proper supports must be in place. Women have a right to equal and full participation in our society. I believe that by doing more to protect women from violence and build women's economic independence, we build stronger, safer and more vital communities.

1530

Les femmes ont le droit de participer également et pleinement dans notre société. Je crois qu'en faisant davantage pour protéger les femmes contre la violence et favoriser l'autonomie financière des femmes, nous bâtissons des collectivités plus fortes, plus sûres et plus dynamiques. Cela est, en fin de compte, le sens de la Journée internationale de la femme.

Ultimately, that is the meaning of International Women's Day.

In closing, I want to thank the women from all walks of life in Ontario who are helping to create strong

communities through their remarkable achievements in their workplace, in their communities and in their homes.

Happy International Women's Day.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm very pleased to speak on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, because it is a pleasure and an honour each time, each year, to celebrate with my colleagues from all three parties.

Canadians have stepped forward to celebrate this week the progress that has been made by women toward equality and also toward full participation. It's also an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and the barriers that remain, and to consider future steps to achieve equality for all women in all aspects of their lives.

This year, the theme in Canada is "Strong Women. Strong Canada. Strong World." That emphasizes the need to continue to focus on increasing women's participation in and access to leadership roles and opportunities, and making sure that every female in this province and country has the opportunity to achieve her full potential and to help build a stronger and more prosperous Canada.

I would say to you that much has been done. Women have made great strides. We're seeing participation in pretty well every aspect of Canadian life. Currently, women make up the majority of full-time students in most university faculties. Certainly, their participation in the workforce has increased. In 2007—the most recent statistic—women made up 35% of all self-employed individuals.

What is an area where we need to do some more? We've just gone through the Olympics, and I would have to say to you—I want to just reflect on women and athletics. We were able to see some outstanding Canadian women, who won our hearts as they displayed their skill both on the hill and at the rink. Some people have wondered why the women did as well as they did. The women did win 14½ medals out of a 26-medal total. The half refers to the skating duo of Scott and Tessa.

I'm going to refer to an article by Debra Black on February 25. Part of the reason that we saw women doing as well as they did is because I think the Olympic committee has gone a long way to try to ensure gender equity in its Canadian Olympic programming.

I want to quote Bruce Kidd, a former Olympic runner and the dean of the faculty of physical education and health at the University of Toronto, who says that women have always had a strong performance at the Olympics "dating back to 1928 when the women's track and field team scored the most points overall." But he goes on to say that part of the reason women perform so well, in his estimation, is because they're focused on achievement at the Olympics because there is, as he says, "a dearth of professional sports" opportunities, "other than golf and tennis, for them to put their energies into." So, for them, the Olympics are the pinnacle. They want to make sure that they can be the best that they can be. Men, of course, have opportunities to excel in sports. If we take a look, there's hockey, baseball, lacrosse, basketball and football. Women don't have those same opportunities, and so

for them, this is the pinnacle of athleticism that they can participate in.

So we see women working hard—that is what they believe is one of the reasons women do so well. Although there is lots of opportunity for participation in this province and in this country, there is not so much in comparison to males. I just want to point that out.

We are proud of the women who worked hard to achieve success in their sport at the Olympics. I would like to say to you that they do serve as outstanding role models for young women in this province and in this country. Again, it's an indication that women have made great progress, but I think it's also an indication of the fact that there is always a little more that we need to do.

I want to congratulate all those who have supported women in achieving equality and achieving leadership opportunities. We've got a great province and country, and we will all continue to work together—men and women—to make it the best it can be.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to rise today on behalf of New Democrats to speak about International Women's Day, which was a couple of days ago. International Women's Day is our chance to celebrate all the people who have led the way over the years in the struggle to create a society that promotes things like social justice, equality, diversity and tolerance between men and women. We know that many people have been involved in that struggle; certainly many women, and some men as well.

It's also a chance for us to recognize the real progress that women have made toward equality. I say "progress toward equality," because unfortunately we know that it is not quite equal yet between men and women in Ontario or in Canada. It wasn't so long ago, in fact, that women were told they couldn't have a career, that that was not something a woman should have in her life, let alone having women actually run for public office.

We have made some progress—progress that we're proud of today, absolutely—but we need to recognize that as a society we still have quite a distance to go. Sadly, there is a lot more work to do when it comes to equality for women.

Women in Ontario have been especially hard hit with the global recession. We know that when an economic downturn takes place, that negative economic atmosphere hits women very, very hard. Often, women end up carrying the burden of the household income on their own, and yet they do that still earning less than men earn.

These days in 2010, about 75 cents on the dollar is what women earn compared to what men earn. Women of colour and aboriginal women are particularly affected by wage disparities. Women are more likely to live in poverty, even when they're working. More than 70% of people earning minimum wage in this province are women. Most of those are immigrant women, visible minority women from racialized communities.

Right now, a new crisis in child care in this province is also leaving working moms wondering how they're going to get child care for their children, how they're

going to afford to even go to work without subsidized child care, which we know is in a crisis state here in the province. In fact, our caucus had the pleasure of talking to some child care workers today about the serious situation in this province with a government that refuses to fund child care, even though it is a provincial responsibility.

These are the kinds of things that women in Ontario face each and every day. It's the job of this government and of everyone in this chamber to make sure that there is real equality in this province, not further disparity. That's what their job is on the government side; that's what our job is on the opposition side as well.

1540

Unfortunately, we are seeing more and more poor decisions coming forward from this government, and they disproportionately are affecting women. There's an assault on social services. When that happens, women are most impacted. When child care spending is slashed, it creates a roadblock for women looking to re-enter the workforce as daycare costs rise. We know that women are more likely to be the ones to care for an elderly parent, so when we see cuts to home care and when we see long-term-care beds that are not available, we know that the burden of caring for our family members as they age ends up on the back of a woman.

When schools close, women are the ones who end up taking their children further and further to get to the school that is remaining open. Fundraising happens in schools because the government is not funding them at appropriate levels. Who do you think is doing that fundraising? The vast majority of it is being done by women.

It's women, it's moms who are being affected by the policies of this government in a negative way.

As New Democrats, we believe fundamentally in fairness. I would suggest that this government needs to take a real hard look at how to make life more fair for women in Ontario.

I'm going to end by quoting Agnes Macphail, a woman who stood in this very chamber. What she said is, "Never apologize. Never explain. Just get the thing done, and let them howl."

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to remind the people of Ontario of a few things that were in the throne speech. These petitions were presented to me. They read as follows:

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

"Whereas by 2010, Dalton McGuinty's new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and

businesses buy" and use every day. Just a few examples are: "coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services;" home care; "veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements"—the list goes on; and

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

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

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

I'm pleased to sign it, support it and hand it to Quinton, one of the pages, on his last few days here.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

"Save Our Child Care! Ontario Faces Dramatic Cuts to Subsidies

"Whereas in the 2006 budget, the McGuinty government allocated \$63.5 million for child care for each of the next four years. Each year since, \$63.5 million went to support our vital child care services;

"Whereas if the province does not continue this funding in the 2010 provincial budget, municipalities will have no option but to make dramatic cuts to child care subsidies, destabilizing the entire system;

"Therefore, be it resolved in the 2010 budget, 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; and

"(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 the child care system remains stable and sustainable."

I am in agreement and will sign my name thereto.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This petition was sent to me by a group of people on Symington Avenue who want to stop unlawful firearms in vehicles. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the growing number of unlawful firearms in motor vehicles is threatening innocent citizens and our police officers;

“Whereas police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

“Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and being found in motor vehicles; and

“Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver’s licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

“We, the undersigned citizens, strongly request and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, entitled the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2009, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving unlawful firearms in our communities.”

Since I agree with the petition wholeheartedly, I am certainly delighted to sign my name to it. I’m going to give it to legislative page Julia to present it to you right now.

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have petitions provided to me by Ms. I.K. Raymond of Kitchener and Michelle Freeman of Kitchener, which read:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes yet again on Canada Day 2010 with his new combined 13% GST, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty’s new 13% combined GST will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as: coffee, newspapers and magazines, gas at the pumps, home heating oil and electricity, postage stamps, haircuts, dry cleaning, home renovations, veterinary care, arena ice and soccer field rentals, Internet fees, theatre admissions, massage therapy, funerals, condo fees, courier fees, fast food sold for under \$4, bus fares, golf green fees, gym fees, snowplowing, bicycles, taxi fares, train fares, domestic air travel, accountant and legal services, and real estate commissions;

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

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

Pursuant to the standing orders, I affix my name thereto.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the people of Ontario expect this Legislature to be a model of decorum and respect; and

“Whereas the people of Ontario expect members of the Legislature to conduct themselves at all times with dignity and to at all times show respect for our treasured institutions, including”—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. Is that petition certified by the table?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I think it’s certified.

Interjection: I don’t think so.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It must be certified by the table.

Petitions? Member from Ottawa–Orléans.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Phil McNeely: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario”—this is from Calvine Wilson students Terah-Rose Labelle, Robyn Burman, Kristal Church and many others:

“Whereas the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its 2007 report, concluded that without dramatic reductions in human-induced carbon dioxide emissions, climate change may bring ‘abrupt and irreversible effects on oceans, glaciers, land, coastlines and species’; and

“Whereas no one group, country or continent is responsible for climate change, but where all human beings are collectively responsible for solving the problem; and

“Whereas the production of greenhouse gases in Canada has increased by 27% over 1990 levels; and

“Whereas our elected leaders have a responsibility to report to the public on their actions with respect to halting climate change for the sake of accountability; and

“Whereas youth in particular have a special interest in this issue, being those that will inherit this earth, our only home;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario swiftly pass Bill 208, An Act to increase awareness of climate change.”

I will put my signature to this petition and send it up with Daria.

TAXATION

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

“Whereas the McGuinty government’s plan to harmonize the PST and the GST will result in Ontario taxpayers paying 8% more for a multitude of products and services; and

“Whereas the 8% tax increase will increase the cost of services such as housing and real estate services, gasoline, hydro bills, home heating fuel, Internet and cable bills, haircuts, gym memberships, legal services, construction and renovations, car repairs, plumbing and electrical services, landscaping services, leisure activities, hotel rooms, veterinary services for the family pet and even funeral services; and

“Whereas Ontario taxpayers cannot afford this tax grab—particularly in the middle of a recession;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to

abandon the sales tax increase announced in the 2009 budget.”

As I am in complete agreement, I have affixed my signature and given it to page Jordan.

1550

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: This is a petition to the Parliament of Ontario. It’s about a total ban on handguns. It reads as follows:

“Whereas only police officers require handguns to do their job; and

“Whereas handguns are the weapons of choice of drug dealers and criminals; and

“Whereas we have lost too many people to handgun violence; and

“Whereas there is no reason to have a handgun in a home, car or on a person in the city of Toronto;

“We, the undersigned residents, support and request a total ban of all handguns in Toronto and the province of Ontario.”

I agree with the stop-the-handgun movement in Toronto, and I will sign my name to this petition.

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition provided to me by Fred Spitzig, the owner of The Blitz, a club in Cambridge, which reads:

“Petition to stop the HST on gym memberships:

“On March 26, 2009, the Ontario government announced the introduction of a single harmonized sales tax (HST) on July 1, 2010.

“However, the implementation of this tax will cause an 8% increase in the cost of gym memberships, such as The Blitz memberships. It is well documented that a regular routine of strength and cardio training combined with balanced nutrition can prevent or significantly lower the risk of developing many diseases, thereby lowering the need for medical attention for the treatment of those diseases, and thereby reducing provincial health care costs. The proposed tax may generate funds for the provincial government, but lead to greater costs in health care and poorer health for Ontarians who cannot afford the increased cost of their memberships.

“We, the undersigned, feel it is unfair to tax people for getting fit and building a healthier Ontario.

“We call on the Legislature of Ontario to stop the intended introduction of the harmonized sales tax on fitness memberships.”

Pursuant to the standing orders, I affix my name thereto.

PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Earlier today, the member for Ottawa Centre

tried to introduce a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads as follows:

“Whereas the people of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I have to read this petition—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): No, you’re not going to read the petition, because it’s a petition that has not been certified by the table. I will not allow the petition to be read into the record, and I will continue to stand here and not allow that petition to be read into the record. I do not believe that it has been certified by the table, and I’m not going to rule on a petition that has not been certified by the table.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The Clerk has indicated to me that she will not certify the petition, as she does not feel that it falls within the authority of the Speaker. I do believe that it does fall within your authority, Mr. Speaker, as we are asking for you to seek an apology from the opposition for the behaviour that they demonstrated, which was in violation of standing order 23(1).

“In a debate”—granted, this is not a debate, but during the speech from the throne on Monday—an opposition “member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he or she speaks disrespectfully of Her Majesty or any of the royal family, or the Governor General, or the administrator of Canada, or the Lieutenant Governor, or the administrator”—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just remind the honourable member that during the delivery of the throne speech, the Speaker is not in the chair of the House. The chair was occupied by the Lieutenant Governor. I have no authority to intervene in the proceedings when the Lieutenant Governor is occupying this chair.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Respectfully, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: This is a regrettable incident. I’m loathe to see the table brought into this type of debate. It’s a regrettable sort of thing. Perhaps, Speaker, this matter could be discussed after today’s proceedings in an effort to resolve concerns that people might have. Quite frankly, I suspect it would be more appropriately done by way of a discussion after today’s proceedings.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): To the honourable member, I would very much welcome, as I have commented before, a discussion to take place amongst the members regarding petitions because there are petitions that—in this case—I do not think are appropriately delivered in this House. Quite honestly there are no rules. Somebody could stand up and have a petition that is 15 minutes long and use the whole period for petitions.

I would welcome a discussion to take place with the House leaders. If the matter is of importance to the members, let’s forward this to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly and undertake a comprehensive review of petitions and the delivery of petitions within the chamber.

Petitions? Member from Peterborough.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today that has been certified.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its 2007 report, concluded that without dramatic reductions in human-induced carbon dioxide emissions, climate change may bring ‘abrupt and irreversible effects on oceans, glaciers, land, coastlines and species;’ and

“Whereas no one group, country or continent is responsible for climate change, but where all human beings are collectively responsible for solving the problem; and

“Whereas the production of greenhouse gases in Canada has increased by 27% over 1990 levels; and

“Whereas our elected leaders have a responsibility to report to the public on their actions with respect to halting climate change for the sake of accountability; and

“Whereas youth in particular have a special interest in this issue, being those that will inherit this earth, our only home.

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario swiftly pass Bill 208, An Act to increase awareness of climate change.”

I'm presenting this petition on behalf of Kareen Wilson, and I will affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 10, 2010, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to the government motion, which is of course the throne speech that we heard the other day.

When I go across this province, when I travel Ontario, the one thing that I hear constantly and consistently from the families I speak to is this: They're worried. People are worried in this province. They're worried about the well-being of themselves and the well-being of their families, and they're worried about the future of this very great province that they call home.

Ontarians know that times are tough and that these particular times are like no times we've ever seen in our recent history. They recognize that the scope of the challenge before us is quite great, but they expect their government to rise to the challenge. They expect their government to make a difference because, in the depths of this recession, families are counting on their elected leaders for solutions that will support them more than ever before.

There's no question that this is not an easy challenge, but it's a challenge to which the government must rise because Ontario families need help and they deserve to get that help.

The Ontarians my colleagues and I have spoken with since Monday's throne speech tell me they have no problem with some of the language in the throne speech, but what they were really shocked about was what wasn't in the throne speech. What Ontarians are really shocked and dismayed at, which is truly telling about this government's real priorities, are the things that the government did not include in Monday's throne speech. In fact, what worries me the most is the stark absence of any reference whatsoever to the very real challenges that are facing so many Ontarians today; that there was no remark whatsoever in the throne speech about how families are struggling.

1600

It's clear what Ontarians were looking for in this week's speech. They were looking for a plan to create more jobs; they were looking for some help in their retirement—a plan to protect our health care and to make life more affordable.

Unfortunately, what we saw amounts to lots of talk but little action.

On the issues that families are telling us really matter, Ontarians saw absolutely no commitment by this government to take action.

Do you know what? We don't disagree. Talking about developing water expertise and establishing long-term plans to strengthen Toronto's position as a global financial centre: These are worthy points of discussion. We would agree with that. But what this government chose to focus on in its throne speech entirely ignores what should be the immediate and obvious task at hand, and that is helping the Ontario families who need help now.

This government had a responsibility to prove it's able to both walk and chew gum, to address the challenges that so many families in this province are facing today. Blue-sky rhetoric and lofty schemes may make a government look like it's keeping busy, but all the hot air in the world is not going to comfort a family that is struggling just to pay the heating bill. In fact, there's nothing—there's nothing at all—in this government's throne speech that will help families make ends meet in the difficult months that lie ahead.

There's nothing in the throne speech that will open emergency rooms that have already been closed and will hire nurses that are facing layoff. I remind the House that front-line health workers are being laid off and surgeries are being cancelled and deferred right now. That's happening right now, today, in communities across the province.

People are worried about their jobs right now. Older Ontarians are worried and anxious about their pensions. They're worried and anxious about their pensions right now.

The fact is, this province's near-term challenges could not be more painfully obvious, yet this government has chosen to neglect Ontario's immediate challenges almost

entirely in this sham of a speech from the throne. You can visit nearly any community in the province, and you'll hear the alarm bells going off. But what does the Premier do? He reaches out and he hits the snooze button.

Unfortunately, pretending a problem isn't there does not make it go away. Hiding under the covers isn't going to make the problems that Ontario families are facing go away. Avoiding having to deal with a problem by trying to change the channel, with vague and dubious plans that may see the light of day sometime in the distant future, doesn't make the problems that are actually before us here and now suddenly go away. As much as this government might like to believe it, ignoring problems doesn't make them go away.

The recipe for addressing today's challenges is finding pragmatic, workable, common-sense solutions to the very real challenges that are before us. It's not as if many of the answers aren't already there. In fact, Ontarians have been pretty clear about where they think this government should start, not with pie-in-the-sky ambitions that may find fruition when the recession is over and when the sky finally clears, but with the kind of level-headed ideas that have always made our province work.

In fact, the only thing Ontarians were looking for in this throne speech was just a little bit of common sense and some smarter thinking, such as:

- an Ontario jobs-first policy that would ensure that job creation incentives are used to build skills capacity here in the province, instead of what this government is doing, which is sending more money overseas;

- a buy-local approach to public procurement that would strengthen local economies and create jobs by keeping investment closer to home;

- proven health reforms that actually stop the cuts to our hospitals and save us money in the long run, starting, for example, with improvements to our home care system to ease the burden on hospitals, focusing on disease prevention, for example, and healthy living as well; and

- a pragmatic retirement plan, like the one that New Democrats have proposed, a common-sense plan that would actually give Ontarians the assurance of some stability and security as they age.

These ideas are only radical in that they are actually proven to work. They're the kinds of things that can deliver help when it's necessary and when it's actually needed, which is right now. These are the kinds of pragmatic things that this government should have been talking about in the throne speech. I'm dumbfounded as to why the government would craft a throne speech built entirely upon a collection of vague ideas that it may attempt to deploy in the future, when it should have been talking about the very real support Ontarians are looking for right now—today.

I know that the Premier loves to spin the yarn about how higher taxes are the way of the future. He loves to tell reporters that anyone who doesn't share his dubious vision for the future is somehow stuck in the past. But as much as things change, there are some things, really, that just don't.

Whatever the pace of change, people still need jobs. That's something that never changes. People still need jobs. They still need health care that they can rely on. They still need good schools for their kids, dignity for their aging parents, a cost of living that is fair and affordable, a helping hand when they need it. Unfortunately, these things don't seem to have a place in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. And if they do, I'd certainly like to know the reason this government will give for leaving them out of the throne speech.

There are other areas, too, that this government could look at and should have signalled for some action on in the throne speech, and I'm going to go through some of them in my remarks.

For example, we weren't alone in expecting that the government would finally move to increase transparency in this chamber. I'm not referring here to the fact that we've had to submit freedom-of-information requests just to find some of the most basic information about cost estimates related to the HST, although that is the case and everyone is quite aware of that. I'm talking specifically about the independent officers of the Legislature. Given the fundamentally important role they play in protecting the interests of the public, and given that Ontarians want to see some transparency in how they're hired and fired, apparently as the case may be, once and for all, why was there no mention of this in the throne speech?

We all agree that no government should be immune from independent oversight. In fact, that oversight is vital to upholding public confidence in a parliamentary democracy. It's for that reason that my colleague from the riding of Welland, Mr. Kormos, introduced new legislation that would provide an appropriate, transparent and truly independent process for the appointment of these very important officers of the Legislature. He just introduced that bill a few moments ago. It is legislation that I hope the government will actually support. But I'm left to wonder why the government was silent on this issue earlier in the week, given the public concern over how these independent officers are appointed.

It boils down to a throne speech that addresses not the things Ontarians have told us they need but a carefully scripted treatise to give the government more excuses simply to do whatever it wants. Unfortunately for Ontario families, Monday's throne speech has left them empty-handed.

I want to talk a little bit more about some of the things this government decided to leave out of the throne speech, because those happen to be the very things that Ontarians are really, truly concerned about: things like the immediate challenges to our health care.

This throne speech includes a lot of lofty talk about reforming Ontario's health care system but no language that offers any peace of mind for families and communities across Ontario—families that received a phone call during these past few weeks to tell them that the surgery they've been waiting for had been deferred or cancelled because the hospital was out of money.

There certainly were no words of comfort in the throne speech for the nurses and front-line health workers

across the province who have suddenly found themselves out of a job; no words at all about these lost jobs which, I remind the House, actually hurt Ontarians twice, once because of the job losses, which have a profound impact on local economies, and again because these kinds of health care workers, these kinds of health sector jobs also mean that a lower quality of care will be expected for our families and loved ones as these front-line health care service providers are axed.

1610

Unfortunately, the health care changes that the government speaks of in its throne speech have set the table to potentially make things even worse. It's the kind of language we're most accustomed to hearing in discussions around health care south of the border. It's a failed model that simply doesn't work. The changes the government speaks of could have devastating impacts on patients. Ontarians are already concerned that their community care is threatened, and there is simply no justification for the government's secretive approach to health care reform. The kind of opaque language this government uses in its throne speech does nothing to reassure Ontarians and only spurs more and more worry.

If the government had a good idea or has a good idea to genuinely strengthen health care, why won't they share it with Ontarians, with the experts in the field, with the opposition? What are they afraid of?

New Democrats have some substantial concerns about the shift in hospital funding. We are gravely concerned that this government is choosing to further pursue a failed model of competitive bidding and private care, just as they did in home care, just like they've done with private hospitals, hospitals that have delivered less for more public money. This isn't our criticism. This is the criticism of one of our other independent officers. The Auditor General was quite critical of the private model of funding hospital construction.

Ontarians need the highest quality of patient care that is available to families close to home. People want to get their care close to home, and they should be able to get their care close to home, but we're simply left to wonder what those proposed reforms that the government spoke of in the throne speech are going to actually mean. In fact, where Ontarians are looking for clear answers, the government is simply showing them much more confusion.

The government talks about accountability in health care but won't tell us what proposed new measures they have in mind and what those measures are truly all about. Will we see Ombudsman oversight of hospitals, for example, or is this government moving toward linking executive pay to patient outcomes? If the government truly was working to introduce meaningful transparency and accountability in our health care system, as New Democrats have long called for in numerous private members' bills and numerous motions, it should speak clearly and say so, but it shouldn't leave Ontarians to wonder. Health care in Ontario should be premised on providing the utmost quality, close-to-home care. What

we've heard in the throne speech hints at picking winners and losers and pitting people and communities against one another, a model that Ontarians have roundly rejected.

We still don't know what the full plan for this government's new hospital funding system is, because the government has refused to be clear about its intentions. Rather than sharing a clear plan with stakeholders, with the opposition and all Ontarians, the government has preferred to once again put politics first and roll out its so-called reforms in dribs and drabs. Ontarians don't know what's in store for them. They don't know what's in store for the health care system that they rely on, that they count on. It's simply an inexcusable way to launch a new model of hospital funding. Rather than open communication and consultation with the public, this government seems to be choosing to further open the door to American-style reforms—and shame on them for that. All the while, they're refusing to confirm or corroborate what they truly have in store for our health care system.

New Democrats are concerned. We're tying funding procedures—trying to put people's health problems in a box and solve them all separately. It seems to me a bit of a risky situation. Research shows that we have to take a holistic approach to people's health. This is what all the research shows, and yet this government is looking at parcelling off procedures and funding them all separately. In some cases, we fear people won't be able to get the kind of procedures they need without travelling significant distances. What we think the government should be doing is treating patients like people, not like widgets and not like problems.

Ontarians want excellent patient-based care, but we need to understand the system as a whole and not just pick out the procedures and health care facilities that will garner the most support. The road this government seems to be taking is going to have a devastating impact on smaller and rural hospitals, smaller community hospitals. We already see that happening in Ontario now. The very ones that have already had a number of cuts, had emergency rooms close in places like Port Colborne and Fort Erie, these are the very kinds of hospitals that will not do well with this government's plan.

Families in Ontario have been very clear, as have New Democrats: We simply don't want or need a health care system that picks winners and losers. Ontario's wounded health care system needs consistent policy, meaningful long-term planning and sustainable support.

The government says it will create an independent expert advisory panel. Well, New Democrats have long supported research and clinical guidelines, but the government hasn't yet been clear just what it plans to have this panel even do. Is it just a smokescreen for introducing a series of competitive mechanisms into our system, or is this actually a move toward higher quality care? We need to know how any new system of clinical guidelines will fit within the existing framework. What about the existing avenues for expert advice, such as the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences? This has been

in existence since 1992 and is the body responsible for clinical guidelines right now. So why the change? Why is this change being brought forward? What will it mean for Ontario?

The government is also proposing to review the Public Hospitals Act, but it won't tell Ontarians why or for what reason they're doing that. I can remind the House that New Democrats have proposed changes to the Public Hospitals Act ourselves dozens of times in the last number of years. Every single time that we brought these proposals forward, they were rejected by the government. This is a vital move if we are going to take on some of our hospital issues and if we're going to take them on seriously. There are some really major problems that people are experiencing in Ontario when it comes to their hospitals and the health care they get there, but the government, again, instead of being open and transparent, has chosen secrecy instead of a process that everyone can engage in.

The question becomes, will the government finally go far enough and recognize the contribution of all health professionals and community health partners? We know that nurses and midwives have long asked for changes to hospital advisory committees. These health professionals have told this government time and time again that if Ontario wants to get serious about full collaboration in our hospitals, the full spectrum of health care providers must be represented on these advisory committees.

Will the government clarify just what they're going to be reviewing, or will this just be a quick move to ram through changes the government knows most Ontarians are going to oppose instead of dealing with the real problems? They need to be part of any discussion about meaningful long-term changes to our health care system.

If this government wants to talk about efficiencies in health care, it should start by cleaning up its own house. I note that the throne speech contained no mention of any promise to stop directing scarce public dollars away from the pockets of the government's friends and into front-line care, where it's truly, truly needed.

The lack of meaningful language on protecting Ontario's health care system is perhaps eclipsed only by the complete absence of any real action on pensions and jobs. At a time when thousands of people have received pink slips, Ontarians expected to hear details of a real plan to get people back to work, to get this province back to work. Unfortunately, that's not what Ontario families heard on Monday. The vision in this government's throne speech is too rooted in giving up control of Ontario's economy to large outside interests. That's what this government thinks is the right direction. For example, why sign on to the Harper government's Buy America deal when it could tie the hands of the provincial government and municipalities to use local tax dollars to create local jobs?

Interjections.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's interesting to hear the way that the House receives this little salvo because, really, our tax dollars should be used to put our people back to

work, yet the Premier of this province would rather be best buddies with the Prime Minister of this country and sell all our jobs across the border.

1620

For example, public infrastructure projects that are being constructed in local communities, whether it's hospital construction, school construction, roads, bridges, transit systems, water and sewer, all of those things—these are the kinds of things being funded by our own tax dollars that could be putting Ontario workers back to work. But we will only get Ontarians back to work in these kinds of projects if we are allowed to put in place a policy that actually favours our own workers and our own companies. Unfortunately, the government thinks that it's not necessary to do that. They're not putting anything place. In fact, what they're doing is signing on to a deal that does the exact opposite, that tells municipalities and our province that we are not allowed to, that we will no longer be able to put in place local procurement policies for infrastructure and stimulus funding projects. It's wrong-headed.

If we had full employment, if we had nobody unemployed in this province, then perhaps, but that's not the reality, and we know it's not. There are lots and lots of people—hundreds of thousands of people—still out of work, not able to get a job, yet this government is prepared to get rid of one of the few tools that we have at the municipal and provincial levels to get people back to work. It's absolutely unacceptable.

Here's another one: Why forbid the OPG from being a leader in renewable energy? Here we have Ontario Power Generation, a publicly owned company, not allowed to bid, not allowed to be in the game of green energy in this province. The unfortunate reality is that a leader in renewable energy could be OPG—could be—but not in Ontario, not with Dalton McGuinty at the helm. Why? Because he would rather invite foreign giants like Samsung and the American giant NextEra Energy into the province instead of creating that green energy opportunity with our own public companies.

Why sell off Ontario's crown jewels when it's only existing provincial policy that prevents these crown corporations from using their expertise and resources to create jobs here in Ontario? Let's do the math. Crown corporations currently contribute as much as \$4 billion to the provincial treasury—that's \$4 billion for schools, \$4 billion for roads, \$4 billion for hospitals—every single year, year in and year out. If we sell them, they'll pay about \$1 billion in taxes, leaving about \$3 billion of profit for somebody else. In what world does that kind of thing make sense? It seems like a raw deal to me. The government says that they're going to find a way to make that deal work. Well, we're waiting. We're waiting.

We're also waiting to see the government stand up for Ontario jobs. Public money and natural resources should be put to use to create jobs here in Ontario. We have said it before, and we will continue to say it: That needs to happen. Unfortunately, the McGuinty government seems happy to see those jobs shipped away. Ontario needs a

comprehensive program that would ensure that whenever it is economically feasible, provincial and municipal procurement jobs get preference to Ontario- and Canada-made projects—period. It's very simple, very fundamental.

We also need to see that Ontario's resources are processed here in Ontario. We don't want to see our precious resources, particularly in northern Ontario, just pulled up out of the ground and then sent all around the world to be processed. In other words, those good, value-added jobs are being sent all around the world when they should be kept here in Ontario so that we can put Ontario workers to work.

We need to allow smaller and mid-size Ontario companies to achieve the scale they need to export and successfully compete in global markets, creating good-paying jobs for Ontarians. Despite what the government tells us, the harmonized sales tax, corporate tax cuts and tax giveaways to profitable banks simply are not going to create jobs. These kinds of tax policies do not create jobs.

High-wage, good-quality jobs will come, but we need to be smart about it. New Democrats believe in creating a pro-investment tax regime, certainly, a tax regime that directly rewards job creation. How? By making sure that those tax incentives that are going into plant machinery, new employment, information technology, and workplace skills are tied to jobs. That's what we'd like to see.

The government's harmonized sales tax is going to cost the treasury of this province—I say this everywhere I go, and people don't believe it—\$4 billion each and every year—\$4 billion. People say to me, “How can that be? Isn't there a huge deficit that the province is facing?” “Absolutely, there's a huge deficit,” I say. Well, then why would the government bring forward a tax policy that blows a hole in the revenue stream to the tune of \$4 billion every single year? It makes no sense whatsoever.

Corporate income tax reductions alone are going to cost the treasury \$2.4 billion annually—\$2.4 billion in corporate income tax reductions. We don't believe that these tax cuts are the best possible use of our money. We don't believe that \$10 billion per year going out the door is the right thing to do. Targeting those funds to create the kind of jobs that we want, good-paying jobs in this province: That's smart policy, not these no-strings-attached, huge corporate tax giveaways that really don't achieve a single thing at all and where there are no jobs guaranteed whatsoever.

In particular, the targeting of funds to jobs is important, but creative and timely use of tax credits for new investments and new hiring in Ontario, as they already do in Quebec—it's not like these ideas are not being used, and used successfully, in other jurisdictions, places like Quebec, Manitoba and other provinces—is a much more effective way of creating jobs. It's working. It's successful in other jurisdictions, but this government isn't interested at all in those kinds of policies.

In our forestry and mining sectors, Ontario must work to create more value-added jobs. A value-added strategy in forestry would mean more jobs making hardwood

flooring and doors, engineered wood products, cabinets, furniture, and less unprocessed lumber simply being shipped out of the province. Whenever possible, the processing of Ontario resources should be done in Ontario and not in outside jurisdictions.

Again, I say very clearly that New Democrats are bringing these issues to the table every single day in this Legislature. Whether it's Gilles Bisson, the member for Timmins–James Bay; France Gélinas, the member for Nickel Belt; or Howard Hampton, the member for Kenora–Rainy River, they are constantly on their feet, ringing the alarm bells for the people of northern Ontario, trying to get the government to pay attention to the fact that communities in the north are shutting down, literally. They're becoming ghost towns, because there are no jobs for their people. The mill closes. What happens? There's no money in the economy. All the stores close. The people move away. There's no opportunity for young people. In some of the towns I've visited in northern Ontario, there are no young people. They joke, to try to make themselves feel better, but they're becoming retirement communities, not necessarily because they want to be retirement communities, but because the young people have no opportunity there and are forced to leave. Entire towns are being decimated while this government snoozes and puts forward a throne speech that doesn't talk about these issues at all. It's an absolute shameful state of affairs.

1630

It's really unacceptable that the government hasn't brought forward anything in regard to job creation, particularly when we know that people are really suffering. That's exactly what they wanted. They wanted to hear some real hope about jobs, not just some pie-in-the-sky plans like the throne speech laid out for the future, but jobs for today, jobs for the here and now. That's what people wanted to see and they were sorely disappointed.

One of the other things that was missing from the throne speech was any discussion at all about people's retirement income. There's an entire national debate going on about retirement income and pensions. There's been nothing said by this government on the pension issue.

New Democrats have been travelling this province for years now talking to people about pensions. The MPP for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek recently was on tour, not even quite a year ago, talking to people about pensions and income security in retirement. Did the government even say a word about pensions in their throne speech? Absolutely not. It's outrageous, when we know that two out of every three Ontarians do not have a workplace-based pension plan.

It was really clear in the Harper budget that the federal government has no intention whatsoever of addressing the pension issue; no expectation at all was left that there was going to be expansion of the CPP or that there was going to be any kind of attention to the pension issue in this country. Obviously, it then falls on this government to begin to address the crisis in retirement incomes for

the people of Ontario. It's incumbent upon them to take on that issue.

People are very, very worried about whether they're going to be able to make ends meet when they retire. It is a huge public policy issue that this government is simply turning a blind eye to, and that's unacceptable. People work hard all their lives; they should be able to retire in dignity and with some quality of life.

We've already done some work on this, as I was mentioning. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has done some really good work on this, and as a result of that good work—after extensive discussions and consultations across the province—we laid on the table in mid-January something called the Ontario retirement plan.

We think it's a good plan. It would basically allow every single worker in this province without a workplace-based pension plan to actually have such a plan. But it also recognizes that some people feel that they are already taking care of that themselves. If you believe that you have a better way as an individual to plan for your retirement, you don't necessarily have to participate in the Ontario retirement plan. It's exactly the kind of forward-thinking, practical retirement strategy that people in Ontario have told us, through our consultation process, that they want and that they need, yet this government's throne speech didn't offer Ontarians worried about retirement any plan at all. There was not a word on pensions in the throne speech, not a word.

We did, thankfully, hear a few words from the government about green jobs in Monday's throne speech, but it was a far cry, unfortunately, from a real commitment to the environment and to building the green economy that we need to have here in Ontario, especially given the fact that this government has missed its climate change targets by such a dramatic margin; again, an issue that was raised very recently by our Environmental Commissioner, another independent officer of the Legislature.

We did hear a reiteration of a promise to close coal plants on the same day it was revealed that the government paid OPG over \$400 million in 2009 to keep coal plants open. And despite the fact that Ontarians learned just a few months ago that this province is on track to miss its emissions reduction commitments by a mile, there's no plan in the throne speech to get Ontario back on track in terms of the environment, and neither is there an expansion of energy conservation targets for green energy.

The government does say that it wants to promote the export of clean water technology, which is perhaps a laudable goal. If such a promise had come from a government with an environmental record less tarnished than this one, perhaps it would have received a little more support. But a pledge to develop Ontario as a centre for water expertise really does ring false, particularly coming from a government that has done such a poor job of providing clean water right here at home to Ontario's First Nations.

If the environment minister doesn't have any idea about that, he should probably learn about it, because it's quite a disgusting situation. We have boil-water alerts in communities across this province, and this government puts in a throne speech a highfalutin idea about clean water technology, and makes no commitment to make sure that every person in Ontario has access to clean and safe drinking water. Shame on them.

We're seeing in the throne speech more handouts to profitable multinationals like GE and DuPont, but there are no strings attached to ensure that we can start creating green jobs, and creating them now.

Perhaps worst of all in the throne speech, the government has allowed mining companies to stake 8,000 mining claims covering an area six times the size of the Athabasca oil sands. It's a serious situation. It has allowed construction of a 2,000-metre airstrip and the planning for a 350-kilometre railway without any consultation whatsoever with First Nations communities.

This government likes to talk about its new relationship with First Nations. The only people who think it's a new relationship is the government. First Nations know it's not a new relationship. They knew it when this government refused to make commitments in terms of point-of-sale exemptions on the HST, and now they're seeing it play out again in the Ring of Fire. Shame on you.

If you don't have a proper dialogue and consultation with First Nations, all of Ontario is going to have to regret it, not just you. It's your obligation; it's your responsibility. It needs to happen, and it needs to happen before the airstrips are built. It needs to happen before the railways are put down. It needs to happen before the mining stakes are claimed. That's what has to happen.

It's a serious situation when this government hasn't learned from the mistakes of the past. The government is creating unnecessary conflict between First Nations and mining companies while polluting the environment for decades to come. Shame on them for that.

It's regrettable that the throne speech contained no meaningful alternatives, because better ideas are there. I'm proud that many of those good ideas have come from New Democrats.

Instead of giving corporate handouts for unproven technology, the government should be making environmentalism more affordable for struggling Ontarians. We all deserve a stake in the greener future. That means the government needs to demonstrate a plan to invest in proven job-intensive green sectors. We need to create green jobs by making green choices affordable for everyone today.

We've been clear on where we think we can start: free home audits; low-interest loans and grants for home energy efficiency retrofits—these are pretty basic ideas—grants and loans for apartments and condo conservation and energy efficiency; interest-free loans for solar panels; freeze transit fares so public transit is a viable alternative for all Ontarians. These are viable, workable, pragmatic ideas, and yet they were entirely absent from the throne speech.

1640

I want to say, on the topic of issues Ontarians didn't hear in the throne speech, I believe their omission helps to tell the real story about exactly what this government's priorities are and whose interests it really represents. Some of the issues that affect Ontario's most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens got shamefully short shrift in this throne speech. Issues related to poverty were entirely glossed over, and that's particularly unsettling because this is a government that not long ago at least made overtures about pretending to be concerned about the issues low-income Ontarians face. In fact, a key component of the McGuinty government's 2007 platform was poverty reduction. Specific actions to reduce poverty were part of the 2007 throne speech. Last time I looked, we still have a poverty crisis in this province. Is it because so little has actually been accomplished on poverty reduction that Monday's throne speech contained no focused strategy or tangible commitments to reduce poverty? They're too ashamed of their poor record on poverty to even dare to mention it in the throne speech?

The Toronto Star called this situation with the issue of poverty not even being talked about in the throne speech as being "virtual silence" and "disappointing." Is this silence an admission that the government has abandoned its election promise to implement a poverty reduction strategy? Is that what Ontarians are to take from the absence of any reference whatsoever to the crisis of poverty that still faces many, many people in this province? It appears so.

The government's throne speech said nothing at all about affordable housing, nothing at all about improving people's income security, nothing at all about job security, and nothing at all about child care and access to child care. What this government did instead is to simply pass the buck onto the shoulders of the federal government and onto the backs of community volunteers. Now we're left to hope that this government will make the necessary investments in the upcoming budget to achieve its poverty reduction targets, but it's far from encouraging that no blueprint at all for that was provided on Monday in the throne speech. In fact, it seems that the government is doing its best to talk about Ontario's most disadvantaged citizens as little as possible; they're doing their best to just keep quiet about that issue. It's inexcusable at a time when there are more people in our province looking for help than ever before.

Today, more and more Ontarians are losing their jobs; they're falling into poverty or are, at least at this point, only one paycheck away from falling into poverty. That's a pretty scary situation. And what's happening? People are turning to food banks in record numbers. Food banks are being established in communities that never had food banks before.

People are waiting for affordable housing for years and years; they're on waiting lists for affordable housing for decades. The waiting lists for affordable housing are growing day in and day out, and yet not a word—not a single word—about affordable housing in the throne speech.

People are waiting longer for child care. They're facing higher tuition fees, higher student debt. These are the kinds of things that concern the people of this province.

Schools are having to fundraise hundreds of thousands of dollars every year just to be able to provide the basic essentials for kids to learn in school.

Interjection: Six hundred million dollars altogether.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Six hundred million dollars annually is being fundraised to help shore up a crumbling public school system. What is the government's response to these crises? It's to thank the volunteers for all the support that they're able to provide, to thank volunteers who work on poverty reduction, to thank volunteers who help out to fundraise for schools, and to pretend that somehow full-day learning on its own is magically going to lift kids out of poverty; full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds somehow is the big solution to lifting children out of poverty. It's shameful.

It begs the question, where exactly is the provincial government action on the issues that are of top concern to the people of Ontario? Where is their government when they need them the most? This throne speech gave Ontario families nothing on child care, nothing on affordable housing, nothing on minimum wage, nothing on income security and nothing on increases to child benefits or social assistance. Poverty reduction was simply left off the table in the 2010 throne speech, and it's unacceptable.

The government still has a year and a half left in its mandate, and its mandate clearly included a commitment to reduce poverty in the past, but without a comprehensive set of measures, poverty is simply not going to be reduced in this province. It's irresponsible for the government to abandon its election promise to reduce poverty, especially when there are good ideas already on the table. If we want to both reduce poverty and spur local investment in our economy, we can begin by ensuring fair wages for every Ontarian.

Taken as a whole, Monday's throne speech leaves one with the impression that this government is either so out of touch that it genuinely has no idea whatsoever of what families worry about when they go to bed at night, or perhaps it's simply not interested. Perhaps it's simply not interested because those needs and wants don't accord with the government's needs and wants.

Not once, when I went across this province, did I hear people talking about things like expanding the number of students that pay full tuition fees at university and college. Nobody talked to me about that over the last year or so. Nobody has talked to me about clean water technology in particular, seeing that as the way forward for this province. But somehow these are the things that this government puts forward as the panacea, as the thing that's going to help us find a new path and put people back to work.

What people talked about was the fact that they lost their job and haven't been able to find another job, or they lost their job and now they're working two or three

jobs because there aren't any good-paying jobs left in their community. Those are the things they talk to me about.

They talk to me about the concern that they're not going to be able to see their children go to university because they can't afford it, because the tuition fees in this province are the highest in Canada, almost the highest in North America. We rank 10th out of 10 on post-secondary funding per capita—10th out of 10 of all the provinces. That's nothing to be proud of at all. That's what people talk to me about. Those are the things that people are worried about. They're worried about whether they can put their kids through university or college.

Do you know what else they're worried about? They're worried about what happens if they actually do manage to get to university, because once that degree has been achieved by that student, they're likely going to leave their education with a debt that's the size of a mortgage, a debt that they're going to have to carry on their backs for a decade to get rid of, because post-secondary education is not being supported the way it should be supported in this province. The weight of it is being carried by young people. That's what people talk to me about when I go across the province.

They talk to me about the fact that there are all kinds of opportunity in our resource-rich north, but they're watching the opportunity walk away because this government has no plans to make sure that those resources that we extract from the ground in northern Ontario are actually used to put people to work with value-added jobs in the communities where those mines exist.

Go to Thunder Bay. Talk to the folks in Thunder Bay about what's happening to the forestry sector. Go to Marathon and talk to the folks there—Terrace Bay, Longlac. These are the kinds of communities I was talking about earlier. There are no jobs left in these communities.

1650

Thunder Bay has a huge problem with food bank reliance. They can't keep up with the demand. The poverty is unbelievable. The fear in the eyes of the people in these communities is unbelievable. I would ask the Premier to go and visit and talk to these folks and give them some hope. Talk to them about what can be done to reposition Ontario's forestry industry, because it can be done; it's being done in other jurisdictions. We have a hydro rate that makes our forestry industry completely uncompetitive. That's a problem. It's a problem that many of the people in northern Ontario, particularly northwestern Ontario, would have liked this government to have addressed in their throne speech, but it wasn't there. It was not there.

This is the first time I've had an opportunity to respond to the throne speech as the leader of the NDP, and I have to say I'm of two minds about it. On the one hand, in preparation for the remarks today, I spent a lot of time thinking about the extent to which I've had the opportunity over the past year to meet with folks and talk to them about their concerns and issues. I thought that, at

the very least, I would be able to bring some of those things to the table in my response today. I feel positive about that, at least insofar as it brings voice to all of the serious, serious issues that people are concerned about in this province. So on the one hand I'm very pleased and proud to do that.

But unfortunately, on the other hand, I find myself responding to a throne speech that is empty—empty of any kind of proactive, immediate hope for the people of Ontario. It's a throne speech that doesn't provide a single ray of hope for communities that have been devastated from one end of the province to the other; not a single ray of hope for families that are continuing to struggle in poverty; not a single ray of hope for people who are without work and who have been struggling without work—in some cases for well over a year—who have now lost their homes, who have had to liquidate their assets and are on social assistance; not a single ray of hope for those folks in that throne speech that came on Monday.

I still can't understand, I still can't fathom, how it is that a government can put forward a vision for the future that doesn't even provide hope for the future for the people that it purports to represent and to be responsible for governing. How is that responsible government, I ask myself. How could a government possibly bring forward a throne speech that does not address any of the top-of-mind concerns that the people of this province have? Jobs, economy, health care, education: These are the things that are on people's minds. Yet I find myself, in my first opportunity to respond to a throne speech, having to respond to something that—really, the word “disappointment” doesn't cover off the feeling that I have when I look at this government's blueprint, their Open Ontario five-year plan.

I guess they forgot that a big part of the plan is supposed to include the people of the province. A big part of the plan is supposed to actually make life better for folks. A big part of the plan should be about getting Ontarians back to work—right?—because when the people of Ontario get back to work, when they're feeling strong and they're feeling hopeful about the future, then Ontario will be a strong province again.

But that's not what we saw in the throne speech. We saw a lot of lofty ideas, a lot of insinuations about crown corporations, about our health care system—no transparency, no details, nothing specific. But what we didn't see is the government actually respond to the concerns that the people of this province have. So I've had the opportunity to do that over the last couple of minutes and the last, almost, hour.

I think the government needs to be put on notice. They can't just continue to hide under the covers and pretend it's all going to go away. The unemployed single mom who can't get back to work, not only because there's no job for her but also because there's now no child care for her: That's the person this government should have been thinking of when they put the throne speech together. The First Nations communities that don't have clean

drinking water: That should have been top of mind for the government when they put the throne speech together. The hundreds of thousands of people who still are not able to find a job in Ontario, the communities that are closing down: Those are the kinds of things that should have been top of mind for the government in preparing the throne speech. The fact that we've woefully missed our targets on greenhouse gas emission reductions in this province: That's something that should have been top of mind for the government.

Unfortunately, the government has its mind somewhere else completely, not on the very serious issues that face the people of Ontario. They should have been thinking about all those communities that are concerned now about access to quality health care. They should have been thinking about Port Colborne and Fort Erie, about the impact on a community when their emergency ward closes. We've seen the tragic impact of what happens when people have to travel far too far distances to be able to get the emergency care that they need. We'll be hearing from the coroner in regard to a particular tragedy that occurred in the Niagara region. But those are the things that should have been top of mind for this government.

The fact that surgeries are being cancelled, the fact that in my community, 1,200 fewer surgeries are going to be done next year than were done in this year: Why? A simple reason: The hospital can't afford it. The hospital can't afford to do surgeries, so they're going to scale back by 1,200 surgeries. That's just my community. Go to Ottawa: 300,000 hours of front-line, hands-on nursing care cut from the hospitals there. Those are the things that are top of mind for the people of this province, and those are the things that should have been top of mind for this government as they prepared a throne speech.

All I can say is, we have another process to look forward to, and that's the government's tabling of its budget. That's going to be coming in a little while. I'm certainly hopeful that when we get to that process, some of the things that I brought to the table today on behalf of New Democrats, some of the things that I've mentioned, that people tell me they are concerned about, actually get listened to across the way, and the government actually takes heed, takes some advice and starts to address those issues in their budget. People need hope in this province. Ontarians want hope that their health care system is going to be improved, not reduced—and unfortunately, that's what we're seeing. They want hope that there are going to be jobs for them and their children. They want hope that some of the serious issues around education in this province are dealt with. They want to see jobs created with our own tax dollars in this province. They want to see our resources putting people back to work in our communities, instead of shipping raw logs and minerals across borders. Resources that should be giving jobs to the people of Ontario are instead being processed, being manufactured elsewhere.

1700

These are the kinds of things that I'm hopeful the government will deign to address in their budget, be-

cause, Lord knows, it wasn't in the throne speech, and shame on them for that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. McNeely assumes ballot item number 7, Mr. Arthurs assumes ballot item number 28, Mr. Ruprecht assumes ballot item number 8 and Mr. Oraziotti assumes ballot item number 20.

Further debate?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak on the throne speech. I will be dividing my time with the member from Ottawa–Orléans. I'll probably be speaking for about half my time, and the member from Ottawa–Orléans will be speaking for the other half.

It is a great pleasure for me to speak on the throne speech and the Open Ontario plan, a plan which really puts forward a vision for the future economy of our province, a vision for what 21st-century Ontario should look like.

I think we have amply debated in this Legislature the economic disorder we went through globally last year, in 2009. It was a tough year; it was a very tough year. Both here in Ontario, at home—almost 300,000 people lost their jobs in our great province—and across Canada and the world, globally, this was a very significant recession.

The question becomes, as we are starting to recover from this recession, what government should be doing, and that's what this throne speech is addressing. What it's doing is putting forward a road map to build an economy in Ontario for the 21st century.

We're not putting our heads in the sand, because that's not the approach we should be taking. What we should be doing is planning for the future, and that is why the Open Ontario plan puts forward a five-year plan to build a stronger economy and creates a plan to create jobs in Ontario. That's what the people of Ontario want. What this government will be delivering through this throne speech, for the people of Ontario, is: How can we have those jobs? What do we need to do, and in what sectors, to be able to create those new jobs? We also know, because of the reorganization of the global economic order, that we have to look at new ways. We have to look at areas where Ontario has capacity to create those jobs.

We also need to make sure that we compete globally. Ontario is in a position to compete globally for investment so that we can create jobs right here in Ontario. Our competition is not nationally just in Canada, with Alberta or Quebec or British Columbia. We do not do business that is limited to North America only. We need to make sure that we are able to compete globally around the world so that we can help Ontarians right here.

We've already started taking those steps. We brought forward a very comprehensive tax reform package. We know the opposition doesn't like it and they're trying to play politics with it, but we have experts from all sides who have looked at the tax reform package and said,

“This will make Ontario competitive.” We are making sure that we have a sales tax system in Ontario which benefits Ontarians and which makes our businesses more competitive. We are reducing taxes for our families and we’re reducing taxes for our businesses, especially small businesses. I have a lot of small businesses in my riding of Ottawa Centre, and the kind of tax cuts we’re bringing—the way we’re completely eliminating the capital tax, the way we’re eliminating the small business surtax—are going to help small businesses like the ones that exist in Ottawa Centre. That’s the kind of approach we need to take to ensure that our businesses are competitive.

But we did not stop there. We also brought in a revolutionary Green Energy Act, which is already starting to create new green jobs in Ontario. It has made Ontario a leader in North America. We have governments at the federal and state levels in the United States that are looking at our Green Energy Act, which is made in Ontario, and saying, “Hey, if Ontario can do it, why can’t we do the same?”

We look at examples like the Samsung deal. I always remind people that \$7 billion—foreign dollars—are being invested in Ontario. Can you imagine? That’s the kind of thing we read about other jurisdictions in the newspapers, and it’s happening right here in Ontario. Why? Because Samsung sees an opportunity in Ontario. We’ve got rules and regulations in place that have made it attractive for Samsung to bring their foreign investment dollars to Ontario, creating jobs right here—permanent and temporary jobs; not every single job is going to be permanent. But \$7 billion is being invested. That’s something we should be proud about, and that’s the kind of strategy we need as we recover from the recession.

I also want to mention and talk about the stimulus package—the government is investing \$32.5 billion last fiscal year and this fiscal year—which is already starting to do the job. Today, a report by the Conference Board of Canada came out that talked about how 70,000 jobs have been created through the investment the Ontario government has made in our public and community infrastructure. My community in Ottawa has been quite fortunate to see a lot of those jobs being created in my city. Through the 2009 budget, the McGuinty government has invested almost \$257 million in Ottawa just last year, which is significant.

We have invested about \$124 million in things like the knowledge infrastructure in Ottawa. Carleton University, which is in my riding, has received \$26.25 million to build two new buildings. This is a very important investment. It’s incredible. Every time I pass Carleton University—my house is not that far from the university—I see these two towers going up. I see people working, creating new space for knowledge to be distributed, where students will be studying and getting quality education at Carleton University. I congratulate Carleton for the great job they do in research and innovation, and teaching.

Other projects through the infrastructure stimulus fund: We’re seeing in my riding of Ottawa Centre invest-

ment being made in the Ottawa Chinatown Gateway project, which will celebrate the heritage of Chinese Canadians in my city of Ottawa; money being invested in the Ottawa Public Library; creating urban multi-use pathways around the river so we can promote more use of bicycles and for people to use as pedestrian sidewalks; transitway improvement around the Albert/Slater Corridor—these are the kinds of investments. Not only are we creating jobs, but we’re also making long-term investments to ensure that people are living healthy lifestyles and living in a responsible fashion.

I can go on and on in terms of investments that are being made as a result of the stimulus package in my riding. Affordable housing is another very important one: \$6 million for a 55-unit project sponsored by Shepherds of Good Hope in Ottawa Centre, and \$18.3 million invested at Beaver Barracks, being built by Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corp. Actually, just last week I had the opportunity to put on my hard hat and boots and visit the site where the construction is taking place. The quality of work going on is incredible. This is going to be over 200 affordable housing units in Ottawa Centre because we are investing there. They’re creating jobs now, and it’s going to help a lot of good people in Ottawa Centre. I’m very proud of that project. It was just heartening to see the great work that is going on. Green building as well—fantastic work that is going on. I can essentially go on and on.

1710

I’ve got very little time left. Let me focus on two things which really made it important for me how—the right approach the government is taking in this throne speech. One is the focus on post-secondary education. I don’t think any member in this House can deny how important post-secondary education is in today’s economy. We need to make sure that people have an opportunity to get a good education because that is how we’re going to grow our economy. The laudable target of reaching a 70% graduation rate is something we should really move forward on and achieve. Creating 20,000 new spaces this year is a remarkable step, and I encourage and laud the government for doing so. I know the four post-secondary institutions in Ottawa—Carleton University, the University of Ottawa, La Cité collégiale, which is in my friend’s from Ottawa—Orléans riding, and Algonquin College—are going to benefit.

The second one I want to quickly mention is the Water Opportunities Act to make sure that we not only conserve water, but also promote water cleaning technologies and be able to export them. That is going to create jobs right here in Ontario.

Ottawa has an incredible clean tech sector, with companies that are focused on clean air, clean energy, clean water, bioproducts, green buildings and waste management. They are going to significantly benefit. These companies create jobs right in our community in Ottawa, and I’m very excited to work with them as we develop this Water Opportunities Act to ensure that we are preparing an economy for the 21st century.

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity, and I pass the floor to my colleague from Ottawa–Orléans.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The Chair recognizes the member from Ottawa–Orléans.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to speak in response to the throne speech delivered by the Honourable David C. Onley on March 8, 2010.

The Open Ontario plan will create an Ontario even more open to new ideas, new investment and new people to create the new jobs that are coming.

The package of tax reforms, which started January 1 with provincial personal income tax cuts, to be followed by the harmonization of the sales taxes, will save businesses \$4.5 billion per year and will give our businesses a level playing field with other provinces and other countries when we export our products and our services. Corporate tax cuts will follow, and they will make Ontario one of the best places to grow existing businesses and a place to locate new businesses.

Jack Mintz, the well-known Conservative economist, evaluated the tax reforms brought in by the 2009 budget and said that the tax package will, in the next 10 years, attract an additional \$47 billion in investment, increase the earning power of Ontarians by up to 9% and create an additional 591,000 jobs in the province.

Another Conservative economist that I know, Bob Plamondon, said that the bill that was brought in by our government was brilliant, "but we're going to have a hard time selling it." I think there's an acknowledgement that we're doing the right thing. We know we are, and this is the right way for Ontario to go.

There are tax increases and tax decreases under the new tax reform system, and most Ontarians, including seniors and low-income families, will not experience a significant change in their taxes. Some will pay a little bit more, and some will pay a little bit less overall.

Job creation is and has been the focus of this government's actions, and the Open Ontario plan will invest \$32 billion in infrastructure to continue the job creation of past infrastructure investments.

The Green Energy and Green Economy Act, with 50,000 new jobs in the first three years, will continue to build a stronger Ontario. The first of the feed-in tariff projects are now being approved. I have something that was announced today; the Canadian Solar Industries Association has a press release. They "welcomed the Ontario Power Authority's announcement of green-lighted feed-in-tariff projects, noting it was a great day for solar energy in Ontario.

"More than 500 new green energy projects are listed and most of them solar power installations," said Ron Mantay, general manager, solar, Schüco Canada Inc. and a member of the CanSIA board of directors, representing the association at the announcement. "The wide variety of rooftops that will be covered by solar panels will go a long way to reducing Ontario's carbon footprint by offering stable pricing to renewable energy producers.

We tip our hats to the Ontario government for their championing our children's futures."

"Solar in Ontario is becoming a reality thanks to the Green Energy Act and the landmark-setting FIT program," said Elizabeth McDonald, CanSIA president. "The fact retail stores, schools, hospitals and even a church see the richness solar offers the future is evidence of the power of the sun and everyone's growing understanding of how it can be harnessed."

That in itself is a significant stage that we've got to with the feed-in tariffs.

The official opposition railed against the state of the economy in Ontario, but they should know that 80% of our exports went to the USA before this downturn and that that customer, the USA, is hurting now. We have reacted to that change by creating the conditions for Ontario to weather the storm, and with the Open Ontario plan we will come out stronger when world economies recover. That is why the Samsung projects—investing over \$7 billion in Ontario, jump-starting the manufacture of solar panels and wind turbines in Ontario, and creating 16,000 jobs—are so important.

I was pleased last summer to visit two eastern Ontario companies that saw opportunities in the new economy and were expanding their businesses to give them increased capacity to produce complex machine products. Another was responding to the need for bigger and better water-powered turbines and related equipment. This was a result of the eastern Ontario development fund, which has been very successful in holding and increasing jobs in Ontario.

I was fortunate in 2008—2007, I believe—to bring a distance learning centre to Orléans. Despite a lack of municipal support, I see that facility transitioning into the Ontario Online Institute. This will bring the best professors and the top programs at Ontario universities into the homes of those who wish to pursue this new option for higher learning. Distance learning works. We have a good basis for it, which started in northern Ontario, and we're ready to move in the new direction. Millions of families around the globe want what Ontarians have: a quality post-secondary education. Through our colleges and universities and our new Ontario Online Institute, we can provide that.

I was recently quoted in an Ottawa newspaper as saying that I "wished climate change had been given more of a priority" in the throne speech. But the lack of action I spoke of was at the federal level, not the provincial level. The fact is that we in Ontario have been working hard to green our province and our economy; in the throne speech, we called on the federal government to show the same kind of leadership on climate change.

In Ontario we are closing down our coal-fired plants, we are building clean technologies and we are supporting them. Canada must show the same leadership that Ontario, Quebec, BC and other provinces have shown. The federal government must change its position where it is fighting against the rest of the world in preserving dirty coal and supporting big, dirty oil. Ontario and other

provinces have shown the way to reduce our greenhouse gases. Canada has placed all its efforts in capture, transport and storage of CO₂. This technology is expensive and far from being a solution.

Canada must work with the provinces to put in place a cap-and-trade system. We passed our cap-and-trade legislation last fall, and we are working with the Western Climate Initiative to establish levels of pollutants for each industry. Greenhouse gas production in Canada has increase 27% since 1990, and Canada, under the current government, has shown leadership only to those who want to continue to pollute.

Ontario has taken a different direction, one of greening the environment. We are on schedule for closing coal-fired electricity plants. Through the Green Energy Act, we are creating green energy in solar, wind, water, biomass and more. Just look at the announcements today from Ottawa.

The Ontario home energy savings program has had great success, and includes the upgrade of low-rise properties—typically under three floors—under part 2 and part 9 of the National Building Code of Canada. This program has accomplished much, with more than 107,000 home retrofits, each averaging \$1,400, in 2009-10 alone. Ontario's share of \$150 million leverages a total investment of \$900 million and reduces each home's carbon emissions by about three tonnes, for a total annual reduction of about 321,000 tonnes of carbon for 2009-10 alone. This is an important conservation program that created 8,500 jobs in this period of recession and economic downturn.

This program has the potential of lowering greenhouse gas production on an annual basis, if all these types of homes are retrofit, by six million to nine million tonnes annually, which compares favourably with the closing of coal-fired plants.

1720

So we have a plan to green the economy and at the same time create jobs. The throne speech moves these vital and successful programs forward. It builds on and continues many other initiatives the government has put in place for Ontario: better success rates in school, higher graduation rates for high school, full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds and the Open Ontario plan that has set a target to raise the proportion of Ontarians with post-secondary education from 62% to 70%.

Our bold new plan for health care will improve patient care in hospitals while holding health care providers accountable for the dollars they get. Since forming government, we have given 900,000 more Ontarians access to a family doctor; 900,000 more Ontarians have a family doctor. We have the lowest wait times in the country. Now is the time to build on that success, while controlling the increasing costs of care. The plan outlined in the throne speech will do that by focusing on patients first when determining where money will go.

This is one more example of our government putting Ontarians first. That is what we have been elected to do; it's what I've been elected to do. It's why I'm proud to

support this speech from the throne and its visionary agenda. Together, we will all make Ontario better for Ontarians.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased that both members from Ottawa read their speeches, which were prepared for them, quite well. That's good.

I want to put on the record an article that is worth reading. It's from the March 9 post-mortem on the budget—or the throne speech, which is roughly the same thing. It says: "Canada's Greece? Ontario Better Get Its Act Together." Here's the important thing for the record: Former central bank governor David Dodge suggested that Ontario has a "structural" deficit that will persist and grow even when the economy fully rebounds.

"Mr. Dodge told a business audience in Toronto last week that Ontario's spending is outpacing revenue growth so quickly that the result will be a structural deficit equivalent to 3.5% of the province's economic output by 2020...."

I put a lot of faith in what he says. A lot of what they're saying here today is simply incorrect. The 20,000 students? There is no money for it. All these plans and promises are just like they did in 2003 and 2007. You can't trust a word they're saying.

It goes on to say: "Provincial deficits like Ontario's are likely to be 'very much more difficult' to eradicate than the federal budget gap, Mr. Dodge opined in a recent talk in Toronto, because provinces are the front line for soaring health care spending," which is out of control. It says the only solution here is higher taxes and user fees.

There it is. There is the former governor of the Bank of Canada. There's an article, if you call my constituency office, we'd be pleased to—it's not a politically pinned piece. This is a real, open, honest commentary on the ineffective plan of Premier McGuinty and his finance minister, Dwight Duncan.

Now, we'll see how they're going to fund these new hospitals, the 20,000 students, the water treatment, the Open Ontario. There is no chance in—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened with profound interest to my colleagues from Ottawa Centre and Ottawa—Orléans when they were talking about this document, this vision of the future. I was waiting for the word "ethereal" to come out of their lips because it appeared to me that they were drawing things out of the thin air that are contained within that document and within the learned words of our Lieutenant Governor.

They talked about how the government is doing this wonderful job, but they never once acknowledged the bad job that the government is doing in terms of job creation. They never once acknowledged why our education systems are 10th out of 10 across this country. They never once acknowledged what really the people of Ontario are asking them to talk about.

Within the body of the document there was much said about the Ring of Fire. With the greatest of respect, it is nothing more than the dream of a prospector at this point. There have been no negotiations whatsoever that have taken place with Canada's First Nations—absolutely none. We read in the paper yesterday and confirmed again in the paper today that there is an attempt by some of the First Nations to blockade it.

What kind of development plan is that? What kind of hope for jobs is that? If that's the best you can come up with, if that's the best you can talk about, I'm not sure that this is what it's really all about. They talk about our water technology. God bless our water technology; it's probably a good one. But how can we export our water technology around the world when we can't even provide clean and safe drinking water to many of our northern and First Nations communities? They talk about calling in the federal government, that old bugaboo: "When I can't do it, blame the federal government. Say that they've done something wrong."

This is all, with the greatest of respect, a lot of hog-wash.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments? The member for Durham—you have spoken.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): No, no, no; take your seat. The member for Durham, take your seat. We're in questions and comments.

The member for London–Fanshawe.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I listened to my colleague speaking about the important issues from the throne speech. They outline our government's vision for the next five years. They talk about the important things: how we can increase the capacity of our universities and allow our students across the province to attend college and university, opening up our universities for international students to come and learn in this province, which I believe strongly has the best education system in the whole world. Many people want to come and study in our universities. I think it's very important to allow those students to come to learn about our inventions, our research, our innovations.

They also talk about green energy, which is a very important step toward a brighter future, a green future. I think many people in this province are looking forward to seeing our energy come from green energy, to protect our health, to protect our environment.

They also spoke—I know the member from Beaches–East York commented in his speech that it's very important to explore our water technology, because our water technology is very important. We have so many different companies across the province, not just in Ottawa. In my riding of London–Fanshawe we have great companies, like Trojan Technologies. Many companies from around the globe come—Purifics had a contract not long ago with NASA to purify the air and the water. Why don't we explore this avenue? Because I think in the future all the fight and all the technology is going to

focus on green energy and water technology because, as water becomes less and less, it's our obligation and duty to purify that water, treat the sewer water and send it back to the river or the ocean in the way we received it. We are experts in this field. We're going to explore it. I think it's a good way for a brighter future for the province of Ontario and for our people.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: In the few moments that I have, I think one of the most important messages about this throne speech is what it wasn't, and that is, it doesn't give people across the province—people in my riding of York–Simcoe, for instance—something to hang on to. They want to know about jobs. They want something very specific. If they're not directly involved in water technology or perhaps boil-water orders, this is not something that they can relate to. They were looking for something that would tell them what opportunities would lie ahead for them. They wanted to know about the cuts that they have witnessed in the delivery of service by the CCACs. They want to know about the HST. Many have written to me about how difficult or impossible it will be for them to absorb 8% more for such things as hydro and home heat and putting gas in their cars.

We understand that a throne speech is designed to lay out a plan of the government's. But in this case, there was not a vision with a plan. There was a great deal of disappointment in the fact that it didn't speak to those issues they feel the most strongly about.

I think that one of the other contradictions is, of course, the way in which there are a number of issues that the government continues to bring up in throne speeches and never quite gets around to.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Ottawa Centre, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the members from Durham, Beaches–East York, London–Fanshawe and York–Simcoe for their comments on the comments made by the member from Ottawa–Orléans and myself.

What I would like to say is, I think it was a bit of a theme I heard from the three members who spoke from the opposition that somehow there's a lack of a plan, as they argue, or there's no talk about jobs. The whole plan outline is about creating jobs. Jobs just cannot be created out of thin air. You need to create opportunities in the province to ensure that businesses are able to succeed and create jobs. That's what we are trying to do. That is why we undertook a very comprehensive tax reform, which the opposition disagreed with, but it is about creating jobs. It's making sure that our businesses are competitive, that they can compete here in Canada and they can compete globally. When business is successful, they will create jobs. The government's job to is to make sure that there is a business-friendly environment in this province.

We're doing the same thing with looking at clean water technologies: There's another great opportunity for

Ontario to succeed globally. If we can have those companies be able to be successful and sell those technologies globally, like the company Ecoview in Ottawa, they will create jobs. That's what we're trying to do.

The member from York-Simcoe said, "Where are the opportunities?" This is how we're going to create those opportunities, and that is what we are trying to do through this plan. I think we all have to recognize the old days are gone. The way we did business in the past and the kind of businesses that operated in Ontario are no longer sustainable. We need to find new markets, new horizons, new opportunities, and that is what we are trying to do through this throne speech, so that Ontarians can be successful, they can get good jobs and make this province even more prosperous than what we have inherited. That's what we're trying to do through this Open Ontario plan. I encourage all members to support it.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'd like to begin my remarks with what I consider Mr. McGuinty's last throne speech, and I make reference to a headline on the website of my local radio station. It's titled "Liberal's Throne Speech—Out of Gas and Out of Touch." That's CD98.9, Simcoe radio.

Instead of using his last speech from the throne to change course and finally provide a long-term plan, new leadership, spending restraint and job creation, Mr. McGuinty has very clearly chosen the "same old same old" throne speech that will ensure Ontario does remain saddled with one of the worst records with respect to job creation, taxes and debt in all of Canada.

Going back to that headline, "Out of Touch," well, I can tell you there's no mention of any of the issues that people in my riding phone me, contact me, email me or stop me on the street about.

There's certainly no mention of the decision to waste hundreds of millions of dollars in Liberal-friendly consultants with respect to the eHealth scandal.

Despite the fact that it's probably been the hottest political topic in the province over the last year, there's no mention of the decision to impose a massive \$3-billion HST tax grab on seniors, families and small businesses.

"Out of Touch": This coming Sunday, steelworkers will be holding a rally down at US Steel in Nanticoke. Well over 1,000 steelworkers at US Steel have been laid off. They've been locked out since last March. They've been out in the cold for almost a year now. Families have been split apart; homes have been lost. As many in the House will know, a foreign-owned company purchased the former Stelco. The minister responsible has failed to meet with the federal government and has not met with any of our local mayors. Obviously, I can find no policy coming from this government with respect to primary industry or heavy industry. Despite all of this, Monday's throne speech really had nothing for them, no mention at all of the steel industry or any of the other related industries. I'm very concerned that what we heard on Monday is a very clear indication that this government is bereft of any new ideas.

Agriculture: There was a mention of agriculture; no mention of risk management. There was not even a mention of supply management.

Interjections.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Was this by design? I hear some carping across the way. Is this sending a signal to rural Ontario? I really wonder if those in charge of this government—it may not be those across the way—could find rural Ontario on a map.

I wonder as well if anybody here could find Caledonia on the map. We do know that the Attorney General did make it down to meet with Haldimand's municipal representatives. However, he would not meet with them in Haldimand county. These were the municipal councillors and the mayor. They had to drive over to Brantford for a meeting. I guess if you're in a Liberal riding, you get a meeting with a cabinet minister.

I suppose it's not surprising the throne speech fails to make even passing mention of the unacceptable situation playing out down in Caledonia and Haldimand county. I personally find that quite depressing. However, this government was certainly quick out of the gate last week in repeating the absolute and complete falsehood that Justice Sidney Linden's Ipperwash report, the 100 recommendations, included a recommendation for the handover of the provincial park. You'd better check that one out, most specifically the Minister of Natural Resources. There is no such recommendation.

This government can throw their unquestioning support behind a complete falsehood for Ipperwash, but it can't mention any plan for Caledonia. Again, the assumption is, they have no plan. It goes beyond being out of touch or beyond being out of gas.

The fact is we have a government that has spent us into a \$24-billion deficit this year alone and fails to mention any sort of plan to find savings, to turn things around. The fuel gauge is on empty on this one.

This government is on a course to double Ontario's debt by 2012-13, to put Ontario in the hole to the tune of something like \$245 billion in debt. However, the throne speech only devoted 24 words, something like three lines, to talk about either the debt or the accumulative deficits that create that debt.

Instead of savings plans, we get deficit spending plans, plans to spend money we don't have. I've said this before: This province does not have a revenue problem; this province has a spending problem. Deficits have risen to levels that are going to be very difficult to turn around, because of this cumulative impact on the debt. We must stop this deficit growth to ensure sustainable revenue generation in the future.

By fiscal year 2011-12, the Ministry of Finance projects the province will be raising \$100 billion in revenue. Revenue by that time will have increased 46% since the year Dalton McGuinty took office, yet expenses will still exceed revenue by nearly \$20 billion.

The same goes for this present fiscal year. October 22, 2009—we know of that earth-shattering announcement of a \$24.7-billion deficit, a deficit that was larger than all

of the deficits combined from every other province and territory across the dominion of Canada.

Every hour of every day, the government spends \$2.8 million more than it receives in revenue. At this current rate of spending, by 2012-13, as I said, Ontario's debt will double to \$245 billion. However, instead of finding savings, we see a government finding ways to deficit-spend.

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Since coming to office, Mr. McGuinty has increased government spending by over 65%. You name it; everything gets funded. Over the same time period, Ontario's economy only grew by 5.7%. So, since that same time, 2003, Ontario's debt has grown by \$65 billion, government spending has increased 65%, and yet over that same time period Ontario's economy has grown by less than 6% on a per household basis. So far, Mr. McGuinty has increased the province's debt by \$13,500 for every family in the province of Ontario.

Stimulus funding, shovel-ready: Despite spending more than \$32 billion on stimulus and promising to create more than a million new jobs, the McGuinty government has presided over a net job loss of 141,600 people—not just jobs, these are people—in the year 2009.

Since coming to office, we've seen the loss of 279,000 manufacturing jobs and what I consider a staggering expansion of the public sector—a public sector expansion well over eight times any growth in the private sector. Obviously Ontario, once the economic engine of Confederation, is now a have-not province, and we see an unemployment rate at present of 9.2%. Again, that's 600,000 people who are not working, and 9.2% is well above the provincial average.

Clearly, the evidence is there. We've got a government that's addicted to spending. There is clear evidence of the negative impact that this kind of spending has on our provincial economy, and we see nothing in this throne speech to put us back on track.

At the beginning of this year I listened to nearly 140 groups who presented to Ontario's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and deputants made something like 1,000 recommendations to this government. Again, I see no evidence of their input in this throne speech. Perhaps some of this will show up in the budget down the road; I'm really not holding my breath on that one. I'm very concerned that this government, from what we've seen in the throne speech, just really doesn't get what's been going on in the last year or two in this province.

No mention of targeted tax relief instead of what has been rolled out: the proven-to-fail corporate welfare scheme; the bad economics of picking winners and losers. Where was the initiative to reduce the tremendous cost of excessive regulation and unnecessary red tape in this speech from the throne?

It's well known that red tape and over-the-top regulation kills jobs. It's very simple. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business estimates that complying

with regulation costs the Ontario economy \$11 billion a year. In the end, excessive regulation costs us time, money and jobs and forces businesses to pay up, shut down or leave the province. The Toronto Star has an estimate that the province of Ontario is currently awash in over 500,000 regulations. Again, this was not addressed in the throne speech.

There are some ideas that have come forward, the kind of ideas that I feel farmers and small business would find heartening. One recommendation coming from the opposition: The McGuinty government should make a member of cabinet specifically accountable for the reduction of red tape along with the—we called for the reinstatement of the provincial Red Tape Commission. This commission, once established, would have a number of responsibilities, including accountability:

(1) help inform business of regulation and assist in achieving compliance;

(2) consider principles and outcome-based approaches before proceeding to impose prescriptive, rules-based regulation;

(3) Undertake an assessment of any proposed legislation or regulation and determine its economic or administrative impact. The assessment should include a review of the additional burden on business as well as the cost on government to implement this kind of legislation or regulation.

Further to the third point, we do have to remember that every time a farmer or a small business person fills out some paperwork, fills out some forms, there's somebody at the other end—a staff person, a bureaucrat in government—who has to read those forms, make a decision and send them on down the line.

(4) Review all existing legislation, regulation and forms, and undertake to remove those which are outdated and, wherever possible, streamline the rest.

(5) Establish hard targets by counting the number of regulations for each ministry, decrease and streamline these figures, and report to cabinet at regular intervals on progress made.

So there are some ideas with respect to red tape.

I want to talk a little bit about one thing that was mentioned in the speech that's going to cost us money under, in my view, the cloak of environmentalism: the announcement of what appears to be an uncostered water strategy, the green water bill from Mr. McGuinty. Given the track record, I suspect once again that this government is trotting out their latest green plan—usually these things are brought out to divert people's attention from the economy, from increases in taxation. Take a look at the costly path that's being plowed with respect to the Green Energy Act: untendered sweetheart deals with foreign companies, price hikes, and on and on and on.

As we have seen in the past, when it comes to some of these McGuinty "feel green" announcements, so often, regrettably, the devil is in the details, and while the goals of the strategy may sound good on the 6 o'clock news, I fear we're only hearing a very small part of the story. Former minister David Caplan very recently admitted

that his private member's bill to revamp the province's water system would cost consumers something like \$600 a year. Again, it raises that spectre: Could Mr. McGuinty's green water bill turn out to be yet another tax grab, again under the guise of environmentalism?

At this time in the history of the province of Ontario, when this government has spent its way to the bottom of the barrel while so many of our residents struggle to maintain their livelihoods in a spiralling economy, I do question the timing of further water rate reductions or tax burdens, or onerous red tape, for that matter. This is not the time.

The throne speech did make mention of a new approach to hospital funding. Why not? How did the LHIN approach work out so far? That's the question down in my riding. Maybe the addition of a funding model which picks winners and losers would further threaten the health of our rural health care facilities. I think of the emergency departments in Niagara that have been shut down for good. That's the work of the LHIN in Niagara, although somebody pulls the strings on those organizations. So I'm afraid that down my way we, somewhat ruefully, just can't wait to find out how this latest made-in-Toronto funding model will work out for our small-town and rural health care providers. Again, from what I've been hearing, we have a system that will choose winners and losers. In rural Ontario, we have a gnawing concern about which end of the stick we're going to be at with respect to this one.

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The Ontario Health Coalition is quoted as indicating that expanding pay for performance to small hospitals would lead to further disparities between the level of care available in rural and urban Ontario. That does not go over very well down my way. We'll wait for details, but based on early returns there is reason for concern that this will place our hospitals further down the funding food chain. If that's the case, that's clearly not acceptable, and I do put the government on notice for that one.

Education: All-day kindergarten was mentioned in the throne speech. Here's a headline from one of my local papers this week after the speech from the throne. Here's the title: "Board Expects Funding Shortfall." The story goes on to say, "The Grand Erie District School Board could be looking at a \$500,000 shortfall in funding for the first year of full-day kindergarten.

"And, according to cost estimates released on Monday, the board would be forced to charge parents significantly more than current daycare providers do for before- and after-school care in order to make the program break even.

"The cost estimates prepared by superintendent of business Jamie Gunn confirmed trustees' concerns that the province is hastily putting in place the program without giving school boards enough money to do it."

I'll continue to quote this newspaper article:

"The program leaves us with some concerns, and we're not alone," said Gunn. "The Ministry of Edu-

cation) is saying, make it work and we'll deal with it later' ...

"Gunn said that based on numbers provided by school principals, projected enrolment in the classes is 382, or an average of 22.5 students per class. Ministry funding for the program to break even is based on having 26 students enrolled per class."

Obviously this is not going to work out, and they're talking about a funding shortfall of something like \$500,000.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to my colleague from Haldimand-Norfolk. He sits right next to me, so I can hear every word, even in spite of the occasional heckle.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, no. He spoke very well. There are some things, obviously, on which I do not agree with him, because, as I listened to him, I thought I was listening to Mike Harris. I honestly thought that the days had not changed and—

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Mr. Michael Prue: There's the "hear, hear"—the days have not changed since what happened with that government all those years ago.

He talked about debts and deficits, and yet I do not understand to this day where the Conservatives stand on deficits during this enormous time of social and economic upheaval. I really have no idea where they stand on this, and I really think they need to come clean in terms of whether or not the expenditures that have been made to the social service sector, public service and some businesses were warranted or not warranted and whether or not our debt-to-GDP ratio is too high, because although I am conscious of the fact that our debts are growing, the debt-to-GDP ratio still remains among the best in the G8.

He talked about the public service expansion. I am very worried about what I heard in the throne speech about cutting public employees and cutting public services to the tune of some 5%. But when I listen to my friend beside me, he is talking about a much more serious public service reduction than that.

I hearken back to the days of Walkerton. I hearken back to the time of meat inspectors and the fact that we really require a decent, good and loyal public service in this province and that we cannot blame the public employees for what is happening in terms of the economy or in terms of the province. We need to laud them for the service that they give each and every day to the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Charles Sousa: Yesterday, I had the opportunity to be on a multicultural radio program, CIRV-FM, with a journalist on one side and hosted and moderated by the radio host. We took questions from residents of Mississauga South and throughout the GTA about the throne

speech, and they shared some of their concerns as to what they would like this province to be in the coming years.

In those discussions, we took a number of questions. The issues that kept coming up were the issues around our economy: to ensure we have opportunities to strengthen our economy, to ensure that we can build those opportunities to inspire more business investment in Ontario and ultimately to create jobs—secure jobs.

They want us to build on the existence of our agendas to date, at the same time promoting future generations.

The bottom line I heard yesterday is that people have some concerns around the leadership going forward. What they take some comfort in is that this government has shown true leadership with regard to this proposal and this throne speech, which are the building blocks going forward. We have a budget coming out in a few weeks to reinforce and to elaborate more fully on some of those issues that we spoke about in the throne speech.

The bottom line, though: It's a balanced approach. I've heard some criticism from opposition members. On the one hand, it's, "Let's slash and burn, and little care for public service." On the other hand, some are talking more about a tax-and-spend policy. They criticize the tax reform and yet, at the same time, they're suggesting that we increase the PST.

What we need to show to the public, I believe, is hope, and to initiate those opportunities to go forward.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I wanted to comment specifically on the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. I thought he summarized quite fairly—especially when he referred to the "feel green" initiatives. I liked that phrase. I think some of the members on the government side should pick that up. Everything is kind of wrapped in green fuzz. No one is against the environment. It's just a motherhood kind of attitude.

I think it's important to mention what wasn't mentioned. It's very important. Now, listen up. What wasn't mentioned is anything on pension reform. Maybe we'll hear something in the budget on that. There is nothing in here on the new-build nuclear at Darlington. There is nothing on the deficit reduction plan—24 words; nothing to even apologize on the eHealth or the OLG scandals. Selling crown assets—I'm pleading with the Premier: Don't sell Niagara Falls. Of all things, these are sacred treasures for the province of Ontario, so I beg you, don't sell Niagara Falls.

I think the most important thing here is that there was no mention of Dalton days. I think he has done a bit of polling on this. He must have talked to the teachers or whoever.

But my point is this: There is no one here who wouldn't agree with many of the platitudes of making Ontario the best place in the world. It's just the way they're going about it. It's so ham-fisted. To me, you don't spend our future today. Do you understand? You don't spend—to our pages here: Now we have a deficit of \$24 billion, about \$13,000 per person. This is your

future tuition. They just announced in that throne speech indirectly that tuition is going up. Some 20,000 new students, and tuition is going up. It's a tragedy. I can't wait for the budget. It's the other shoe that's going to drop.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, it is. Clearly, as many of the headlines said, it's Alice in Wonderland. That was one of the headlines. The other one was, "A Government with No Plan."

I am so discouraged by this whole throne speech—

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: Here is my difficulty: Mr. O'Toole is a very good friend of mine—the member for Durham—and I heard him say "saving" and I heard him say "spending." He wants to spend on some things and save on some things. It reminds me of that Christmas commercial that Canadian Tire used to have: "Spend like Santa and save like Scrooge." That's the Tory caucus over there.

In the first half of the question period—I listen very carefully to question period—the questions revolve around, "You're spending too much money." Then, in the second half—you hit the 30-minute mark, or maybe a little more sometimes—they get up and ask us to spend more money. That's very difficult, because if you do that, if you're cutting and spending at the same time, that makes the deficit even wider.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: Just balance the budget.

Hon. James J. Bradley: My good friend from Cambridge wants to balance the budget. He says that the best thing to do is not have members ask "spend" questions, because the more we spend, following the member for Cambridge's logic, the higher the deficit. But I keep hearing "spend" questions from my good friends in the Conservative Party. You can't have it both ways. You can't spend like Santa and save like Scrooge. Pick one of the two.

1800

The old Reform Party said, "Save money," and they were all for that. The Reform Party that has morphed into a different party in Ottawa today is spending a lot of money; there's no question about it. But I suspect that's because they're in a minority position. If they were in a majority position, we would see things dictated as they think of them economically in Alberta and imposed on the country. Thank goodness we have, at the present time, a minority government in Ottawa.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Member for Haldimand–Norfolk, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the comments. In fact, the member for Beaches–East York and the member for Mississauga South travelled on that finance committee. We travelled to Niagara Falls, London, North Bay and Kingston. There's still time to transfer forward some of that knowledge and information that we picked up for the budget process.

I just want to reiterate: I'm very concerned with respect to the position that this throne speech has indicated some of our school boards are going to be in with respect to all-day kindergarten. I'm very concerned for small-town hospitals, with this announcement of a new funding model that favours those areas with very high population growth.

My questions remain: What's in store for the steelworkers down at Nanticoke? What's in store for farmers? No mention of risk management; that continues to cast doubt on their future.

The member for Durham made mention of the green water bill, yet again another water bill from Mr. McGuinty—

Interjection: The “feel green” bill.

Mr. Toby Barrett: The “feel green” bill. What's that one going to cost us?

The Minister of Municipal Affairs did use the word “savings.” That's a start. He seemed to spend most of his time talking about spending. My advice to the cabinet minister across: You're in a position to allocate scarce resources; spend wisely, spend appropriately, but most important, think of some savings. Think of saving for a rainy day. Think of saving for the children and grandchildren in the province of Ontario.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

MINING INDUSTRY

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister has up to five minutes to reply.

Let the fun begin.

Mr. Randy Hillier: This question—this late show tonight—was called because of the importance of the question and the importance of good, clear, strong answers from the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry.

Yesterday I asked a question that arose out of the throne speech. The question was about the Ring of Fire and about development in the Ring of Fire. I asked a simple, straightforward question. To paraphrase: The Premier, in the throne speech, said that the resource sector is so important to Ontario's future. I asked the minister, “Will you commit to developing those resources wherever they are, regardless of Bill 191?” This requires a concrete and substantive answer if we are

actually going to move forward and develop that Ring of Fire, which I do want to see happen.

But we've heard many different, contradictory statements and actions out of the Liberal government. I guess the way I would sum it up is, it's maybe yes and maybe no from the Liberal government. “Maybe we will; maybe we won't.”

To quote the Premier, he said, “The Ring of Fire is the best mining opportunity in Ontario in a century.” That was what the Premier said. The minister, on a CBC Radio show, told northerners, “We need to dial this back. We need to tone it down. Don't get too excited about the Ring of Fire.” Then the minister came back here once again in the House and said that this is a great and wonderful resource and opportunity. We need to reconcile these contradictions. I need some clarity because we can't be all things to all people, and the Liberal government has already had their fair share of promises on this.

You've told your environmentalist friends here in southern Ontario, like Monte Hummel of the World Wildlife Fund, that you are going to protect the north. Dalton McGuinty said even in the throne speech as well that he's going to protect 50% of the boreal forest north of the 51st. He's referring, of course, to Bill 191, the Far North Act. It's an act that restricts, prevents, eliminates any development on 50%—on a quarter-million square kilometres—of northern Ontario. Just for clarity: That means no roads, no airstrips, no hydro grids, and, of course, no mines. Nothing will happen in 50% of the north. I don't know how we're going to get across that 50% protected area to get to the unprotected areas, but that's what I want to hear from the minister. That promise of Bill 191 is a promise of a vast, empty northern Ontario, a vast, empty park that is off limits to all people and all economic activity.

You've also made promises to the developers. You've promised that you're going to develop this Ring of Fire and that you will work with the aboriginal groups in the area, those same aboriginal groups who are now blockading the airstrips, which is the only way in and out of the Ring of Fire. Your promise to develop the ring was promise number two, and your promise to deal with the aboriginal groups is number three.

I'm all for development of this Ring of Fire. I'm all for working with native groups so that they can be treated as real partners and not pawns. The minister asked me if I would join with him, but I can't join with the contradiction. I want to join with him, but I can't join with the contradiction. You've made all these promises, but you haven't consulted anybody except, of course, the World Wildlife Fund. I'd like you to state unequivocally: Will you allow mining in Ontario's north to proceed without any impediments? Will development of the Ring of Fire be hindered, obstructed, impeded, restricted or prevented in any way by Bill 191?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I thank my colleague for inviting me to the late show. It is a good opportunity, I think, for all of us to speak together about the opportunities that are in northern Ontario, of which there are

many. Certainly, when we get the excitement of a throne speech, as we did earlier this week, and as part of that throne speech you have a substantial economic opportunity such as the Ring of Fire—again, an opportunity that is going to be something like we have not seen in 100 years—it's tremendous, it's invigorating and exciting and refreshing for northerners to see that highlighted as one of the opportunities we have in the future. Again I call on my colleague to join us in supporting that.

There is a tremendous amount of excitement. The member was at the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada convention this past couple of days, and he met with a number of people who were also very pleased. Indeed, our government and the Premier have made this a real priority of our government. It's part of our Open Ontario plan, and that says exactly what it means. It really is a plan: a five-year plan for how we can develop an opportunity that's just tremendous in northern Ontario, an opportunity that can deliver up to 3,300 jobs and probably that many as well in terms of construction jobs. The fact is, it's very important that we manage this process in a very positive way.

I want to actually respond to the comments that the member asked of me this morning in terms of my comments on CBC Radio when I said we needed to dial it back. I think what I was trying to convey is that we are going to be moving forward with this plan. We are going to be working with the mining companies, with the aboriginal communities and with all the leadership in terms of this project taking place. But it's also very important for people to understand that there is substantial work to be done. People are asking us whether this is going to happen tomorrow or the next day. There is a process in play that it's very important that we carry forward. We want to be sure that all those who should benefit from this great development do indeed benefit from it.

So when you talk about the situation in terms of a blockade, it's important to point out that the communities that are involved in and excited about this development also want to be sure they accrue the benefits that will come from this project. I can tell you, speaking with the mining companies, which are working closely with the First Nations that are particularly interested in this, they are very optimistic that they can reach a conclusion and reach a resolution to this that will benefit everyone.

There's no question about it: We want to work to implement this plan. We want to be sure that indeed we do this the right way. I think that's important, that we do it the right way. That's why our ministry, the Ministry of

Northern Development, Mines and Forestry, has been engaged on a day-to-day basis, working with the companies, working with the communities and, may I say, also speaking to many of the other municipalities in northern Ontario that see the opportunities that could come as a result of this extraordinary economic opportunity.

Our ministry officials brought the mining company executives up to Marten Falls and Webeque about a month ago—less than a month ago, in fact—and made it very clear how important it is that we build those relationships so that we can come to the kinds of agreements that need to be in place for this to move forward. We're going to be doing that.

So when I was talking about dialling back, it was, "Let's make sure that we manage this in a positive way." There is no doubt that our government is very excited about the mining resources that are in northern Ontario—in fact, all across the province, but specifically in northern Ontario.

We've had some wonderful announcements recently. Just last week, the Young-Davidson mine in Matachewan basically kicked itself open—hundreds of jobs being offered in that—Detour Lake near Timmins, the Lake Shore Gold operation in Timmins as well. There are so many other tremendous opportunities.

As I notice the clock beginning to run out—it's amazing how fast five minutes can go—my colleague needs to understand that our support for the Ring of Fire is based very much on a level of excitement because the Premier and our government see this as being indeed one of the great opportunities of the last century. We want to be able to make sure it moves forward in a positive and constructive way. That means we need to be able to work with the companies and with the aboriginal communities that are impacted directly. We are going to do that by developing a plan that will move this process forward.

As minister, I'm excited. As a member from northern Ontario myself, I see the potential and the value it can have. I know you do as well. Again, I ask you to join people like Chris Hodgson of the Ontario Mining Association and Len Crispino of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Join us and support this great project as we bring great employment opportunities to northern Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until Thursday, March 11, at 9 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1813.

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Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
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Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
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Hampton, Howard (NDP) Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Kenora–Rainy River Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
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Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
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