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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 30 March 2010

Mardi 30 mars 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Tuesday 30 March 2010

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mardi 30 mars 2010

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY

SUPPLY ACT, 2010

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2010

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Finance, and I move second reading of Bill 17, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I will be gratefully sharing my time this morning with the member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I thank the government House leader for sharing her time gratefully with me this morning. I'm pleased to be able to rise today in this Legislature this morning to speak to the Supply Act, an act which authorizes the expenditure of a variety of sums for this current fiscal year, which ends on March 31.

The Supply Act is one of the cornerstone acts in the Legislature, because if passed, the bill gives the government the necessary authority to finance its programs and honour those commitments. I'm going to urge, when we complete this debate, that all members of the Legislature support the bill, because without this very necessary spending, the government would be unable to meet its obligations to the people of Ontario. For the benefit of my friends opposite, that's page 1 of 44.

The government's interim spending authority for the fiscal year ending on March 31 is provided through—and this is Colin, the page who's delivering a bit of water to start the day—the interim appropriations act, 2009-10 and the supplementary interim appropriations act for 2009-10, pending the vote on supply and the enactment of the Supply Act.

Last Thursday, the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Dwight Duncan, introduced the government's seventh provincial budget in this Legislature. The 2010 budget builds on the progress that has been achieved

since 2003 and puts the measures in place to sustain economic growth in this province.

Ontario, like the rest of the world, is feeling the impact of this global economic recession, and in spite of the good things we're hearing today, clearly, this recessionary period and its impact is far from over.

The global economic recession hit Ontario harder than other provinces. Due to job losses in its manufacturing and forest sectors, government revenues have declined steeply. In fact, no other Canadian jurisdiction experienced a sharper decline in corporate tax revenues between the years 2007-08 and 2009-10 than did Ontario.

Families, communities and related businesses have been severely impacted. The McGuinty government had to make a choice between increasing the deficit or helping to lessen the impact of the recession on the people of Ontario. We opted for the people of Ontario. The government chose to invest in Ontarians as we build on the future well-being and economic prosperity of the province.

The government's short-term stimulus investments are keeping families working in ridings throughout this province, and I can attest to that within my own riding. It is assisting in keeping communities running and businesses operating. Our investments in schools are preparing our young people for the future so they can achieve their full potential and contribute to Ontario's economy in a fashion not seen in the past.

Our continuing investments in health care provide the medical care and assistance to keep Ontarians healthy. I had the opportunity over the past number of weeks to attend two different hospital-related functions that very clearly reflect on these commitments, one in the member from Oshawa's riding, which had to do with a dialysis unit being opened in the Lakeridge health centre; and I had the opportunity, just in this past week, to attend the opening of a 30-bed complex and continuing care facility at the Ajax-Pickering site of the Rouge Valley Health System.

It gives you some indication not only of the importance of health care but of the diversity of health care expenditures that the people of Ontario, through us, have been making in securing the necessary health care—both immediate health care for things like diabetes and dialysis and also to ensure that those who have a variety of other needs of a more complex and continuing nature are also being provided service in our communities broadly.

Our infrastructure investments are supporting the programs and services Ontarians value most. Our objective is to build a strong Ontario.

0910

When we came to office in 2003, we laid out what we believe to be a prudent and responsible plan to improve our schools, our hospitals and other public services throughout Ontario. That plan is delivering results.

Class sizes in Ontario schools are smaller, and test scores are higher. There are 120,000 more students in Ontario's colleges and universities because of the government's 2005 Reaching Higher plan, the biggest multi-year investment in post-secondary education in 40 years. Investments in skills training and employment supports are helping more than one million Ontarians a year to get the services they need to find and succeed in new jobs.

In the last six years, 900,000 more Ontarians obtained access to a family doctor, and patients have shorter wait times for cancer surgery, hip replacements and CT scans.

Investments in infrastructure are creating jobs while rebuilding Ontario's roads, its bridges, its schools, hospitals and transit systems, which have been neglected for a number of years.

The government's investments are protecting the environment and creating green energy jobs, including new jobs in the clean water sector. I want to speak briefly, if I can, about the clean water sector. I have an example within my own riding, a company that has been leading this field for a number of years. I know that they will welcome the government's initiatives on clean water, and at the same time we will have the opportunity to capitalize on their expertise and ask them to share some of that expertise with the rest of Ontario.

The company's name is Eco-Tec, and they're located in Pickering. They produce high-quality industrial water. One might ask, "What's high-quality water? What does that have to do with industrial applications?" I'll give you a brief example. Among the things they do is they ensure and supply on-site clean water with no impurities in it for the purposes of the non-nuclear side of a nuclear plant. Within the boiler systems that generate the steam that drives the turbines—the energy coming from the nuclear side—obviously, they have to have water within those boilers.

Having extremely clean water ensures that those boilers can run for extended periods of time with less maintenance and limited shutdowns. Each time you have to maintain or close down a boiler to clean it because of impurities in the system, much like you might find calcium in your taps at home, it means you have to bring down the entire operation, thus not only removing power from the grid, but you also have to go through all of the efforts to bring down and stop a nuclear plant from producing power for the purpose of providing energy in the province.

This local company in Pickering provides exactly that kind of expertise. Providing highly pure water for the nuclear business, obviously, is a very specialized business operation. But they do the same thing for any number of other industries, providing extremely clean water. Not only do they operate in Canada, they also operate throughout the world. They operate in India and they

operate in China. They've been selling their expertise and providing that expertise globally. I'm looking forward to the opportunities that exist for a local company in Pickering to be able to share their expertise with Ontario, and the opportunities that will be presented to them by virtue of the government's very proactive and aggressive approach through initiatives on clean water.

To move on a little bit to some of the more social functions, the Ontario child benefit, investments in social and affordable housing, increases to benefits under the Ontario Works and the Ontario disability support program, and other investments in the government's poverty reduction strategy are improving the quality of life for Ontario's most vulnerable.

We set out a strategy some years ago to address the matter of vulnerability in our communities. I recall early budget discussions and caucus discussions in which members of caucus and government members in the front benches spoke to the need to ensure that this government kept its eye on the ball in regard to those in our communities who are most vulnerable. We've done that when the economy is difficult. We haven't lost sight of what that need is. We've done that through a variety of strategies, everything from the Ontario child benefit, certainly unique to this province and unique in many ways, through to enhancements to the ODSP and Ontario Works on an ongoing basis, as well as a very direct effort in respect to the poverty reduction strategy.

That's not even to comment on our increases to the minimum wage, because obviously the best way to reduce poverty is to provide opportunities for people to be able to earn a living wage and thus to be able to invest in the economy; it's not just ensuring that people are meeting some minimum standard of living, it's at the same time to ensure that what they're doing is effectively re-investing in the economy, particularly in their own communities.

The government's tax plan for jobs and growth, which was introduced to this Legislature a year ago, is transforming Ontario into one of the most tax-competitive jurisdictions in the industrialized world for new business investment. The tax plan that we put in place will replace the outdated retail sales tax with a modern, value-added tax and combine it with the federal goods and services tax on July 1 of this year—and that would be referred to as the HST.

It also includes significant temporary and permanent tax relief for both people and businesses, and we know that as of January 1 this year, there was a reduction in personal income tax for virtually all Ontarians. The tax plan that we put together, with other recent tax changes—and this particular plan was not the only initiative we've undertaken; you might recall that just a couple of years ago we took some initiatives on the business education tax, to reduce that broadly across the province, to standardize it so there weren't disparities, so one municipality wasn't being treated differently than another municipality in that regard and so that businesses were able to compete on an equal footing across various jurisdictions

in the province. We took that initiative as one of the tax changes that we wanted to see put in place, and we are phasing that in over a period of time.

The tax plan, together with other recent tax changes, supports new business investment and is estimated to create nearly 600,000 net new jobs within 10 years. That's part of the overall tax plan. Over a 10-year period, some 600,000 jobs are projected to be created.

Since 2003, the McGuinty government's investments to support universal health care, public education, a modern infrastructure, our vulnerable citizens, a greener Ontario and lower business costs have protected and enhanced programs and services for Ontarians, both before, during and—they will—after the recession. These investments continue to strengthen Ontario's economy and competitive advantage, boosting jobs and job growth.

We're particularly proud of the progress that has been made to date, but it's certainly not over yet. Many Ontarians are still coping with the uncertainty caused by unemployment or underemployment. Companies, big and small, in this province are still grappling with the new ways of doing business. Municipalities continue to struggle to respond to the increasing demands for services.

Our work here in this Legislature remains cut out for us. I'm proud to say that the 2010 budget, part of our Open Ontario plan, will continue to benefit Ontario's families, its businesses and our communities. Open Ontario is the McGuinty government's five-year plan to create new opportunities for jobs and economic growth. It will build on the progress that is slowly, but surely, making headway toward economic stability. It lays out the measures to manage spending, eliminate the deficit and secure the province's long-term financial sustainability.

Six years ago, the government began building a solid foundation for economic growth and prosperity through its investments, particularly in education and the skills training areas. Our government recognizes the importance of developing a well-educated workforce to compete in the new global economy. Ontario's colleges and universities play a vital role in equipping people for success and preparing them to generate the ideas, the products and the jobs that will ensure future prosperity. Today, more than 120,000 additional students are attending college and university, a 31% increase over 2002-03.

I had the opportunity last Thursday following the budget to speak with Ron Bordessa, who is the president of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. I see the member from Durham opposite knows Ron well and knows the work that's happening at UOIT. I had the opportunity to chat with him following the budget, and I have to tell you how pleased he was. I think that's reflective of the sector as a whole. I had an opportunity yesterday to see Sheldon Levy, the president of Ryerson University, and he spoke in the same fashion about how pleased they were that the government saw the priority and the need, in spite of the economic climate, to make significant investments in this budget year in addition to the investments that have been made in operating, as well

as the capital investments that are being made in post-secondary education and within the context of their particular part of the field in the university sector. They know how important it is to build a strong future economy and that we provide the opportunities for primarily young people, but not always so, to have the education and the training necessary for both current employment as well as the economy as it evolves.

0920

University per-student funding is 27% higher and college per-student operating funding is 44% higher in 2008-09, compared with 2002-03. Those are significant advancements in per-student investment, both in the university and in the college sector.

About 186,000 students are benefiting in the 2009-10 time frame from enhancements to the Ontario student assistance program that were introduced in 2004-05. We know how important it is to provide assistance to students who often can't do it on their own. In many cases those students have very limited capacity for support from family and other support mechanisms, so it's incumbent upon the government to step up to the plate for the students who need our help, to ensure that qualified students, students who can meet those standards to achieve acceptance into our colleges and universities, have the opportunity that every other young Ontarian would have. I think we have a strong obligation to ensure that occurs.

The degree completion rate has increased to 78% from some 73% just five or six years ago for university students, and to 65% from some 57% for college students—the point being that graduation rates for both university and college students are increasing. I think that speaks to the investments that are made to ensure that they have the support mechanisms in place while they're there to ensure that the staff who are there teaching, the professors who are there teaching, the support staff, can help the students—those who find themselves in some difficulty—to find their way through the system. These are not easy times; it's not an easy transition for a student to move into a university or a college, and we don't want to lose them along the way because they don't have the necessary supports.

A total of some 260 additional first-year medical student spaces will be created by 2011-12. That's a 38% increase from 2004-05. Clearly, to have enough family doctors in place, we need to continue to increase the medical spaces available and ensure that those young people moving through medicine move into a practice that allows families to have the health care they need.

That's why post-secondary education remains a top priority of this government. As part of the Open Ontario plan, new commitments to post-secondary education will add 20,000 new spaces to colleges and universities in the 2010-11 year, reflecting a new annual investment of \$310 million in post-secondary operating grants. It's exactly those dollars that I was referencing when I spoke about Mr. Levy and Mr. Bordessa in the context of their role as the presidents of two of our universities. Our government

will also be aggressively promoting Ontario's post-secondary schools abroad to encourage the best students from around the world to study and settle here and contribute to our economy.

Since 2003, the government has made tremendous strides toward helping students improve their reading, their writing and their math skills in elementary and secondary schools. These programs have helped more students achieve the provincial standard on province-wide tests. Additional annual investments to improve literacy and numeracy in 2009-10 totalled \$95 million.

Since 2005, the government's student success strategy has been helping students in the grades 7 to 12 area tailor their education to their individual strengths, their goals and their interests. Graduation rates increased to 79% in the 2008-09 year, from 68% in the 2003-04 year. That's an increase in graduation from post-secondary education of some 11%. That's not to be underestimated, the importance of those 11% of students who have graduated and are now graduating. For us, often it's numbers, but when it comes down to that individual student, the one who wasn't graduating but is graduating today, that will make a difference in their life today and certainly make a difference in their life in the future. This means an additional 11%, or 16,500 more students graduating each year.

Students from junior kindergarten to grade 3 are receiving more individual attention from their teachers. We're achieving our goal to reduce the size of primary classes: 90% of classes now have 20 or fewer students this year, compared to 31% in the 2003-04 year. All primary classes now have 23 or fewer students this year, compared to 64% in the 2003-04 year.

My wife, who retired just a couple of years back, spent virtually her entire career in the elementary system. She kids about the fact that she went from high school to the elementary system and taught grades 7 and 8 and 5 and 3, and ended up later on at grade 1. Once she was there, she spent 10 or 11 years, and at times she said, "I felt like I was going backwards," in the context of the grade level. But the fact was that she was very good at what she did. She stayed at that grade level because she understood the needs of young people at that level, and she relished the achievement of those students coming in at four and five years old—they're into grade 1 at about six years old—and watching their growth in those few months she had them before her.

She'd come home at night and she would tell me about the challenges she faced in the classroom. I know there are other members of this place who have either been in a classroom or have family members, spouses or neighbours in classrooms, and they hear about the challenges that they have and that they continue to have in the classroom setting. During those years, her final years of teaching, the demands increased, the challenges of students increased, and it made the job that much more difficult. The initiatives to reduce class size in those primary classes provide those teachers now with the opportunity to spend that more individualized time with each

student, and particularly provide opportunities to spend time with those students with the greatest needs.

Early learning is also an important part of this government's Open Ontario plan. Full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds will be phased in starting this September. Nearly 600 schools across the province, benefiting up to 35,000 children, will be covered, with a focus on those areas of lower income or greater challenge. A full implementation of full-day learning will employ up to 3,800 additional teachers and 20,000 early childhood educators and benefit about 247,000 children. Our goal remains to fully implement the program by the 2015-16 fiscal year.

Each year, more than one million Ontarians rely on Employment Ontario for help in finding work or acquiring job training. Over the past two years, demand for employment and training services has increased sharply. Obviously, that won't be a surprise to anyone in this place or, I would suggest, anyone within the workforce in Ontario. In response, the government boosted Employment Ontario's spending on jobs and skills training to about \$1.6 billion in each of the last two fiscal years, with a special focus on workers affected by the economic recession.

Our Second Career strategy continues to provide financial assistance for laid-off workers to undertake longer-term training. Since its launch, over 27,000 people have participated, and another 30,000 participants will be supported over the next two years. This means nearly 60,000 participants in total since the program began in June 2008. These are opportunities for those who have been displaced in the workforce through layoff not simply to wait to be recalled into the role they had, but opportunities to retrain and prepare themselves for new careers.

0930

By August of this year, a new one-stop access will be in place to make it easier for job seekers, employers and communities to obtain the full range of programs and services that are needed.

We'll also launch the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers agreement to support skills training projects in hard-hit communities throughout this province. There's no question: We've all seen the instance where older workers have even greater difficulty in reintegrating into the workforce if they find themselves out of the employment arena, through layoff or because a particular manufacturer or company discontinues providing any service. Those older workers often will not have the skills necessary in today's marketplace and won't be conversant with the new technologies that are so important for employment in this province currently and which will become increasingly important in the years ahead.

The Targeted Initiative for Older Workers is a federal-provincial initiative to assist unemployed older workers in vulnerable communities. Any time this government can work with its federal or municipal counterparts in a co-operative fashion, it is good for Ontarians. It's what Ontarians expect of their governments: the capacity to

work together on initiatives that are important to Ontarians.

Our summer jobs program is helping youth, especially in those high-needs neighbourhoods. The program will support nearly 110,000 jobs and services for students this summer.

Additional support services include workplace-based pilots for literacy training, enhanced apprenticeship programs and improved training and employment supports for underrepresented groups.

The province has made a commitment to break the cycle of poverty. Families, children, and low-income working adults are already benefiting from our overall poverty reduction agenda. Our poverty reduction strategy has set out an aggressive target to reduce child poverty by 25% over five years. This means lifting 90,000 children out of poverty by 2013. Key achievements in the poverty reduction strategy include the expanded children in need of treatment program, which provides urgent dental and general anaesthesia service to children in low-income families until their 18th birthday, and Ontario's after-school initiative, which supports after-school activities in high-needs communities.

To assist people on social assistance in becoming more financially independent, the government has taken a number of steps:

—first, allowing full-time post-secondary students who have employment earnings to keep all of their social assistance benefits. That's certainly an inducement for those who find themselves on social assistance to re-engage in the academic sector, through skills training or college training or university training, to prepare themselves for a better future;

—secondly, changing the rules governing the receipt of earnings so that people can keep a larger portion of their social assistance benefits. To the extent that we can do that, it's good for those Ontarians to feel that they can be contributing members of society from the standpoint of a work environment, but at the same time to not find that their social assistance benefits are dramatically clawed back;

—thirdly, extending health benefits to people making the transition from social assistance to employment. We've heard consistently that one of the very serious challenges for those who are wanting to move from social assistance into the workplace, particularly those with children, is the capacity to ensure that health benefits will help them bridge from the supports they have on social assistance to the supports they will get in employment. It has always been a grave concern of those on social assistance that when they move into the workplace they will lose those health benefits, either for themselves or for their children;

—fourthly, increasing the amount of social assistance benefits that parents can keep if they have employment earnings and incur unlicensed child care costs.

Those are just some examples of the initiatives that the government has been taking to assist those on social assistance as they take the necessary steps to move back into the workplace.

In our 2010 budget, starting this fall, we propose to increase adult basic needs and maximum shelter allowances by 1% for those Ontarians on ODSP and Ontario Works. This move will provide families and individuals on social assistance with additional benefits of about \$57 million in total annually. We would suggest that it has been a hallmark of this government that we've made—although some will say modest—increases to ODSP and OW allowances on an annual basis. My recollection over my time here is that, since 2003, there was one budget year in which we weren't able to achieve that, but in each of the other budget years there has been an adjustment to OW and ODSP rates to ensure that those folks continue to move along in a fashion that keeps pace with the current economic climate.

As well, our government continues to review the social assistance programs to ensure that they are easier to understand and more transparent and sustainable in the long term, so the system can continue to support those who are most vulnerable in this province.

Ontario's minimum wage will rise to \$10.25 per hour starting on March 31. That would be tomorrow, I believe. This will be the seventh consecutive year that the minimum wage has been increased since we took office in 2003. I said in my opening comments that having a wage that becomes a living wage not only provides the necessary support to provide food on your table, a roof over your head, support for your families and a level of dignity about what you do, but it also allows for investment back in the economy. That investment back in the economy supports those who are in the workforce.

Among other key initiatives in the government's poverty reduction area—certainly, an increase in the minimum wage moves people out of the poverty cycle by virtue of employment, but there are other initiatives we've taken within the poverty reduction strategy. These include an affordable housing agreement with the federal government, signed in June 2009, to deliver new affordable housing to Ontario and renovate existing social housing. More than 3,000 social housing renovation projects have already been committed as part of this federal-provincial stimulus package.

We also have ongoing funding for municipal rent banks to assist tenants who are at risk of eviction or homelessness. I recall that debate earlier on that we had both in here and within our caucus about the need for a rent bank to protect those who may find themselves moved out of the accommodation they currently have through eviction. It's better to work to keep those people in some type of housing than have them put on the streets in some fashion—they and their families.

The McGuinty government believes in a strong, universal health care system. Since 2003, the government has taken significant steps to transform the health care sector while creating a system that is patient-focused. The government has acted on Ontario's need for shorter wait times, better access to care, promoting health and preventing illness, and updating infrastructure. The government has implemented the wait-times strategy. It was

not that long ago that we didn't know what the wait times were because nobody had taken the initiative to bother measuring them or even attempted to find out what those wait times were, let alone compare those wait times from hospital to hospital and jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

The wait-times strategy has made the wait for elective surgery, from cataract surgery to cancer, faster. Since 2008, patients with complex conditions are spending 8% less time waiting in the emergency room, and patients with minor conditions are spending a modest amount of time—less at this point.

But we need to do better in each area. One of the areas we need to do better on is emergency care. We need to have people moving through emergency care, either out of emergency care where it's not necessary and/or into a hospital bed for acute care, in a more expeditious fashion. We need to see the backlog in emergency care cleared up.

An investment of \$1.1 billion over four years, which began in 2007, provides funding for the unprecedented aging-at-home strategy, which helps seniors live with dignity and independence in the comfort of their own homes. Those of us with aging parents know how important it is for them to have the opportunity, if at all possible, to be able to age at home. The alternatives are not what seniors in our province want. They would prefer, given the opportunity, to have the support of their family and the dignity to be able to live in their own homes.

0940

We've made tremendous strides to provide better access to health care since 2003.

As I said earlier, about 900,000 more Ontarians who did not have a family doctor now have access to one, 2,295 more doctors are practising in Ontario, and we've created 170 family health teams. I remember the early discussion around the family health teams as we launched the first 50 of those. I must say, as one member, I was anxious that my region, my area, was not in that first group of 50 health teams. Subsequently, I've seen the success of the Durham West health team operating their facility out of Pickering but servicing a much broader Durham West community. I've seen the success—I've had a chance to meet with the doctors, the support staff and the nurses who are working in that environment—and the enthusiasm they feel for this model that we've put in place, their capacity to work together and provide support to patients and direct their services specifically to the needs that are there, and in many cases free up their expertise for other patients by using a team approach.

Canada's first nurse-practitioner-led clinics were established, and 25 more will be open by 2012.

The Northern Ontario School of Medicine was opened. In 2009, the school celebrated its first graduating class of 55 students. Certainly, we understand the need for the provision of practitioners throughout Ontario, but even more so in northern Ontario. This can only go to help provide the doctors we need in that part of our province.

More than 8,200 beds were added to long-term-care homes across the province, and investments in home care

have expanded services to about 500,000 Ontarians annually.

We've also managed the growth of health care spending at a responsible rate, including proposing reforms to Ontario's drug system that will facilitate lower generic drug prices.

The government has toughened tobacco laws, including banning smoking in public places and encouraging more Ontarians to quit.

An expanded newborn screening program in 2006 makes it Canada's most comprehensive, with three free-of-charge vaccines for families, saving them about \$600 per child.

Twenty minutes of physical activity was introduced every day as a mandated part of our school program, as well as a new law requiring schools to follow new nutritional standards for food and beverages sold on school premises.

The government has invested significantly in infrastructure that supports the public health system valued by all Ontarians. Construction is under way or completed in more than 100 major hospital projects. These include, but certainly aren't limited to, the Credit Valley Hospital redevelopment, four new floors at the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, modernizing patient facilities and expanding the emergency department at the York Central Hospital, and expansion to various sections as well as construction, as I mentioned earlier, of the 30-bed complex continuing care wing of the Rouge Valley Health System. Just this past late fall, we opened the new emergency facility at the Ajax-Pickering site, and that was most welcome. Those are the kinds of investments that people see. They may see a building going up at their hospital or an expansion going on, but most people for the most part don't engage in that part of the facility on a regular basis. But families do see the ER—not by choice, mind you, but they do see the ER. I can tell you that within our community, the opening of the new emergency area within the Ajax-Pickering hospital was very well received.

Modern infrastructure boosts productivity, supports economic growth and improves the quality of life that Ontario enjoys. For almost 30 years, Ontario's infrastructure has been neglected. Underinvestment, aging infrastructure and growth pressures have resulted in a substantial infrastructure deficit. In 2005, we committed \$30 billion to ReNew Ontario. We are on a \$32-billion program over two years for stimulus and infrastructure spending, and we plan on continuing that.

Being cognizant of the clock, even with my distance glasses off, because I can't read with them on and I can't see with them off, I'm noticing we're down to about 30 seconds of time remaining. I wish there were more time. This is a topic that I would love to have the opportunity to speak to more extensively. Let me just say that I'm hoping that as this debate continues today, at the end of it, all members of the House will see the need to support the Supply Act and will vote in favour of that. I'm urging them to do that, and look forward to the debate as it continues.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: It was interesting, listening to the member from Pickering–Scarborough East speak about this bill, the supply bill. Like all other Liberals we hear so often in this House, he spoke of building on the progress, and he spoke of the open doors, but he didn't actually speak of what progress the Liberals have made.

I think it's important that we put on the record some of the Liberal progress that we have seen here in Ontario. We have seen a \$3-billion HST tax grab. We didn't hear him mention anything about tax increases, but we all know there's a \$3-billion HST tax grab.

He didn't talk about the earlier, \$24-billion health care tax. Now, I know they sometimes call it a premium and they sometimes call it a levy—

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Oh. Pardon me. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the member from Thornhill and the member from Simcoe–Grey as well.

Mr. John O'Toole: And the member from Durham.

Mr. Randy Hillier: And the member from Durham.

They also cancelled, in the 2004 budget, the lower- and middle-income personal tax. They've increased business taxes. They've put on their new electronics tax, of course, for TVs and computers. They cancelled the seniors' property tax credit. They brought in a \$4-a-tire tax and a multitude of new taxes on alcohol and tobacco during their regime. And of course, there was that other little one last week, or the week just before the budget, the \$53-million hydro tax. I think they called that one "an investment" but not a tax.

They've also delisted chiropractic services, eye care and physiotherapy, but there was never a mention of that in their talking about their progress. Of course, we've also seen this latest announcement that Ontario Hydro will be ramping up costs for all users of hydroelectric energy in this province.

They also talk about their Open Ontario plan, and it's a wonderful, beautiful-sounding phrase: Open Ontario plan. But what they don't talk about is how they shut the door on manufacturing, and killed our manufacturing and resource sector in this province. Did anybody hear them talk about the 62 mills that are closed in the north? Did anybody hear them talk about the 45,000 lost jobs in forestry? Did anybody hear them talk about the 210,000 manufacturing jobs that were lost? Nothing. That's part of their Open Ontario plan. Open the door to the trustee, I guess, under the McGuinty plan.

And also, what about our have-not status? We know that there was a recession, a significant recession, but nobody weathered it worse in this country than Ontario. We're the only ones to have fallen into have-not status during this recession.

Of course, maybe the Liberal government is pleased that they got a \$300-million equalization welfare payment last year from the federal government, because next year they're budgeting on getting a \$900-million equalization welfare cheque from the federal government. Is

this their idea of progress: getting a bigger welfare cheque every year from the federal government? That's what we see on this side of the House. That is their progress: spending more, taxing more, delivering less and doing it in a poor fashion for the people of this province.

I also want to speak to one other subject in this supply debate, and that is the \$25 million that this Liberal government is throwing down the drain—money from the hard-working citizens of Ontario. It's on this tax collector severance. Of course we were told that harmonizing the sales taxes will be a great boon and a great benefit to the people of this province. There will be less administration cost; there will be improvements in delivery. Most people would have thought that we would have harmonized the bureaucracy with that but, no, we didn't. We didn't lessen the bureaucracy. This Liberal government took 1,250 tax collectors off the provincial payroll and has deposited them on the federal payroll.

0950

Interjection: They didn't lose one day of work.

Mr. Randy Hillier: They aren't missing a day of work; they aren't missing a stride. They're not missing anything. In fact, this Liberal government is giving them a reward for keeping their jobs. They're rewarding them \$25 million, up to \$45,000 each. These tax collectors, members of the Ontario public service—many of them don't expect this severance; many of them don't want this severance. But this Liberal government figures, "Well, it's just taxpayers' money anyway. What does it really matter? We're just taking money from people who worked hard and sweated and laboured to pay their bills. We're just going to take \$25 million of it and give it to somebody for keeping their job." This is the Liberal idea of saving the taxpayers money: saving them money by transferring those employees to the federal government and giving them a bonus out the door.

Everybody in this province knows that severance is intended for when you lose your job, to make up and mitigate some of the harmful effects of losing your job and not having an income. That's what we all know severance is for. But this Liberal government believes it's for something else. It's there for a reward for some people—but not for most people. I know we've heard from the Liberal government that, "These were in the details and we didn't really understand the details." We often hear that the devil lives in the details in every agreement. Well, I believe that the devil doesn't read the details, and that's what happened with this HST severance package: Nobody in the Liberal government actually read those details. Had they, they could have easily gone to the union, they could have gone to those tax collectors, and said, "Listen, we can either terminate your employment and you will get your severance, or, if you forgive that severance, the federal government will take you on in the same role." But that didn't happen, did it? Nobody looked at it. The devil was certainly in the details, and they didn't read them.

We see the hardship that is happening in this province in our ridings; we see the high unemployment rates; we

see the loss of manufacturing jobs; we see the declining revenues; and we see a declining status relative to others. Of course, in our own country we are now in the have-not status. Relative to other provinces, we are in worse shape. We lost more jobs than all the other provinces combined. We have an unemployment rate that's higher than Alberta, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia. We have the highest one here, under your guidance. Our GDP, our standard of living, is lower now than one of the jurisdictions in the States that has been tremendously hard hit by this recession: Michigan. We have a lower standard of living now than Michigan, the famous rust belt of the United States. We have a lower standard of living than they do. And this government talks about Open Ontario and building on their progress. Well, I'll tell you this, and we all know this: These people are living in a fool's paradise. But what they have to remember is that a fool's paradise is a wise man's hell, and that is what they are creating in Ontario.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'll be splitting my time with other members, I'm sure, who will be here a little bit later. Anyway, I want to say upfront that I must say this was a very interesting budget from a whole bunch of different perspectives.

As I look at it from the perspective of what it means to Ontario and what it means to northern Ontario, there are some quite interesting points that I think could be drawn from what the government has put forward.

I want to just say upfront that it's unbelievable and quite interesting when you look at what the government has decided by way of fiscal policy, that it's going to put off the decision about how they are going to balance the deficit to two Parliaments from now. I just think that is unbelievable. I haven't seen anybody have that much chutzpah in a long, long time.

I've got to say that for the government to say, "We have a deficit today, and we're not going to balance it in this Parliament, we're not going to balance it in the next Parliament, but we're going to balance it in the Parliament after that," is almost like saying, "We're going to pass the problem on to somebody else. We don't know who, but we can fairly assume as Liberals that we won't be the government at that point." I just think that is really, really something, as far as chutzpah, that a government could put forward.

I think what people look to see is that this Parliament and this government make decisions on an annual basis as to what should be happening and what should not be happening to both revenues and expenditures in the province of Ontario. As I look at a number of things inside this budget, I can agree, but I can disagree also with other issues when it comes to overall budget policy.

We understand that we're in a deficit. There's nobody in this House who's going to say, "There would be no deficit if it had been us in government," or somebody else, because we understand there is a huge problem in the world economy. Ontario being an industrial province

as far as output, as most of our products are through natural resources or through industrial outputs, we are greatly affected by what happens in the world economy. We trade with everybody from the United States to European countries and people on the Pacific Rim, so we understand it's an interconnected global economy. Ontario, as such, is going to have some difficulty trying to balance the books with the type of fiscal problems that we find ourselves in today on a world basis.

So I understand there was going to be a deficit this year as a result of what happened in the meltdown of about a year and a half ago. I also understand that some of the decisions that needed to be made were not going to be easy ones as far as how we position Ontario in order to balance its budget so that it can afford the programs that we so much want in this province.

For example, there's not a member in this House who will say, "Well, let's cut health care," because at the end of the day we all understand that health care services are important to all of us. You may not need health care today, but you certainly are going to need it at some point in your life, and you want to make sure that when you get to the emergency room, when you get to the community care clinic or you go to the doctor's office, the services that you are going to need to make you well and to manage your illness are there for you. You don't want to be in a position of having worked all your life and all of a sudden finding out that in some future Parliament, health care services are reduced to the point that you have a hybrid system like what we see in the United States, where those with a lot of money get better service than those with less money.

We understand there are challenges to all governments when it comes to being able to balance the budget, but what really is astounding in this budget is that the government is putting off the decisions that need to be made to a Parliament three Parliaments from now. I just think that is unbelievable. It seems to me that we should at least, in broad strokes, be saying what we're going to do to deal with the revenue issues and what we're going to do to deal with the expenditure issues that the government in this Parliament has to turn its attention to.

On the revenue side, what is this government really doing to deal with assisting those within our business community and entrepreneurs out there to invest in Ontario so that we're able to build the wealth that is necessary in this province not just to provide jobs but also to provide the revenue we need from those jobs and the income from those corporations and small businesses that make up the budget of Ontario and allow us to pay for programs such as health care, education, plowing our roads in the winter and doing the necessary things that make infrastructure work in the province of Ontario? I would argue that that is where we need to put most of our emphasis in this Parliament.

1000

If I was the Premier of Ontario, I would be looking at what I can do in order to try to prime the pump of the economy of Ontario, because I would recognize that we

need to rebuild the revenues that we've lost and build them beyond the point that we have lost them. You would only do that in a strong economy.

What can Ontario do in order to get us to that point? As a northerner, I can tell you one very simple one: Ontario was built on natural resources. The mining, forestry and hydro developments that have happened in northern Ontario made up a large part of the GDP of this province. Ontario was built as a result of the wealth that is in the ground and in our forests, but we have managed, over the years, to change policies to the point that those industries and those sectors aren't doing as well as they could.

You have to remember that if you have a mine operating in Sudbury, Timmins, Kirkland Lake or Red Lake, or a forestry company operating in Ear Falls or wherever it might be, the supplies and services that allow those places to run and operate, by and large, come from southern Ontario. Manufacturers and the service sector and the finance sector and others are residing here in Ontario. My point is that a strong resource sector is not only good for northern Ontario, it is good for all of this province, because we all benefit when there is a strong resource sector.

I look at what has happened over the past number of years and where we are today in the resource sector, and it is no surprise. The litany goes on. We look at community after community in northern Ontario where, in some cases, the only employer in town is shut down. If you look at Cochrane, Smooth Rock Falls, Kapuskasing, Opasatika, Hearst, Constance Lake, Thunder Bay, Ear Falls, Red Lake—if you look at almost every community in northern Ontario, there has been a negative effect to what has happened when it comes to resource policy in this province. Their employers, in some cases, have closed down entirely or have reduced operations and have fewer people working for them, creating less wealth for the province of Ontario and the tax revenue needed for this province to provide those services that we think are so important to each other.

What has happened simply is this: There was a time when governments in Ontario understood that they needed to keep an eye to natural resource policy, that a provincial government needed to make sure that the mining, forestry, hydroelectric and agricultural sectors were taken care of in the sense of making sure that we had policies that allowed them to flourish. For many years in this province, governments of all stripes ensured that that was the case.

I would argue that Ontario started to fall behind some years ago. It started not entirely under the watch of this government, but I can tell you that it started under the Peterson government for darn sure and the Conservative government before that, and even ours to a certain degree. As a result of that, what we're seeing is natural resource policies having morphed into something that has, at the end, really hindered the ability of the resource sector to weather the storm that we have gone into when it comes to commodity prices and what's happening with

being able to operate a plant in some of these communities.

But let's look at us as Ontario and compare ourselves to other jurisdictions. If you look at Alberta, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Quebec, I would argue that in those provinces, those governments still understand that you need to have good public policy when it comes to the natural resource sector. You look at the investments that are done in the exploration field and mining: We know that the majority of the Canadian and international dollars that are raised for exploration and the mining industry now are no longer coming to Ontario as they used to. Ontario has some of the best geology in the world to find all kinds of mines, from gold mines to diamond mines, but they're now going into the province of Quebec and yes, even into British Columbia. Why is that? Because money, when it comes to investment, goes to where they feel it's the friendliest. Where are they able to get the best bang for their buck? Where is it that they're more likely to get a return on that investment?

What has happened here in Ontario is we have turned our attention away from natural resource policies and we have made it more difficult for those investments to happen here in Ontario. As a result, other jurisdictions like Quebec and others are doing far better than us when it comes to attracting that money.

What are some of the policies the government has done that I think need to be addressed in regard to natural resources? There are many. Just on the question of environmental regulation in the province of Ontario, nobody can argue with me that if you compare the mining industry today to what it was 30 or 40 years ago, it is no longer the same. It has become one of the safest industries in Canada, and it has become one of the most environmentally responsible industries in Canada as well. We are able to mine now like we never have before as far as productivity, but we've also decreased the impact on the environment, and we've certainly made it a safer place for workers to go. The difficulty is that government has not figured out ways of being able to do that in such a way that makes it financially more sustainable for companies to make this type of investments.

We're looking now at a system that has become far more—how would you say? I don't want to use the word "bureaucratic," but far more difficult to navigate your way through when it comes to being able to get permits and when it comes to being able to even understand what the government wants at the end of the day. As a result, it is really making it difficult for people who are bringing mines online to work their way through. They're having to spend far more money on permitting than they ever have before. If you're trying to invest in Ontario, you know that if you find a mine, it's going to cost you more money to put it into production because of the way that we've organized our permitting structure and others for the mining and forestry sectors—far harder to get in.

Am I arguing that we should lessen the environmental regulation? That's not my argument. My argument is, make clear and concise what it is that you want as a goal

when it comes to impact on the environment, then ensure that they're able to get there with technologies that exist, and make sure that they make those investments necessary. The way that we do it now, we spend more money with consultants going between the government and the industry trying to figure out what it is that they want in the first place and then trying to engineer a solution. We spend all kinds of money that, quite frankly, could be spent better.

Take a look at what's happening right now with the start-ups of the Detour Lake gold mine and the Lake Shore gold mines up in Timmins. We have, interestingly, two premier ore bodies that are ready to go. Lake Shore has already made the decision to go forward with the expansion of their operations on the existing site and also for what they call Timmins West, an investment to move them forward into a production of a brand new facility, a brand new mine. If you look at the difficulty they're having on the permitting side, it is really discouraging at times. Because all that industry asks is, "What is it you want us to do? Let us get there." Instead, what we have is a process that is quite user-unfriendly and makes it far more expensive for operators to get their mines into operation.

I know I'll get a visit from my friends from the environmental community soon as a result of my comments this morning, but I remind people that when we had the old Detour Lake gold mine running, and it started I believe in the late 1970s early 1980s, that particular gold mine operated for 10 or 15 years. As a result of the laws that we have in this province, which is the mine reclamation act, when that mine shut down, we took apart the entire mine that was there. We rehabilitated it to the ground, to the point that if you were to fly over that about a year ago—because now they're back doing work there—you would have had a hard time knowing there was a mine there. We had revegetated the area, we had taken out the power lines, and we had tried to take the land back to the most natural state possible. My point is that we have good laws in this province that can allow us to do development in a way that makes some sense, but the difficulty is it is becoming harder and harder to achieve those goals based on how the government wants you to get there.

My point is that natural resource policies are important from the perspective of understanding that we have natural resource policies in this province that support our activities in mining, forestry, hydro development and agriculture so that we're able to build the industry and strengthen it so that we have the jobs in northern Ontario and revenues for the people of Ontario. I say to my friends here in the House, clearly what has happened is that we have changed our attention from what used to be good natural resource policies to those of not paying attention to that as much as possible.

You take a look at some of the other difficulties that we have in mining and forestry, and I think the interesting one is the question of electricity prices. Up until about seven or eight years ago, Ontario had an electricity

rate that was competitive with Quebec and Manitoba. Why? Because we had a public utility called Ontario Hydro. It was run as a crown corporation, as an economic development tool in order to allow utility customers such as Kidd Creek Mines, Tembec pulp and paper and others to operate and keep their costs down on the energy side so that we could compete with other jurisdictions that are in the same business as us. It's hard for us to compete with workers in South America who are making fewer dollars per hour in a paper plant than trying to compete in a paper plant in northern Ontario that pays a fairly good wage—you have to have something else to offset the overall cost, and one of those things was electricity.

1010

The government, in its day, decided that it was going to change hydroelectric policy in this province. We've moved from a crown corporation to a partly privatized system that is now somewhat deregulated but re-regulated in a pretty difficult way. We find ourselves in the worst possible system of both worlds.

Electricity prices are more than double the rate that people have to pay in Quebec or Manitoba when it comes to electricity.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, it's higher than that. My point is that we're way out of whack.

If you look at what you've got to pay here in Ontario, it is way, way higher than what you would pay in Quebec or Manitoba. Again, if you're making a decision on where to invest and you're saying, "There are dollars to build a sawmill, or there are dollars to build a new mine, because we've discovered one, and I can operate that in Ontario or I can do that in Quebec," most will go to Quebec just on the price of electricity. In fact, what we saw with the Xstrata announcement last December, when Xstrata decided it was going to close its smelter and refinery in Timmins, putting 700 people directly out of work—about 3,000 direct and indirect jobs—the key consideration for them leaving was electricity prices.

The government says, "Oh, those people from northern Ontario, they're making noises about hydro power. Those pesky little mayors are organizing, coming together. The opposition and unions and economic development corporations and chambers of commerce are all speaking in one voice in northern Ontario. We're going to try to silence those voices."

What they announced in the budget last week was the northern industrial electricity rate. When you listened to Minister Duncan speak, he said it is going to reduce by 25% the hydro bill for an industrial user in northern Ontario. When I first heard it, I thought, "Well, that's interesting. We're still going to be higher than Quebec, but we're not going to be as high as we were. That's putting our foot in the door. The door is slightly open. Maybe we can push it open and get some more."

Then we started looking into the details of what this is really all about, and it's really a shell game. Currently, there is a program that provides roughly about a 20% to 25% reduction on hydro bills in northern Ontario—as I

call it, the northern rebate program. It applies only to pulp and paper mills. On average, it means to say that if a qualifying mill gets into this program, they get about \$18 per megawatt that they will receive as a credit towards their hydro bill.

This new program is being announced for three years, and it's going to make a difference of \$18 plus \$2, which brings it to \$20. What they're doing is taking an existing program, renaming it as something else, and then they're putting an extra \$2 per megawatt into the system.

You say to yourself, "What is this going to do to change the economics of a pulp and paper mill in northern Ontario?" There's not a pulp and paper mill in northern Ontario that isn't already on the NR program. We were looking for a renewal of at least three years for the NR program. We've been trying for the last year or so to get the government to renew that program, because it is one of the key things that are allowing some of our remaining paper mills to operate.

What do we get? The government announces, yes, a three-year extension. They added \$2, but it's not a 25% decrease in electricity over and above what industry is already paying. What it works out to be is about \$2 per megawatt. If you look at what it means to a paper mill that's in Kapuskasing, currently it would mean that rather than getting a rebate of \$18 per megawatt, you would get about \$20 per megawatt.

Is it good? Sure, it's a step in the right direction, but it's certainly not anywhere near what the government has pretended to announce in its budget, which is a 25% decrease in electricity costs for industrial users.

I would argue that the \$150 million added that was set in the budget, the \$150 million each and every year for three years, so year 1, \$150 million, year 2, year 3, they get \$150 million into this program—I would be really interested in seeing if this includes the money that's already being spent by the existing NR program. Is the government actually putting in \$150 million a year? That's what I ask myself. That's something that we're doing a bit of research on.

For the mining sector: Yes, the mining sector was not able to apply to the current NR program, and what the government is saying in this budget speech is that for the northern industrial electricity rate, any industrial user now may be able to apply. But I have a little bit of news for you: \$150 million a year when it comes to reductions in electricity rates is not enough money to cover the electricity bill of all the industrial users. If you look at Kidd Creek alone, they're using a million megawatts per year. If you figure out what that is worth, that in itself, just with that one company, if you were to apply the logic of the 25%, is a big dent in the \$150 million a year. So—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I'm going to get to that in a second. I'm not even at that yet. But my point is, the \$150 million a year, even if it was new money, does not cover all the industrial users in northern Ontario, so somebody's going to get left out. As you take a look at what they have said in the budget, it is going to be a

program that you're going to have to apply to, and you are going to have to be accepted. Not every industrial user will benefit from this program, and most of them are already in the NR program, so it won't mean a hell of a lot in the first place.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I am pleased to welcome into the gallery the father and godmother of page Erin Gaudette: Matthew Gaudette and Lynn Gaudette, from Tecumseh, Ontario. Welcome.

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to introduce a couple of individuals, one from my riding and one from Windsor.

George Bahdi is here as my guest. I also want to mention that his son Lucas, for his birthday, raised over \$1,100 for victims of the Haiti earthquake disaster. Congratulations to Lucas.

The other guest I'm pleased to introduce is Reem Bahdi, who is George's sister. She's an associate professor and a co-director at the University of Windsor.

I'm pleased to recognize both of them here with me today.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to recognize Professor Mark Langer, who is with us in the gallery today. Mark is the president of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. He is kindly inviting all members to their third annual Queen's Park reception from 3 to 6 today in rooms 228 and 230. Please come.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have the great pleasure to introduce two grade 10 classes from Oakwood Collegiate. They told me they've heard a lot about the MPPs here and they came today to see how real MPPs behave.

Mr. David Zimmer: It's my pleasure to introduce two visitors from the energy sector here today: Mr. John Brace, the president and CEO of Northland Power; and Rick Martin, the manager of renewable energy. They're here to talk about renewable energy projects.

MEMBERS' ANNIVERSARIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the member from Nepean—Carleton as she celebrates her fourth anniversary in the chamber, and the members from Whitby—Oshawa and Parkdale—High Park, as well.

WEARING OF PINS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: On April 9, we will be celebrating the anniversary of the Vimy Ridge victory in World War I.

Almost 3,600 Canadians died in that victorious battle, and 10,600 people were injured and wounded.

I have purchased from the Vimy Foundation 107 pins for all members of the Legislature to wear prior to April 9 to recognize this momentous victory and this very, very proud day for Canada.

Later this afternoon, I, along with my colleagues Mr. Zimmer and Mr. Prue, will be presenting a bill to the Legislature to recognize this day and to ensure that our flags at Queen's Park will be flown at half-mast on April 9 to recognize the tremendous sacrifice that our veterans made for us.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to wear this pin in the Legislature before and during April to recognize this very, very special date and the sacrifice of our wonderful troops in the past so that we will never forget it.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, the Ombudsman, André Marin, was looking into your LHINs and now you want to show him the door. We now find out that you're still handing out untendered contracts to Liberal-friendly consultants through the LHINs, and now, all of the sudden, you want to kill the public review mandated by your own legislation of the LHINs.

Millions of dollars in untendered contracts have gone to Liberal-friendly consultants through the LHINs, including the Courtyard Group, and all we get from the Premier and his minister are more denials and excuses rather than accountability. This certainly looks a lot like eHealth. Premier, what are you trying to hide?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the opportunity to talk about the importance of LHINs and the value that they bring to the integration of our health care system.

I know that all of us in this House—indeed, all of us in this province—understand that we have to do things differently in health if we want to maintain a very strong, universal health care system in this province. The LHINs are doing that very hard work that is driving the integration between our hospitals, our home care sector, our long-term-care sector and our community services, supports like Meals on Wheels, for example, that keep seniors in their homes as long as possible.

I completely support the model of the LHINs, and we will continue to strengthen the LHINs as we move forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Minister, your LHINs are an absolute mess, and all you're doing is looking the other way.

Our freedom-of-information records reveal that your LHINs have ignored your so-called new rules against untendered contracts on at least six different occasions to date. When the Premier said that the government and all of its agencies will no longer allow untendered contracts for consultants, you didn't actually mean all cases, you meant when it was convenient; you meant some cases.

Back to the Premier, who dodged my first question: Where exactly are the exemptions to your rules in untendered contracts listed, so the public can find them?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do welcome the opposition doing their job and shining the light on aspects of our government that we need to look a little more closely at.

As a result of yesterday's questions, I did look more closely at the six contracts they were referring to—let's have a little clarity here—all of which were extensions of existing contracts to allow a certain project to be completed. There were extensions granted so the job could be completed. For example, the Waterloo Wellington LHIN had a project on rural health. They need a little more time to finish the project; that extension was granted.

We have clarified with the LHINs that that transition time is now over and that all new contracts and existing renewals will be going through the tough new protocols we have established.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Now we understand: The Premier's so-called new rules apply only when the Premier wants them to apply. We have seen abuse at the LHINs—these creatures are a mess—and we see again that there was no asterisk, there was no separation clause, there was no way out when the Premier made his announcement on his so-called on-again, off-again ban on untendered contracts. When we find out the LHINs have ignored this, the minister seems to just shrug it off.

Our FOI requests show that now, some \$7 million in untendered contracts has been handed out to Liberal-friendly firms through your LHINs. This has become some kind of second career program for disgraced eHealth consultants.

1040

Minister, why did you cancel the mandatory review of your LHIN? What exactly are you trying to hide?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think the people at home who are watching this need to understand there are two elements to the Conservative Party's health platform. One is to freeze spending or cut spending, depending on which document you look at; the other is to abolish the local health integration networks and bring all of that decision-making back to Queen's Park. That puts them in a very strong position to close more hospitals and to decimate the health care system, to continue with the work they did when they were in office to really undermine the foundation of the health care system.

That is not our approach. Our approach is to make decisions as close to home as possible. The best decisions are those that have the buy-in of people in the com-

munities. That is the work the LHINs are doing, and I support that.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier. I hope the Premier will answer my question about the growing scandal at his regional health bureaucracies.

Speaker, you'll remember when we brought up the \$15 million that the Premier gave to the Toronto Central LHIN during the mayor of Winnipeg's by-election campaign, and you will remember the name Barry Monaghan. Barry Monaghan, Premier, as you well know, is a well-connected insider who collected \$351,000 from the Toronto Central LHIN a year after he resigned as its CEO.

Premier, are you at all concerned about the fact that Monaghan handed out an untendered consulting contract to the Belcourt Partners just months before he left the LHIN to take up a job with the Belcourt Partners? How can you justify that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to take this opportunity to object to what the—

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I do want to take this opportunity to take a moment to talk about the calibre of the person that the member opposite chooses to once again embark on a smear campaign on. Barry Monaghan is a highly respected health care professional in this province. We in Ontario are very lucky to have his services available to improve health care for patients in this province.

Some time ago, the member opposite raised the issue of Mr. Monaghan and described him as a Liberal-friendly consultant. Indeed, when we actually looked at what party he had donated to in the past, we found that he had made a political contribution—to the Conservative Party.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the minister, and I know the minister sounds like she is a friend of—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Members will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Economic Development.

Start the clock. Please continue.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I know the minister wants to defend Mr. Monaghan. He may be a friend of yours, Minister, but that doesn't mean that you exempt him from the rules. The rules apply to everybody equally.

We saw that your friend Mr. Monaghan handed out \$300,000 in untendered contracts, including a deal to Jan Walker of Belcourt Partners. Previously, Jan Walker had been the chief information officer for Mr. Monaghan

when he was CEO of West Park Healthcare Centre. After Mr. Monaghan left the LHIN, Jan Walker rewarded Mr. Monaghan with a job. So here's the bottom line: Barry Monaghan handed out an untendered contract to himself.

Minister, how are you going to hold him accountable, or are you going to look the other way?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I will definitely look into this situation. The rules are very, very clear. They apply to everyone. If there has been a problem, I will learn about it and we will take the appropriate steps.

Mr. Monaghan, just for the information of the people in this House, has an exemplary career in this province. Before taking on the position of CEO of the Toronto Central LHIN, he was the president and CEO of West Park Healthcare for 18 years. Before that, he was the CEO of the Orthopaedic and Arthritic Hospital for five years. He was chair of the pediatric Cardiac Care Network of Ontario and also a past chair of the Ontario stroke strategy. Under the Conservative government, Mr. Monaghan served as chair of the Cardiac Care Network for seven years. I take objection to the smearing of people who are working very—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: The question is, what is the minister going to do about it? I will note that the Premier has dodged five consecutive questions on the growing rot in his LHINs. This is looking an awful lot like eHealth, where the Premier denied and dodged and handed off the tough questions to his health minister. Your failure to address these serious problems shows a growing stench at your LHINs that smells a lot like eHealth. They stood by their CEO at eHealth, Sarah Kramer, when she handed out untendered contracts to Liberal-friendly consultants, and now you're standing beside Barry Monaghan, who one-upped Sarah Kramer by handing out an untendered contract to himself.

I ask the minister, why are you stopping the review of the LHINs? Why are you sidelining the Ombudsman? Why won't you stand and fight for Ontario families and get those dollars into front-line care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are absolutely working to get dollars into front-line care. We are working very hard to integrate services so that the patients of this province get the services they need when they need them, as close to home as possible. That is what we are striving for and that is why we have put in place local health integration networks, to really help us drive that change.

Speaker, I'm sure that you and others will be interested to know that the examples that the member opposite has raised all happened before the rules were changed. There are new rules in place. The rules we inherited in 2003 were no longer acceptable; we changed them. We're enforcing them, and that's the way forward in this province.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. A report yesterday by the Toronto Board of Trade said

that this city ranks dead last in commuting times. Toronto needs investment in new light rail to help people get around the city. Instead, the Premier is threatening the Finch and Eglinton lines, the Scarborough RT and Viva bus service in York region.

My question is a simple one: How can the Premier justify a move that leaves people in some of Toronto's hardest-hit communities waiting and waiting and waiting?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm pleased to take the question. I note with some passing interest that there's an apparent change of heart on the part of the NDP. We have invested some \$9.3 billion in public transit during the course of the past six or seven years, and on each and every occasion the NDP voted against those measures. Notwithstanding that, I welcome her support for public transit now, particularly in the GTA and in Toronto itself.

What we have decided to do, just to be perfectly clear, is we have not cut or put a stop in any permanent way to any plans for our investment in public transit in Toronto. What we have decided to do, given our economic circumstances, is to take a bit more time to make those investments. We think that's responsible and we think that's reasonable and in keeping with our circumstances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The board of trade says that the average commuter here spends 24 minutes longer in her car than a commuter in Los Angeles, a city defined by highways and smog. That's "embarrassing," says the board of trade, who gave Toronto a D—a D—in their transportation report card. How can the Premier slam the brakes on better public transit for working women and men who were promised it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, just so we get a good sense of what we're talking about here, we put in \$9.3 billion, and if you compare that with the previous government, that's about \$9.3 billion more that we put in on our watch. I think you should also understand what we've done when we've had occasion to do so. In 2006—that was a year that the economy performed better than we anticipated, so we had about an extra \$650 million, and we decided to put that into public transit.

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This year, the economy is not performing as well as we would like it to. We needed to find about \$4 billion in savings. We decided not to find that in our schools, not to find that in our hospitals, but instead to merely slow down our investments in public transit. I think when Ontarians understand what we're doing and why we're doing it, they'll agree that it's reasonable and responsible.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: If the province wants to make this particular city a world-class city, which they often talk about, transit actually needs to be a big part of that; not just for the people who can pay for a private train to the airport, but for the working mom who actually wants to get home before dinner so she can have dinner with her kids.

Instead of replacing MoveOntario 2020 with "SlowOntario to Whenever," will the Premier keep his promises on jobs, on the environment and on the future?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I welcome my honourable colleague's belated support for public transit, especially in the city of Toronto.

I do want to assure the people of Toronto in particular, and of the greater Toronto area insofar as they're affected by these investments, that these investments will continue, but given our economic circumstances, we cannot proceed as quickly as we would have liked to. We have decided to slow these down rather than make cuts to our schools and hospitals. Those are the choices that we made. We think they're reasonable, we think they're responsible, and we believe they're in keeping with the values shared by Ontario families.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. Congestion costs \$3 billion each and every year in lost productivity, and the Premier wants to somehow talk about the economy in the context of pulling \$4 billion out of this project. Transit gets people to work on time, makes shipping more efficient and creates jobs. When the Premier announced his support for Toronto transit, he said it would create 175,000 jobs. How many jobs is he killing with this wrong-headed budget plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's very clear from the work that's going on in the city right now, whether you talk about the \$874 million that's being spent on the Georgetown South corridor to support the Pearson-Union air-rail link, or the \$416 million for TTC streetcars, or the work that's being done on the Sheppard light rapid transit line right now—all of those projects are going to add to the transit infrastructure in this city.

The party opposite did not support those investments. They have not supported investments in public transit that we've made. We're going to continue to put those investments in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, there's a lot of talk going on over on the other side, but according to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities infrastructure calculator—this is an infrastructure calculator that that organization puts together—taking \$4 billion out of a transit system is going to cost 0.5% in GDP and almost 50,000 jobs. How can the Premier tell Ontario families that a plan that increases commute times, kills 50,000 jobs and hurts our competitiveness is actually good for us?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What's good for us is that we provide the public services that the people in Ontario need. So as we made our decisions regarding the budget, we had to protect those schools and protect those hospitals; we had to look for a way to slow down some of the investments that we've made.

Before we came into office, there was no investment going into public transit in the city of Toronto; there was no investment going into public transit across the province. The gas tax alone has provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to municipalities around the province to allow them to grow their transit infrastructure. In Toronto, we provided \$172 million for the revitalization of Union Station. On the Sheppard East light rapid transit line we're going to extend from Don Mills to Meadowvale Road—it's on that line that the people whom the member opposite—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The reality is that the Premier's move will have a real impact on jobs and the economy. People will wait longer to get to and from work, small businesses will struggle in a city with North America's worst gridlock, and the good jobs lost will hurt families from Toronto all the way to Thunder Bay.

Why is the Premier abandoning a commitment that families across this province were counting on?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We are following through on our commitment to build public transit in the GTHA over the next five years. What we have said is we need to slow down those investments. I think the people of Ontario understand that in order to be responsible, facing a \$21-billion-plus deficit, we had to make some difficult decisions.

We are not backing off on our commitment to build public transit in the GTHA. We continue to make investments in the city of Toronto, and there will be hundreds of millions of dollars going into public transit today, next year and the year after that.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, Premier McGuinty's excuse for breaking his own law and cancelling the review of the LHINs was that his unaccountable, unelected and anonymous bureaucracies have yet to take on all of their responsibilities. But according to the home page of the Ontario local health integration networks, the LHINs took "full responsibility for health services in their communities" on April 1, 2007.

You want to fire the Ombudsman. You want to cancel the public review of the LHINs. What do you have to hide?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the opportunity to talk about the decision to delay the review of the LHINs until they have had the full mandated responsibilities.

As I said earlier today and other days, the importance of the LHINs cannot be overstated. The future of health care demands that we integrate services at the local level. We cannot continue with siloed services, where the hospitals do one thing and the community care does another

and long-term care does another without the integration that really works for the patients to smooth the transition from one level of care to another.

It's important that we take the review of the LHINs very seriously. When the legislation was passed, I think it's fair to say that we underestimated—

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like to point out that this is the seventh consecutive question we have asked on the LHINs that the Premier has refused to answer. Why is he letting the minister respond for his words in this House?

The LHINs say that they assumed responsibility for their full mandate three years ago. Premier McGuinty has become so tired and arrogant that he can't be bothered to get his story straight with his accomplices at the LHIN. Meanwhile, the culture of rot is spreading right across the McGuinty Liberal government.

You want to fire the Ombudsman, you want to cancel the public review of the LHINs, and you have run out of excuses.

Will you scrap your ill-conceived schemes and let Ontario patients see exactly what you're trying to hide in these bureaucracies?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Just to correct the member opposite, the LHINs have not yet assumed full responsibility for all of the aspects of care. Indeed, they get responsibility for long-term care this coming July. So that is in fact after the deadline for the review in the act.

We don't think it's in the best interests of the people of Ontario to embark on a review of an organization that has not yet taken on their full mandate. It will be an all-party review, a select committee of the Legislature, that will look at the act to determine what improvements we need to make to the act to provide the kind of integrated care we are determined to provide.

But we are continuing to work to improve the LHINs as we go along. KPMG has completed a review of the LHINs. That report is posted online. Twenty-seven recommendations—they're all being implemented.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Rosario Marchese: A question to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Minister, are your projections that the Second Career program will train an additional 30,000 unemployed workers based on the old criteria for applicants or the new criteria you imposed in the fall of 2009?

Hon. John Milloy: I'm very happy to respond to the question.

I'd first like to announce to the Legislature that I got news this morning that we have hit over 28,000 individuals who have benefited from Second Career.

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As the honourable member is aware, the success of the program, despite the criticism—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Members will please come to order.

Minister?

Hon. John Milloy: As the honourable member knows, despite the criticisms of the opposition, the program is a great success. We hit 20,000 last fall, and we redesigned the program, promising another 8,000 spots that we've met. In the budget, the Minister of Finance indicated funding for a further 30,000 spots.

The member asked about the criteria of the program—

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

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: That's why I asked a simple question: because I hoped he would be able to answer it. Instead, he avoided the whole thing.

Your projections reflect the old rules, not the new ones. We have heard from many unemployed workers over the last year, workers who invested time and energy applying to get into the Second Career program, only to be rejected and abandoned by your ministry. There is no way that 30,000 unemployed workers will be approved by the Second Career program in the next two years under the current criteria.

Are you prepared to change the qualification criteria to guarantee that 30,000 unemployed workers will be approved for the Second Career program?

Hon. John Milloy: The targets that were brought forward in the budget are based upon the existing program. That being said, we have always said to all stakeholders that we want to make sure that we get Second Career right. We continue to meet and consult with individuals to find out ways in which we can strengthen the program and ways in which we can provide training and retraining opportunities to Ontarians. I repeat again: 28,000, when that member and members of his party were standing up—and members of that party—and asking us to scrap that program.

I have met dozens and dozens of individuals in the Second Career program who tell us about the success, the way their lives have taken on new meaning because they have completed training programs and moved on to jobs. During the throne speech, we had the privilege to have Jason Boylan here, an honourable young man who, after being laid off in the auto sector, has gone and rebuilt his life at Fleming College, is moving on to a job—

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

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Minister, our province, like many other jurisdictions around the world, has felt the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm finding it difficult—I would ask the members to remember what the member from Davenport said. Order.

Please continue.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Our province, like many other jurisdictions around the world, has felt the negative effects of the recent global economic downturn. A number of Ontario industries were hurt as a result. Production was down, and people were out of work.

Ontario's automotive sector was particularly affected by this recession. Employment in this sector fell and production lines were idle as auto companies scaled back to make up for lagging demand. The downturn in the auto sector was felt right through the supply chain as well. The auto parts sector was forced to make cutbacks in order to adjust to the dwindling demand for their products. More people lost their jobs. My Durham constituents were particularly sensitive to and impacted by this.

As our province begins to emerge from the recession, we have seen progress in a number of industries. It is for this reason that I ask the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: What is the current state of the automotive sector amidst all of this recovery?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I appreciate the question from our member from Pickering–Scarborough East, whose area has a number of people who are totally engaged in the automotive sector. Why this is especially a happy day for us is that we've had yet another good-news announcement, this time from Honda Canada. This morning, they did announce that they will be adding 400 people to their operations in Alliston. We want to congratulate them.

We know that Ontario has a very integrated automotive sector with the United States. We know that we have had a very tough couple of years in this sector. We also know that, in partnering with the government of Canada, we've been in a position to help buffer some of that pain. We know that it was far worse in the southern states compared to what Ontario suffered. Nonetheless, we are looking forward to those jobs coming back to production—

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It is encouraging to see such developments in the province's auto sector and to hear about Ontarians getting back to work. In light of this news, I'd like to take the opportunity to congratulate Honda Canada on their announcement this morning. This is definitely welcome news for the people of Ontario.

Minister, in your response you mentioned that a number of key announcements in the auto sector have been made recently that indicate there is a recovery taking place within the auto sector.

Beyond the announcements made today by Honda Canada, could the minister give this House further examples of such announcements from major auto companies that show Ontarians that our auto sector is on the mend?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: You know that today's announcement, with Honda adding 400 jobs in Alliston, increases production by 50%. We're delighted by that.

The Acura, those vehicles, are doing very well in our market and beyond.

In addition, General Motors is recalling 600 workers in Oshawa to meet demand for the Equinox. They're adding 70 more people at the CAMI plant in Ingersoll. We are delighted about that addition.

We have seen the Chrysler plant—in particular, the Windsor van plant—running flat out to meet demand. That is a very good sign. We know that people are starting to buy cars again. Thankfully, they are buying great Ontario-made vehicles.

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Health. Yesterday, and even today, your excuse for breaking the so-called tougher rules and handing out untendered contracts was because these were contract extensions for work that couldn't wait.

Minister, I don't see where in the Premier's get-tough message there is any room for that excuse. Exactly what were Beth Snyder Coaching or Batchelor and Associates doing that was so urgent that their contracts could not be put through a competitive process?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I again welcome the opportunity to talk about the nature of these contract extensions that happened after the rules were changed.

There was a period of time where it was appropriate that the work that was under way be completed. That time is over. All new contracts now are going through the rigorous procurement process that we have put in place, and that includes renewals.

I'm more than happy to talk about some of the work that was being done. The Waterloo Wellington LHIN had a rural health review under way. They need a little more time to complete that review. The Erie St. Clair LHIN had a contract to complete their integrated health services plan. That's the foundation of the LHINs' work, to bring the advice they receive on their public consultations into a document that's—

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Two particular contracts that I referenced earlier—our freedom-of-information records reveal that the Central LHIN handed an untendered contract to Beth Snyder Coaching and Consulting for administrative consulting. She invoiced for board meetings and a “consensus discussion on accountability.” Freedom of information also reveals that Batchelor and Associates was contracted for communication and media relations, specifically, newsletters, annual reports and brochures. Neither of these consultants improved front-line care for patients, and there's no excuse for avoiding a competitive bidding process.

You want to fire the Ombudsman and cancel the public review of LHINs. Minister, exactly what is your government trying to hide here?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Just to be clear, no one is talking about firing the Ombudsman. His term is up, and

there is an all-party process that will put a new Ombudsman in place.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you, Speaker.

As I was saying, the Ombudsman is not being fired; his contract is up. In fact, what we have done is extended it because we believe in the idea that there should actually be an opportunity for others to apply for the job. It will be an all-party committee that will decide who the next Ombudsman of this Legislature is.

When it comes to understanding the work of the LHINs, I think people understand that the LHINs' function—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, I'm sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It's a little late. Members, particularly from Lanark and Renfrew, need to be more respectful of this House.

New question.

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IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. This morning, Ontario's fairness commissioner released a report that shows the so-called Open Ontario is closed to many new Canadians. Skilled immigrants who come here with the promise of work in their field instead find endless roadblocks and frustration. Only one in four skilled immigrants find work in their field, and those who do find work in their field earn half what their Canadian-trained counterparts do. This is a disgrace. Will this government admit that its system is failing new Canadians?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: First, I want to thank the fairness commissioner for her report that she's issuing today and the recommendations contained therein, and particularly for her commitment to this issue. Over the coming weeks, certainly my ministry and my office will carefully review this report and its recommendations, which include not only recommendations for this government but also the regulatory bodies and the assessment organizations that are responsible as well for this process, and for the federal government.

Helping newcomers succeed in our province is not only good for them, but also crucial to our economic prosperity. I should remind the member opposite that Ontario led the way: We were the first in Canada to introduce legislation, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, to ensure that the process of getting licensed in a regulated profession is transparent, fair, objective and impartial.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: It appears that this government has moved straight into damage control. Today's event

with international medical graduates is nothing more than a last-ditch effort to deflect attention from your very real failures. The commissioner's report finds that international medical graduates are the least likely to complete the Ontario licensing process: Only 18%, or one in six, do so. In August, the practice-ready assessment program closed—your ministry closed it—leaving even more IMGs without opportunity. This government talks a good line, but in reality it does nothing.

Why won't this government confront its obvious failings and commit to opening Ontario to all of our citizens?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: There's no question that all of us need to do more to help our newcomers integrate successfully, including into our workplace here in Ontario. That is what this government is doing, not only through the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, but we need to work hard and we are working hard with employers to ensure that they are providing the opportunities for our newcomers and those who are in the regulated professions, as with all newcomers.

We're working closely with our arm's-length agency and the fairness commissioner, Jean Augustine. The report that she issued today is certainly a big step in the direction to provide ourselves as well as the regulatory bodies with the information that we all need to make a difference and improve the situation. Unlike the member opposite and his party when he was in government, who did nothing to introduce a commissioner to review such practices or legislation to help newcomers, this government is serious about helping our newcomers integrate successfully.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Dave Levac: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. As the government, we have the responsibility to provide Ontario families and taxpayers fair, accountable and sustainable programs that deliver results. Importantly, we must also help people facing challenges by giving them the tools they need to get ahead.

In the recent budget, it was announced that the special diet allowance program will be eliminated. Can the minister tell us directly why the special diet allowance has been eliminated?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you to the member from Brant for his question. This government's Open Ontario plan and the poverty reduction strategy are about results. The special diet allowance was originally intended to assist our special assistance recipients with the extra costs of a special diet due to a medical condition, prescribed by and approved by health professionals.

As I have highlighted in the Legislature before, the cost under the special diet allowance went from \$6 million in 2001-02 to over \$200 million this year. Should the program have continued in its current form, the special diet allowance would have reached an expenditure of \$750 million by 2015-16. This program was no longer sustainable and was not achieving its—

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

Mr. Dave Levac: I appreciate the minister's response and I know there are some concerns that have been raised about this. I also appreciate the government's continued commitment to increasing social assistance, even this year, despite the economic downturn. But we must also ensure that those vulnerable in Ontario who need assistance for severe medical conditions receive the help they so desperately need.

Can the minister tell us what this government is doing to ensure that those with severe medical conditions receive the assistance they need, and what other measures is this government taking to ensure that we continue to remove those barriers that exist for those on special assistance? I need to know those answers for my constituents.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This government is committed to ensuring that those most vulnerable with severe medical conditions receive the additional assistance they require. This is why our budget announced that we will be establishing a new nutritional supplement program over the next few months to allow for a transition period that will be administered by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Also, we will be implementing a number of changes as a result of the recommendations from the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council. Initially, policy work will focus on exempting small payments and in-kind gifts, shortening the suspension period for non-compliance with participation requirements, clarifying the rules for disposing of assets in relation to eligibility and changing the shelter allowance calculation—

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

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Today we find that you're asking ratepayers to pay an additional 9.6% for electricity next year. Every time you speak, it seems it's going to cost Ontario seniors and working families a lot more for basic services. This latest shock is just one in a series of ongoing increases. You're no longer nickeling and diming Ontarians to death; you are now relieving them of loonies and toonies.

Minister, when are you finally going to admit that your energy policy is strangling—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Finance will withdraw the comment he just made.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Withdrawn.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Minister, when are you finally going to admit that your energy policies are strangling the people in Ontario who can least afford it?

Hon. Brad Duguid: One would think, as critic for energy for the number of years that this member has been critic, that he would understand the role of the Ontario Energy Board. This is an application that is before the

Ontario Energy Board. It's a very normal process to go through. It is not a 9.6% increase for all consumers. It's an increase they're applying for for their portion of the bill. That being said, it's an application. This isn't an automatic approval process. It's not unusual at all for the Ontario Energy Board to take a very good look at these increases—and often they drop them down. Sometimes they don't allow them at all. The member is absolutely jumping the gun here. I'm not sure what his motivation to do that is. But the fact is, this is not an increase; it's an application.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The minister would like to pretend that these things aren't going to happen. People out there know they're going to happen. They've been happening.

Your former colleague told us in this Legislature that—
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Nepean–Carleton will withdraw the comment. My back may be hurting, but my ears are good.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdraw.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Your former colleague told us in this Legislature that the Green Energy Act would only amount to a 1% increase in energy bills per year. What a bunch of hooey. Let's look at the facts: This latest increase, together with the 8% you're going to whack people with on July 1 with the HST, double-digit increases in the distribution rates and the sneaky \$53-million increase you put through the back door last week have brought seniors, families and small businesses to the breaking point. This amounts to an over 41% increase in electricity bills in Ontario. How much more can they take of the scam you call an energy policy?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I could respond in many ways to that last comment, but I think I'll refrain from doing it because I think it's important that the people of Ontario, after hearing what the member just said, understand what he's really talking about, because he clearly doesn't.

We're talking about an application that's before the Ontario Energy Board by Ontario Power Generation. It's not unusual for applications to come forward. The Ontario Energy Board has been put in place to ensure that any of these applications are looked at with regard to the interests of consumers and with regard to the future sustainability and reliability of energy in this province.

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We're going to let them do their job; that's what they're there to do. They've often looked at these applications and made decisions that roll them back or cancelled them altogether. We'll let them do their job.

The member can say what he wants; he can try to tell people information that may not—

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

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Each and every day, millions of Ontarians depend on

local transit to get to work, to their shopping, jobs, and all kinds of other things. Municipalities rely on the Ontario bus replacement program to upgrade aging buses and improve services. Now the McGuinty government is cancelling this program completely.

In Ottawa, the average age of buses is 16 years, and many buses are close to the end of their lifetimes right now. Thanks to the McGuinty government cuts, riders in Ottawa will face increased breakdowns and service interruptions.

My question is this: Why is the Premier undermining public transit by cancelling the bus replacement program?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the member opposite is aware that the Ontario bus replacement program has allowed municipalities to replace a substantial percentage of their bus fleet over the last few years.

I know the member opposite is also aware that the gas tax, the two cents per litre of gas tax, flows to municipalities. In fact, although we did make a decision that we had to change the Ontario bus replacement, we've opened up the gas tax so that now municipalities can actually use that gas tax in the way that they need to, to supplement the replacement of their fleets.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I know the minister knows that municipalities are still being strangled by down-loading in this province as well, and it's not just Ottawa that's being affected by this bus replacement program cut. Thanks to this government's cuts, the city of London is going to lose half of its replacement budget for buses. Windsor riders will see \$2 million a year pulled from their transit system.

Municipalities need long-term, stable funding to plan new routes, to buy new buses and to build new garages. Will the Premier admit that it is wrong to cut a program that is so vital to transit users, and when will he reverse this very wrong-headed decision?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite asks the question about a specific program but neglects to look at the entire picture, which is that the gas tax funding is distributed to 92 transit systems in 118 communities across the province. That gas tax, that two cents on the litre of gas tax, provides hundreds of millions of dollars to municipalities to allow them to increase transit ridership. The whole point of the gas tax program was to provide funding to allow that ridership in public transit to increase.

We have changed the rules around the gas tax funding so that municipalities will be able to use that money to supplement the replacement of their fleets in the changes around the Ontario bus replacement program.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question for the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. As spring arrives,

we begin to put the winter behind us and the heating season behind us.

Northern Ontario boasts fabulous winter recreation opportunities, from skiing to snowmobiling and everything in between, but it does have a longer, colder winter.

The north has also been impacted more severely than the rest of the province by the global economic climate. Its resource, tourism and manufacturing sectors have been hit hard.

Last week's budget proposed much-needed help for individuals and families through the northern Ontario energy credit. Could the minister elaborate on that proposal?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member is absolutely right: Residents of northern Ontario do have very different energy needs than those in the rest of the province. The McGuinty government recognizes that there are some very unique challenges faced by northerners. That's exactly why the 2010 Ontario budget is focused on making life better for northern residents.

The northern Ontario energy credit will undoubtedly play a part in that plan. This credit would be offered to both homeowners and renters and would allow for significant yearly savings. Families, including single parents, would save up to \$200, and individuals could see up to \$130 back in their pockets.

For 2010, about a quarter of a million families and individuals, over half of northern Ontarians, would benefit from about \$35 million in assistance.

I want to commend our northern caucus for the leadership and—

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

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I'm confident that my constituents will receive this credit very well and it will no doubt make a difference in their day-to-day lives and improve the quality thereof. But there is an important group in the north that could also benefit from the energy savings; namely, industrial businesses.

During this economic downturn, jobs were hard hit in the north, with employment falling at more than twice the rate of the rest of the province. The cost of running a large industrial facility in the north is becoming increasingly difficult to keep up with, particularly when it comes to energy costs. The cornerstone of this government's new Open Ontario plan is the creation of jobs and economic growth. What is the plan to address these issues in the north, especially as they relate to direct and indirect costs of electricity?

Hon. Brad Duguid: In addition to the northern Ontario energy credit for residents, our government is introducing the northern industrial electricity rate program. It's a three-year program that would average about \$150 million in annual savings. By providing electricity price rebates of two cents per kilowatt, large northern industrial facilities will be able to reduce their electricity costs by 25%. All we ask in return in order to qualify for the credit is for these facilities to commit to an electricity efficiency and conservation plan for the future. Not only will this program help northern industry to create jobs, it

will also help protect jobs as well. Right now, what northern Ontarians need most is certainty in uncertain times.

Again, I want to thank Minister Gravelle for his leadership in coming forward with this northern Ontario growth plan. I know this new northern industrial electricity program will contribute—

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

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. I listened with some interest to the Premier's response to questions earlier today regarding the \$4-billion cut to the Metrolinx budget. He stated very clearly that it was intentionally a slowing down of the implementation of the transportation plan. I know that the Premier agrees with all of us that the issue of gridlock is essentially important to Ontario and that we should not be slowing down in any way the plan that the province has through Metrolinx to deal with that issue.

I want to ask the Premier this: Would he not agree, rather than slowing down the funding of Metrolinx, to slow down the \$7-billion subsidy to Samsung under which there are no guarantees of jobs, under which there are no guarantees of benefits to—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I gather that this is a spend question, that my colleague is in favour of us in fact elevating the level of our deficit and perhaps even requiring that we take longer to eliminate the deficit than we have planned. We can't agree with that.

I say to my honourable colleague—I know he's open to these kinds of reasonable arguments—we feel that the best thing to do in the circumstances, instead of making cuts to our schools or to our health care, is to extend the time frame to stage these projects in a way that is better suited to our economic circumstances. I think our record on public transit demonstrates our commitment to that, and what we're prepared to do, in keeping with the circumstances, is just stretch this out a little bit longer. We think that's fair and reasonable.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: I want no cuts to health care and I want no cuts to education. What I do expect from the Premier, however, is that he would prioritize his former commitment of some \$9.3 billion to Metrolinx and transportation infrastructure over subsidizing an offshore company that has no guarantees for the people of Ontario either in jobs or benefit. That's what I would ask.

Failing that, I would ask the Premier, will he at least mandate Metrolinx to pursue alternative financing arrangements so that these projects can proceed with private sector funding support, so that we don't have to slow down the infrastructure projects in the province?

1130

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There are two dimensions to this that I want to speak to. One is, it's an interesting day

in Ontario when the Conservative Party stands against a \$7-billion investment in our economy which will create 16,000 manufacturing jobs and also position our province and our economy to take advantage of a burgeoning green economy south of the border. That's something new.

Secondly, we have asked Metrolinx to take a look at these projects—the ones that we're talking about at the TTC, the ones that we're talking about extending. We're asking them for their very best advice as to how we can proceed as expeditiously as possible with these investments, being mindful of our economic circumstances today. That includes, I say to my honourable colleague, taking a look at alternative means by which we can pay for these projects.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you would know that last week and again this week I requested, on behalf of the coalition to save the closure of the refinery/metallurgical site at Xstrata, to meet with you in order to discuss possible ways to keep that facility open. You have refused to meet with that coalition. I wonder why you would say no to the mayor of Timmins, who is requesting, as a member of that coalition, to meet with you?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this question.

A few things on this: I have had an opportunity to chat with the mayor of Timmins, and I've had an opportunity to meet with some representatives from Xstrata.

My colleague and I have been exchanging notes, as recently as 30 minutes ago, on this very issue. It has been brought to my attention that there is a group of elected representatives who will be coming to Queen's Park. I want to say to my colleague what I said in my note: If that's in fact the case, I think I have an obligation to meet with that group, and I'd like to be able to arrange that, working with my colleague so we can find out who's coming and get it at a time that is, obviously, in keeping with our schedules.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Can I remind the Premier that Sudbury is on the way to Timmins? If the Premier is willing to meet with the people from Timmins, would he also be willing to meet with the people of Sudbury, more particularly about the strike between Vale Inco and USW Local 6500, to help bring both sides back to the table? Is the Premier willing to meet with the people of Sudbury?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Thank God these questions aren't three-parters; I'd be scheduling the next month here.

What I can say is, this is the first I've learned of this particular request for a meeting, and I will consider that.

I will say that our government and, I believe, every member of this Legislature is very concerned about the ongoing labour dispute in Sudbury. It has gone on for a very long period of time. It has now not only com-

promised quality of life for those who are immediately involved in this labour strike, but it's having, I think, a very serious negative effect on the community at large. If my honourable colleague has any positive suggestions on any role that we might play as a government to get the sides together and to bring about some kind of a conclusion at the earliest possible opportunity, I just want to reassure my colleague that I'm all ears in that regard.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question today for the Minister of Labour.

Minister, since 2004 your ministry has phased in six increases to the minimum wage. The seventh increase will take effect tomorrow, on March 31, when our province's minimum wage will rise to \$10.25 per hour.

When our government came into power, the minimum wage had not been raised in nine long years. In 2003, we were at the back of the pack. At midnight tonight, Ontario will have the highest minimum wage in all of Canada.

Minister, please share with this House further details on why it has been so important for this government to raise our province's minimum wage.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I'd like to thank the member for the question. He's quite right; raising the minimum wage is one of the most important things we can do to raise the living standards of Ontario's lowest-income earners and their families.

This is one of the platform commitments, and I'm proud to be part of a government that is serious about poverty reduction. It's only fair that Ontario's lowest-paid workers are properly compensated for the work they do. As the government, we're working hard to raise the living standards of our most vulnerable citizens. We've taken a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy approach, which includes full-day learning, personal income tax breaks and investments in affordable housing and child care. These increase the minimum wage marks in an important step to promoting fairness—

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Minister, for that response. You've said that your ministry's minimum wage policy needs to take a responsible, fair and balanced approach to assisting all Ontarians. I understand that your policy has been to slowly phase in these increases. That provides employers in the province with the time they need to prepare and to adjust for these changes from a business perspective.

Even so, Minister, some business owners and some employer organizations in the province have expressed concerns to myself and to other members about their ability to pay those higher wages, especially in these difficult economic times. Minister, how specifically are you addressing these business concerns?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I thank the member for the question. To address the concerns, our government is

committed to supporting our businesses during these uncertain times. I'd also like to point out that when the minimum wage increases happen, so does the consumer spending on goods and services by all these Ontarians who see their wages go up, and they spend that money locally. This means that the local economy gets a much-needed boost at a time when it's most needed.

It's also important to remember that our government has recently introduced many new commitments to help our economy prosper, including cuts to business costs and taxes. These new business reforms and commitments help businesses prosper by reducing costs and increasing investments. Allowing them to pay these increased wages to hard-working Ontarians makes us all better and provides jobs and creates jobs for—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Nepean–Carleton on a point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I was remiss at the beginning of question period, and I beg the indulgence of the House to introduce Monte McNaughton, the chamber of commerce president for Strathroy—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That's not a point of order, and I saw the visitor come in after question period.

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: On a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker: I have given your office notice of a matter of privilege I wish to raise. May I proceed?

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to expand on my letter to your office dated March 29, 2010, on this particular matter. For the benefit of those who are not aware of its contents, I will repeat some of the points that I did make to the Speaker's office in writing.

Pursuant to standing order 21(c), I provided the Speaker with the required written notice of the point of privilege I'm raising. The point relates to the breach of subsection 39(1) of the Local Health System Integration Act, 2006, that was also raised during question period yesterday.

Section 39 provides that a committee of the Legislative Assembly shall begin a comprehensive review of the act no earlier than three years and no later than four years after the act received royal assent. Yet, buried deep inside the 2010 budget papers—page 164, to be exact—the McGuinty Liberals said that they would be amending the act to “provide the time necessary for a thorough review of the act and the powers available to local health integration networks.”

In other words, the Premier and Minister of Health arbitrarily decided to reschedule the comprehensive review, but that is not their prerogative. The act does not give the executive council discretion to make a call on whether to cancel or postpone the review. The act refers to royal assent only. It does not have an asterisk that says that the Premier or the government can begin a review of the act when they believe that all parts of the act are being acted on by the local health integration networks.

The power to alter the timing of the comprehensive review of the act and local health integration networks belongs to the Legislative Assembly. As of March 28, the government missed the legally mandated time for beginning the review. This show of contempt for the Legislative Assembly is a matter of public importance and I'm raising it at the earliest opportunity, as required.

Standing order 21(a) says that the House collectively and MPPs individually enjoy rights conferred by the Legislative Assembly Act and other statutes or by practice, precedent, usage and custom. These rights are listed in many parliamentary manuals and precedents.

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On October 18, 1989, Speaker Fraser made a ruling on contempt that is applicable to the matter which I've raised. In the House of Commons debates, he set out that “Contempt may be an act or an omission; it does not have to actually obstruct or impede the House or a member, it merely has to have the tendency to produce such results,” and matters ranging from minor breaches of decorum to grave attacks against the authority of Parliament may be considered as contempts.

Speaker Stockwell of this Legislative Assembly cited Speaker Fraser's ruling in a January 22, 1997, ruling where he found a prima facie case of contempt was established for government advertisements. Reiterating that, “We are a parliamentary democracy, not a so-called executive democracy,” Speaker Stockwell applied the principle in finding that the actions of the government in that instance left an incorrect impression of how parliamentary democracy works.

By disregarding that the statutory requirements of the act be reviewed by a committee of the assembly by a certain time, the McGuinty government is similarly perpetuating an incorrect impression of how parliamentary democracy works. The government is already in breach of the act. Even if it was passed today, the legislation the budget alludes to comes too late. The fourth anniversary of the act was March 28, 2010.

The role of the assembly is clear. The Legislature declared its intention that this act be reviewed by no later than March 28, 2010, but the government did not respect the will of the Legislature either by beginning the review or amending the requirement in time to address the time limits stated in the act. As Speaker Fraser's precedent establishes, whether the McGuinty government's failure was deliberate or accidental does not matter.

I also refer you to the precedent of Speaker Sauvé's ruling on October 29, 1980, where she states that “while our privileges are defined, contempt of the House has no limits. When new ways are found to interfere with our proceedings, so too will the House, in appropriate cases, be able to find that a contempt of the House has occurred.”

The McGuinty government's breach of subsection 39(1) of the act is a serious and flagrant disregard for the role this assembly has in providing oversight.

The opposition has been raising concerns about how the local health integration networks created under the

act have been conducting themselves. Evidence is already mounting that shows these health bureaucracies are continuing the same practices that occurred in the eHealth Ontario scandal. A disregard for the legislative review of the act compounds the diminution of public confidence that follows once a scandal like this is revealed with a lack of confidence in how parliamentary democracy works.

It boils down to this: By defying the law and scheduling the legislative review at their own whim, this government is treating everyone as being irrelevant except for the governing party. In this government's view, people do not matter; the representatives they elect do not matter; this assembly and its long-standing traditions of jurisdiction and oversight of the executive do not matter.

Fortunately for members and the constituents we represent, the Speaker is vested with the power to protect those traditions and the oversight we provide. That protection we are seeking today. Should you rule that a prima facie case of contempt has been established, I am prepared to make the appropriate motions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for affording me the opportunity to speak to this matter of privilege today.

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, we were not given prior notice of this point of privilege. But I would respond in that the legislation before the House now, Bill 16, An Act to implement 2010 Budget measures and to enact or amend various Acts, does include a provision in schedule 16 that would—

Interjection.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Perhaps the member could be in his seat or would allow me to respond? I think we allowed your member the privilege to make her statements in this House without interruption. Thanks.

I would just point out that the section does provide that clause 39(1)(a) of the Local Health System Integration Act be repealed and replaced by—and I won't read the section—and as well that section 2 requires that this schedule come into force on March 28, 2010. So we would be providing for the enactment of that prior to the expiry of the provision that was in the previous legislation.

I will provide you, Mr. Speaker, with more fulsome comments in a written submission.

Mr. Peter Kormos: On a point of order, Speaker: I was disinclined to join because Ms. Elliott had done a thorough job of presenting the case, but the government House leader provoked me, first with the use of the word "fulsome." Secondly, by referencing existing legislation that repeals relevant legislation, the government is acknowledging that it's conscious of that legislation and that it intends or wishes to alter it. That, with respect, aggravates, in my submission, the government's position because it's difficult for the government to argue that it's an oversight. It's difficult for the government to argue that the provision that Ms. Elliott refers to—compelling the review—is a mere administrative one, because the

government sees it as clearly something more, something that has to be repealed. If it were a mere administrative provision, then it could be complied with or not complied with, at the whim or whimsy of the government of the day.

I listened carefully to the government House leader's response, and I appreciate that there isn't notice given, and that's perhaps another issue. But with respect, the government House leader's having pointed out to us the repeal of the relevant legislation in my view underscores the case that's made by Ms. Elliott on behalf of the Conservative caucus here today and does not in any way enhance the government's position in this regrettable scenario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I take this opportunity to thank the member for Whitby–Oshawa and acknowledge the receipt of her notice of raising the point of privilege. I thank the government House leader and the honourable member from Welland for their input into the point of privilege. Because this is of a complex nature, I'm going to take the opportunity to thoroughly review what has been presented and reserve my decision.

Just before we recess, I'd like to remind the members who have not received the Vimy pins provided by the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills that they are available at the security desk in the members' lobby.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1148 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Introduction of visitors? Oh, way back there. The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Kim Craiton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like get moved back to my other seat, if you could do that.

I'm pleased to introduce two very special people who are with us today. They're both grandparents: Olga and Alex Alexander. They're in the members' gallery, sitting right here. They're here today from Whitby because I'll be introducing a private member's bill dealing with giving grandparents rights and access and visitation to their grandchildren. They have not seen their grandchildren in six years, so they're here to show their support for the bill.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PASSOVER

Mr. Peter Shurman: Today is the second day of Pesach, known more commonly as Passover. Passover begins on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nisan and lasts for eight days.

This is a time for celebration and reflection. It is a Jewish and Samaritan holiday and festival commemor-

ating God sparing the Israelites when he killed the first-born of Egypt, and is followed by the seven-day feast of the unleavened bread commemorating the Exodus from Egypt and the liberation of the Israelites from slavery.

We get together with family and friends to join in the reading of the Haggadah, the story, and partake in the Seder. The Passover Seder, with its symbols and rituals, instructs each generation to remember their past while appreciating the beauty of freedom and the responsibility it entails.

The Haggadah is the fulfillment of the biblical obligation to recount to our children the story of the Exodus on the night of Passover. I, along with many of my constituents and all members of the Jewish community, celebrated the holiday with a Seder last night, and will be again this evening. My stomach will prove it.

From my wife, Carole, and myself, I wish everyone a happy and peaceful Pesach, or Passover. Chag Sameach.

VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It is with great pleasure that I rise today to share the names of the Celebrate 2010 award recipients in my riding of Northumberland–Quinte West. In no particular order, I'd like to name them: Paul Allen, Jake Degroot Jr., Joe DiCresce, Layton Dodge, William Dunk, Scott Fraser, Wendy Giroux, Bevett Horner, Shirley Irvine, Cheryl Langevin, Hazel Male, Tim Larry, Annette Otter, Doug Platt, Dave Sommerville, Daphne Simms, Wayne Storms and Tim Whitehead.

These outstanding citizens were presented the Celebrate 2010 award in recognition of their outstanding volunteerism in support of sports, recreation and athleticism within their communities. From baseball to hockey, from school sports to exercise classes for seniors, these are the people who make our communities click. These are the people we all turn to when we want to get things done. These are the volunteers.

Please join with me in congratulating this group of dedicated and committed people, as well as all of the selfless volunteers right here in the best province in the best country in the world.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's been seven months since the F2 tornado devastated apple orchards in the Town of the Blue Mountains, and apple growers are still waiting for the McGuinty government to put cheques in the hands of growers who are desperately looking to recover from this disaster.

In the last few weeks, I've spoken with the agriculture minister personally. I followed up on that conversation with a letter to her office addressed to her, and I've been on the phone with the deputy minister. Despite those ongoing conversations and efforts, we're still waiting for action. After seven months, the time to stop talking is now. It's time for action, and it's time for a solution.

Growers are hopeful that the AgriRecovery program will help close some of the gaps not provided by other existing programs. While we remain hopeful, we were counting on an answer to that request weeks ago. We are relying on the province and the Minister of Agriculture to push that process through with the federal government and come back with a package so that we can move on to providing assistance to apple growers.

There is some money that is supposed to flow through the Ontario disaster relief assistance program in April, but it's a drop in the bucket in terms of what these growers need. Many growers are wondering how they're even going to survive unless more assistance is announced soon.

So I'll just say to the minister and the Premier: Please, please, get moving on this file. Apple growers have paid into these programs, and they deserve an immediate and compassionate response from your government.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. Bill Mauro: Declining commodity prices, the strong Canadian dollar and the global economic recession have severely affected northern industries. That's why our budget includes a commitment to further energy assistance for large industrial users in the north. We will now extend the current energy rate program for three years and enrich it as well, providing a \$20-per-megawatt-hour reduction.

Some suggest that that is too little, too late, implying that this is the first time our government has provided support to our forestry sector. Nothing could be further from the truth. Not only have we been providing energy relief to our forest companies for several years, but we've been providing relief in other areas as well, including stumpage and the construction of forestry roads, which was downloaded onto the backs of forestry companies in the early 1990s by the NDP. We've also provided significant help with capital improvements, such as the \$22-million grant to AbitibiBowater in Fort Frances for a co-generation project. And an additional \$10 million will be added to the northern Ontario heritage fund, bringing the funding to \$90 million, up from \$60 million in 2007. During the last recession in Ontario in the early 1990s, which was not as severe as this one, the NDP took the entire \$60 million out of the fund and away from northern Ontario.

Our government has recognized that people living in the north tend to pay more for energy. That's why the budget provides northern Ontarians with energy relief of up to \$130 for a single individual and up to \$200 for families. This, of course, is in addition to all of the other permanent tax relief measures announced by our government.

These measures will help to strengthen northern Ontario. If the Conservatives and the NDP are truly concerned about the north, I hope—

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

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I stand proudly today in affirming that our government believes that strong, publicly funded schools are at the core of a competitive economy.

Investing in education is one of the most important things we can do. That is why our government has once again made a significant investment in our education system. We have increased the operating funding of school boards to over \$20 billion, an increase of nearly \$700 million over last year. Under our government, school boards have seen their operating funding increase by over 40% since 2002-03.

My riding of Ottawa Centre will benefit from an almost 5% increase in funding for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and over 3% for the Ottawa Catholic District School Board. These investments will support key areas in our education system, such as special education, transportation and school operations. But Ontarians should also know that while we are managing these expenditures in a way that protects the gains we have made in education, we are also working closely with school boards to reduce their operating costs.

These investments will help boards better meet the needs of their students. I'm proud of our government's commitment to strengthening our public education system.

VIMY RIDGE ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: In a few minutes, I will introduce a private member's bill, co-sponsored by my friend Mr. Prue from Beaches-East York and my friend Mr. Zimmer from Willowdale, to proclaim April 9 as Vimy Ridge Day in Ontario.

On April 9, 1917, four Canadian divisions took Vimy Ridge back from the Germans, something the British and French had tried for four years and were unable to do. The 100,000 Canadian men followed a creeping artillery barrage, an innovative tactic that was used by both sides later in that Great War.

1510

The battle of Vimy Ridge should be remembered not only for the sacrifice made by 3,590 Canadian men and women who died during the battle and the 10,600 who were wounded, but also for the importance in the evolution of Canada as an independent nation. The battle of Vimy Ridge was the first time that four Canadian divisions fought together under Canadian leadership.

As there are no Canadian veterans of World War I still alive, it is more important than ever that we make a point of remembering them and the honour they brought to our country, Canada. On February 27, I joined with Lesley Lehman and a group of Kanata Sea Cadets for the launch of the Vimy pin. In order to help keep the memory of Vimy Ridge alive, the Vimy Foundation created the Vimy pin, which we unanimously agreed this morning could be worn in this chamber. I hope that all members of the legislative chamber will wear it here and elsewhere before and on April 9.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

M^{me} France Gélinas: Over the last five years, northeastern Ontario has lost 15,000 net jobs. Sudbury lost 6,000 jobs in the last year alone.

I heard this government talk about how the economic problems encountered by northerners are the result of the global financial crisis. Let me tell you: People across the north, we don't buy it. The north was losing jobs long before the financial collapse.

For years, northerners have called for an industrial hydro rate to assist mills in keeping their doors open. They waited and waited. Those doors have long since been shut closed.

We have waited for the forest sector assistance fund to flow, only to find out hundreds of millions of dollars stayed at Queen's Park and never reached the north.

Finally, after all those years, the Liberal government has realized there's a problem in northern Ontario. So what do the people in northeastern Ontario get from the so-called northern budget? Well, some will get a hydro tax credit, but that will be eaten up by the hydro rate increase and the HST. Some will get a three-year temporary industrial hydro rate, but that came too late for all the mills that are already closed.

Whether I think of Gogama, Foleyet, Shining Tree, Westree, Ramsey, Biscotasing, Cartier, Estaire, Alban, Big Wood—and the list goes on and on just in my riding—people across northern Ontario communities have had their economic legs taken out from underneath them. The McGuinty government should have acted years ago.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Child care is an important service that families across Ontario depend on. Affordable, high-quality, licensed child care services allow parents to stay in the workforce and improve their family's quality of life. Our recent budget included an investment of \$63.5 million a year in permanent funding to support 8,500 child care spaces and help 1,000 child care workers keep their jobs.

Unfortunately, the federal government is no longer investing in child care in Ontario. In 2006-07, the federal government cancelled the early learning and child care agreement, which resulted in the loss of \$1.4 billion for the province. At that time, our government stepped in to fill the funding gap left by the federal government. We now will provide ongoing permanent funding to make sure that those child care spaces stay open.

This is not just good social policy; it also makes economic sense. For parents living in the highest-needs neighbourhoods, which would have been the most affected, losing the highest number of child care spaces if our government did not intervene, this initiative will help to ensure that low-income working parents continue to have access to quality child care and play an active role in the labour force.

This is great news for the parents of York South–Weston and Ontario, and I look forward to seeing the residents in my riding benefit from this investment.

PASSOVER

Mr. Mike Colle: Today I bring attention to Pesach, the Jewish holiday which is commonly known in English as Passover. This is one of the most important holidays in the Jewish calendar.

Just like the night before, tonight, members of the Judaic faith all across the world will participate in the ancient ritual of the Seder. By the way, the focal points of the Seder are eating matzo, eating bitter herbs to commemorate the bitter slavery endured by the Israelites; drinking four cups of wine or grape juice, a royal drink, to celebrate our new-found freedom; and the recitation of the Haggadah, a liturgy that describes in detail the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The Haggadah is the fulfilment of the biblical obligation to recount to our children the story of the Exodus and the night of Passover.

Pesach is a sombre occasion where the Jewish people reflect on the difficulties of their troubled history. It is also uplifting in character, bringing together family and community to appreciate the freedoms and liberties they enjoy today. It is a powerful reminder for the Jewish people of the horrors of discrimination while simultaneously providing hope that it can be overcome.

Together with all members of the assembly and our Premier, Dalton McGuinty, I want to wish all of our friends across Ontario Chag Sameach. Have a wonderful Pesach and have a wonderful Seder tonight. Chag Sameach.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I beg leave to present a report on child and youth mental health agencies from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Sterling presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member wish to make a short statement?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: As I've pointed out before, it's my pleasure to open the "debate" on this particular report. This report on child and youth mental health agencies comes from the Auditor General's 2008 annual report, which was delivered around December 1 of that year. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts held hearings on the report dealing with this particular subject matter in April 2009.

The report puts forward a number of recommendations primarily dealing with the concern of the committee that

all regions of the province of Ontario have similar kinds of treatments for mental health for our children. Unfortunately, mental health services in our province grew piece by piece in different communities in different ways.

The Ministry of Health has been struggling for some period of time to bring some reasoned coherence to mental health services for our children. The report makes several recommendations on how this should be done, so that the ministry will have a better idea how to allocate future resources for different communities to deal with problems in each of our communities across the province of Ontario.

The committee is concerned with the slow pace with regard to getting accountability for the services provided and ensuring that there is equalization of opportunity across all of our communities for children's mental health to be dealt with, whether it's in Windsor, Ottawa, North Bay or Thunder Bay.

We hope that this report will spur those people in the bureaucracy who are dealing with mental health to get the proper records so that we can provide better children's mental health in the future.

With that, I would adjourn the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. David Oraziotti: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 235, An Act to enact the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010 and to amend other Acts / Projet de loi 235, Loi édictant la Loi de 2010 sur la protection des consommateurs d'énergie et modifiant d'autres lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The bill is, therefore, ordered for third reading.

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the March 30, 2010, report of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 108(f)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

VIMY RIDGE DAY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LE JOUR DE LA BATAILLE DE VIMY

Mr. Sterling moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to proclaim Vimy Ridge Day / Projet de loi 19, Loi proclamant le Jour de la bataille de Vimy.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Does the member wish to make a short statement?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Yes. Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, I would like to acknowledge that Jean Thérèse Riley from the Vimy Ridge Foundation is with us here in the gallery.

As I explained to the Legislature in my member's statement, it is important that Ontarians and Canadians remember the battle of Vimy Ridge. In 2003, the Parliament of Canada passed an act recognizing this date, and I think it's now time for the Ontario Parliament to do the same.

The bill is modeled after that federal legislation, and I am encouraged to note that perhaps we have unanimous consent to pass this for second and third reading today. For that reason, I'd like to just state the two sections of the bill so each member of the Legislature understands fully what they're passing if they vote for that unanimous consent.

Section 1 identifies that April 9 in each year is to be proclaimed as Vimy Ridge Day. Section 2 of the bill states that all Canadian flags flown on the exterior of the Legislative Building and its adjoining premises shall be flown at half mast on April 9 in each year.

I'd like to thank all members of the Legislature for their support of this bill. It is truly a non-partisan matter, and I am glad that all parties and all members of the Legislature are acting in that manner.

We all honour our veterans, and I'm just so proud this day that we all recognize it.

LABOUR RELATIONS AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 20, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 / Projet de loi 20, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Does the member wish to make a short statement?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: A brief statement: Simply, this bill is meant to protect media from being further hollowed out. It protects workers in the media sector from having their work contracted out or sent offshore.

RETIREMENT HOMES ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LES MAISONS DE RETRAITE

Mr. Phillips moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to regulate retirement homes / Projet de loi 21, Loi réglementant les maisons de retraite.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Minister, a short statement?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I will make my statement during ministerial statements.

CHILDREN'S LAW REFORM AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI PORTANT RÉFORME DU DROIT DE L'ENFANCE

Mr. Craitor moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 22, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act / Projet de loi 22, Loi modifiant la Loi portant réforme du droit de l'enfance.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Does the member wish to make a short statement?

Mr. Kim Craitor: This will be the fourth time I've introduced this bill into this House.

This bill is designed to assist grandparents—and there are thousands of them out there—who have been denied access to their grandchildren, denied visitation rights or even possible custody. The bill requires the courts to look at what is the best interests of a grandchild when there is an application by a grandparent to have that opportunity.

Earlier today, I introduced two grandparents who were sitting off to my right, Olga and Alex Alexander, who haven't seen their grandchildren in six years. That's what the bill is designed for, and I hope this time, after the fourth time, I can get it through.

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 10 be waived.

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

Motion agreed to.

JOHN BABCOCK

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent for up to five minutes to be allotted to each party to speak on the passing of John Babcock, Canada's last World War I veteran.

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I rise in the House today to pay tribute to John Babcock, Canada's last veteran of the First World War, who died just last month. At the same time, I wish to honour all the men and women who served in that conflict.

John Babcock was born in 1900 on a farm just outside Kingston, and he was humble about his place in history. He enlisted as a teenager, eager to serve his country, and he was our very last witness to what people hoped would be the war to end all wars. Now, with Mr. Babcock's passing, that war passes from living memory into the pages of history. All of us, the generations who followed those brave men and women, are now the custodians of that history, and we have a duty to perform—a duty to remember the bravery of 650,000 Canadians who served in the First World War and a duty to remember the sacrifice of the 68,000 soldiers who never came back.

En 1914, le monde était un lieu bien différent. L'ère des empires prenait fin, et de nouvelles nations atteignaient leur maturité : des nations comme le Canada.

The world was a very different place in 1914. The era of empires was ending and new nations were coming of age—nations like ours. For the people of our great nation, it was on the battlefields of the Somme, Yprès and Vimy Ridge that in a real sense, for the first time, we were not merely defined by the countries of our ancestry but by the place we called home. We became Canadians—first, foremost and forever.

In the trenches, old differences passed away and a new nation was born, one with values taught to us by our young soldiers. We became a country that fights for freedom, here and around the world. We became a country that is diverse but never divided. We became a country that is strong because, when push comes to shove, we work together, we build together, knowing deep down, we're all in this together.

Ce qui importe le plus, ce ne sont pas les terres que ces jeunes ont conquises, mais les gains qu'ils ont faits. Pas plus qu'importe ceux qu'ils ont combattus, mais plutôt les raisons qui les ont motivé à se battre.

1530

What endures most is not the ground those young Canadian soldiers captured over there but the gains they made for us right here, not who they fought against but who they fought for: a country we call the best in the world today because nearly 100 years ago, we gave our best to the world.

We must remember this history of ours, we must teach our children about it, and we will. It will be taught in our classrooms. It will carry on, as it has, for example, for 100 years in the cadet organizations of Canada. But above all, it will live on in how each of us daily chooses to honour and serve this great country and the foundation of freedom and democracy upon which it is built.

I want to recognize that in the gallery today we are joined by a number of cadets. I'd like to thank them for being here. I'd like to thank them for committing to the cadets.

Applause.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: On April 9, as Canadians honour our victory at Vimy Ridge, the federal government will hold a ceremony to mark the end of an era and the passing of our last veteran of the Great War. While we are commemorating the end of that era by welcoming Ontarians to sign a book of reflection here at Queen's Park or online, my hope is that people across Ontario will pause, take just a brief moment from their busy lives and give thanks for the freedom and peace we enjoy today. In the immortal words of the English poet Laurence Binyon:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I would like to begin by reading a poem entitled *A Soldier Died Today* by Second World War RCAF veteran Lawrence Vaincourt:

He was getting old and paunchy and his hair was
falling fast.
He sat around the Legion, telling stories of the past.
Of the war that he had fought and the deeds that he
had done,
Of the exploits with his buddies; they are heroes,
every one.

Tho' sometimes to his neighbours his tales became a
joke,
His Legion buddies listened; they knew whereof he
spoke.
But we'll hear his tales no longer; he has passed away.
The world is much poorer now; a soldier died today.

He will not be mourned by many, just his children and
his wife.
For he lived an ordinary, uneventful, quiet life,
Held a job, raised a family and quietly went his way;
The world won't note his passing, tho' a soldier died
today.

When statesmen leave this earth, their bodies lie in state.
Thousands note their passing and proclaim that they were great.
Papers tell their stories, from the time that they were young.
The passing of a soldier tho', goes unnoticed and unsung.

It's so easy to forget them, it was so long ago,
When our young men left for battle, but this we should know.
It was not the politicians with their promises and ploys
Who won for us the freedom that our country now enjoys.

Should you find yourself in danger, with enemies at hand,
Would you want a diplomat with his every shifting stand?
Or would you prefer a soldier, who has sworn he will defend
His home, his kin, his country; he'll fight until the end?

He was just a common soldier and his ranks are growing thin,
But his presence should remind us; we may need his likes again.
For when countries are in conflict, then we find the soldiers' part
Is to clean up all the troubles that the bureaucrats did start.

If we cannot do him honour while he's here to hear the praise,
Then at least let us give him homage at the ending of his days.
Perhaps just a simple headline in a paper that would say:
Our country is in mourning, for a soldier died today.

John Babcock won no medals for the great feats of World War I. He was not in the trenches of Passchendaele, he did not storm Vimy Ridge and he did not die in battle to lie in Flanders fields. He was only one of 650,000 men and women who served the Dominion. Still, that farm boy from rural Ontario, who enlisted at 16 years old to, from the words of another poem, "take up our quarrel with the foe," holds another honour and distinction no other man, woman or child can claim. He was our last son of the First World War, the Great War, the horrible conflict, the war to end all wars, where Canada became a nation.

In the words of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, "His family mourns the passing of a great man. Canada mourns the passing of the generation that asserted our independence on the world stage and established our

international reputation as an unwavering champion of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law."

But as we pay John Babcock honour, we should not forget that while he was Canada's last veteran of the First World War, he is not our last veteran and not the last soldier this country has asked to take up arms to defend democracy, freedom and the rights we enjoy as a nation. Every time a soldier's body is carried down the Highway of Heroes, we should remember that they do not die for the glory of war; rather, they fought for the majesty of our nation. We should respect our veterans and give credence to their deeds in life, not just in death. Every soldier, whether it be John Babcock, my own father or so many of his generation who took up arms and those who continue to take up arms in defence of our nation today, deserves our respect and our thanks.

As a 16-year-old, John Babcock left the family farm to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Sydenham, Ontario. When they discovered his age, he was relegated to a training battalion and forced to wait until he was old enough to fight. The armistice came before that could happen, a few months short of his 18th birthday. Later in life, he expressed regrets at being a "tin soldier," a World War I veteran who never saw combat, saying he was willing to fight and, if need be, die on the fields of Belgium and France. True to that word, during the Second World War he fought on the side of the United States, his adopted country, where he was forced to give up his Canadian citizenship when he was naturalized in 1946.

He regained his citizenship in 2008, and during one of the last interviews he gave from his home in Spokane, Washington, he said, "I think it would be nice if all the different people in the world could get along together so we weren't having wars. I don't suppose that'll ever happen, though."

Sadly, John, you were probably right. But those of us who are elected to assemblies, Parliaments and councils across Canada will strive every day to promote freedom, democracy and justice. Our goal is to show that, more and more, our nation can be a beacon of light in the world—a world that endeavours to end wars. But when tyranny rears its ugly head, we will turn to soldiers like John Babcock to stand on guard for our nation and honour them by saying we shall not break faith with you and we shall not forget.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We in this House bear a distinct responsibility to honour the legacy of John Babcock and the 650,000 Canadian men and women who served our country in the First World War. Our remembrance in this chamber must remind us that speaking freely, assembling as we wish, speaking with one voice when we agree and having the liberty to voice opposition when we don't is indeed enshrined as a right, but a right that came to exist solely as a product of the selflessness and sacrifice of an entire generation of Canadians.

John Babcock did not see battle, but his legacy, in particular his enlisting at an age when our children today are first earning their driver licences at, persuades us to

recall an entire generation of Canadians who gave freely of themselves so that we could enjoy the liberties and freedoms that allow us to meet in this House here today.

1540

John Babcock was our country's last living connection to a truly remarkable generation, a generation that sent an unimaginable 650,000 of its own into battle during the Great War. The enormity of the sacrifice of those 650,000 brave Canadians is especially astonishing when we recall that Canada's population during World War I was not even one quarter of what it is today. Canada's war effort consumed an entire nation and profoundly shaped the course of the history that continues to shape us all.

John Babcock's embodiment of the selfless sacrifice that defined his generation endured even until the time of his death at the age of 109. Four years ago, after parliamentarians voted unanimously to sponsor a state funeral for Mr. Babcock, he respectfully declined. He was concerned that such attention would overshadow the contributions made by the many others who had served.

It is our collective responsibility and obligation to ensure that the type of humility, selflessness, courage and principle that defined Mr. Babcock's generation is never forgotten. We must embrace the passing of John Babcock not simply as an occasion marked by sadness but also as a reminder of the responsibility we share, a responsibility not just to remember but to commit ourselves to the ideals that the Canadians of his generation upheld—in particular, an enduring plea for peace.

Canada's war veterans returned as our country's finest ambassadors for peace. The passing of John Babcock reminds us that as that time moves forward, those voices for peace become fewer. Of the 650,000 Canadians who served in the First World War, there are now no living voices at all. The number of living Canadians who served in the Second World War and in Korea grows smaller with every passing day.

We have both the responsibility and also the privilege of ensuring that the voices of those who fought for our freedoms can continue to have deep resonance both today and in the future. We must not forget that there are Canadians fighting in conflicts still today and never surrender our gratitude that we may continue to live peacefully here at home. The march toward peace must be continuous and ever renewed. Let those of us with the liberty to assemble and speak freely commit ourselves again to standing up for the freedoms that so many lost their lives defending.

I encourage all Ontarians and all members of this House to add their voices to the books of reflection on display at both Queen's Park and Rideau Hall. These important books of reflection mark the end of an era, but more importantly, they signify a collective pledge never to forget.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Mr. Speaker, we would request a moment of silence for the passing of John Babcock, Canada's last World War I veteran, and all of our World War I veterans.

The House observed a moment's silence.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe it's timely and I believe that we have unanimous consent regarding the Vimy Ridge Day Act, 2010.

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that the orders for second and third reading of Bill 19, An Act to proclaim Vimy Ridge Day, shall be called immediately and that the Speaker shall put the questions on the motions for second and third reading of the bill forthwith, without debate or amendment, and that in the case of any division, the bells be limited to five minutes.

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

Motion agreed to.

VIMY RIDGE DAY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LE JOUR DE LA BATAILLE DE VIMY

Mr. Sterling moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to proclaim Vimy Ridge Day / Projet de loi 19, Loi proclamant le Jour de la bataille de Vimy.

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

Second reading agreed to.

VIMY RIDGE DAY ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LE JOUR DE LA BATAILLE DE VIMY

Mr. Sterling moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to proclaim Vimy Ridge Day / Projet de loi 19, Loi proclamant le Jour de la bataille de Vimy.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I would remind members that the book of remembrance is in the lobby downstairs for your signatures, if you so choose.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

RETIREMENT HOMES

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Today I have the great pleasure and privilege to introduce, for the first time in Ontario, legislation that would provide strong protections for seniors living in retirement homes.

The proposed Retirement Homes Act is about more than just stronger protections; it's about deeply held values we often take for granted, values like respect, dignity, independence and the freedom to make our own decisions. It's also about peace of mind for seniors and for their families.

Many of us in this room today know a senior who is living in a retirement home. They could be a mother, a grandfather, a sister or a dear friend. There are approximately 40,000 seniors who live in approximately 700 retirement homes across this province.

Many retirement homes do their very best to give their residents the comfort of knowing that they're living in a safe environment. Other retirement home residents are not so lucky. Imagine not having the information you need to make decisions about your own care. Imagine not having any recourse for making your home better and no one to talk to when your rights are not respected. This is the reality for some retirement home residents in Ontario.

But today, we're taking action to change all that. The time is right to do this. So we have talked to seniors, retirement home operators and government partners about how we can come up with a retirement homes strategy that puts our seniors first and helps ensure the viability of an industry that is poised for growth.

Several of my colleagues dedicated long hours and hard work to this proposed legislation. I would hope that you would allow me to recognize Aileen Carroll, the member for Barrie, who did a lot of the work that allows me to stand here. I might also point out the dedicated staff at the seniors' secretariat, who care deeply about this and worked very hard on this legislation. If it were not for their efforts, I wouldn't be standing here today.

I also want to recognize some important people here in the members' gallery today: Gord White, the CEO of the Ontario Retirement Communities Association; and Donna Rubin, the CEO of the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. Donna and Gord, thank you very much for being here. They are all part of a collective effort to provide stronger protection to retirement home residents.

1550

In order to ensure these protections, the proposed Retirement Homes Act will, if passed, create a third party authority. The authority would be responsible for creating a public registry that lists all homes across the province, the services they provide and the inspection results. It would be responsible for inspecting retirement homes to make sure they meet care and safety requirements, responsible for penalizing homes that do not comply with orders and responsible for revoking the licences of homes if necessary.

We believe all homes across the province should have to meet consistent care and safety standards. The proposed act, therefore, requires all retirement homes to have emergency plans and infection control and prevention programs, to meet standards for initial and ongoing assessment of residents' care needs and care planning, and to conduct police background checks and training for staff.

Finally, the proposed Retirement Homes Act would ensure that all retirement home residents would have:

- the right to all the information they need to make an informed choice about their care and accommodation;

- the right to know the true cost of the services they are receiving;

- the right to know in plain, clear language the terms and conditions of their accommodation and care;

- the right to be able to access or purchase the same sort of care services that they would be able to get if they were living in their own homes;

- the right to know about staffing levels and that the staff have been trained on safety and evacuation procedures;

- the right to make complaints about the care and safety standards of the home to an arm's-length body;

- the right to live in a safe and clean environment where residents are treated with courtesy and respect; and

- protection from abuse and neglect.

This legislation would, if passed, be one of the most important things we can do for our seniors in our province. It's the respectful thing to do; it's the right thing to do. Society demands this of us, and our seniors deserve no less.

YOUTH SCIENCE MONTH

MOIS DU FESTIVAL SCIENCES JEUNESSE

Hon. John Milloy: March is Youth Science Month in Canada, and I stand here today, actually, in my capacity as Minister of Research and Innovation. It's with great pride that I rise to ask all sides of the House to join me in celebrating the achievements, the curiosity and the promise of Ontario's young people who are involved in the sciences.

We're very honoured to have a number of leaders in the field of youth science here with us today at Queen's Park, including from Let's Talk Science, Dr. Bonnie Schmidt; from Youth Science Canada, Reni Barlow and Sharon Gregory; from Bioscience Education Canada, Dr. Alison Symington, Jeff Graham and Rick Levick; and from Youth Science Ontario, Carolyn Rayfield. We welcome them here and thank them for their leadership in this important field.

Every year, over 500,000 young Canadians participate in project-based science. That's as many as play minor hockey or about the population of Hamilton. This month, youth from across our province have been showcasing their work at science fairs, such as the 50th Bay Area Science and Engineering Fair and the Windsor regional fair, both of which took place just a few days ago. These young people have been competing to earn a coveted spot at the Canada-Wide Science Fair, which will be hosted in Peterborough this May.

Ontario students also get to showcase their immense talent at the international level. Next week, for example, I will be speaking at the Sanofi-Aventis BioTalent Challenge awards ceremony. This event is one of Ontario's

premier youth science mentorship programs, and Canadian winners move on to an international biotechnology competition in Chicago this May.

Les temps sont durs en matière d'économie—c'est indiscutable. Mais nous nous trouvons à un moment décisif de notre histoire, un moment où nous avons l'occasion de prendre une longueur d'avance en créant des approches, des technologies et des solutions scientifiques face aux problèmes du 21^e siècle.

Ce sont nos jeunes, la prochaine génération de scientifiques et d'entrepreneurs innovateurs, qui, en prenant des risques, nous hisseront à des niveaux que nous n'aurions jamais pu imaginer.

Former UN Secretary-General and Nobel Peace Prize winner Kofi Annan once said, "Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation.... Empowered, they can be key agents for development." He was right, and Ontario is committed to supporting and inspiring our youth so that they become the drivers of innovation in our province and all around the world.

Young people like Erik Yao: Erik was a high school student from Hamilton who won a Canada-Wide Science Fair award and went on to participate in one of Ontario's youth programs. Before this, he was unsure of his career aspirations. But now, after getting the opportunity to work alongside leading Ontario immunology researchers, Erik is pursuing an education in medical science.

Since 2005, the Ministry of Research and Innovation has invested over \$5 million to support science outreach projects which have sparked the scientific curiosity of more than 156,000 youth across the province—young people like Erik.

In addition, our government was proud to support the work of Youth Science Canada and Let's Talk Science with an investment of \$5 million in 2008. These amazing organizations are supporting science and technology education in remote and aboriginal communities, enabling Ontario youth to participate in science fairs and championing more young people to advance to national and international competitions. Let's Talk Science is even reaching out to children between six months and six years old with their Wings of Discovery science program. This program recognizes that during the early years children are asking the questions and acquiring the knowledge and attitudes that will drive their curiosity and cognitive development in the future. Like Let's Talk Science, in Ontario we have our eye on the future.

Si nous voulons que l'Ontario devienne un chef de file économique, nous savons qu'il nous faut être chef de file en matière d'éducation. Pour affronter la concurrence mondiale, il nous faut une population active très instruite et hautement spécialisée.

By moving ahead with full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds and strengthening Ontario's colleges and universities, our new five-year Open Ontario plan is laying the foundation for the powerful and productive workforce of tomorrow. We are laying the foundation for tomorrow's leaders, for tomorrow's scientists and engineers, entrepreneurs and innovators. We are laying

the foundation for students like Erik, who will be finding the solutions to global challenges like climate change and water scarcity and the fight against diseases like cancer.

With our support, there is no doubt that Ontario's youth will succeed, and when our kids win, we all win.

RETIREMENT HOMES

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: My comments are directed to the retirement homes bill. The McGuinty government's plan to regulate retirement homes does not go far enough to meet the real needs of Ontario's seniors. What Ontario's seniors really need are more long-term-care beds funded by this government.

This government has basically stopped construction of new long-term-care facilities for six years, and my fear is that by regulating retirement homes, seniors will be moved from hospitals to these homes, where the level of care they require may not be available. This has already happened in Waterloo region.

Our province is in desperate need of long-term-care beds to accommodate the many senior citizens being cared for in hospitals. In Cambridge Memorial Hospital, an estimated 35 beds are occupied by patients waiting for a bed at a long-term-care facility, and this situation exists across our province.

Regulating retirement homes may be a good idea, but it totally ignores the real problem and is the cheap way of getting patients out of hospitals. There are better ways to save money than privatizing our health care system. This privatization creates a dangerous situation and could put the safety and well-being of seniors at risk.

I'm sharing my time with my colleague and friend Jim Wilson, the member for Simcoe-Grey, who will speak in response to the Minister of Research and Innovation.

1600

I want to congratulate my colleague, who started Youth Science Month in Ontario and who, as Minister of Energy, Science and Technology, launched the programs that the minister was talking about today.

YOUTH SCIENCE MONTH

Mr. Jim Wilson: In response to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, on behalf of Tim Hudak and the PC caucus, I too want to join with all members of this House in saluting Youth Science Month.

As my wonderful colleague from Cambridge said, during my time as Minister of Energy, Science and Technology, we started many of the programs that mirror what the minister just talked about. Our efforts were focused on getting young people interested in science from grade school to high school to college and university.

We had to pick up the slack back in the mid-1990s because, as the minister would know as a former assistant to Jean Chrétien, the federal Liberals had cut all the funding for science fairs across the country and, in particular, Ontario. So we picked up the ball and worked

with Sci-Tech Ontario to promote science among young people and to re-establish funding for science fairs across the province.

I remember we bought wonderful jackets, in co-sponsorship with the drug company Pfizer, for the best and brightest students, and sponsored their travel and accommodation to attend Ontario science fairs and later the Canada-Wide Science Fair.

As science and technology minister, I travelled to Timmins for the Canadian championship. I have to say that it was like attending the Olympics for science. I remember being so proud to watch the Ontario team come onto the floor. I understand that's in Peterborough this year.

Another thing I really enjoyed was the launch of Engineering Week every year, sponsored by Professional Engineers Ontario. If there's one thing I miss, it's the interaction that I had as minister with those very bright engineers in training.

The one other thing I'll mention is a project we did with NASA called Tomatosphere. We teamed up with NASA to allow students to do a science experiment to see how tomatoes grew in zero gravity as compared to those grown in classrooms across Ontario. We had almost 100% participation of grade school students across Ontario. To this day, I still have the posters that were signed by all of the students at Thor prep school in Thornton and Byng Public School in Stayner. Those posters actually went up into space on the space shuttle and were brought back down, and they're still hanging in my office here at Queen's Park.

In closing, I just want to say congratulations to all of the students participating in Youth Science Month. Your innovation, know-how and excitement have always been an inspiration to me and my caucus. Spending time with these very bright young people has certainly been a highlight of my career and, I know, the highlight of many of those in my House.

Just in case you're all wondering whatever happened to Tomatosphere, the plants that started growing on the space station actually did grow a little taller than those tomatoes that were grown in the classrooms.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I know the greenhouse growers in Leamington-Kingsville would be interested in that. Responses?

RETIREMENT HOMES

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to respond to the seniors' bill. There are some good things in this bill. I'm happy to see that there have been some administrative changes, and I'm happy to see that there's going to be some more monitoring and scrutiny and accountability. I'm happy about that, but in the bill, part I mentions safety, part IV mentions safety and part V allows for inspectors to enter the homes to inspect. Needless to say, I'm a little disappointed to see nothing on sprinkler systems.

This is from the Ontario Retirement Communities Association, which, on many different pages on building amenities, suite amenities, have asked for fire and smoke

alarms and also sprinkler systems individually. Also, the fire chiefs of Ontario have recommended this on more than one occasion, on different disasters that happened in our province.

Last September, I talked about a sprinkler system in every retirement home and a sprinkler system in every suite. I tried to put it in perspective to this government. I reminded them of their spending on eHealth, consulting fees, and wild personal spending on Ontario agencies, boards and commissions. However, when sprinkler systems in retirement homes should have been their priority, the very basic requirement for each and every retirement home in Ontario was absent.

This government needs to finally step up to the plate for seniors and ensure the funding for retirement homes in Ontario be fully equipped with operational sprinkler systems. I'm sure that when I read this legislation there will be no significant mention, let alone direction, for fire sprinkler safety in retirement homes.

Our most vulnerable citizens have every right to expect their government ensure their safety as they live away from their families while trying to maintain their independence during their twilight years. Those fire victims should have been able to depend on appropriate government legislation and support to the industry so their lives would have been saved.

They have the support of the firefighters of Ontario and the fire chiefs, particularly those who were on scene at the horrific retirement home fires that unnecessarily took away mothers, fathers and grandparents from their families.

Although the Liberal government has likely missed the boat with this legislation, there is still time to do the right thing, to enact legislation and provide financial support for programs that will ensure fire sprinkler safety for all those living in all retirement homes in our province.

RETIREMENT HOMES

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is also my pleasure to talk about the retirement home legislation that was tabled in this House today. New Democrats have long called for a regulatory system for retirement homes, a system that, as my colleagues have mentioned, would include mandatory sprinkler systems in all of the homes, a system that protects the rights of vulnerable residents of retirement homes and a system that would prevent severely ill patients from being placed in a home that is unable to properly care for them.

Since I was elected in 2007, I have risen in this House and asked numerous times when this regulation was coming. I was told numerous times that the regulation was on its way and that I would be happy when it came. Today, I guess the wait is over: The bill has been tabled.

From what I have heard so far, there are some good things in the bill. Vulnerable Ontarians living in retirement homes have waited far too long for the regulations that are presently tabled today. While the government kind of dawdled, elderly Ontarians have been put at risk, and in some cases actually tragically died.

Seniors who have to be in retirement homes are often left without adequate medical care, without safeguards in place to prevent abuse, without enforcement of any regulations and without continuity of care. Today, with the tabling of this bill, should be the day when all of this changes, but allow me to be a little bit concerned that that won't be the case. In 2007, when the public consultations were carried out, the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly's submission to the consultation process warned that this government was not getting it right in its questions, that it was not getting it right with its definitions, and that the regulatory models that they were considering were not the right ones.

I certainly hope that they have listened to them and that we will be satisfied with what's in the bill. I have waited a long time. I hope I will be happy.

PETITIONS

PENSION PLANS

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

"Whereas several paramedics in Simcoe county had their pensions affected when paramedic services were transferred to the county of Simcoe, as their pensions were not transferred with them" from the hospitals of Ontario pension plan and OPSEU trust plan "to OMERS, meaning they will receive significantly reduced pensions because their transfer did not recognize their years of credited service; and

"Whereas when these paramedics started with their new employer, the county of Simcoe, their past pensionable years were not recognized because of existing pension legislation; and

"Whereas the government's own Expert Commission on Pensions has recommended that government move swiftly to address this issue; and

"Whereas the government should recognize this issue as a technicality and not penalize hard-working paramedics;

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

"That Premier McGuinty support Simcoe-Grey MPP Jim Wilson's resolution that calls upon the government to address this issue immediately and ensure that any legislation or regulation allows paramedics in Simcoe county who were affected by the divestment of paramedic services in the 1990s and beyond to transfer their pensions" from the hospitals of Ontario pension plan and OPSEU pension plan trust to OMERS.

I'm happy to note that the government has introduced legislation to respond to my resolution, so I will sign this petition.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from the people of Sudbury, and it reads as follows:

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

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"Whereas" since "October 2009, insured PET scans" are being "performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

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

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

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

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas we currently have no psychiatric emergency service at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to support the creation of a psychiatric emergency service in emergency at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario."

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

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: I am pleased to present a petition in the limited time allowed for petitions. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

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

"Therefore we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the members of the provincial Parliament of Ontario to enact legislation in support of the Ombudsman of Ontario to have the power to probe decisions and

investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies (CAS)."

I'm pleased to sign and support this on behalf of my constituents of the riding of Durham and give it to Catia.

ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Mr. Rick Johnson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the health of the First Nations youth in Ontario is of growing concern;

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

"To continue the partnership with the Right To Play partnership with the Moose Cree First Nation;

"To expand the Right To Play program to other First Nations communities; and

"To follow up these programs to ensure that other initiatives continue to promote the health of First Nations youth in Ontario."

I agree with this petition, sign it and will turn it over to page Jameson.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Steve Clark: This is a petition from Leeds–Grenville, from a rally yesterday. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario government created the local health integration networks; and

"Whereas the mandate of the LHINs includes providing funding to a hospital; and

"Whereas Brockville General Hospital's deficit of \$2 million has resulted in the hospital cutting the equivalent of 17 full-time staff members and shutting down 15 acute care medical surgical beds; and

"Whereas other Ontario hospitals have been successful in receiving increases in base funding to help preserve front-line health care jobs and services; and

"Whereas the job loss will impact the local economy and the closure of 10% of hospital beds is an enormous loss for a small community;

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

"That the Ontario government sufficiently fund the South East LHIN and the Brockville General Hospital to ensure that Brockville and area residents have full access to all hospital services to which they are rightfully entitled."

I certainly agree. I will affix my signature and pass to it page Catia.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over Ontario in the form of postcards. On the postcards, people wrote things like, "shameful," "hear-

less," "frightening," "disgusting," "frustrated," "sad," "rural discrimination," but the petition reads as follows:

"The Ontario government promised no cuts to health care during the recession. Now a proposal for a funding increase threatens to cut our hospitals—a cut that won't heal. H1N1 has already increased demand on our hospitals, the costs of drugs and diagnostic equipment are constantly rising, and every day our hospitals are being asked to do more with less. A 1.5% funding increase will create a care deficit for our patients. It will also undo efforts to reduce wait times, return health professionals into the system and provide better access to services, efforts that have already cost millions of dollars. Turning the clock back wastes these investments."

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Please do not fight the recession on the backs of our public hospitals. Our hospitals need to be funded based on our communities' needs."

Those come from all over the province. I will affix my name to it and send them to the table with page Harsh.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: A petition from Etobicoke Centre:

"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 that 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 shall affix my name to this and give this to Anne-Marie.

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the residents of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound do not want a provincial harmonized sales tax that will raise the cost of goods and services they use every day; and

"Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for gasoline for their cars, heat, tele-

phone, cable and Internet services for their homes, and will be applied to” houses “over \$400,000; and

“Whereas the 13% blended sales tax will cause everyone to pay more for meals ... funeral services, gym memberships, newspapers, and lawyer and accountant fees; and

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

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

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

I’ll give it to Jameson.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Glen R. Murray: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we never want to see another tragedy like Walkerton ever again. The health and safety of Ontarians can never come second to profit and greed. Clean, safe drinking water is a right” of all Ontarians;

“We, the undersigned, petition the” Legislature “of Ontario as follows:

“To continue to upgrade our current water filtration system;

“To continue to monitor and test our water systems;

“To continue to strengthen Ontario’s trust in the safety of our drinking water;

“To continue to invest in new systems and personnel to monitor and test our water;

“To never forget the mistakes of the past and always hold our water supply to the highest standards;

“To continue to invest in the health and safety of Ontarians through our water supply.”

I will sign this petition and give it to page Catia.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Petitions? The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you, Speaker; that’s very kind of you.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas early childhood learning is a fundamental program in the development and education of Ontario’s youth;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“To continue to expand full-day learning across the province;

“To continue to make our children a priority for this government;

“To continue investments in the infrastructure of our education system;

“To continue to support Ontario’s families through these initiatives; and

“To never go back to the days of forgotten children and mismanagement of schools we saw in the 1990s. We applaud the new investments in full-day learning and look forward to their continued growth across the province.”

I endorse this petition myself.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty’s plan to blend the PST with the GST into one 13% harmonized sales tax represents one of the largest tax hikes in Ontario history, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

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“This new tax, which we are calling the DST ... will raise the cost of a long list of goods and services not previously subject to provincial sales tax, including” but not excepting “electricity; home heating oil and gas at the pump; haircuts; newspapers and magazines; Internet and cable; home renovations; heating; air-conditioning repairs; accounting, legal and real estate fees; condo fees; new home sales; rents will also go up; minor hockey registration fees will increase; and green fees and gym fees will also be taxed;

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

“That the McGuinty government not impose this new tax on Ontario’s hard-working families and businesses.”

I agree with it, I’ll sign my name and send it down with Colin.

TAXATION

Mr. Pat Hoy: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a duplicated tax system puts our businesses at a disadvantage by increasing the costs of doing business; and

“Whereas a single, unified tax system reduces the burden on businesses by removing the provincial sales tax on goods and reducing administrative costs; and

“Whereas both Conservative and Liberal members of the provincial and federal Legislatures have voiced their support of a single sales tax; and

“Whereas local chambers of commerce, economists and experts are also supporting the move to a single tax system; and

“Whereas the recent RBC Economics report found that the HST is improving the competitiveness of Ontario businesses by lowering the cost of doing business in Ontario; and

“Whereas a harmonized sales tax is expected to create jobs for Ontario;

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

“That all parties of the provincial Legislature support the government of Ontario’s plan to implement the HST and other tax reforms to benefit Ontario businesses and consumers.”

I too have signed the petition.

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition which reads:

“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, ... gas ... , home heating” and it goes on and on; I’ll just read the end of it.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the proposed tax harmonization, especially in light of the current economic uncertainty.”

As I agree, I’ll sign it.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Mr. Jeff Leal: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas early childhood learning is a fundamental program in the development and education of Ontario’s youth;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“To continue to expand full-day learning across the province;

“To continue to make our children a priority for this government;

“To continue investments in the infrastructure of our education system;

“To continue to support Ontario’s families through these initiatives; and

“To never go back to the days of forgotten children and mismanagement of schools we saw in the 1990s. We applaud the new investments in full-day learning and look forward to their continued growth across the province.”

I agree with this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to page Mathilda.

OPPOSITION DAY

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I move that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario call on the Premier of Ontario to adopt the principle that if you do not lose your job, you do not collect severance, and cancel severance payments to HST tax collectors who keep their jobs. This is addressed to the Premier of Ontario.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to this motion that our Ontario PC caucus has brought forward. This motion

is in keeping with our commitment to use all of the legislative tools at our disposal to put a stop to the inexcusable payout of \$25 million in severance to HST tax collectors, none of whom will be missing a single day on the job.

As members know, in every other jurisdiction on the planet severance is defined as a payment to someone when they actually lose their job. You don’t need to go to the legislative library to learn this fact; it just makes good plain sense. In fact, only in Dalton McGuinty’s Ontario is severance defined as the payout you get when you change your business cards, as the HST tax collectors are doing in moving from the provincial to the federal payroll.

We believe that Dalton McGuinty missed an opportunity in this year’s budget to present Ontario families with this gesture of good faith that his government has learned from its past mistakes and is finally prepared to treat Ontario families’ tax dollars with the respect they deserve. But sadly, they missed this opportunity.

The \$25 million in severance is in fact symbolic of a larger problem we see in the approach of this budget and the approach of the McGuinty government as a whole. It has become symbolic of the lack of respect the government continues to show for how hard Ontario families work to put food on the table and the sacrifices that they make each and every day to balance the family budget. It is symbolic of an approach to government where promises of action to reign in spending just cannot be taken seriously.

The 2010 budget confirms that Ontario’s deficit is actually larger than all the other provinces’ combined. The 2010 budget confirms that Dalton McGuinty’s government is on course to double the provincial debt by 2012. They are on course to mortgaging the future of our children and grandchildren, and this needs to come to an end today.

A forward-thinking government would clearly see this situation and realize that a change in direction is desperately needed. But with this so-called severance deal, it is sadly business as usual in Dalton McGuinty’s Ontario. He didn’t even raise a finger to challenge this, didn’t try any kind of appeal mechanism under the agreement. Taxpayers across Ontario, from Northumberland to Perth–Wellington to Peterborough, were shocked to find out that Dalton McGuinty will pay up to \$25 million in severance packages to 1,200 provincial tax collectors even though they don’t miss a single day on the job and the vast majority of them are actually getting pay increases. They will now be employed with the federal government to collect Dalton McGuinty’s \$3-billion HST tax grab. This is not acceptable to me, it’s not acceptable to the PC caucus and it is not acceptable to hard-working families in the province of Ontario.

I am confident that all members would agree the principle here is simple: If you don’t lose your job, you do not collect severance from the taxpayers in the province of Ontario. It is as simple as that. Every other jurisdiction follows that pattern. British Columbia is

following that pattern. As we all know, BC signed an agreement to harmonize its sales tax, it signed an agreement to transfer provincial tax collectors to the Canada Revenue Agency, but its public employees, the HST tax collectors in British Columbia, are not receiving the severance payouts that Dalton McGuinty's tax collectors are.

All Ontario families are asking for is for Dalton McGuinty to do the right thing. There are so many better uses for that \$25 million in severance than this sweetheart deal for Dalton McGuinty's HST tax collectors, who don't miss a day on the job and in fact are getting a pay raise.

When you're laying off nurses in the province of Ontario, when special-needs children cannot get the services they need in our classrooms, when Dalton McGuinty is closing down ERs in communities like Fort Erie and Port Colborne, it is absolutely wrong to hand out \$25 million to his HST collectors.

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Now, what has Dalton McGuinty told us when we confronted him here in the Legislature with this unconscionable waste of taxpayer dollars? Well, he tells us that his hands are tied. But if the Premier had even the slightest sincere interest in protecting Ontario families against this unwarranted, unjustified severance payout, he had every opportunity to do so. He could have specifically addressed this in the collective bargaining agreement his government signed in 2006. He could have addressed it in the collective bargaining agreement he signed in 2009. He could have addressed it in the comprehensive integrated tax coordination agreement that he signed just last year. He could have addressed it in the HST legislation he introduced last winter. He could have addressed it in the human resource agreement, the transfer of staff to the CRA. To my count, that's five different occasions when Dalton McGuinty could have stood up for Ontario families, and five times he failed to do so. This stops now, today.

So if Dalton McGuinty claims that his hands are tied, despite passing on an appeal, despite five occasions to change this, the Ontario PC caucus is more than happy to untie Dalton McGuinty's hands and do the right thing and save that \$25 million for priority services.

That is why, in addition to this motion, we will introduce a budget bill amendment that will specifically amend the Ontario Tax Plan for More Jobs and Growth Act, 2009, to clearly block the severance payout.

This is just the latest example of how the Ontario PC Party is standing up for Ontario families, who have had it up to here with this reckless spending, scandals, tax hikes and fee increases visited upon them by the Dalton McGuinty government.

We are standing up for Ontario's small business owners, who have tightened their own belts, who have made sacrifices in order to make ends meet while the McGuinty government continues to indulge in this outrageous spending and sweetheart deals.

We are proud, as a caucus, to be bringing forward innovative, new job-creating policies. We have put out 10 good ideas to take Ontario down an entirely different path than the one we're on today, to help stimulate our economy and help to create jobs. These ideas can be found on our website, 10for2010.ca, because we in the Ontario PC caucus want to see Ontario lead again.

There was a time not too long ago that Ontario was known for having the best jobs, for having the best hospitals, for having the best schools, the best roads in our entire country. Ontario defined being a "have" province. Ontario helped to define Canada. For generations, young people from St. John's, Newfoundland, or Victoria, BC, came to Ontario to find a good job, to start a family and to build a better future, and our province stood as a beacon of opportunity for thousands and thousands of immigrants from all corners around the world. We want Ontario to lead again, and we call upon the Premier to implement our ideas at 10for2010.ca to create jobs today.

Cancelling this HST severance payout would be a symbolic, significant and substantive show of good faith that this government has finally received the message from Ontario families. We are asking all members of the Legislature to join with us in amending the budget bill to cancel the \$25-million severance payout to the HST collectors, who won't miss a single day on the job. This is a straightforward challenge based on this simple principle shared by Ontario families from Niagara to Ottawa to Kenora to Northumberland: If you don't lose your job, you don't get severance from the taxpayer in the province of Ontario.

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

Hon. John Wilkinson: Before I start, I would like to thank the members who have expressed their condolences to me and my family on the recent passing of my mother. I take that to heart and appreciate that, so thank you so much.

Now we'll get to the matter at hand. I find it quite passing strange that the Leader of the Opposition, who used to sit around the cabinet table, part of a government that actually, according to history, brought this clause into the collective agreement—I believe it was the Robarts government that brought that in—and had a number of opportunities to take that out of the collective agreement and, of course, did not do that; had a number of opportunities when people transferred from one level of government to another, and paid out severances gladly, I would assume, many, many times.

What did our government do? While we were negotiating collective agreements, we were able to remove that clause from our current collective agreements for new hires going back to 2006, 2008 and 2009. That's why we were able to do that.

The question here is a question of principle. Is the opposition opposed to this on principle? I would say not, because when they were in power they did exactly what they are upset about us doing: honouring an agreement.

Or is this a question of politics? When it comes to principle, we believe that if we sign a collective agreement and enter into that, as a government we are bound by our signature. That is the most important thing. There may be howling masses on the other side who believe that our signature should be here today and gone tomorrow, but we believe it's important that we honour our agreements with OPSEU and AMAPCEO.

The fact of the matter is, the people I am proud to serve as minister at the Ministry of Revenue, who have been doing a remarkable job of collecting \$100 million of tax each and every day to pay for the public services that we value as a province, those people continue to work. We are proud of the fact that we were able to negotiate an agreement with the federal government that sees their unique skill set transferred to the federal government. As they collect the HST, a portion of that reverts back to the province, much as is the case with income tax, for example, in this province. Those people have a unique skill set, but they will not be doing the same job. The people involved have been collecting the outdated 1961 retail sales tax. Instead, they'll be collecting the modern value-added tax used around the world. They have the right skill set, but they're going to have to have a different job.

I'm proud to be part of a government—and I know that members opposite, in their caucus, are particularly proud that the job offers that people are receiving will be within 40 kilometres of where they're working today. For the federal government to offer jobs to our people and say, "Well, those jobs are in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, at the headquarters of the HST"—I don't see how that would be good for the economy of Ontario, not at all. So it is reassuring that those people will have jobs that they'll be able to find in Ontario, close to their communities.

It's a question here of whether or not we honour our agreement, an agreement entered into in good faith. Are we a party and a government that would say, "Well, now that it's inconvenient, we're going to ignore the fact that we've signed this agreement, an agreement entered into by Premier John Robarts and reaffirmed by so many different governments"? As I'm sure the other speakers will talk about, they, under this exact same clause, have been able to pay things out.

How I know that this is driven by partisanship and politics, not by principle, is the fact that I have not heard one member there say that when a certain member of this House from the party opposite did not lose a day of pay and decided to be appointed by the Prime Minister to another Legislature—there was no call that the severance that he's entitled to should not be paid to him, so I find it somewhat odd. If the member opposite was getting up and saying that perhaps Senator Runciman should not receive the severance that's part of his compensation package of being a member of this place, then perhaps it would be a question of principle, but I don't seem to see that. All I know is that the Leader of the Opposition, when sitting around the cabinet table, approved a number

of deals, over the years that they were in government, that I know my colleagues are going to be able to talk about in great detail. They found this not offensive but actually honouring a collective agreement.

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This is a question of partisanship and politics versus principle. If you sign an agreement, I say to someone who desperately wants to be Premier one day, you send a very strong signal to the people who would work with you as to whether or not you could be counted on to honour the agreement on behalf of the government of Ontario. Whether we find those agreements subsequently to be of question, we know as a government that our job is to honour those agreements. I've had an opportunity to speak to my constituents about this and they're reassured that there is a government that keeps its word.

I'll yield the floor to others, but I've been delighted to be part of today's debate.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm proud to be standing today alongside our leader Tim Hudak and the PC caucus to call on the Premier of Ontario to cancel severance payments to HST tax collectors, who are not losing a day of work.

While the McGuinty Liberals are going to collect \$3 billion more in taxes off the backs of Ontario families, this government is adding further insult to injury by forcing Ontarians to pay \$25 million in severance to HST tax collectors. In fact, it is akin to when Woolco was acquired by Wal-Mart. Those employees were not entitled to receive up to \$45,000 worth of severance to do the same job in the same location with the same title, but that's precisely what is happening in this case. These tax collectors are eligible for up to \$45,000 in severance—same job, same office, just a different logo hanging on the shingle outside.

We in the PC caucus do not support that principle. We do not support the principle that if you do not lose your job you collect severance. We think that if you do not lose your job you do not collect severance. We hope that the MPPs in the other political parties will endorse this principle.

The McGuinty Liberals have had five separate opportunities to avoid this handsome bonus being paid to people who aren't losing their jobs. In fact, they renegotiated the collective agreement with the HST tax collectors twice. They also negotiated the CITCA agreement, which was the foundation of the HST. They enacted the HST legislation, and in March the McGuinty Liberals finalized the human resources agreement that transfers HST tax collectors to the federal government, yet the McGuinty Liberals, as we just heard from the revenue minister, want to reach back 40 years to a Premier who left his job before I was born. That is how much of a joke their argument is—again, five separate agreements under Mr. McGuinty's watch and five different opportunities for the McGuinty Liberals to show leadership and stand up for Ontario families during a time of economic restraint.

Again, our position is very clear: If you don't lose your job, you don't collect severance. Ontario families know this. While they're tightening their belts and making sacrifices, they are being slapped in the face with higher energy bills by a hidden hydro tax, a greedy \$3-billion HST tax grab, a health tax they've been paying since this government came to office, and now they have to pay \$25 million in severance to people who are not losing their jobs.

It's against the backdrop of a deficit that is higher than all the other nine provinces combined. It's a debt that will have doubled in the eight years that this Premier has been in office and a reliance on federal welfare payments that will triple this year. Ontario as a have-not province before Dalton McGuinty took office would have been unheard of. Shame on you. Ontario families cannot afford Dalton McGuinty anymore.

With this motion, we are calling on the McGuinty Liberals to make a choice and stand up with us for Ontario's families by cancelling the severance payments to those who are not losing their jobs. We ask for true leadership, like the leadership Tim Hudak has shown today by introducing this budget amendment, and demand that taxpayers and their collectors return this \$25-million taxpayer burden right now.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: If there were any doubt that the neo-con reflex of nastiness that is so emblematic of the dark Harris-Eves years has once again infested the soul of the Conservative Party, this resolution has removed all such doubt forever.

If you sign an agreement during the term of a Liberal government and you think you have a deal, you do. But this resolution says that if you sign an agreement before or during the term that a Conservative government just may serve, they may honour it only if it suits them. If you have an agreement under a Conservative government and your job is something that allows Conservatives to play the politics of division and get in a cheap shot, then not only do you not have a deal, you're in for abuse and ridicule while Tories play to their right-wing, neo-con gallery, stoking the anger that is the hallmark of how they behave in government.

The principle of honouring a legally negotiated and signed agreement is one that the Conservative Party, while in power, adhered to. It paid severance to Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Royal Affairs staff who were transferred to the University of Guelph in 1996. They did it again in 1997 with 841 employees of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Later in the term of that government, the Conservatives paid severance to 3,311 employees who worked in psychiatric care.

But these people couldn't be lumped together and given the sneering label of HST tax collectors. That somehow renders these 1,251 employees of the Ministry of Revenue as less human and less valuable and less worthy of dignity than employees of agriculture, food and rural affairs, or health care workers.

This philistine approach to men and women who can be labelled as tax collectors ought to give everyone pause who plans to give a Conservative a dollar. This reflexive ideological nastiness ought to cause everyone who might consider voting Conservative to recoil in the horror that awaits them should that party ever again form government in Ontario. This clear, biased, inhumane, unprofessional and presupposing illegal challenge, illegal position ought to cause every man and woman who is a supporter or a member of that once-great party to hang their head in shame.

These men and women who leave the Ontario public service and join the Canada Revenue Agency as new hires have no seniority. The emotionally loaded Conservative resolution failed to mention that. Ministry of Revenue staff who choose to join the Canada Revenue Agency have an employment guarantee for only two years. The Conservative resolution that calls them "tax collectors" doesn't mention that.

So let's suggest a resolution that actually tells it like it is. Listen up, Conservatives. This is what your party really stands for: That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario call upon the Premier of Ontario to adopt the principle that if you sign a legally binding agreement with the government of Ontario and it does not suit Conservative ideological politics-of-division purposes, the government of Ontario reserves the right to revoke your legally negotiated benefits and stick it to you.

Let's draw a comparison between how Liberals govern and how Ontario Conservatives govern. If you come to work with the province while Liberals govern Ontario, you'll be treated with respect and dignity. And the contractual arrangements you have, whether or not you signed them on our watch or during our term or that of any previous party or government, those terms will be honoured. To a Conservative, a contract or a signed and legally negotiated collective agreement is only valid if it works to the advantage of Conservatives. If the terms might benefit you, the Conservatives will abrogate a legal agreement if they are in power, and to all other governments, they advocate abrogating a binding agreement while in opposition.

1650

This resolution is more than a promise that says that the word of a Conservative is worthless, and that the signature of a Conservative leader isn't worth the ink on the paper. This resolution goes deeper than a threat to everyone who works in the Ontario public service, in the broader public services or everyone who has ever entered into a collective agreement with a public sector organization. This Conservative resolution is just the latest sneering neo-con taunt to Ontarians and a warning to everyone who would equate their party, their ideology or their platform with the concept of democracy. All that's missing is a final outstretched finger to Ontarians.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: I have to address a couple of words to the television audience. I'm looking at you in

that television camera, all 43 of you who are watching: You're not watching *The Stupid Show*. You think you are. This is as good as *Family Guy*, except *Family Guy* is humorous. What you just heard from the member from Mississauga–Streetsville would be laughable if it weren't so sad. We're talking about \$25 million that we're going to pay in severance to people who aren't being fired; \$25 million that you could have used, for example, to take care of autistic children and their families who you took to court so you could get out of doing that. That's what we're talking about here. So let's be absolutely plain and clear about what this discussion is about.

There are public servants in British Columbia who signed a similar deal this week to move to federal positions, and they will not be entitled to severance payments. But not here in Ontario, don't you know, where we're rich. We must be, because we use Dalton McGuinty's yardstick of how much money you can spend. Apparently, if you take a look at last week's budget, it's a hell of a lot more than what he's bringing in. When asked about it, McGuinty defended it on the basis that the severance is provided for in the collective agreement. McGuinty said, "When we do business with each other and ... do business with the world ... when we give you our word, our word is our word." He said that on March 11.

I don't know what Dalton McGuinty interprets as the criteria for when his word is his word, but apparently it doesn't apply to taxpayers in the province of Ontario. There were promises made with your word being your word, Premier, that had to do with whether or not we all pay a health tax. You call it a premium, but we know what it is. Your word was, "No new taxes." The HST: No new taxes. The new line item going on your hydro bill: No new taxes. There are so many examples of that. So if your word is your word, what I say is, why didn't you keep yours, Premier?

Since I was first elected in 2007, I've stood in this House and I've debated many bills that could be charitably described as nothing less than stupid, and I've commented on that before. We're not talking about a bill here. We're talking about a severance payment that's contained in an overall budget: \$25 million to people who basically have to go through the arduous task of having their business cards changed.

Have you listened recently to what the pundits are saying on the radio, in the papers, everywhere? Who in Ontario gets severance to leave one job, stay in their office, get a new business card, sit at their desk and continue with a new job, and oh, by the way, with a 3.4% increase in salary? That is what we're talking about. I don't know about members from the government side, but everywhere I go, people want to talk about it, and I can tell you I haven't met one person yet who says that they agree with that idea.

When it comes to having a lock on particular types of resolutions, motions or legislation that are presented here, as I said, I've been here since 2007, so going on three years. I've talked about some of the legislation that's

rather silly and I've talked about it in the context of bills that were about nanny statism. I guess charitably I could call them banning bills: banning pesticides, banning smoking in cars, banning pit bulls, banning plastic bags and so on.

What I'd like to say today is that we in the PC caucus decided that we would come up with a ban of our own. With our motion today, what we're calling for, what Tim Hudak and the PC caucus are calling for, is a ban on stupidity in the Liberal government, because paying \$25 million in severance to government employees who will not miss a day of work is just stupid. Plain and simple, it's stupid.

Isn't it offensive that the McGuinty government is forcing each and every one of us to pay 8% more for almost everything we buy each and every day because of the HST? From Internet services to gas to hydro to vet bills to accountant fees, everything will cost Ontarians more. Isn't it offensive enough that the flawed Green Energy Act is going to force Ontarians to pay more for their gas and hydro bills because of the \$53-million hidden hydro tax? Isn't it offensive enough that this governmental is running a \$20-billion deficit this year that's going to have to be paid for by who? Our children and our grandchildren. Isn't it offensive enough that this government is so addicted to spending that despite repeated advice from respected economists, this government doesn't have a plan to get Ontario out of deficit?

Open Ontario indeed. I got word of yet another plant closing in my own riding this afternoon. Why? Because conditions in Ontario don't merit keeping it open—definitely a jurisdictional thing. This is the Open Ontario that we're talking about.

Isn't it offensive enough that despite paying a health tax for the last six years, Ontarians are having to endure dramatic cuts in patient care? From emergency room, clinic and bed closures to firing of nurses, Ontarians are paying more for health care and they're getting less. So what's offensive? That's offensive.

What's even more offensive? That before we ever got to a point in time where we could look at a recessionary period and listen to our Premier and his government tell us that everything bad that's happened to them and that's happened to us in Ontario comes as a result of a period of recession, in fact, we all know—and I say to you Ontarians out there watching us, we all know—that there were over 200,000 valuable manufacturing jobs lost before we ever got to a recession here in Ontario. So now what are we doing? We're paying the piper for a lack of policy then, and we're going to continue to pay the piper for a lack of policy now.

This is pure stupidity, pure and simple stupidity. You do not pay \$25 million for nothing—you don't do it—and there's not an Ontarian out there, save and except for the recipients of that, who would say otherwise.

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

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I don't pretend to be as articulate as the member from Thornhill. Nobody has a

monopoly on stupidity, that's for sure, especially after hearing some of the words.

I want to start by sharing a couple of things that drive this government these days. We believe strongly in public services. That's why we've worked so darn hard over the last seven years to raise up those services that were so trampled down by the previous government. We value public servants, and that's why we honour agreements that are in place regarding their positions.

By the way, the three examples that were quoted by my previous government speaker did reference a total payout of some \$50 million. It all occurred between 1996 and 2003—

Interjection: On your watch.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: —on your previous government's watch, under this same clause.

1700

So the Leader of the Opposition can say that he wants to use all the tools at his disposal to stop this—I don't know where he was back when he was sitting around the cabinet then with the same clause making the payouts—or that he's standing up for Ontarians, but frankly I don't know where he was then. If the measure of standing up for Ontarians is breaking your word, then, to their credit—I want to say this to the members opposite—they didn't break their word then; they followed through with the contract.

We believe in hard work on this side of the House. That's why we've doubled our investment in the Second Career program, another 30,000 spots. That's why we're investing \$1.3 billion in our Employment Ontario program; because hard work is a value that we appreciate.

We certainly value fairness, and that's why we're honouring the agreement that previous speakers have already noted was put in place by the Conservatives when they were in government.

I don't know what it's like where you come from, but where I come from, you're out in the rural part of Flamborough and you look somebody in the eye and you shake hands with them and you say, "That's what we're going to do." Not only that, but they expect you to keep your word; they don't expect you to break a contract every time you think it's convenient.

I want to ask, perhaps rhetorically, where does it end? If you don't like this one and you think we should break our word on this one, what happens tomorrow with any other? Do you break that too? Do you just say, "Hey, it doesn't count. We want a mulligan. We want to take it all back. You can't trust us when we give you our word"?

Anyhow, I think the party opposite insists on too strict a paradox to insist that this government do what they weren't prepared to do, what they put in place and weren't prepared to do. But somehow we're supposed to do that. We're supposed to be the bad guys that break our word on the contract.

The Harris government was the government that included the Harris government severance clause in their collective agreements in 1996, and reaffirmed this clause, the clause that we're talking about today, twice before

the 2003 Ontario general election: in 1998 and 2001. I noticed that the Leader of the Opposition left that out. He didn't mention that. Did you notice that, colleagues? He didn't mention that. He didn't say anything about that.

I'm assuming, by the way, that the payments to OMAFRA and to the Ministry of Health and the second lot of Ministry of Health employees that were transferred—410 employees, 841 employees and 3,311 employees, respectively—I'm assuming that the government did that because they understood that they were bound by the legal agreement that they had in place. I don't fault them for that any more than I'm prepared to lay any blame here at the situation that we're in here because we're moving ahead. I think that's the big difference between the opposition, who insist on looking in rear-view mirrors unless and until it reflects something that they don't like to admit they did, and the government on this side of the House that's looking purposefully, steadfastly and with a real sense of direction at the future.

I think it's important, too, not to miss the inconsequential fact, and if the people who are watching on television—the member from Thornhill said "all 46 of you"; I suspect it is more than that—that there are less than 8% of these employees that will get the full severance. The employees that are, in fact, going over to the federal government will not receive—they're losing all their seniority, by the way; that's another point.

The third point is that when we were in contract negotiations in 2005 and, I believe, 2003, we removed for all new employees the very clause that the members opposite are speaking about.

Mr. Jeff Leal: They forgot that point too.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: They left that out as well.

We get up every day and we try to make a difference, and generally we do. It helps if you're not too intensely partisan. I can think of a lot of other resolutions that the party opposite might have brought usefully before this House, where we could have worked co-operatively to build a stronger, healthier, more caring society.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yeah, you always support our motions.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Well, something less partisan and something that you at least could say, on a good day, that you practised the spirit of yourselves, but you certainly can't do that given the anecdotal evidence we shared today.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: You haven't recognized me yet.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I was about to, but you jumped in before I did. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased to join the debate on this motion today, where our leader, Tim Hudak, calls on the Premier of Ontario to adopt the principle that if

you do not lose your job, you do not collect severance, and to cancel severance payments to HST tax collectors who keep their jobs.

If you went around this province and you told people, “This is a set of principles. I’d like you to give a comment on them,” and one of them is that severance is given to people who (a) lose their jobs or (b) don’t lose their jobs, I can be very comfortable in saying that an almost overwhelming, perhaps unanimous, majority would say that severance has a very specific purpose. Severance is there to assist in the transition from the loss of one job till you find another.

It’s very clear and it’s very simple. No one ever expects that someone will collect something that was designed and built for that very purpose: to help someone during that transition period. No one would ever expect that someone would be collecting that severance when they’re not losing their job, they’re not losing a day of work, they’re not losing a day’s pay. In fact, in this case, most of them are seeing their wages increase.

The government is going to give you all kinds of spin about why they felt they had to go ahead and make these payments and proceed with them. One of the things the Premier says is, “Our word is our word.” I’ll paraphrase because I don’t have the quote sitting in front of me. He talked about how important keeping one’s word is. This is from the very same Premier who, seven short years ago, when he was campaigning to be Premier, got in front of a whole cadre of television cameras, in front of all kinds of newspaper and radio reporters, and proudly stood and signed the taxpayers protection agreement and pledged—with his own signature, not John Robarts’s signature—that he would not raise your taxes. As soon as he got into office, he broke his word and dishonoured his pledge to the people of Ontario. Now, all of a sudden, this Premier is telling us how important it is to keep one’s word. What is important to these guys is that when they haven’t done their homework and they haven’t prepared properly, they put themselves in a box.

There were ample opportunities for this government to honour that principle that most people support around severance. There were ample opportunities, as they were negotiating the CITCA agreement with the federal government, to sit down with their federal counterparts and say, “Hey, you know what? We’ve got a situation here. Can we negotiate an agreement that, in the case of someone losing their job after the transfer to the federal government, the severance paid out to them would be divvied out commensurate with the amount of time they served with the Ontario government and the federal government”—that could have been done—“and no severance paid for anyone who doesn’t lose their job?”

That is just the kind of common-sense approach that people across this province would have hoped that the government would have sat down and negotiated. There were any number of occasions while negotiating that agreement—and they want to talk about previous Conservative governments and their position on severance. At no time was there a situation where they were nego-

tiating an agreement with the federal government to assume provincial tax collectors becoming federal tax collectors—at no time. That’s never been part of the discussion.

1710

You people knew exactly what you were doing. You were taking provincial employees, transferring them to the federal government, and you never for a moment considered the consequences to the hard-working families in this province who are bending over backwards to try to survive, to try to keep their heads above water, to try to pay their bills.

In the midst of the worst recession we’ve seen in our lifetime, in midst of the largest deficit in this province’s history, in the midst of a deficit cumulatively more than all of the provinces combined, you’re telling the taxpayers in this province, who pay their bills dutifully every day, hoping that they’re getting good government in return, “By the way, \$25 million more are going to be taken away from you, dear taxpayer, to satisfy the failures of us, the McGuinty government.”

Whatever happened to honouring the collective agreement with the people of Ontario? The people of Ontario get up every day and go to work—if they’ve got a job in this province; if your government hasn’t taken it away from them—in the belief that if they do their job and if they pay their taxes, this province is going to be a better place. You’ve shaken their faith in that belief because you’ve taken their hard-earned money, handed it over to people who will not lose a single day of pay, will not lose a nickel. Shame on you.

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: I want to preface by saying just let’s slow down a minute here. I feel like I’ve encountered two old neighbourhood dogs, half blind, lifting their legs trying to mark out new turf. What I regret is that the hard-working, very skilled and capable public servants of this province are being, in effect, held hostage, if not actually being used as cannon fodder in this debate.

Mind you, don’t get me wrong. I’ll join the member for Renfrew any day in an attack upon this government. I have no time for Mr. McGuinty and the Liberals after what they’ve done to working folk in this province over the course of the last—what?—six, seven years now—far too long.

Let’s be very clear. The government should have been upfront and candid about this as being yet another cost of its HST proposal—end of story. Nobody’s disputing that there’s going to be some payout. I’m going to get into that in just a few minutes.

Now, is the official opposition entitled to exploit this to further its political agenda? Well, of course, they are. Do I agree with them on this occasion? Of course not. Do I find myself sharing space with the Liberals in the government? Not on your life. But I want to let you know what some of the facts are in this scenario.

The government knew that a whole lot of people in its Ministry of Revenue were going to lose jobs as a result of

this government's imposition of this brand new—and, you know, for a while we were calling it the BS tax; right? But then the Speaker shut that down because that was unparliamentary. I don't know what BS means where you come from, but where I come from, I don't know. It just doesn't seem unparliamentary at all when you think in the context of what the HST is going to do to the folks down Welland riding and the BS that the government used to try to sell it. But that's unparliamentary.

The opposition parties feel like we should be calling the nurse to administer some novocaine to the Premier, because we're drilling here, and we know we hit a nerve; we can see the response. But it's just hard extracting the facts.

As you've heard, Andrea Horwath and the NDP have already been up on the floor, question period after question period, challenging this government to produce the paperwork in terms of what the HST is really going to mean to so many folks across this province, folks who can ill afford it at this point after so much has been done to them by this government.

I don't care whether you're talking about working folks—because, Lord knows, there are few enough of them left. It was only three weeks ago that it was like the last man standing: John Deere down in Welland—100 years of producing agricultural equipment, and finally, three weeks ago, maybe four, the last man left. There were women working there too, but it happened to be a man. This government didn't even blink at the prospect of John Deere, that historic, traditional manufacturer, shutting down here in the province of Ontario. Mind you, it didn't have much leverage, because this government, of course, has refused to adopt a buy-Ontario policy from the get-go. If it had a buy-Ontario policy, it could have used that as some leverage with John Deere, just like it could have used it with Siemens and maybe Lakeport down in Hamilton.

Hamilton and Niagara have been hard hit. I'm not sure how much more we can take. It used to be that when you lost 1,000 jobs, like at Atlas Steel, that was a crisis. Now, when you lose 15 jobs down in Hamilton and Niagara, never mind 150, that's catastrophic because there are just so few jobs left and those families are struggling. So they get hit with another tax, and a tax on those sorts of things that they have less control over, in terms of paying the tax, than they would over so many others. Everything from being born to being dead is going to be taxed now with an additional 8%.

Let's understand that the contract, which I understand is article 53 of the collective agreement between the OPSEU workers—and some of them are AMAPCEO, because some of them are in managerial positions. In fact, the highest-earning chunk are going to be AMAPCEO members. Article 53 is a standard severance agreement that's found in most, if not all, union employment contracts.

I listened to the member from Renfrew, and he was making reference to some of the common law around severance compensation for unjust dismissal. It's not so bizarre a proposition.

My good friend, my dear friend, who I miss so much here in this chamber, Bob Runciman—capably replaced—is now in the Senate. He got his severance when he left here, and he didn't lose a day of work. He went right into a very similar job with a new employer. That is called the Senate of Canada, and this is called the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Again, I miss Bob. I miss him a great deal. He and I go back a long way, and I have the utmost respect for him. He and I did a lot of work together. Although I'm pleased for him at having ascended—it's not the best choice of words, especially in view of the season that we're in—to the Senate, to the red chamber. He has done well, and I'm sure he's going to make an impact there. He, like any of us, should we retire, resign or be defeated, got a severance. It's in the employment contract that we have as MPPs here.

1720

I am not going to deny any worker the rights that they have under a collective bargaining agreement. Who would dare do that? Those rights aren't granted just with a snap of the fingers. Do you understand that working people in this province, in this country, across this western world have fought over the course of decades and generations to win the modest rights that they have in their workplaces, including the right to belong to a union, including the right to collectively bargain?

When you sit at the bargaining table, there's always give and take. This provision, article 53 with the severance provision—and let's understand what it really says: It's one week of pay for every year of service. Come on, now; when you deconstruct it a little bit, it's not quite as dramatic, is it? One week of pay for every year of service: Why, the Employment Standards Act provides some minimum equivalent in terms of severance pay based on length of service.

Let's understand that only a handful of those 1,000-plus workers are going to get the full payout of some \$45,000. Those are going to be the auditors, the high-priced help, the ones at the top end of the salary grid. Most of them will belong to AMAPCEO and not OPSEU, but that's fair enough. The vast majority of them, who haven't worked—because, you see, to collect that, you've got to have worked for at least 26 years. Most of those people being transferred, because they lost their jobs with the Ministry of Revenue, province of Ontario—and I'm not saying that's a good thing, because I'm saying that this government just did the wrongest thing anybody ever done when it imposed the HST on people here in the province of Ontario; make no mistake about it. And we have not yet seen all of the consequences that are going to flow down. This is but one of them. There's more to come; trust me. The first boot has barely hit the floor. We're waiting for the second boot to drop yet. It will drop, it will drop hard and it will drop heavy.

Let's put this in perspective. An employee who works 26 years will be entitled to maximum entitlement, which is one week's salary for every year of service. The vast majority of those workers make modest incomes. They're

intake people, clerical people. They work hard. Their work is important. Should we pretend that it isn't, that the collection of public monies and the public trust involved and the need to maintain the integrity of the system doesn't demand and require and call for skilled, qualified workers? Of course it does.

Let's understand what happens when they lose their jobs with the Ministry of Revenue, province of Ontario, and acquire these new jobs with the federal government, because the impression that some—and I'm convinced it's only as a result of their failure to properly investigate the matter. I can't for the life of me believe—because, you see, you don't have to make things up to attack the Liberals here at Queen's Park. By no stretch of the imagination do you have to concoct anything or engage in any alchemy to be able to criticize the Liberal government here at Queen's Park. The facts stand and speak for themselves on a daily basis, on an hourly basis.

While those workers get their severance pay, to which they're entitled as a result of a contract—and understand that when you bargain for severance pay, you concede something else; you understand bargaining, Speaker. And as I say, workers have fought and struggled long enough and hard enough and paid a huge price, oftentimes with their own blood and their own freedom, for the right to belong to unions and the right to collectively bargain. So I say, shame on anybody who wants to attack the collective bargaining process; shame on anybody who wants to criticize workers for the modest gains that they acquire through the collective bargaining process, because, you see, what happens to those Ministry of Revenue, province of Ontario workers when they become federal employees is, they lose their seniority, and seniority is one of the most fundamental rights that a worker should have and acquires through collective bargaining. I say, shame on this government for cooking up a deal with the feds that forced those workers, those province of Ontario Ministry of Revenue workers, to forfeit their seniority. Shame on Dalton McGuinty. He's robbed them of their seniority. That is one of the most sacred things in a collective bargaining agreement: seniority and seniority rights.

What does that mean? Let me tell you what it means. It means that when Mr. Harper, with the help of Mr. Ignatieff—

Ms. M. Aileen Carroll: Who?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Somebody says, "Who?" Ms. Carroll says, "Who?" when I say Mr. Ignatieff, and I agree. It's more like Mr. Ignatieff, not, "Who?" but "Mr. Ignatieff? So what?"

But with the help of Mr. Ignatieff, we're going to see the privatization of revenue collection at the federal level, we're going to see a contraction of that particular workforce, and who are the first people who are going to lose their jobs when that contraction occurs? Those provincial workers who were forced to become federal employees, having lost their seniority rights in the process.

Dalton McGuinty didn't give a tinker's damn about those workers, because he fed them to the Harper lion.

Dalton McGuinty fed those workers to the furnaces of neo-liberalism. If this government's going to be criticized, it should be criticized for not having looked out for those workers when it cooked up this deal with the feds, because as sure as God made little apples, you can count on it. The mere situation that governments find themselves in with reduced revenues and the fact that right-wing governments, whether it's Dalton McGuinty here at Queen's Park or Stephen Harper up in Ottawa, resolve shortfalls in revenue by attacking working people and by cutting back on public sector services—we're going to see it here in the province of Ontario, too. Wait till we see it in health care. Do you think shutting down the emergency rooms at Port Colborne and Fort Erie was the end of the closures? No, no. Don't even think for a minute that Mr. McGuinty is finished with the hospitals with the closure of Fort Erie and Port Colborne emergency rooms, not for a minute. You can count on that; you can bet the farm on that one.

So you see, the resolution that should have been put forward today is one that tells workers that we respect their right to collectively bargain and we respect their right to receive what's due to them, pursuant to collective bargaining agreements, but that we condemn—we condemn in the strongest way—we damn the McGuinty government for having stolen from these workers their seniority.

I would like to hear Liberal backbenchers who represent some of these folks in their ridings stand up and join me in condemning Mr. McGuinty. I would expect some of those Liberal backbenchers to stand up and speak out for folks in their own ridings, who they're supposed to be representing, saying to this Legislature and to their Premier that the Tories are way off base when it comes to arguing that people shouldn't receive severance.

But you know what? Why isn't this debate about Conrad Black not receiving a long enough jail sentence? I could have endorsed a motion from the Progressive Conservative Party that condemned the inappropriate leniency shown to that thief Conrad Black. As I told you before, I just wish he had done his pre-trial time in the Don jail, the old Don, and maybe a couple of months of assessment over at Millhaven. That would have pleased me to no end, rather than being sent off—at least the Americans have the gonads to ship him off to a prison, although it's not much of a prison; it's pretty country-clubbish. That's why I say nine months' dead time at the Don and a couple of months at the Haven, Millhaven, for assessment—and the Minister of Correctional Services, of course, isn't responding, but that would have been most appropriate.

1730

Why isn't this Legislature, on the occasion of a motion from my friends in the Conservative caucus, condemning the severances that are being paid to the bank barons who are robbing working families blind but who, when the—why, the top brass at Nortel walk away from that, leaving behind a trail of unemployment and despair, and the top

dogs at Nortel walk away with multi-million dollar severances. You want to attack severances? Let's start attacking the severances of the CEOs who have been robbing people blind here in the province of Ontario and across North America.

You want to start attacking severances? Let's start attacking the severances of some of the high-priced hospital CEO types, with their \$800,000-plus salaries and severances to match, when they're running hospitals as if they were widget factories and shutting down emergency rooms, aiding and abetting the McGuinty agenda of privatizing health care.

The statement that 1,251 members stand to receive severance of \$45,000 is inaccurate. I've already told you, very few will receive that severance amount, because you need 26 years of service—one week of salary for every year of service. You've got to be in the highest salary range; they're the smallest number. The biggest number are front-line clerical-type staff, intake staff, who earn a fraction of what the auditors make, many of whom have not worked for 26 years, who are going to receive a fraction of that severance and who are going to lose seniority.

Now, you can bet your boots that this government didn't sit down with those workers to talk about preparing a package that this government could put to the federal government to protect those workers' interests more effectively. I understand the Conservative interest in appealing to the actual perception out there that we've got all these civil servants who don't earn their keep. Mike Harris appealed to that back in 1995, and we endured—suffered—Walkerton, amongst other things.

Why I'm upset with Mike Harris is because he set a standard for Dalton McGuinty. Why I'm angry with Mike Harris is because he laid the groundwork of privatization and of defunding essential public services that Dalton McGuinty has followed. Mike Harris did the heavy lifting and Dalton McGuinty is getting the free ride, and I find that repugnant. You remember when the Liberals campaigned they said they were going to be different. They said it was time for change. Well, change is small change on a good day, mere coins, and we're not even talking loonies and toonies yet.

It's regrettable that the privatization agenda remains as strong as it is. Why, hospitals alone, Mr. McGuinty's so-called P3s, which he decried when the Conservative government of the day was using private sector financing, for-profit, Bay Street, big-bucks financing, diverting millions and millions of dollars from each hospital construction project away from health care and into the pockets of the Bay Street fat cats—Mr. McGuinty decried that, yet upon election, and even re-election, he has pursued the same policy and, if anything, compounded it.

We've got folks coming up here next week, part of the health coalition, demonstrating in front of a speech that the minister is making downtown here. These are folks who are concerned about the closure of the Fort Erie and Port Colborne emergency rooms. Do you understand

what it's like to be in emergency, a medical emergency, and to think that you're going to be able to go to the emergency room at the hospital that is just four kilometres down the road, but then to have to, if you can, strike yourself on the forehead and say, "No, that's the one Dalton McGuinty shut down. Now we've got to travel the 406 all the way to St. Catharines."

If you live down in Wainfleet, I tell you—Wainfleet is part of Welland riding: a great community. It's a rural community; it's a pretty big rural community. Those folks used to be able to go to the Port Colborne hospital if they had an emergency. Let me tell you, I've driven from Wainfleet to St. Catharines. There's no sense going east of the 406; you're just wasting time. But you could spend a good 40 or 45 minutes getting to St. Catharines from Wainfleet. A whole lot of people are going to die in 45 minutes, aren't they? There's already a coroner's inquest into one death: a beautiful young woman in a motor vehicle accident down by Highway 3 and the QEW for whom the Fort Erie emergency room wasn't available because, you see, Mr. McGuinty shut it down. Mr. McGuinty says, "No, I didn't shut it down. The LHIN shut it down." The LHIN says, "Well, no, we didn't shut it down. The hospital board shut it down"—that un-elected, unaccountable, anonymous, faceless, nameless hospital board.

How about a little accountability? I don't want to hear arguments about LHINs any more than I want to hear a debate about hard-working workers—public sector workers are not receiving what is due to them under a collective bargaining agreement: a lawful contract. So I say to you, why isn't the government abolishing the LHINs and requiring hospital governments to be elected, just like city councillors, school board trustees and regional councillors are? But that would be so democratic. That would make the decision-makers around hospitals accountable to the communities that they represent. It might make those hospital boards more representative of the communities that they come from, the communities that those hospitals serve.

I've actually heard people say, "Well, no, it's not appropriate to elect hospital boards. It requires a special expertise." Well, heck, I'd like to start seeing some sort of testing procedures, some sort of threshold applied to election to the provincial Legislature. I'm not sure how many of the 107 would pass it. If you want to start applying those kinds of standards to democratic representation, you've got a whole lot of people up in Parliament in Ottawa on Parliament Hill who would be hard-pressed to pass that kind of threshold too.

There are so many important things that could have been and should have been dealt with this afternoon. It's sad that—as I say, I understand the interest of the Conservatives in pursuing it. I have no hesitation in standing up here and saying I know public sector workers, just like almost all of you, if not all of you, and I've worked with them. I've worked with them in the courtrooms. I've worked with them historically, and now as an MPP. Of course, we work with them all the time.

We're the ones who phone them when we need a Ministry of the Environment worker to come out and check out an environmental issue. They're the ones we phone when we need somebody from the Office of the Worker Adviser to protect the rights of one of our constituents who is being screwed around on their WCB claim. We phone the Ministry of Labour when one of our constituents calls up and talks about having been fired or dumped without severance pay that was due them.

I'm not afraid to stand up here and defend those workers. Those public sector workers keep our communities safe, they keep us healthy and they are the mark, I say to you, of a democratic, civilized and civil society. I don't see anything to be gained in using them as political pawns, holding them hostage or using them as cannon fodder. But I do want to tell them how badly they were abused by Mr. McGuinty and his government when their seniority rights weren't protected.

1740

Sure as Mr. McGuinty knew that he was going to have to pay out the severances pursuant to article 53 of the collective bargaining agreement, he knew that these people were going to be denied their seniority rights. It seems to me that Mr. McGuinty is playing fast and loose with the lives and the futures and the welfare and the security of these workers.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Let's talk about Rae days.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Somebody mentions Rae days, the last Liberal Premier of this province. I say to you that Mr. McGuinty has outdone Bob Rae. Mr. McGuinty has out-Rae'd him. I've got to tell you, Bob Rae fades in comparison to Mr. McGuinty, first, with Mr. McGuinty's deficits, and second, with his demonstrated disregard for workers' rights like we're witnessing right here, denying workers their right to seniority. So I don't need any lessons from Liberal backbenchers who were mere pups at the time about Liberal Premier Mr. Rae. Never liked Liberals—didn't like them then; don't like them now; never will.

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important issue.

I want to start with two very important lessons I've been taught in my lifetime so far. The first one is from my parents, a very important lesson, which is that, "A deal is a deal is a deal. Always emphasize, when you're talking to your siblings or your friends, that if you make a deal, you honour that deal, because your integrity relies on that."

The second one—I paid a lot of money to get that lesson—was in law school, that when you sign a contract, you abide by that contract. That is something I am sure we are all also taught, and you don't have to go to law school: that when you put ink to paper and sign an agreement, you honour that agreement. If you don't honour that agreement, you pay a price for it. There are

damages associated with it. There are costs associated with it.

Can we imagine in this instance, as the member from Welland has so eloquently pointed out article 53 of the agreement, if this motion which has been suggested by the Conservative Party passes, what kind of damages there could be for the government of Ontario? Far in excess, I would argue, of \$25 million which has been paid out in severance—far more in excess.

So I think it is our collective responsibility as the government of Ontario to make sure that the agreement that has been signed—and I don't want to even get into who signed the agreement, how long ago, how many times it was renewed by the previous Conservative government. A contract is a contract; it's an agreement which is extremely important. If you don't honour that agreement, there are costs associated to it from those workers, from those unions, which will be far higher than the \$25 million which is being paid in severance.

I think the member from Welland spoke quite eloquently about what this severance is about. The severance is for the loss of seniority of those workers who are being transferred to the federal government. By the way, that particular transfer of responsibilities of these workers from the provincial government to the federal government is going to save the provincial government of Ontario \$100 million a year—\$100 million a year. That's \$1 billion in the next 10 years. That is a significant savings for our taxpayers in Ontario. That's something that has to be remembered, how important it is that one of the benefits of harmonizing the GST and the PST—

Interjections.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I won't even get into the benefits that are there for the businesses, for our economy as we grow this 21st-century economy, something which has been supported by the Conservatives in the past, but the benefit alone in terms of the savings to the provincial government is significant. It's \$1 billion over 10 years, which is incredibly important, especially in a time of economic uncertainty that we live in as we're trying to grow this economy.

So I will be voting against this particular motion because of the time-honoured rules which have been taught by my parents, and something I learned as a lawyer in law school: that when you sign an agreement, you follow and abide by the agreement.

As new agreements have been signed by this particular government, this severance clause has been taken out. It doesn't exist. So as we're negotiating those new agreements, we're making sure that this type of clause does not exist. So as we are negotiating those new agreements, we're making sure that this type of clause does not exist. But since it exists in this particular instance, we've got to make sure that we honour those workers and the work they have done and pay them the right amount of severance, as pointed out by other members in this Legislature from the government side.

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Before I start, I want to thank all the men and women in the public service who are working hard on behalf of all of us across the province of Ontario.

I listened to the member from Welland speak about the importance of public servants and the importance of collective agreements. When the government or the employer signs an agreement with employees, it should be honoured and it should be respected. In this case we, as an employer, and the civil service workers in Ontario have an agreement. That's why we honoured this agreement.

The honourable members from the opposite side should remember very well that when we have an agreement with people, we should respect it. We're not the NDP government. You remember, the honourable member from Welland, when they wrote the social contract, which did not honour the agreements back then. The Conservative government is also trying right now to not honour any agreements.

I was listening to the member from Thornhill speak about the difference between the agreements here in Ontario and in British Columbia. In the British Columbia agreements, they kept their seniority. In this province, the people who worked on the PST lost their seniority. Therefore, we're obligated, as the people who are in charge of transferring those people to different departments, to pay that severance pay which we owe them as a government and as taxpayers.

I was listening very carefully to the member from Welland explaining the importance of collective agreements. The workers in this province fought very hard to establish the right to gain some severance if they lose their job, if something happens to them at work or if the company goes bankrupt. What are they supposed to do? They are supposed to get severance for the work that they did on behalf of all of us in the province of Ontario. That's what we do in this province. That's what our government did: honoured this agreement and paid them severance, because they lost a job with us. The agreement with the provincial government was terminated, so they moved to different departments. It's totally different. They lost their seniority, and it's their right to collect this money. I spoke to many different people from my constituency of London-Fanshawe when they came to my office and asked me about this very important issue, and I explained to them, "If you work in a company, if you work in a factory, if you work in an office for a certain time, you're entitled to severance if you lose your job or if your job is being terminated. It's the same thing."

When we speak about those people who moved to different departments, we have to speak about the honourable members from the opposite side who, when they moved from the provincial government to the federal government, collected their severance pay. I'll give you some examples: Mr. Baird, Madam Scott and also Senator Runciman, who departed not long ago to the federal government. He collected more than \$173,000 in

severance pay, which I think he was right to do, because that's part of our collective agreement with the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

When we speak in this place, I think we have to always speak the truth. We have to point out to the people of Ontario what we are all about. We are here to protect rights.

We owe those people who worked very hard for many years for the public service. I think we owe them severance, since we are the people who terminated their contracts. I know that many people are trying to twist the truth in order to gain a little political position here and there, but the most important thing is that we have to be honest with ourselves. We have to protect the rights of the people of this province and protect the people who work very hard across Ontario to serve us as a people in general.

I listened to the opposition leader speak about many different issues, but he forgot that back when he was a minister in the Mike Harris government, he authorized and agreed to pay thousands and thousands of civil servants \$50 million as severance when they moved from department to department, even though they didn't lose one day of work. So how come it was good back then and it's not good right now? I'm not going to argue that back then it was wrong, because back then it was part of the collective agreement, because they signed an agreement with the government. They continue to sign that agreement. That's why today we have an obligation as a government to honour our agreement, because we had an agreement with the people of this province, with the civil servants. I think we should honour it.

Interjections.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: The member opposite from Oxford, I think, should be honest with himself, too, and support the people who work very hard for him, for me and for all of us in this province. We should respect the workers when they sign an agreement. This agreement should be respected. We don't want to repeat what happened in the NDP government. We're not going to repeat what happened with different elements of our government.

I think our obligation as a government, as elected officials, is to protect the rights of the workers, to protect the rights of the public servants, because they signed an agreement, and the agreement, when it's signed, should be honoured, should be respected and should not be changed under any circumstances. That's what happened.

I think my colleague the member from Ottawa Centre mentioned very important things. If we didn't honour this agreement, we would be subject to suing and it would cost us more money. Also, as a result of combining the two taxes, PST and GST—the HST—we're going to save more than \$100 million a year for the taxpayers, which is going to go back to health care, education and infrastructure.

We're doing the right things for the people of the province of Ontario. I hope the members opposite stand up in their places and support our move and our

directions in order to restore the freedom and rights for the people of the province of Ontario.

Again, I want to tell you and I want to tell all my people from London–Fanshawe that I'm going to vote against this.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much.

Mr. Hudak has moved opposition day motion number 1. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1752 to 1802.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask all members to take their seats.

Mr. Hudak has moved opposition day number 1. All those in favour of the motion will please rise.

Ayes

Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
Clark, Steve
Dunlop, Garfield
Hardeman, Ernie

Hillier, Randy
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
Klees, Frank
MacLeod, Lisa
Miller, Norm

Murdoch, Bill
Savoline, Joyce
Sterling, Norman W.
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakabuski, John

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): All those opposed to the motion will please rise.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Broten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Cansfield, Donna H.
Carroll, Aileen
Chiarelli, Bob
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Duguid, Brad

Hoskins, Eric
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Johnson, Rick
Kormos, Peter
Kular, Kuldip
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Murray, Glen R.

Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Smith, Monique
Sorbara, Greg
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 18; the nays are 45.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1805.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Hon. / L'hon. Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough–Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism and Culture / Ministre du Tourisme et de la Culture
Chiarelli, Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough–Centre	Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Johnson, Rick (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Hon. / L'hon. Carol (LIB)	Huron–Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Murray, Glen R (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (LIB)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

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Jerry J. Ouellette, David Ramsay
Liz Sandals, Peter Shurman
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Jeff Leal, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Lou Rinaldi
Tony Ruprecht
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Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
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Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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