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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 27 April 2010

Mardi 27 avril 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 27 April 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 27 avril 2010

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

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

Ms. Smith, on behalf of Mr. Bentley, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 231, An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act / Projet de loi 231, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale et la Loi sur le financement des élections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I will be sharing my time this morning with the member from Willowdale, and as he has now reached his seat, I will be sharing it with him now.

Mr. David Zimmer: I was in a rush to get in. I got locked out this morning.

Anyway, I'm very pleased today to rise to speak to Bill 231 on third reading. This act, if passed, would amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act. Third reading of this bill is the result of nearly two years of work. We've built on the recommendation of the Select Committee on Elections through public hearings. As well, extensive consultations with the Chief Electoral Officer have taken place. I think we can all agree that Bill 231 is better as a result of these consultations.

Bill 231 would improve our election system in a number of ways. It would give Ontarians with disabilities more equal opportunities to participate in the voting process, it would make our electoral system more responsive to the needs of voters throughout the province and abroad, and it would bring our election finance system into the 21st century. What I'd like to do this morning is to take some time and tell the members of this House how Bill 231 would accomplish these very important improvements.

Ontarians with disabilities: I want to talk about voting technology as it affects them. We've learned a lot about the barriers faced by people with disabilities when they

vote. We're bringing forward ways to break down these barriers. The use of voting technology could allow electors with disabilities to vote privately and independently. Bill 231 would require the Chief Electoral Officer to use accessible voting equipment in returning office advance polls starting with the 2011 election. This is a very significant change to the voting process. It puts Ontario at the cutting edge of these issues.

It is our responsibility to ensure that even as the voting system evolves, it maintains the highest level of security. Indeed, this goes to the very heart of our democracy. We recognize that as technology evolves, additional voting methods may become as secure as the equipment that Bill 231 requires. That's why we have created a process that would allow the Chief Electoral Officer to direct the use of an alternative voting method if certain conditions are met. These are the conditions: successful testing at a by-election; protecting the integrity and security of the voting process; consulting with parties, experts and members of the public; and—and this is important—approval by a legislative committee after public hearings. This meets the key shared objectives. It would create a process for voting methods to evolve with technology, it would ensure that the integrity and security of elections is maintained, and it would require that there be significant opportunities for public input, including experts in the field of alternative voting methods. To make sure that we're on the right track here, the Chief Electoral Officer would also be required to conduct a comprehensive review and report on alternative voting technologies by June 30, 2013. Voters with disabilities, and indeed all electors, need to vote privately and independently. And they need to be sure that the voting method they are using counts a vote the way it was cast. We are confident that the measures taken in Bill 231 would meet these requirements.

Let me take a few minutes now and speak to some additional access measures. As important as new voting equipment and other voting technologies are for accessibility, there is more that must be done to enhance access. That's why we also strengthened Bill 231 by requiring that all polling places be accessible to people with disabilities. We know that people with disabilities require greater transparency and more accountability, and that additional opportunities for input are necessary. That's why the Chief Electoral Officer would be required to publish proposed voting locations six months in advance of a scheduled general election and invite public comment on those locations. This would allow members of the public, particularly electors with disabilities, to provide input before any final decisions are made about

where to locate polling places. After every election, the Chief Electoral Officer would also be required to report about the steps taken to ensure accessible, barrier-free elections in Ontario. All reports and election-related materials provided by the Chief Electoral Officer must be made available to people with disabilities in an accessible format. This bill would provide more opportunities than ever before for people with disabilities in this province to participate in the voting process and to offer their advice and input about how to make elections work better for everyone here in this province.

0910

There are some other changes in the voting process that I'd also like to touch on in my remarks this morning. The bill would improve access as well as convenience for all electors through the introduction of special ballots. Special ballots can be cast, for example, through the mail. People with disabilities would be given the option of requesting that election officers make a home visit to assist with the special ballot application and with voting.

But special ballots would not only enhance voting options for people with disabilities; they would also enhance voting options for a broad range of Ontarians who are unable to vote on election day or in person during the election period. By permitting special ballots, people such as snowbirds, who go back and forth to the warmer climates in the winter, senior citizens, and military personnel, who are often out of the country, out of the jurisdiction, would also benefit. Voting should be quicker, more convenient and more efficient for everyone.

An important feature of the bill is that the Chief Electoral Officer would be allowed to modify the voting process and to streamline the voting process at polling locations. In addition, the Chief Electoral Officer would be given the flexibility to determine the hours and dates for advance polls, to better deal with local needs. This was an issue that the select committee heard quite a lot about. Ontario is a vast and complex province. The practicalities of voting are quite different in downtown Toronto, in the suburban GTA, in the Far North and in the aboriginal communities, so the ability of the Chief Electoral Officer to take into account those practical local challenges is an important piece in this legislation.

We also want to encourage our young people to get involved early, to vote early, as soon as they're able to, and to establish that pattern of participating in the voting process, so it's important that voting is not made to be unnecessarily or unfairly inconvenient for young people simply because they are away at a college, university or other training facility. That is why post-secondary students will be allowed to choose whether they want to vote in the electoral district where they are attending for their education and training or where they reside permanently, typically with their parents. This was also something that we heard quite a lot about. Often, a student studying here in Toronto who lives in northwestern Ontario is keenly aware of the issues in northwestern Ontario where he or she has grown up, where their family

lives, and wants to vote there rather than in the GTA, where they're temporarily a resident. This is a fair way to deal with that concern.

As I mentioned earlier, these initiatives are supported by measures that ensure the integrity of our election system, that ensure that it remains strong. I just want to touch on a few of those.

Under the heading of professionalization, Ontarians need equal and ample opportunities to cast a ballot. They also need election officials who are sufficiently experienced and appropriately qualified. That is why this bill will depoliticize the appointments of returning officers and poll workers. This is a big change. This includes eliminating the existing requirement that poll workers be appointed from lists provided by candidates.

This bill would also establish a new authority for the Chief Electoral Officer over appointments and remuneration of election officials so that these officials are more directly accountable. The Chief Electoral Officer would be permitted flexibility to establish fees, including wage levels for election workers. This would better ensure that election officials are sufficiently experienced and appropriately qualified. It would also reduce delays in staffing and training poll workers. What we're doing is professionalizing the people who are responsible for servicing and working with the voters as they cast their ballots.

With responsibility, of course, comes accountability. So the legislation would also modernize the Chief Electoral Officer's financial accountability for election funding. The Chief Electoral Officer would make an annual submission to the Board of Internal Economy where he would establish fees for election officials. The board would have the authority to accept, reject or modify these proposed fees.

Let me say something about modernizing election financing—and this is a very important aspect of this bill. We are mindful that changes to modernize Ontario's election finance rules need to be made. That is why we are introducing more convenient contribution options that reflect modern banking practices and emerging transaction technologies. Bill 231 would bring us into the 21st century by allowing the use of corporate credit cards, debit cards, online contributions and electronic transfers. We have also put forward rules requiring larger parties to develop their own electronic receipting and contribution systems. This would allow parties to centrally manage the issuing of their own receipts instead of relying on the receipt forms provided by Elections Ontario. In the future, parties would be able to provide receipts in a manner and in a format that is convenient and easy to manage. As of June 1, 2012, larger political parties would be required to develop an electronic database and receipting system that has been approved by the Chief Electoral Officer. Smaller parties will be able to opt in if they wish. These changes to election finance rules are all about modernizing the system, a system that currently inconveniences some Ontarians who want to get involved in the election process by contributing to a political party or a candidate.

Let me say in conclusion that overall, this bill is the answer to one simple question, and that question is, how can we make Ontario's election process work better for everyone? We have listened carefully to people with disabilities. We are taking significant steps to make Ontario a leader in Canada to make elections accessible. We have developed a variety of options that would make voting more convenient for electors throughout the province and those temporarily living abroad or out of the jurisdiction. We've introduced changes to Ontario's election finance system to bring us into the 21st century.

We have considered thoughtfully the implications of all of the changes that have been proposed, and we have identified appropriate safeguards to ensure security and integrity of the election process. I'm confident that Bill 231 would make the election process work better for all Ontarians, and I encourage members of this House to support it enthusiastically, as I do.

In closing: I had the privilege of sitting on the select committee on election reform, chaired by Mr. Sorbara; Mr. Sterling sat on it and Mr. Kormos sat on it. I want to thank everyone for the contributions they made to the work of that select committee, which served as the basis for Bill 231.

0920

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a chance to comment on Bill 231 and the speech made this morning. I think our party is in support of this bill, although we see that it's missing one big part that the member for Mississippi Mills pointed out in his report, and that is that it doesn't deal with third party advertising. The government is taking advantage of that, in that they have this Working Families Coalition spending millions of dollars in third party advertising and it's not being covered by this bill. That is a huge, glaring error or omission. However, there are aspects of it, and changes at committee, that are positive. I did sit in on some of the committee hearings and I know that many from the disability community expressed that the easiest way for them to vote is via telephone or Internet, and I believe there was an amendment put forward by our critic at committee. I'm pleased to see that there is an option to go forward to bring about alternative voting methods. As has been pointed out, there first of all has to be a by-election, security issues have to be addressed, there needs to be more consultation and then there has to be approval after by a committee of the Legislature. This seems like a reasonable process to put safeguards into effect but that will still in the future allow the easiest way for those who are disabled to be able to vote. I think all parties want to encourage and make it easier for all people to take advantage of and participate in elections. So we're supportive of this bill, Bill 231, with the exception of the fact of that huge omission of missing third party advertising.

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

Mr. Peter Kormos: The critic in this area for the NDP, Michael Prue, the member from Beaches-East

York, will be speaking in due course to this bill. He had the pleasure of working with Mr. Zimmer, the parliamentary assistant, while this bill was in committee.

Mr. Zimmer is quite right that I was with him on the Sorbara committee. I was not there in my own right; I was there on behalf of Howard Hampton, who was the committee member. I subbed in for him during the course of the whole committee. I commend Mr. Zimmer, the parliamentary assistant, for his patience with these matters. The Attorney General gives him stuff like the election reform stuff. He gives him stuff like the accounting act, which we're visiting this Thursday in clause-by-clause. Who gets the sexy stuff? The Attorney General keeps it for himself. The stuff that has any prospect of spotlights and TV cameras and media coverage he gets for himself, and Zimmer is compelled to make clandestine early-morning phone calls to Andy Barrie to get done what he wants to get done.

But I commend the parliamentary assistant for his work on these things and I just want to tell you that he is a delight to work with. He's intelligent, he's articulate, he puts forward a rational argument—he is just such an unusual government member. And for the life of me, he's the best cabinet minister that this province never had. I can't do enough—I suppose I've probably done too much already since Mr. Zimmer's election, trying to get him into cabinet, and I'm not sure that we haven't reached that point where the rate of return has started to diminish, but I'll continue to make best effort in that regard and use every capacity that I can muster to ensure that David Zimmer gets the profile that he deserves, because he surely, truly deserves it.

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

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to make a few comments as we begin third reading on An Act to amend the Election Act and the Election Finances Act. I too think that Mr. Zimmer, the parliamentary assistant, did an excellent job of giving an overview of what this legislation means at this point, having come back here for third reading, with all the consultations having been completed, and what we call clause-by-clause. I'm pleased to hear from across the way that there is general support for this bill. It's one that legislators should and do take seriously, because after all, we are the subject of the voting rights that people enjoy. Every four years here in Ontario, in October, we are up for what I call review. It's important that people have fairness in how they go about the process of casting their vote, accessibility, understanding what their rights are, where the voting places will be, what day etc. The Chief Electoral Officer has some other powers here to ensure that accessibility is fair and in place.

These things that we're talking about within this bill are important to democracy overall. We pride ourselves in what we do as a democracy here in Ontario and indeed in Canada. The voting is part of our definition of democracy, I would think, in that we pride ourselves in how we approach these issues.

Of course, with modern technology and growing populations and the needs of all to be considered, it's

excellent to be here at third reading to see the amendments that are put forth in this legislation.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I came to the House because the member from Willowdale was speaking. He read the notes that were provided for him very thoroughly, I think. Most importantly, I'm listening and waiting for the member from Halton, our critic, who will bring some substance to the concerns that we have.

In fact, I think our finance critic, Mr. Miller, mentioned that we would be supporting the bill but that we want to render a couple of serious concerns. Third party advertising has been—"destructive" would be putting it modestly. I have in front of me a formal document here which is supplied under the elections finance office, and this is from Working Families. What it does is detail the contribution of over \$1 million—\$1,084,904.85—and it attributes this to Alex Lolua, who was the chief financial officer of Working Families. Then it goes on to list, and this is the distressing part of this politicization of this process, to the extent where—there's full accountability; we agree with that. All parties have to file, and all contributions are filed and disclosed. I think what's missing here—these are augmenting, in this case, the Liberal Party war chest for the election. It's right here. It's saying that, for instance, there was \$1.4 million from trade unions; that's what it says. If I look at further detail, it goes on to list the IBEW local union, \$9,000, and \$400,000 from the Ontario Pipe Trades Council.

Now, it's these kinds of contributions that render it unfair to the third party and the opposition. We're for the bill. We're for more transparency. The problem here is this whole disclosure part of third party advertising. It was ignored, and I think that's a mistake in the bill.

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

Mr. David Zimmer: I thank my colleagues in the Legislature from all parties for their comments.

I was reflecting that there are lots of new things in this bill, lots of things to move us towards the most modern electoral system here in the country. But I suppose one of the most important things for me is the new role of the Chief Electoral Officer. In the past, it has sort of been a hodgepodge of who's supervising whom in the electoral process, who's supervising returning officers, who's hiring returning officers, how polling stations are set up and all of those issues. The result has been that throughout the province, I think it was fair to say and we'd all recognize, the voting process, in subtle ways and sometimes not-so-subtle ways, was sort of different in Toronto, different in the Far North, different in rural Ontario. The single most important thing we've done is vest new authority in the Chief Electoral Officer to manage, in an overall way, the electoral process. We've delegated real authority to him to do the hiring of the people involved in administering elections in Ontario, to set their wage rates, to supervise them—hiring, firing, discipline and quality control, if you will. We have reached a whole

new level of professionalization and quality control by vesting the authority to do so in the hands of the Chief Electoral Officer. That is a big—

0930

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'd also say that you have tied the Chief Electoral Officer's hands in a very significant way by not passing many amendments that you could have passed in this act, ignoring the elephant in the room, as it were, with third party advertising. I'll have more to say on that as we go forward.

This bill, as it went to committee, became very contentious. The disabled community was very eager to have a number of amendments passed and to have a great deal more accessibility to polls. We all read with alarm and distaste about the plight of some handicapped people in elections and by-elections in Ontario where the polling station was at first judged to be accessible and then, through the experience of handicapped people in visiting that poll, it was found to be very inaccessible.

Each poll was judged after the election or by-election as to whether it was accessible or not. Some of the criteria that were used for that judging were way out of date and didn't take into consideration the handicapped people who had to use it. Indeed, the consultations with the handicapped community were sadly lacking. Some of those things were addressed in this bill, and certainly many of them were improved through amendments.

The government had not initially thought of those circumstances that handicapped people would find themselves in. It's amazing to me that the discussion on handicapped access to polling stations wasn't considered until after the bill got into committee. It certainly wasn't discussed or considered when the bill was being drafted, because so many of the amendments dealt with accessibility issues.

The result was that there were a huge number of amendments, many of which were accepted. I think that the PC Party set a personal-best record with having eight amendments accepted by the government, none of which, of course, dealt with third party advertising, but which did deal with accessibility items such as the review of polling stations' accessibility by handicapped people following the election. That report would go to the Chief Electoral Officer, and following every election that we have, if those reports are listened to and read, the system that we have should improve itself over time so that, as we proceed, it will continue to get better and better as far as accessibility is concerned for handicapped people.

This bill, when it went to committee, did not contain any legislation that would allow the use of telephones or electronic equipment by handicapped people or indeed the general public. Through, I believe, a six- or seven-page amendment that the government introduced, that was corrected. I would like to think that that amendment was introduced because of a similar amendment that our party put in that found large acceptance by the handicapped community. I think the government was more or

less forced to bring in that piece of legislation, that amendment, that opened up some of the aspects to allow for very private and personal voting by handicapped people. I think it was a good thing that the government brought that forward eventually and passed it. I think that made this bill a better bill than it was initially. Certainly, the hearings that the government went through were not necessarily reflected in the legislation. But by the time the legislation got to the committee level and the amendments began to flow, the bill started to take on a shape that was better than the bill that was introduced for first reading some months prior to that.

There was some serious concern, some debate, between the government and our party concerning the facilities around post-secondary students and where they would vote. We felt quite strongly that the post-secondary student who was involved in a community in Ontario and had lived and grown up in that community might be more aware of the political situation that that community faced and might wish to cast his ballot in that community. The government, on the other hand, wished to make it as easy as possible for that student to cast his ballot where he was living in the university or college town, or living away from home. I think there's a certain political concern in that area when you get such a large block of votes in one particular area that might, indeed, be single-issue voters who might not necessarily reflect the needs or the wants of the larger community or the larger riding that was involved in that particular issue.

One of the most interesting parts of this bill was the report that was put in by Mr. Greg Essensa, the Chief Electoral Officer. He submitted a report back on May 7, 2009. His report went to the Select Committee on Elections. I'd like to quote from his report. I'm going to read most of it, I think. I'm going to make some comments about it as well, because I think it's an excellent report that the government should have listened to in much greater detail than apparently turned out when they produced this Bill 231.

He appeared before the committee in December 2008 and he recommended that the advertising provisions of the Election Finances Act be reviewed. "The law was drafted over 30 years ago," he says, "and the way in which campaigns are run has significantly changed. In February, my written submission recommended that a task force be created to review the rules governing political advertising." The task force was developed but it was much broader than just the political advertising aspect that the Chief Electoral Officer had suggested. He said, "Today I would like to focus on one aspect of political advertising, specifically third party advertising. I will address three topics in my presentation: first, the third party advertising requirement in the Elections Finances Act; second, questions the select committee may wish to consider with respect to the regulation of third party advertising"—and that's a very interesting part of the report—"and third, the role of the Chief Electoral Officer in administering the election finances process." He suggests he'd be happy to answer any questions at the end of his presentation.

"To begin with, it's important to remember that apart from parties and candidates, there are individuals and organizations who participate in the democratic process. These third parties participate in elections by commenting on a candidate or party's position, adding issues into the political debate in an election, and attempting to influence which parties or candidates are elected."

They're taking part in this election process in a very similar fashion as a political party, either the Liberals, the Conservatives, the NDP, the Green Party, the Family Coalition Party—the Rhinoceros Party, for that matter—the same way in which those parties are taking part in an election, so too is a so-called third party advertiser, in that they are trying to get their specific position, their specific wants, needs or philosophy, across to the general public during that election process.

0940

The Chief Electoral Officer goes on to say: "Third parties participate in the democratic process by sponsoring advertising, the same way as candidates and parties. They advertise before and during campaigns to deliver a message about a particular issue or about the merits of a specific party or candidate. Third party advertising has been present in the democratic process in Canada for quite some time. As early as the 1970s, on the recommendation of a royal commission, Parliament"—the Parliament of Canada—"amended the Canada Elections Act to include controls over third party advertisers."

Why would they do that? We have control over the amount of money that the Liberal Party of Ontario can spend in a general election. We have control over the amount of money that an individual candidate can spend in a general election. These controls on how much money parties and individuals can spend are very important to the democratic process. It's important to the democratic process in that money cannot buy an election, and I think we would all agree that that is not the way a democratic process should take place. Yet here we have a third party advertiser who has the same logical position as a party or a candidate, and there are no controls over their spending habits or amounts anywhere in the Election Act.

I think that is a real concern and one that has been expressed by the Chief Electoral Officer. It has been expressed by a number of people in Ontario. And here we have a bill, Bill 231, which went through the House. It went through debate. This issue was raised time and again during that debate. And this government refused to acknowledge that the elections in Ontario are not fair and impartial when one sector has unlimited funding to promote their thoughts and ideas, while all other sectors in the electorate do not have that same advantage, and indeed are restricted—severely restricted, in some cases—as to how much money they can spend, and when and where they can spend it.

The Chief Electoral Officer goes on to say that he would like to turn his attention to the first topic, the third party advertising requirements in the Election Finances Act: "As members of the committee will remember, there were various changes made to Ontario's election laws in

June before the October 2007 general election. Those changes included new third party registration and reporting requirements. At the time these changes were made, there were only three Canadian jurisdictions that had such requirements: They were in place federally—so the federal Parliament of Canada had them—“in Quebec and in British Columbia. It should not be forgotten, however, that the Election Finances Act already contained some restrictions on third party advertising dating back to 1998. The law already imposed blackouts on third party political advertising on polling day and the day before polling day, and deemed that \$100 or more spent on advertising by a person, corporation or trade union which promoted a party or candidate was to be treated as a contribution, provided it was done with the knowledge and consent of that party or candidate. In essence, the law required for several years that third party advertising be treated as a contribution if it could be shown to be controlled by a political party or candidate. The cost of such advertising was also subject to contribution limits and treated as a campaign expense of the party or candidate.”

These are all very fair, equitable regulations. The inequity comes when the third party advertising is not part and parcel of a party's platform or campaign efforts and operates outside any political party's contribution ceilings or limits. That's where the inequity comes from. It's unfair that one portion of the Election Finances Act is ignored, or can be ignored, completely by one aspect of people who are trying to influence the outcome of an election in Ontario.

The legislation that was passed in June 2007 contained the following significant requirements: “Third party advertisers spending over \$500 on election advertising had to register with the Chief Electoral Officer”—that's in Ontario; “all registered third party advertisers had to report on their advertising spending six months after the election; and third party advertisers had to report all contributions they received to support their advertising during the campaign period and in the two months before the election was called.”

Now there's a very serious problem in the legislation in that the third party advertisers only had to report money they collected two months prior to an election. In Ontario, that would be somewhere around July 4, 5, 6 to September 4, 5, 6, depending on when the election day is and the day the writ was dropped. It would be in that first week in September, and that gives them two months now.

It's known in Ontario that one particular third party advertiser, the Working Families of Ontario, collects money for the four-year period in between the elections. In fact, Working Families could very easily have a campaign chest that exceeds what the Liberals are allowed to spend in the next provincial election and what the Conservatives are allowed to spend. Those are the two largest spending entities in elections—they have been—in the history of Ontario. In this next election, we could see in excess of \$10 million spent on advertising by the Working Families Coalition; \$10 million can

seriously tilt the outcome of an election, and that is eminently unfair to all parties, to anybody who is concerned about democracy. This government ignored that issue while putting this bill through the House.

These provisions are similar to federal third party provisions, with the exception that the amendments did not impose any spending limits. Whether you're a candidate or a political party, you have spending limits as to how much money you can accept from one individual or from one corporation. The spending limit for an individual candidate is somewhere in the \$1,100 area. You cannot contribute more than that, from an individual or a corporation, to an individual candidate. You cannot contribute more than—I'm not sure what the party max is, but it's somewhere in the \$3,000 or \$4,000 range. Perhaps someone could help me with that, but it's somewhere in that ballpark, where a political party cannot receive more than that from one individual. I think that's good. That limits the ability for a party or a candidate to buy an election. I think it would be undemocratic for money to play a disproportionate role in swaying an election one way or another, and that's exactly what we're talking about with third party advertising, which has no limit on it whatsoever.

“In support of these new requirements, my predecessor”—this is a Chief Electoral Officer speaking—“issued new guidelines, which attempted to clarify for third parties, candidates and political parties alike how these new rules worked. These guidelines attempted to address, for instance, how to differentiate between issue-based advertising that would not be subject to these requirements and advertising promoting or opposing a particular party or candidate that would be subject to these requirements.”

They tried to clarify this within the standing act, and as Chief Electoral Officer, he found it very difficult to do; therefore, he is asking the government to have a review of this situation. As Chief Electoral Officer, he can't tell the government what to do, but he can suggest, in the strongest of terms, which I believe he is doing in this paper, that the government review this situation and include some new guidelines or some new rules around third party advertising and how and where it can take place during an election, and this government ignored those recommendations entirely.

0950

The Chief Electoral Officer goes on to say, “I think it can be said, in fairness to all, that implementing a new system on the eve of a general election”—this is back in 2007—“posed significant challenges for Elections Ontario and for those involved in the electoral process. I will have more to say about how ... I intend to address these challenges in the last part of my presentation.” This took place in 2007, of course, on the eve of the election of October 2007 but his call for a committee to look into the Election Finances Act was to carry on into the next Parliament and to make those recommendations on a go-forward basis.

He goes on to say, “In light of Ontario's recent experience with third party advertising requirements, I

would like to address my second topic, and that is, questions that the select committee—the proposed select committee—“may wish to consider with respect to the regulation of third party advertising. I began my presentation today by noting that it is time for a comprehensive review of the political finance rules in Ontario. This review is certainly timely with respect to third party advertising requirements,” since third party requirements had been used in a new way, in a way in which they had not been used before. In particular, they had been used with a massive amount of money behind them. In the 2007 election they spent at least \$2 million, and we don't know what the total was because they were collecting money long before the two-month requirement to register that money. So how much money they collected before that is unknown. How much money they spent during the election writ period, how much money they spent prior to the election writ period is unknown. There are estimates that I've heard that are as high as \$5 million, or about half of what both major political parties in Ontario spent, and probably about the same as what the NDP spent as a political party in Ontario. When a third party advertiser is able to get to that level of expenditure in a totally unregulated way, I think everyone can see that it could and probably does have an effect on the outcome of the election. Without some fiscal controls on that, that is wrong in a democratic process—and this government ignored that.

The Chief Electoral Officer goes on to say, “Since changes were made to the Election Finances Act in 2007, two more provinces, New Brunswick and Alberta, have either adopted or proposed to adopt controls over third party advertisers, and BC has substantially amended its third party requirements.

“Now that the legislation is over and the reports have been submitted, and taking into account the innovations being introduced in other jurisdictions, there are a number of areas the Select Committee on Elections may wish to examine. Some of these include:

“First, should Ontario adopt third party spending limits? Currently, Ontario has no spending limits” for third parties. “In comparison, there are third party election advertising limits in other jurisdictions. Federally, a third party is limited to spending \$183,300 in total and no more than \$3,666 in any one electoral jurisdiction.” As an aside, I kind of wonder where they came up with those numbers, but there you have it. “In British Columbia, a third party is limited to spending \$150,000 in total and no more than \$3,000 in any one electoral district. In New Brunswick, a third party is limited to spending no more than 1.3% of the maximum amount a political party can spend if it runs a candidate....” To put that in context, a candidate in New Brunswick can probably spend somewhere in the order of \$60,000 to \$80,000, depending on what the population of his riding is. I think they get 96 cents per elector that they can spend as the limit, and so 1.3% of the maximum amount a political party could spend would be somewhere in the order of \$1,500, I would think, per riding. “In Quebec, a thirty party is

limited to spending \$300 on issue advertising, and third parties may not advertise to directly promote a party or candidate.” Quebec has certainly the most restrictive controls over third party spending. I'm not sure I'd want to see Ontario go that far.

“The second area of consideration is, should Ontario adopt third party contribution limits?” The first was spending limits, this is contribution limits. “Currently, no jurisdiction has contribution limits, but Alberta has introduced a bill, Bill 205, that would limit a contributor to giving a third party for its advertising no more than \$30,000 in an election year and no more than \$15,000 in a non-election year.” That would limit their contributions significantly from the current levels that exist in Ontario.

To continue on a second point, the Chief Electoral Officer goes on to say that “regarding issues that the select committee may wish to take into consideration respecting” third party advertising, “Should Ontario try to limit third party advertising spending to the amounts it raises prior to and during an election?” In reading the Chief Electoral Officer's report, I think it's important to note that he treads a very delicate line. He's very much aware that when you put financial controls in place on third parties, or on anyone else, you have the ability or you have the danger of affecting democracy. Certainly, there should be a mechanism whereby third parties can make their viewpoints known, talk about their philosophies, get those kinds of things out into the political arena so that a fair and equitable discussion can take place. I believe that's where the Chief Electoral Officer is going. That whole debate was ignored by this government when it brought in Bill 231.

“Currently, a registered third party need only report on the contributions it receives to support its advertising in the two months before an election is called. This allows third parties to build advertising war chests but not have to report on the source of those contributions received at an earlier time.” As I mentioned earlier, this is certainly an inequitable situation, and it cannot be considered fair when you consider that a third party should have some restrictions placed on it in a similar vein to what other political parties have placed on them. They shouldn't be able to go down the road without controls while the mainstream political parties, the three that have representatives in this House, and the six or eight—I believe there are 26 registered parties in Ontario, or 27; I think I heard in the news coming in today there was a 28th one just registered—but those parties should all have the same access to funds and access to the limits that all parties in Ontario share.

“In 2006, there was a bill before Parliament”—the Canadian Parliament—“that proposed to limit third party advertising spending to the amounts donated and reported in the six months before an election. While Bill C-79 died on the order paper, this is a requirement that legislators in Ontario may wish to consider.”

The Chief Electoral Officer continues to push forward his concerns about third party advertising, and he keeps asking the government, “You may wish to consider;” that

phrase is repeated many, many times. Given the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of this Legislature, he cannot direct the government to do anything, but he is repeatedly asking the government to do something—to the point of pleading for the government to do something—on this issue which he sees as a serious affront to the democratic process in the province of Ontario.

“The fourth public policy area for consideration” could be, “should Ontario adopt stricter registration and anti-collusion provisions? Under the Election Finances Act, there is no specific provision that prohibits a third party from co-operating or coordinating its advertising with either a political party or one of its candidates, provided that the party/candidate is not actually controlling the third party’s advertising. Such advertising is not necessarily prohibited so long as the cost of the advertising does not exceed the contribution limits and is reported by the party/candidate as an expense.”

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Herein lies the problem with third party advertising that we have in Ontario. They are coordinating and co-operating—the Working Families Coalition, which is a coalition of a number of unions, including teachers’ unions and construction unions. It would appear that they are co-operating and coordinating with the Liberal Party, but they are not admitting that they’re doing so. Therefore, their contributions, their advertising and their costs in elections are not included in the Liberal Party’s maximums, in the number of—

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Pardon me?

Mr. Peter Shurman: Connect the dots.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member from Thornhill says, “Connect the dots.” It’s easy to figure out. Connecting the dots becomes a little easier when you see that the executive directors of the Working Families Coalition contain the same names as many of the directors who sit on the Liberal Party of Ontario. It’s a fine line that separates it and it’s one that distorts the election process and allows the Liberals to double their expenditures over and above what the regulations allow them to do during an election. That’s a dangerous thing for democracy in this province.

The Election Finances Act has no specific connection between what prohibits a third party from co-operating or coordinating its advertising with other provincial parties. “Such advertising is not necessarily prohibited so long as the cost of the advertising does not exceed the contribution limits,” which is my main concern.

“Similarly, with the absence of spending limits in Ontario, there are also no explicit prohibitions on third parties coordinating their activities with one another.” When we look at the makeup of the Working Families Coalition, for instance, there are eight, 10, 12 people—organizations—who are contributing money to that organization. There is nothing to say that they shouldn’t be able to do that, but they should be able to do that only under the same conditions as all other political parties in Ontario find themselves faced with when it comes to

raising funds and operating in Ontario under Ontario regulations.

“In contrast, more stringent requirements are in place federally, in British Columbia, in New Brunswick, in Quebec, and are being proposed in Alberta. It is, or will be, an offence in these jurisdictions to collude for the purposes of circumventing spending limits for political parties, candidates and third parties.” I believe those same regulations should apply in Ontario.

“These are significant questions, and there may be” many “others.” The Chief Electoral Officer says, “I do not have the answers to these questions.” I think he has a pretty good idea of which direction he’d like to see it go in. He doesn’t have a particular policy recommendation to make to you. “As the Chief Electoral Officer, that is not my place.” If you read between the lines, I think he would say, “I wish it was my place, because I think this should be fixed, and I’d like to see it fixed. Therefore, please put it in the recommendations of the committee.” But he goes on to say, “But I do see that these are important issues that other jurisdictions have turned their minds to, and recommend that Ontario do the same.” I think that comes as close as the Chief Electoral Officer can come to asking the government to place some regulations in Bill 231—the bill that has now moved into third reading—and fix the problem that is facing Ontario.

He goes on to say, “I had such examples in mind when I recommended in December and in February that a task force be created to examine the rules of political financing in Ontario.” He’s trying to get the government’s attention.

“Finally, I have not just come here today to suggest things that this committee and the Legislative Assembly can do. As I mentioned earlier, I have a few thoughts with respect to the role of the Chief Electoral Officer in administering the election finance process. While I am not new to the world of elections, I am new to the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. It is incumbent on me to ensure that I administer Ontario’s elections finance laws in a fair and impartial manner.”

Again, reading between the lines, the Chief Electoral Officer seems to have some frustration that the regulations in place in Ontario do not allow him to administer elections in a fair and impartial manner. This government had the opportunity to change that. This government had the opportunity to promote democracy. This government failed to do that.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I stand to commend the member from Halton, who has just spoken, but I am somewhat puzzled because I did hear in the body of the debate and I did hear from some of the people doing questions and comments earlier that the Conservative Party will be supporting this bill. After listening to the member from Halton—who was really quite articulate. He pointed out all the huge failures in this bill: the lack of any kind of concrete action towards the disabled; the weak, ineffective law; the third party spending limits that were

not going to be honoured; the continuing reliance on donations; he didn't talk about this, but there's also the leaving out of advertising and third party advertising in municipal elections—all of the things that were wrong, all of the things that the Conservative Party in committee tried to fix. The government was having no part of it.

Then I listened to him and I listened to his colleagues, and it seems to me that in spite of the many flaws of this bill, they are prepared to support it. Perhaps when the member gets an opportunity in his two minutes at the end, he could indicate why, if this bill is so wrong, as his careful analysis has shown that so many things that could and should have been done have not been done, he is in fact supporting the bill. It would seem illogical to me that any bill that will continue to allow third party advertising and have no third party spending limits, which is the crux of his argument today of what is wrong with the bill—why he would be supporting that to allow that continuing inequity to take place. I am absolutely puzzled as to why he and his colleagues will be supporting this bill.

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

Mr. David Zimmer: I particularly want to respond to the comments of the member for Halton, Mr. Chudleigh. He spoke at length in his remarks about some of the flaws that he saw in the bill. He particularly addressed and spoke strongly, if not passionately, to the issue of third party finance. We listened carefully to everything that he said. Third party financing is something that he's very, very upset that—when you listen to what he said today—was not addressed in the bill.

To paraphrase Shakespeare and referencing Lady Macbeth and, "The lady doth protest too much," I think the member doth protest too much here because the Progressive Conservative Party and Mr. Chudleigh, the member for Halton, sat in clause-by-clause as we went through the bill. The Progressive Conservatives put forth some 40 amendments to the bill in committee—40 amendments. That's a great stack of amendments. They wanted to amend this, that and the other thing—a comprehensive amendment package. We were happy to support a number of their amendments; I believe we supported seven. But the interesting thing is, not one of the Progressive Conservatives' 40 amendments addressed the issue of third party financing. Now, talk about a conflict: The member for Halton sitting here used up a good chunk of his speech complaining about third party financing, yet at clause-by-clause, not one—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

1010

Mr. Randy Hillier: The Election Act—we all recognize how important it is and why we have an independent officer of Parliament as the Chief Electoral Officer. We all recognize that that Election Act is to prevent the fixing of elections. The Chief Electoral Officer recommended strongly that we have guidelines about third party financing to prevent collusion and collaboration between invisible agents and political parties.

The Conservative Party recognizes, and so does everybody else, that the Working Families Coalition is spending and contributing millions and millions of dollars to the Liberal Party. The Liberals are using trade unions, the building trade unions especially, as a proxy political party. They had an opportunity to close this loophole within the Election Act—this gaping loophole, one that the Chief Electoral Officer exposed completely—and they failed to act. They want this loophole to stay there. They want this unseen appendage, the Working Families Coalition, to continue to raise and contribute money outside of the Election Act.

What we're looking for is disclosure and accountability. We want third parties to be active in the democratic process, but they need to be open, they need to disclose and they need to be accountable. Had third party financing been included in this act, you would have seen many amendments by our party in there, but you prevented it by not having it in the act in the first place.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It is a pleasure to stand up and say a few words about this, certainly following on the heels of the member from Halton. Yes, he's right: There needs to be more transparency about third party contributions. Also, our friend from Willowdale is right: Unfortunately, the Progressive Conservatives didn't put forward any amendments to that end. We, however, in the New Democratic Party, put forward over 30 amendments that would actually assist those in the disability community and disability rights community, none of which the government acceded to—in fact, in full view of those who were there as stakeholders. That is a real focus, and that's something that my colleague from Beaches—East York will be focusing on when his time comes to stand and speak about the bill.

Those who are viewing should also know that we in the New Democratic Party would like to ban contributions from corporations and unions. That's our party position. There's significant work to be done about transparency in the election laws in Ontario and, unfortunately, on a number of fronts this bill just doesn't do what's necessary. It doesn't really do what's required to amend our election laws. Like so many Liberal bills, it fiddles around the edges but does nothing, really, to the substance of the issue and the substance of the problems. One is to make elections more accessible to those who have disabilities; the other is to look at where contributions come from and to be really open and transparent about that.

It's sad to see the member from Halton rise and speak so eloquently and then, of course, unfortunately it looks like the Progressive Conservatives are going to support this bill. So I'm looking forward to my colleague's comments. They may not come at this time, but suffice it to say that we need election reform in this province and this bill won't do it.

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'd like to thank the members for their comments. From the former mayor of East York and his riding, whatever that is—

Mr. Michael Prue: Beaches—East York.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Beaches—East York, yes. Why are we supporting this bill, having railed against it for 45 minutes? I railed against what's not in the bill. The bill itself does improve the election process, in particular for handicapped people, and it's worth supporting on that basis. The bill could have been so much better, especially when you talk about the ability for this bill to improve the democratic process in Ontario.

To miss that opportunity—this Election Act doesn't get opened up all that often. It's 10, 12, 15 or 20 years sometimes between acts opening up. With this bill, you missed an opportunity that would have helped democracy in Ontario, and when you look back on your years in this House you will look at that one omission and you will say, "We missed an opportunity to do a better job for the people of Ontario," and that is a sad thing.

Secondly, I'm surprised that the member for Willowdale wouldn't know that when you put in an amendment to a bill, there has to be a clause for you to amend. There was no clause on third party advertising in this entire bill, so there was no clause for us to amend, and that's why there were no amendments that we put in regarding that. I'm surprised that the member for Willowdale, who is a lawyer and tells everybody he's a lawyer at every opportunity, wouldn't know that.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1016 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'd like to introduce some guests we have this morning: the family of page Georgina Hadjiyianni. Here this morning are her parents, Mary and Nick Hadjiyianni; her grandparents Andreas and Georgia Hadjiyianni; and her sister Paulina. Welcome.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: I would like the members to join me in welcoming two of my guests who are in the members' east gallery: Plinio and Anna Paula from Rio, Brazil. Welcome.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's my pleasure to welcome several members of the Oakville provincial youth advisory committee. With us today are Lucas Burton, Erin Nieweglowski, Franziska Miller, Kevin O'Hare, Sara Pezzack, Natalie Djurdjev, Laura McVey, and Ellen Kuschnik from my constituency office.

Mr. Paul Miller: Shortly joining us will be Leanne Siracusa of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario; Sally Palmer from the Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits; Stephanie Chapman, on behalf of her mother, who is an ODSP recipient; and

Amy MacPherson, a single parent on ODSP. Many others will be in front of Queen's Park today.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to welcome the grade 10 students from école Gabriel-Dumont in London to the Legislature this morning. Bienvenue à toutes et tous.

Mr. David Zimmer: I would like to welcome today Mr. Fazal Khan, who is the president of the college of opticians; and Caroline MacIsaac-Power, who is the registrar. They're over here. The college represents Ontario's 2,500 practising opticians. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like the members to join me in welcoming two guests of mine in the Speaker's gallery, Dr. Andy Ballard and Gail Ballard from the great riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London, who are here to observe the proceedings today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Tim Hudak: In the absence of the Premier for the second consecutive day after his—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the honourable member that we have an understanding here: We do not make references to the attendance of members.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): That didn't take long: 24 seconds into question period. Members will please come to order.

Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Acting Premier. Premier McGuinty's ill-conceived plan to teach sex ed to six-year-olds is not the first time we saw him ignore Ontario families and take this Dalton-knows-best approach. Dalton McGuinty is also turning many Ontario communities into guinea pigs for his industrial wind farm schemes. And then he arrogantly dismisses any concerns from local families or municipal leaders about what this means for their neighbourhoods.

I ask the Deputy Premier: What makes Dalton McGuinty think he can cut local governments and families out of planning decisions when it comes to his industrial wind farm schemes?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, please.

Hon. Brad Duguid: We all know very well that your party is opposed to moving forward on the advance of renewables. We know that you would do anything you can to delay that so your love affair with coal can continue. I'm going to tell you right now, your love affair with coal is over, absolutely over.

There are numerous opportunities for public input and involvement in renewable project planning. In fact, the

proponent of the project must consult with the municipality and the community. Their concerns must be documented in their application and must indicate how the proponent is addressing these issues and concerns. Following their submission to the Ministry of the Environment, the application is posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights for 30 to 60 days. There's a good process in place. It cuts out the red tape and delay—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Unlike Dalton McGuinty, who thinks he can sit in his office and decide where the industrial wind farm schemes go, the Ontario PCs believe in a fair price for the ratepayer and local decision-making on these projects. Minister, your Premier once said that municipalities were a mature, responsible level of government and they have their own duly elected representatives. Yet when it comes to local input on your industrial wind farm schemes, only Dalton knows best. We firmly disagree. Municipalities actually have a say over where to put a shopping mall, but you've stripped away their ability on these industrial wind farm schemes that could be the size of 25 shopping malls. Minister, why did Dalton McGuinty say he respects municipalities when clearly he's doing the complete opposite?

Hon. Brad Duguid: There they go again, saying one thing one day and another the next. One day they're against red tape; today they want more red tape to delay very important energy projects and the 50,000 jobs that the Green Energy Act will bring. One day they're for investments in our economy; now they're against—

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: One day they talk about being for investment in our economy; the next day they talk about the \$7 billion in private sector dollars flowing into this province from Samsung. One day they're complaining about not enough jobs being created; the next day they're opposed to the 16,000 jobs coming from Samsung, and the 20,000 jobs coming from the \$9-billion investment we recently announced in renewable energies.

We know they oppose our efforts to transition our energy sector to cleaner sources of energy. We know they want to stick with coal, but—

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

1040

Mr. Tim Hudak: We saw this past week the same Dalton-knows-best routine that saw Minister Papatello call opponents of Dalton McGuinty's plans to teach sex ed to six-year-olds—that those parents were from the Dark Ages. We're similarly seeing you call local municipal representatives and families who object to your industrial wind farm schemes as being part of the Dark Ages. In reality, some 50 municipalities have brought forward resolutions—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Economic Development will withdraw the comment she just made.

Interjections.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Some 50 municipalities have brought forward resolutions calling for a moratorium on industrial wind farms until a study is done to investigate fully their health and environmental concerns. The Environmental Commissioner has expressed his concerns as well. What makes Dalton McGuinty so smart? Why does he know better than local municipal leaders and local families?

Hon. Brad Duguid: These Tories are so far behind the times that they're even behind the Harper government when it comes to getting out of coal and moving to renewable energy sources. In a recent article, Environment Minister Jim Prentice has told Canada's major electricity producers that they'll have to gradually retire their coal-fired plants and replace them with cleaner sources of energy. Even the Harper government is ahead of you guys, you're so far behind the world.

The good news for Ontarians is that we're out in front. Our Premier, many years ago, saw this coming, and he's moving us faster than any other jurisdiction in this world to cleaner sources of energy. The result will be building a green energy hub here, creating 50,000 jobs over the next three years, something—

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

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'd remind the Minister of Energy that it was actually Elizabeth Witmer who closed down the only coal plants in the province of Ontario.

Back to the Acting Premier: You know this impacts your riding, and you've dodged answering any of my questions to date. The Ontario PC caucus has brought forward a motion calling for a moratorium on these industrial wind farm projects until an independent study of the health and environmental impacts is done. We're standing on the side of 50-some municipalities that have similarly brought forward resolutions. We are standing on the side of families from Scarborough to Prince Edward county who are calling for this type of moratorium. Minister, I ask you, can we count on your support to stand up for communities like Prince Edward-Hastings, Scarborough Bluffs and Essex and support our motion for—

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

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member of the opposition should understand that we've brought into place the toughest setback rules on the continent when it comes to wind energy. No wind turbine can be closer to 550 metres to your home unless consented to. This is the toughest setback standard in North America. The Min-

istry of the Environment, under the leadership of our good friend the Minister of the Environment, John Gerretsen, has ensured that literature from around the world has been studied around the world, and they've found that there's no adverse health effects as a result of wind turbines. Under the leadership of the Minister of the Environment, we've appointed an Ontario research chair at the University of Waterloo who will provide guidelines and advice on setting standards. Our chief medical officer of health will be reporting this spring on health effects.

We take these issues very seriously, but we—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Not only do Dalton McGuinty's industrial wind farm schemes ignore what Ontario families want in their communities, they are very expensive as well. They will drive up the cost of energy to Ontario seniors and families. In fact, an independent report says that a \$350-a-year increase in taxes and fees has come about on Ontario family power bills because of your schemes like this and your gross mismanagement of the file. When you add in these industrial wind farms and other so-called projects, families are looking at an additional \$650 a year more on their hydro bills. Minister, are you that out of touch? Don't you understand the struggles families are going through? Will you support our motion before the assembly tomorrow?

Hon. Brad Duguid: If the Leader of the Opposition really cared about families, wouldn't he care about the health of our families, the health of our kids and grandkids, the need for our next generation to inherit clean air from our generation? Wouldn't he want to get off of coal? But his party wants to keep us in the—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: Wouldn't the member of the opposition care about ensuring that we protect the health of our kids and grandkids? I know he does. This is the to-and-fro of the Legislature here. He's forgetting about our kids and grandkids and their health.

If he really cares about families, doesn't he realize the need to ensure that we have a stable energy supply in this province, something that we've had to invest in over the last number of years? Under his government, the use of coal plants went up 127%. We've brought it down 70% since we've been in office, the lowest level in—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Of course we care about the financial well-being of Ontario families that are paying these exorbitant increases in their energy bills because of Dalton McGuinty, and we stand with them in calling for a health and environmental review of your wind energy schemes. Quite frankly, I put much more faith in them and their municipal leaders than a Premier widely known for saying one thing and doing the opposite while he has been in office.

Communities want local input on these industrial wind farms in their community. They want to see that in your green energy scheme, the environment will actually win, because right now the environment loses and families lose, businesses lose, municipalities lose. Unless your name is Samsung, everybody loses.

I'll ask the minister again: Will you support our moratorium and show the respect for local governments and families that they deserve?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Seven years ago, we inherited an energy system that had been neglected by the previous government, causing shortages in supply due to lack of investment in the aging infrastructure. Worse than that, it had a terrible reliance on coal that was harming the health of our people. Ontarians deserve better.

Our plan is delivering reliable, clean energy with a mix of emission-free power generation and a commitment to conservation. That's a real plan. Is there a cost to that plan? Yes, there is. But the benefit is cleaner air. The benefit is healthier families. The benefit is a stronger economy; 50,000 new jobs being created as a result of our Green Energy Act.

This province is leading the world when it comes to these technologies. This province is leading the world when it comes to moving in this direction. Ontarians have a lot to be proud of over the last seven years and how far we've come.

NURSES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Minister of Health. Yesterday, the minister argued that all of the 2,000 nursing positions that have been lost across Ontario are simply moving to the community. Can the minister provide us with a breakdown of where exactly these new nursing positions have actually appeared?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very happy to talk about how much more opportunity nurses have in Ontario now than they did in 2003. As I said yesterday, we have almost 10,000 more nurses working in this province than we did when we took office in 2003. In fact, even in the last year there are 1,000 more nurses working today than just one year ago.

We collect statistics from the college of nurses, from our own ministry, where we fund new nursing positions. I'd be very happy to share the statistics from the college of nurses, from the ministry, with the member opposite.

What I can tell you is that we're one of the few jurisdictions in the world that has a full-time job guarantee for new nursing graduates. It's something we're very proud of. The number of nurses who are working full-time now—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Minister of Health and the Premier can talk a good game about transferring care to the community, but in communities across this province, people know that this is nothing more than government spin because eliminating beds, nursing care,

intensive care units, emergency rooms and cancer clinics is not something that most communities have the ability to make up for.

Can the minister provide us with some evidence that the services by the nurses being cut from local hospitals are showing up in actual services in the communities that lost them?

1050

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm more than happy to talk about the enhanced community services where nurses play a pivotal role in our family health teams, in our community health centres, in our nurse-practitioner-led clinics, and in our long-term-care homes. Right across our health care system, nurses are playing an increasingly important role. The collaborative approach that we have really championed in our time in office means that nurses have more responsibility. And they are embracing that responsibility.

We have significantly increased the number of nurse practitioners. In fact, I believe that we've doubled the number of nurse practitioners in this province.

The responsibility of nurses is growing, and people in our communities are seeing the results of that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families want to see responsible, smart health reform that protects patients and front-line services. Instead, we see cancer patients left without support. We see new moms left on their own, emergency rooms closed—all this as hospital CEOs continue to rake in exorbitant salaries and pocket huge raises like the one at Newmarket's Southlake Regional Health Centre, who received an 81% raise and has made \$2.9 million over five years.

Can the minister tell us when patients and their access to care will be the priority for this government?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There is no higher priority we have than better access to health care. I think we have demonstrated that very clearly. We've got 1,200 new nursing positions in our long-term-care homes. We've got 1,200 new full-time nursing jobs in our hospitals. I'm proud of the investments that we have made.

I think it's important to contrast this with what happened under the NDP government. The number of RNs in Ontario fell by almost 3,000 while they were in office. And that's not all: There was a shift from full-time to casual employment. The percentage of nurses working full time actually fell under the NDP government.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Minister of Health. Yesterday, Northumberland residents were at Queen's Park to protest cuts to their local health care services. Northumberland Hills Hospital has recently experienced very deep service cuts, including closure of a diabetes education clinic, the end of outpatient rehabilitation services and the elimination of 26 hospital beds. Can the minister tell these Ontarians where in their community these new services can now be found?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the question because it gives me an opportunity to thank the member from Northumberland, Lou Rinaldi, for the exceptional work that he has done to protect health services in this riding.

I can tell you that our investments in Northumberland Hills Hospital include an increase in their base funding of more than 37% since we've been elected. We've also invested in bringing down wait times.

We're also really focusing on the aging at home strategy in that community. Part of the aging at home strategy is actually making sure that people who need care but don't need care in the hospital, the alternate-level-of-care patients, actually get the care that they need in the community. So part of the work that's happening at Northumberland Hills Hospital is actually focusing on people who are in the hospital but would be better served in the community.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The services that hospitals like Northumberland Hills used to provide may be available in the community, but only if you pay for them. When hospitals like Northumberland Hills or Toronto East General eliminate rehab services like physiotherapy, Ontarians either have to pay out of their pocket or live without these essential health care services. Is this the government's solution for health care in this province: make the patients pay?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm also really happy to just remind the member opposite that the beds that are closing are long-term-care beds—there are no other beds that are closing—and they will not close until there is a capacity in the community. It's the right thing for the people who are in those beds, those patients who would rather be somewhere else than in the hospital.

I also want to take a moment to talk about the citizens' advisory panel. I think this is a very innovative approach that Northumberland Hills Hospital took in this case. They actually brought together citizens and gave them very intense education into what some of the choices were in the hospital. There is no question that these are tough decisions, but the citizens' advisory panel was something that I think other hospitals may wish to explore, because it does actually ask the people in the community what they need to protect and what could be done better outside the—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: More than four million hours of nursing care disappear, and the government denies it. Communities like Peterborough are asked to brace for deep nursing cuts because of executive mismanagement, and the government remains silent. Patients are forced to pay for health services that their hospitals used to provide, and the government takes a bow.

When will we see health care reform from this government that actually improves the health care that people in this province rely on?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The approach that the member opposite is taking is that it's just business as

usual when it comes to health care: “Just keep paying more and hope that the money goes to where it will make a difference for people.” Those days are over.

Our spending on health care is now at the point where we simply must make decisions about where we’re going to spend those dollars, and we know we can make the right decisions, the thoughtful decisions, that will both improve patient care and bring the increase in spending down.

We’re committing more money this year to health care than we did last year, just as we have done every year since we’ve been elected, and we’ll spend more next year than we did this year. But the time has come to get a lot smarter about how we spend money when it comes to health care.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock, please. The clock is stopped.

I just want to take this opportunity, because this is a special school to me. These are students in the Speaker’s gallery from Edward Street Public School in St. Thomas, with their teacher, Mr. Bruce Smith. It was in a grade 5 class at this very school that the political bug caught me, courtesy of my grade 5 teacher, Mrs. Ethel Bond. Please join me in welcoming the students and parents from Edward Street Public School in St. Thomas.

New question.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Bill Murdoch: My question is to the Acting Premier, and I hope she’ll answer this for me.

Even though industrial wind farms are largely being built in rural Ontario, your Green Energy Act cuts rural councillors and their families out of wind farm planning. Bill Bilton, mayor of Dawn-Euphemia, has been serving the public for 25 years, and he says that the province is throwing its weight around when it comes to industrial wind projects in his township. He says, “I was always told that planning is a public process. I guess on this issue, it isn’t.... Basically, we don’t have input anymore.”

Can you tell me, Acting Premier, why you’ve made it so Ontario family farms have no say about industrial wind projects in their own backyard?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

Hon. Brad Duguid: That’s simply not the case. There are numerous opportunities for public input and involvement in these renewable projects, as I responded to earlier. In fact, the proponent of the project must—I repeat, must—consult with the municipality and community. It’s not an option; they have to consult with the municipality, and they have to consult with the community. Their concerns must be documented in their application and must indicate how the proponent is addressing the issues and concerns that are raised. Following their submission to the Ministry of the Environment, the application is

posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights for 30 to 60 days for public comment.

This is a thorough process. It cuts back on the red tape that the party of the member opposite talks about wanting to be against, but when it comes down to action, it appears that you’re for red—

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

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Unfortunately, the Deputy Premier doesn’t want to answer. She finally gets a question in the House, and she has a chance.

I’ve got several more mayors and reeves and councillors in my riding with the same concerns as Bill Bilton. Mitch Twolan, who is the mayor of Huron-Kinloss township, supports a moratorium to study health concerns raised by rural families who have to live beside these large industrial wind farms. He points out that projects are already on hold until there are more transmission lines anyway. And he says, “When it comes to public health and peoples’ concerns with health, you obviously can never have enough information.”

Why is Dalton McGuinty opposed to an independent study of health and environmental impacts of industrial wind farms? Please answer; don’t give the rhetoric to somebody else. You answer it.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Farmers in Prince Edward county and farmers across the province support this movement, and I’ll tell you why: There are many farmers that are joining together and taking advantage of these programs, making some extra, much-needed revenue for themselves and their families. I don’t know why the member wouldn’t want to stand up for those farmers.

1100

We talked about contradictions. They’re for red tape one minute, and the minute we’re getting rid of red tape, they’re against it. They’re for investment one minute; the minute we’re getting investment in this province, they are against it. Well, here’s the mother of all contradictions: When they were in office, how did they treat municipalities? They downloaded on them like no government in the history of this province. They forced amalgamations on municipalities right across this province. There was more downloading when they were in office than any government in the history of Ontario—

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

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. This government’s wrong-headed decision to cut Toronto’s Transit City program is threatening one of the GTA’s most important transit projects: the Eglinton cross-town LRT. Eglinton is the only east-west road that connects Peel region in the west to Durham region in the east, and transit riders routinely spend 90 minutes or more making the trip across town.

Will the minister commit to having the shovels in the ground on this crucial transit project by the end of this year?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I absolutely understand how important Eglinton is; it goes through my riding and right across the city, and I completely agree with the member opposite, which is why we have not cancelled these programs; which is why we have not cut this funding. What we have done is made a decision that we have to stretch it over a longer period of time.

Right now, Metrolinx is working to bring forward a plan that will allow us to continue to move on all of these projects. I think the member opposite knows full well that this plan is being developed, and we have every intention of moving ahead.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is an absolutely essential transit project that we cannot afford to delay. The annual ridership of the Eglinton LRT is estimated to be 53 million customer trips by 2021, by far the highest ridership of any of the proposed Transit City lines, and its fate is so uncertain that even the Liberals' own member from Eglinton–Lawrence is holding an emergency meeting in his riding tonight to rally community residents to save it.

So, I repeat: Will the minister commit to having the shovels in the ground on the Eglinton LRT by the end of this year? Yes or no?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have committed repeatedly to continue to work on these projects. I have committed repeatedly to work with Metrolinx to bring forward a plan to continue these projects. We have made a decision that we need to spread this money over a longer period of time, and that's what we are doing.

It is very interesting that this member from the party opposite has consistently voted against transit projects that we have brought forward. Right now, there's money being spent in Toronto: \$172 million to revitalize Union Station; \$416 million towards the replacement of TTC streetcars; \$870 million for funding the Toronto-York Spadina subway extension. All of those projects are things that this party opposite has not supported.

We stand for transit. We are going to continue to work on those projects—

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

CHILD POVERTY

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Throughout Ontario, including in my riding of York South–Weston, families have been facing growing financial pressures as a result of the worldwide economic recession. Families are looking for supports to secure their most basic needs in order to better sustain themselves financially.

As part of the poverty reduction strategy, our government is keeping its commitment to continue to increase the Ontario child benefit. In my riding of York South–Weston, many families tell me that the Ontario child benefit is making a difference. The Ontario child benefit provides more assistance to more children and helps families make the transition from social assistance to employment.

Can the minister please tell this Legislature and Ontarians more about how the implementation of the Ontario child benefit will proceed?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank the member for York South–Weston for her advocacy on behalf of her community on this very important issue.

As part of the poverty reduction strategy, we introduced the Ontario child benefit. The Ontario child benefit represents a historic transformation of benefit payments with significant impact for all low-income Ontario families. By making child benefits flow separately from social assistance and distributing it to families based on need, the OCB assists not only families on social assistance but also families working low-wage jobs.

We're very proud of the Ontario child benefit and the difference it makes to moms and dads across Ontario. Parents want to provide the best for their kids, and the Ontario child benefit supports them in being able to do just that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I thank the minister for the response and appreciate the clarification. Allowing parents to keep their children's benefits as they move from social assistance to employment is critical to expanding opportunities for children and families.

Increasing the Ontario child benefit to \$1,310 by 2013 will help give low-income families the financial support that they need to provide a better quality of life for their children. But an effective approach to breaking the cycle of poverty will need to do more. Can the minister please share what other actions our government is taking to reduce poverty in Ontario?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: Yes, to the member from York South–Weston, the Ontario child benefit is one part of a comprehensive strategy to help families lift themselves out of poverty and for us to reduce child poverty in this province by 25% within the next five years. In fact, in last month's budget, we invested \$63.5 million to fill the federal funding gap for child care. That will maintain 8,500 child care spaces and 1,000 jobs, and it will ensure that low-income working parents can continue to have access to affordable, high-quality child care. We are doing important and innovative work.

I recently had the chance to visit with the member for York South–Weston the Learning Enrichment Foundation. They and other partners are working with us across the province to reduce child poverty and to ensure that every child gets the best possible start in life.

TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Acting Premier. In just 65 days, the McGuinty Liberals will begin attacking family budgets by making everyone pay their greedy tax grab on things we need and use every day.

Forbes McEwen from Omeme near Lindsay gets it. He says, "Electricity and gasoline costs will increase 8%." That's 8% more for electricity on top of the \$350 in

other taxes and fees the McGuinty Liberals have added to their bills.

The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock hasn't asked, so I will: Will your greedy HST tax grab apply to your other greedy tax grabs on electricity?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank our caucus member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for the work that he's doing to make sure that there are jobs in his riding—jobs today, jobs tomorrow and jobs for a generation. That is the most important thing that we all must focus on, coming out of what people refer to as the great recession, the first time that the global economy has shrunk at the same time since the Dirty Thirties.

Now, there are those who think we should stand pat, but there are those on this side of the House who believe that we have to do the most important thing that we can do as government, which is to reform our tax system. Leading economists tell us that that is the route to greater prosperity so that we can afford the valuable programs that people rely upon. It's why it's important that our businesses are getting ready for this important change so they can be competitive, compete on the global stage and bring jobs right—

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: In 65 more days, the Liberal members will learn what a mistake they made following along with Dalton McGuinty's decision to not consult Ontario families on his greedy HST tax grab. And I'll let you in on a little secret: Dalton McGuinty not only can't name a government that was elected after bringing in a harmonized sales tax; he can't name a single jurisdiction that brought in a harmonized sales tax and didn't lower the rate.

Walter Pape of North Bay gets it. He says, "If the government wants to implement the HST, it should have lowered the provincial sales tax rate to soften the blow and make it a tax-neutral proposition."

The member for Nipissing won't ask, so I will: What makes you think Ontario families also put up with you attacking their budgets to deal with your own budget—

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

Hon. John Wilkinson: I find it quite interesting. I just want to quote something here from somebody whom you know well: "The five provinces that still apply sales tax to business inputs, namely British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Prince Edward Island, should immediately end this practice. These provinces are further encouraged to harmonize their provincial sales taxes with the federal goods and services tax (GST), which already exempts business inputs." Who says that? Mike Harris says that. Wow.

Then I remember another quote: "I'm quite encouraged by the fact that the government of Ontario decided to harmonize the PST with the GST. This is jobs, this is investment, this is good economic policy," says Jim Flaherty.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Finance, Minister of Revenue and Minister of Economic Development.

New question.

HEALTH PROMOTION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Promotion de la santé. Active Healthy Kids Canada released their annual report today, and the result should be a wake-up call to your ministry. Only 12% of children meet the recommended daily targets of physical activity. That gives us an F in this category for the fourth year in a row. Meanwhile, 74% of kids want to be active.

Physical activity is one of the four pillars of health promotion. When will the Minister of Health Promotion step up to the plate, provide leadership and stop failing our kids?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I want to first of all thank Active Healthy Kids Canada for highlighting the issue of physical activity in Canada.

This is an issue not just for policy-makers, as it says right in the recommendations; it's for everyone. It's a public health and health care professionals issue; it's a parent issue; it's an issue for early childhood educators and for schools.

But let me tell you what we are doing, and I will tell you that 14% of children in Ontario are getting 90 minutes of physical activity a day. That is higher than the national average. This government is investing \$10 million annually towards our after-school initiative, which is aimed at youth in 270 sites in high-priority neighbourhoods across Ontario. We continue to invest in physical—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Did I really hear her say that 14% in Ontario is something to be proud of? Eighty-six per cent of the kids in Ontario don't have enough physical activity, and we should be proud of this?

The government has the power to move kids. You have it within your power. Seventy-five per cent of those inactive, obese kids will become obese adults. We spend \$2 billion in health care costs looking after obese adults and the costs are rising all the time.

The Obama administration is bringing calorie labelling on menus to fight the obesity crisis in the US. Why is the McGuinty government missing in action on this front? Why are they happy with the 14% of our kids being active? What is the minister's plan to address the obesity crisis?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: This government continues to be committed to addressing this issue in Ontario. We understand that there's more to be done, but government cannot do it alone. We need everybody to be on board with this.

We continue to invest. We invested \$17 million in the healthy communities fund. We also invested \$16.7 million to implement 20 minutes of daily physical education for elementary school students.

We need everybody to be on board with this. Yes, there's more to be done, but we continue to work with every sector to make improvements in this area. This is about our kids. You guys over there need to come on board and we all need to work on this.

I would tell you that since 2006 our government has invested \$584 million in community—

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

EASTERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jim Brownell: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Our province, like many jurisdictions around the world, is beginning to emerge from one of the most difficult economic downturns of our lifetime. Our economy is showing signs of improvement, people are being called back to work, and production levels are moving up slowly. This government should be applauded for what it has done to combat the negative effects of the recession by aiding industries such as auto and manufacturing. As a result of this government's efforts, thousands of jobs have been saved.

As it turns out, though, these industries are generally located in the southern portion of the province. As the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, representing eastern Ontario, I wonder what support our businesses are getting from this government. Like the people of southern Ontario, job security is a top concern for these people. It is for this reason that I ask the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: What is the government doing to support jobs in my riding and—

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: We really do appreciate this question about economic development, in particular in eastern Ontario.

For all of Ontario, just when our businesses needed a partner the most, the Ontario government was there, and in particular a focus on manufacturing, which was, in fact, the sector hardest hit in this global recession. We're very pleased that at that time we had the programs that mattered. The Next Generation of Jobs Fund, as people will remember, has helped a multitude of companies make massive investments. A program like the advanced manufacturing investment strategy, which is a loan program: Loan commitments of \$135 million supported initiatives of investment of over \$1 billion. That's the kind of leveraging that our support can give them. The Next Generation of Jobs Fund: So far, 20 projects leveraging \$3 billion in investments and securing—

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

Mr. Jim Brownell: I thank the minister for highlighting the ways in which the government has acted to

protect jobs, increase job security and strengthen our economy across the province and in my region of eastern Ontario, and I applaud you for your efforts.

I certainly know that in eastern Ontario we have benefited greatly from a program called the eastern Ontario development fund. I understand that this program has helped immensely with projects all across eastern Ontario, from Peterborough to the border of Quebec to the north. Seventeen million dollars is a lot of money that the government is spending, especially throughout the recession, but the results the minister highlighted are impressive.

I'd also like to know if she could provide the House with how the eastern Ontario development fund is protecting jobs—

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm glad that the member referenced this fund because this member was a very strong advocate for the development of the eastern development fund. That meant that our government would focus in this region, which has had chronic issues of unemployment for a whole host of reasons. When you get a worldwide recession, it only makes it more difficult.

For example, we have great projects in that region. MacEwen Grain in Maxville: a new feed mill to help establish Maxville as an agriculture hub. Northern Cables Inc. in Brockville; Cam Tran in Colborne; McCloskey International in Peterborough; Burnbrae Farms Ltd.; Trillium Health Care Products—again, in Brockville: These are the kinds of projects that are creating jobs and helping companies tip towards that decision to make an investment—

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

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Acting Premier. Can the Acting Premier guarantee that the cost of direct health care services provided by pharmacists will not be downloaded onto families and seniors as a result of your proposed cuts to Ontario's community pharmacies?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am very grateful to have the opportunity to talk about some of the changes that are coming in this province when it comes to the price of drugs. We are determined to bring down the cost of drugs for people who need those drugs to be or get healthy.

Let me give you some examples. The list I have is the 20 most commonly prescribed drugs in this province. Ramipril for high blood pressure: people today pay \$256 a year for that drug. Under the reform, they will pay \$87. That is a savings of \$169 for that person. For metformin for diabetes, they pay \$178 today; they will pay \$70 under these proposed reforms—

1120

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: What the minister knows full well and what they don't want to talk about is that whatever small cost savings might be achieved by seniors as a result of this are going to be more than offset on the other side by the increased costs that seniors are going to be asked to pay, costs that were formerly absorbed by pharmacists. They're now going to be expected to pay \$8 more in prescription delivery fees, \$10 more for over-the-counter medication counselling, \$20 more for blister packs and \$200 more in co-payments, which many pharmacists currently waive for seniors.

The Premier and the minister would like Ontario seniors to believe that he's reducing the cost of medications, but in fact he's adding more than enough costs to offset that at the other end.

Minister, will you commit today to ensure that Ontario seniors are not left to bear the brunt of these additional costs that—

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite is speaking on behalf of Big Pharma and nobody else. They are on the side of rebates; we are on the side of lower drug prices for people in this province. Even the federal—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The members will please come to order. I would just remind the minister on the choice of her words in implying motive out of the mouths of members. Please continue.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Even the federal Competition Bureau understands that this rebate system is driving up the cost of drugs and padding the profits of big chain drugstores.

I know whose side we're on. We're on the side of patients: people who need drugs like cancer drugs, like blood pressure drugs, diabetes drugs, you name it. We're on the side of lower drug prices; the people opposite are on the side of pharmacy, and I am ashamed of them, that they would take this position. We are paying far too much for drugs in this province and we are determined to get those drug prices down.

CHILD POVERTY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Acting Premier. Ontario's most vulnerable children are under attack as a result of this government's callous reduction of the basic needs allowance. Many families on social assistance are receiving a mere dollar more in monthly support, an insult to those already struggling to properly feed their children. The problem is especially dire in Hamilton, which is why Hamiltonians have descended on this Legislature today. They want to know: When will the McGuinty government put an end to its heartless benefit shell game?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Community and Social Services, please.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you very much for the question. This government is very concerned about the well-being of children. That's why we have done so much since we were elected to help children. In order to help the children, we have to help the parents, so that's why we provided a 12% increase in OW and ODSP benefits since we were elected.

Yesterday, we finished the discussion on full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, which will help children, again, and we have established the Ontario child benefit, which is a beautiful program that will come to help children. What did this party do? They voted against it.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Paul Miller: The Hamilton activists who are in the gallery behind us here—or out on the front lawn—have travelled to Queen's Park to tell this government and its poverty reduction strategy that it's failing. As Ontario families who receive social assistance fall deeper and deeper into poverty, this government shows extreme cruelty by clawing back the little relief they receive through the Ontario child benefit.

Will this minister and her government finally listen to our province's most vulnerable families and finally give them the little break they deserve today? Stop clawing back the Ontario child benefit by reducing basic needs allowances. If you want to do something for Hamilton, there they are.

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order. We welcome guests to observe the proceedings. As much as you may want to participate, you have to be elected to participate in the proceedings, so all you can do is observe. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I will refer the question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: As the member opposite knows, the Ontario child benefit is a transformative initiative. I want to be clear: Every family is better off as a result of the OCB—every family. I want to tell the member opposite what leaders in his community in Hamilton had to say—listen up: “The recent introduction of the Ontario child benefit, a new provincial program aimed specifically at middle- and low-income families with children”—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just remind the member from Hamilton East that he just asked a question. He should listen to the response, and he can call a late show if he's not satisfied with the answer.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: —“middle- and low-income families with children, provides extra financial help. This improved feature with our social safety net couldn't have come at a better time.” That was Don Jaffray, the executive director of the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth.

What did the member opposite do? He voted against it. He voted against the Ontario child benefit; he voted against the increases; he voted against child care spaces;

they voted against rent supplements; they voted against minimum wage—

Interjections.

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

New question.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, in my riding and across Ontario, shoppers are choosing farmers' markets, where they know that the food being sold is fresh, high-quality Ontario food products. More and more of my constituents are supporting local farmers' markets and are telling me that knowing who is supplying them their food is extremely important.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speak louder, Khalil; we can't hear you.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Perhaps if the member from Renfrew was not as vocal in this chamber, he would find it much easier to hear the questions being asked.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very important question, especially for you, Mr. Speaker, because I know that you support local farmers and you support the food being produced in this province. Again, to the minister: As you know, in my riding and many others across the province of Ontario, at this present time people are visiting farmers' markets to buy local—

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

Hon. Carol Mitchell: Thank you for the question. I tell you, this is good news for Ontario. The 2008 Ontario farmers' market study found over 15 million shopper-visits were made to farmers' markets in Ontario. There are about 200 farmers' markets in Ontario, and their economic impact in Ontario is estimated to be up to \$1.9 billion per year. In 2008, our government invested \$4 million over four years for an Ontario farmers' market strategy, to provide consumers with greater access to local food directly from the farmer. I tell you, local food is what people want, and when people buy local food, everyone in Ontario wins.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Minister, for supporting the farmers' markets. I know that farmers' markets are not just good for local business and for farmers; also, they are important for healthy food and to support our local communities. They support lower emissions from long-distance food travel and they support the local communities.

Minister, can you tell the House how important it is to create awareness among the community and Ontarians, to support the local farmers and also support our communities and local businesses?

Hon. Carol Mitchell: Through Open Ontario, we will continue to support opportunities to encourage Ontarians to buy local, but also we will be seeking new markets for

Ontario-grown produce. We have invested almost \$65 million in programming to support Ontario foods and we are committed to investing an additional \$40 million over the next two years. The Premier's summit, held earlier this month, focused on translating consumer demand into market realities. We are building a stronger value chain, from farm to retail. We will help Ontario's agri-food industry thrive and connect more consumers with their homegrown food products. Our government is committed to working with farmers to bring more Ontario food to the table. I tell you, when you buy Ontario, everybody wins. The environment—

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

1130

DARLINGTON NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, on February 22, I asked you a question about the new build at the Darlington generating station, yet we've heard nothing. At that time, you said, "Our intention" certainly is "to move forward with the new build." Also, in that response on February 22, you indicated that you have been in discussion with AECL and the federal government. Once again, we've heard nothing. For all this green energy talk, one would think that you would focus on a Canadian-made solution of green nuclear energy. Yet there's no progress; there's only expensive, unreliable solar and wind.

Minister, when can Ontarians expect the new build at Darlington to begin?

Hon. Brad Duguid: It has been challenging for our government over the last seven years to make up for the lack of investment in our nuclear industry that came as part of the total neglect of our nuclear infrastructure and of all of our energy infrastructure that came under the Tories previous to us. But we're making great progress, and we've added 7,000 to 8,000 new megawatts to our power system. We'll be up to 10,000 within another 24 months. We are absolutely committed to the refurbishment program that's moving forward to modernize our nuclear fleet. We're committed to the building of two new nuclear units as well.

Maybe what I'll do is, I'll save this for the supplementary, because I can use the help of the member opposite with his federal cousins in Ottawa.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. John O'Toole: He would probably know that Durham riding is home to many citizens, and indeed the whole area is very supportive of the new-build nuclear. It's about jobs and the economy, after all.

We've heard the announcements from your government of the \$7-billion backdoor Samsung deal and expensive FIT contract deals. You found time for this, yet we are still waiting for real progress on the new build at Darlington. The minister will know that the Darlington plant produces about 20% of the electricity that powers

Ontario businesses and homes. This is a green, reliable form of energy in Ontario.

Minister, why does your government claim to support the new build at Darlington, but fail to give it any attention or to give it the green light?

Hon. Brad Duguid: It's too bad that that support for the nuclear industry wasn't there when that member and his party were in power, because we would have been a lot better off today had they made the investments that we have to make today to rebuild that system. I'm going to ask the member to do this: to contact his cousins in Ottawa, because we're working very hard to try to reach an agreement with—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): A final warning to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: This is a very important decision for the future of our province, and we're in discussions with the AECL and the federal government. But we need our federal government to backstop some of the risk involved in this agreement, like every other nation and every other nuclear business around the world does. We're calling on the Harper government and we're calling on the AECL to help us get to a decision here, help us get to a resolution. We recognize how important this decision is, and Ontarians are counting on the federal government to work with us on this, not against us.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Ontario's municipalities rely on the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. to assess properties in a timely manner. According to André Marin, the agency is "grossly understaffed," and frankly, Minister, those people are demoralized.

MPAC is currently bargaining with its employees. The number of MPAC managers earning more than \$100,000 grew 50% in the last year. Worse than that, those managers received pay increases in one year of 5.3% to 12%. However, MPAC is telling its workers that they'll get no increase whatsoever for the next two years. This double standard could force people out on strike and disrupt assessments.

Will you tell MPAC to negotiate fairly to protect the public interest?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I remind the member opposite that we have frozen non-bargained compensation for all agencies of the government, including MPAC. I know that you voted against that, or I think you voted against it. I haven't looked at the Hansard of your vote. So let's deal with that off the top.

With respect to collective bargaining, the collective agreement has expired, as I understand it. The parties will, I hope, continue to negotiate and hopefully resolve the differences that they have, and we look forward to a satisfactory resolution of the issue.

I'll remind the member that the last time that André Marin brought forward recommendations—there were 21

of them—we acted on all of them. That member and his party actually voted against a number of those recommendations that we acted upon.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Municipalities are already affected by delays in assessments. As you know, Minister, MPAC has been in turmoil for 10 years. There was a botched restructuring which threw away decades of assessment expertise. There was a disastrous implementation of a new computer system with years of cost overruns. And yet managers continue to receive pay-for-performance bonuses despite a history of management non-performance.

MPAC receives no operational funding from the province. It is not covered by Bill 16. Forcing the employees out with unfair bargaining will hurt municipalities and the income that cities need to provide services. Will you tell MPAC to start thinking about the public and negotiate fairly with their employees?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: That member and his party have a history of stripping collective agreements, and they like to pretend it didn't happen.

As I say, we have confidence in the collective bargaining process. We have confidence that the reforms that we have brought about to MPAC are serving the people of Ontario well. I would suggest to the member that he allow collective bargaining to operate freely. I know their history is against that, but our history is all about that.

We have great confidence in the public servants of this province. We have great confidence in MPAC—and I'd also remind the member opposite that MPAC is an organization that is run by municipalities. We participate, but at the end of the day we need to allow collective bargaining to unfold in this situation, as we do in many others.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome a group of grade 10 students from Delta Secondary School and their teacher, Mike Wagter, from Hamilton today.

DEFERRED VOTES

FULL DAY EARLY LEARNING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

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

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I arrived in the House just a little bit late and I

didn't realize that the PC candidate from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex was in the audience.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): And the honourable member knows that that's not a point of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

We have a deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 242, An Act to amend the Education Act and certain other Acts in relation to early childhood educators, junior kindergarten and kindergarten, extended day programs and certain other matters.

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

The division bells rang from 1139 to 1144.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Gerretsen, John	Mitchell, Carol
Albanese, Laura	Gélinas, France	Moridi, Reza
Arthurs, Wayne	Gravelle, Michael	Murray, Glen R.
Balkissoon, Bas	Hampton, Howard	Naqvi, Yasir
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoskins, Eric	Oraziotti, David
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Best, Margaret	Jaczek, Helena	Prue, Michael
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Broten, Laurel C.	Johnson, Rick	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brownell, Jim	Kormos, Peter	Ramal, Khalil
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Craitor, Kim	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Crozier, Bruce	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Dombrowsky, Leona	Matthews, Deborah	Takhar, Harinder S.
Duguid, Brad	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Duncan, Dwight	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Miller, Paul	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Fonseca, Peter	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David

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

Nays

Bailey, Robert	Klees, Frank	Savoline, Joyce
Barrett, Toby	MacLeod, Lisa	Shurman, Peter
Chudleigh, Ted	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hillier, Randy	Murdoch, Bill	Yakabuski, John
Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John	
Jones, Sylvia	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 60; the nays are 22.

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

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

Third reading agreed to.

CONDUCT OF HOUSE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Bill Murdoch: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, and I ask you for your advice on this: I requested a late show for tonight. I wasn't pleased with the answer I

received when I asked my question. It was the question I asked to the Deputy Premier. She did answer, and the answer was, "I defer it to someone else." That was her answer, I wasn't pleased with that answer, and I feel that I have the right to request her to come here tonight and answer me on that. Now, I've been informed that that's not an answer and that someone else—

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Does somebody else want to get in on this? You have a right to do that. You could speak after I'm done if you don't like what I'm asking, but I think this is what democracy is about.

I've asked for a late show and been told that the person I asked the question to—I can't do that. I find that she did answer my question; I wasn't satisfied with that, and I should have that right as a parliamentarian here to request a late show to understand why that question was deferred. There must be a reason for that, and I'd like to know that.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm asking you for your guidance on this. But as I said, I think I have that right to have that request.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for his point of order. We did have the opportunity in the lead-up to the vote to have some discussion. I offered—and the Clerk offered—an interpretation. He wasn't satisfied with that, so I will take his point of order under advisement and will rule on that at a later date.

There being no further business of the House, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1149 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

JUNIOR HOCKEY

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It is with great honour, privilege and pleasure that I stand here today to applaud the recent victory of the Oakville Blades. On Saturday in Sault Ste. Marie, the Oakville Blades defeated the Fort William North Stars in a 2-1 victory in the final game of the Dudley Hewitt Cup. The Blades ended the tournament with four wins and no losses—an awesome team.

In the game on Saturday, Blades forward Ryan Murphy scored the winning goal, breaking a 2-2 tie in the third period—very exciting. Mark McGowan had the Blades' other goal, and goalie Daniel Savelli earned the win with 20 saves. Blades forward Kellan Lain was named the 2010 Dudley Hewitt Cup MVP for the tournament. Forward Kyle Badham was recognized with the tournament leading scorer award and forward Ryan Murphy with a championship game MVP for Oakville.

As a result of the team's victory, for the second time in three years the Blades will represent central Canada at the Royal Bank Cup, Canada's national Junior A hockey championship in Manitoba.

I would like to congratulate head coach Jason Nobili and the entire Blades team on their success. When they go to Manitoba, they'll be meeting, amongst other teams, the Brockville Braves, from the home of the member for Leeds–Grenville, who sits directly behind me. We do have a small bet on the outcome of the Royal Bank Cup. Good luck.

When I say, "Good luck in Manitoba. Let's bring home another cup," I have an ulterior motive for cheering for them, to make that victory successful for Oakville.

DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Paul Miller: The National Day of Mourning is a time to remember workers who have lost their lives and those they've left behind. I look forward to the day when workers are treated as individuals who are truly valued and respected.

But now, as summer approaches and many of our kids start their first jobs, we worry. As the system stands, profits take precedence over health and safety, loopholes and number-crunching above true accountability.

Current policies are all wrong. Care for the worker is not a priority. The LMR scheme is sustaining private career colleges where we hear new horror stories of unaccredited courses every week. But the LMR is failing to properly prepare injured workers for new careers.

Experience rating rewards companies who sneakily keep injuries off the WSIB books—yet another short-sighted policy that revolves around private profit and not around the worker. And deeming is a practice that helps the WSIB cut their payments, a practice which unfairly assesses what employment-injured workers could have.

What these policies amount to are people as numbers and figures on balance sheets, figures to be twisted for maximum profit. The WSIB needs a new emphasis called "care." Care for the worker: That is the WSIB's job. There are injured workers who cannot do the job they long to do. The WSIB must be reformed so that it is a workers' compensation program, not an insurance company.

Tomorrow, we officially mourn those who have lost their lives in the workplace, not as numbers or as budget targets but as individuals with families, all affected by workplace—

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

GARRETT HOLMES

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Keeping with the theme of Oakville and sports, I want to recognize the incredible fundraising efforts of a young man in Oakville. Ten-year-old Garrett Holmes is the quarterback on the Halton Cowboys team, which plays in the Ontario Minor Football League.

He recently launched a fundraising initiative called Go Garrett Go, where people are being asked to pledge a dollar amount for every touchdown he either throws or scores himself during the spring season.

One hundred per cent of all donations will go directly to the Children's Miracle Network, and Free the Children, which is partnering with organizations in Haiti to support the rebuilding efforts following the devastating earthquake.

A few years ago, young Garrett suffered a severe seizure and was hospitalized at Sick Kids hospital. As a result, he was unable to play football for two years. The experience made Garrett aware of how lucky he is to have the opportunity to play sports and how he wanted to help others who could not.

The 2010 spring season is going to begin a few weeks from now, but already Go Garrett Go has pushed past the \$750-dollar-per-touchdown mark. Reasonable expectations have him pegged at 10 to 15 touchdowns per year. That would mean anywhere from \$7,500 to \$11,000 will be raised, and that amount, I'm sure, will rise.

I applaud his efforts. I'd like to thank him for demonstrating, despite his age, a tremendous and incredible drive to improve the lives of others through his fundraising efforts.

JUNIOR HOCKEY

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased today to honour the Brockville Braves, winners of the Fred Page Cup as eastern Canadian junior A hockey champions. The Braves earned the trip to the national championships with a decisive 5-1 victory over their archrival, the Pembroke Lumber Kings, before more than 1,500 fans in an electrically charged Brockville memorial centre on Sunday afternoon. The Braves now travel to Dauphin, Manitoba, to compete for the RBC Cup.

The game's high points included two shorthanded goals in a five-minute penalty kill and stellar goaltending by Justin Gilbert, who was named tournament MVP.

Final-game scorers included Justin Taber, Scott Arnold, and captain Shayne Thompson, and Shayne Stockton with a pair of goals.

The Braves are the first-ever two-time Fred Page Cup champions, and I'm proud to say that I was president of the hockey club in 1998 when that first championship occurred.

Braves head coach Todd Gill and his team are to be congratulated for their record-breaking season. The team destroyed the record book with a CJHL, or Central Junior Hockey League, record of 106 points and an amazing consecutive-win streak of 26 games.

Fred Page Cup organizing committee chairman Norm Saunders and his 30 to 40 volunteers are to be commended for a well-organized event, with almost 9,000 fans attending the eight games.

I know I speak for all members of this House, with maybe the exception of the member for Halton, when I say good luck. Go, Braves, go!

ELENA MAMYCHEVA

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I rise today to congratulate Elena Mamycheva, a grade 12 student at York Memorial Collegiate in my riding of York South–Weston.

Eighteen-year-old Elena is this year's winner of the University of Toronto Brain Olympiad. She was awarded first place last March 26.

The Brain Olympiad is a competition that asks questions related to the brain and neuroscience. Elena prepared by studying 14 hours a week with her teacher, Mark Harding. The win is the direct result of Elena's hard work and dedication to her education, as well as York Memorial's commitment to the success of its students.

This is an excellent example of how the support of educators and support staff in Ontario schools and boards, as well as initiatives such as the Ministry of Education's student success teams, are promoting student achievement along with rising graduation rates.

It gives me great pleasure to announce that Elena is the second student from York Memorial to win first place in the Toronto competition in two years. Last year's winner, Sean Amodeo, went on to place first in the national competition and to place fifth in the international competition.

Elena plans to continue to the national competition and beyond as she pursues her dream of a career in neuroscience.

On behalf of the proud community of York South-Weston, I would like to wish Elena every success in both future competitions and her career.

1510

GENERAL MOTORS OF CANADA

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: It's with great pleasure that I rise today to congratulate General Motors and the hard workers of the CAW. You see, over a century ago, a community called Oshawa lent a company now called General Motors an interest-free loan for a then-whopping \$50,000, which General Motors paid back in exemplary form.

That tradition that started 100 years ago continues today. You see, I'm happy to rise today to inform those who are unaware that Wednesday last, General Motors of Canada, which had taken a loan from the taxpayers of Ontario and Canada, paid back that loan in full, with interest, five years early. This goes to show how General Motors and the CAW workers are moving forward, making the changes necessary, returning confidence to the taxpayers of Ontario and Canada and keeping a proven history of relationship-building between General Motors, the CAW, taxpayers and consumers. Good work to all.

But the good news doesn't end there. The previous adding of two shifts will bring back over 1,300 workers as public demand rises and General Motors answers that demand once again. General Motors and the auto sector are the lifeblood of Oshawa and so many other communities, let alone the province of Ontario. This just goes to show that great things are once again happening in Oshawa.

MINOR HOCKEY

Mr. Bill Mauro: Last week in Regina, Canadian minor hockey history was made when the Thunder Bay Sportop Queens won the midget girls Canadian championship with a 4-3 win over the Notre Dame Hounds. Kaitlyn Tougas scored the winning goal in the third period.

With this victory by the Queens, Thunder Bay becomes the first city in Canada to win a national midget championship in both the female and male groups. The Queens advanced to the AA Esso Cup national championship in Regina by going undefeated 6-0 at the Ontario championships.

I offer my congratulations to Brianna Iazzolino, Courtney Tougas, Jana Henry, Michela Cava, Kaitlyn Tougas, Michaela Coulter, Ellia Heroux, Kaitlyn Quarrel, Riley Cronk, Amber Butler, Savanna Gamache, Taylor Savard, Brittany Zuback, Kylie Cornell, Haleigh Croves, Amanda Makela and Megan Leikkari. I also congratulate manager/trainer Crystal Tustian, trainer Melissa Parenteau, goalie coach Lui Tassone, conditioning coach Steve Bailot and assistant coach Randy LaPointe.

A special congratulations to the dynamic father-son coaching tandem, old friends of mine Denis and his son Danny Lavoie.

Overall, the Queens, sponsored by owner Gary Littlefield of Sportop, went a very impressive 13-1 in their playoff games, and this outstanding group of 15- to-17-year-olds went 34-5-1 in tournament action.

Thunder Bay's incredible hockey history has been further enriched by the efforts of all involved. Congratulations to the parents, to the coaches, to the players and to the sponsors.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Jim Brownell: Recently, I welcomed the Premier to my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, where he made an important announcement on green energy initiatives across the province of Ontario. The McGuinty government has just delivered the largest green energy initiative of its kind in Canadian history. Under the Green Energy Act's feed-in tariff program, 184 new contracts for big green energy projects have been approved.

This is wonderful news for eastern Ontario because 60 green energy projects with the potential generating capacity of 900 megawatts have been approved. This includes three 10-megawatt ground-mounted solar projects in the Cornwall area.

The three Cornwall-area solar projects are Northland Power in Cornwall; EffiSolar in the township of South Glengarry; and Penn Energy, also in the township of South Glengarry. This is in addition to 510 medium-sized green energy projects already announced. The contracts could generate more than 2,500 megawatts—enough electricity to power 600,000 homes. The domestic content requirements in these projects will mean thou-

sands of new jobs in the growing green energy sector and about \$9 billion in private sector investment.

This is good news for the province of Ontario, good news for eastern Ontario and good news for the people who championed this new investment. Growing our economy and growing a stronger Ontario requires that Ontario be open to change and open to opportunity, and these green energy initiatives are the way to the future.

OTTAWA SENATORS

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm going to continue with the sports theme of the day in members' statements. I'm going to share some good news and bad news. Let me deal with the bad news first. The bad news is my beloved Ottawa Senators did not proceed to the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. They did their best; they did their best, but they couldn't proceed. But the good news is that my community in Ottawa Centre still rallied together. They cheered the team on and they made sure that some good dollars were raised for local charities right in Ottawa.

Two people, Cameron Bishop and Sarah O'Grady, got together and organized the Sens Mile, which is the Elgin Street business corridor in my riding of Ottawa Centre—which is recognized by the city. At the Sens Mile, they approached some businesses and talked to them about donating some funds during the playoffs game. The result: \$10,000 were raised for the Ottawa Senators Foundation and their preferred charity of Roger's House. Roger's House is located on the CHEO campus, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, and provides a warm home-like environment for children in palliative care. It was very exciting. You can imagine: six games—\$10,000.

I want to give special thanks to the businesses involved: St. Louis Bar and Grill; D'Arcy McGee's; MacLaren's; Big Daddy's Bistro and Oyster Bar; the Standard Tavern; the Lieutenant's Pump; Johnny Farina Restaurant; Sir John A. Pub; Elgin Street Diner; Hangover Joe's; and Nine. A special thanks to Cameron Bishop and Sarah O'Grady for all their hard work.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated April 27, 2010, 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

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ENSEIGNEMENT POSTSECONDAIRE

Mr. Milloy moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 43, An Act to amend the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000, the Private Career Colleges Act, 2005 and the Ontario College of Art & Design Act, 2002 / Projet de loi 43, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 favorisant le choix et l'excellence au niveau postsecondaire, la Loi de 2005 sur les collèges privés d'enseignement professionnel et la Loi de 2002 sur l'École d'art et de design de l'Ontario.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. John Milloy: During ministerial statements, Mr. Speaker.

MOTIONS

APPOINTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice respecting the Environmental Commissioner.

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that the Legislative Assembly recommends that Gord Miller be appointed as temporary Environmental Commissioner of Ontario for a period of not more than six months.

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

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION ÉDUCATION POSTSECONDAIRE

Hon. John Milloy: Ontario's post-secondary education system is recognized for the quality of programs offered by our colleges and universities. We are a leader in quality assurance for our post-secondary education

system. This is a reputation we value highly and aim to protect.

Part of our government's Open Ontario plan to create new opportunities for jobs and growth includes raising the number of Ontarians with a post-secondary education credential to 70%. We are also opening our doors to the world and will increase international enrolment by 50%.

Today, I am pleased to announce we are moving forward on three different fronts. We are proposing amendments to the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000; the Private Career Colleges Act, 2005; and the Ontario College of Art & Design Act, 2002.

L'Ontario avance efficacement pour protéger sa réputation en matière d'excellence au niveau postsecondaire, sur le plan national et à l'étranger. Grâce aux mesures que nous prenons aujourd'hui, nous assurerons aux étudiants que les programmes de niveau postsecondaire offerts ici en Ontario sont de la plus haute qualité et qu'ils répondent à nos normes d'excellence.

We are introducing amendments to the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, or PSECE, as it's called, to protect both international and Ontario students. The PSECE act came into effect in 2001 to expand access to degree programs, improve student protection and implement quality assurance for the new degree programs. The act allows private institutions from inside and outside of Ontario, public out-of-province institutions and colleges of applied arts and technology to apply to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to offer a degree program. Previously, colleges of applied arts and technology and private institutions located in Ontario could not apply to offer degrees in this province.

The act created the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, which has implemented rigorous quality control to protect Ontario students from degree mills since that time. But we have experienced an increase in organizations challenging the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act and our ability to ensure the quality of our post-secondary education brand.

We believe we need more and stronger tools of enforcement, much like the changes we made to our Private Career Colleges Act. If passed, the proposed amendments would strengthen the ability of the government to shut down unscrupulous and unauthorized educational organizations and prevent them from taking advantage of international and Ontario students.

The amendments would allow the government to impose financial penalties and impose restraining and compliance orders against unauthorized degree-granting institutions. The amendments would also reduce red tape for publicly assisted colleges and other institutions by making the application process for consent to offer a degree program more cost-effective and less time-consuming.

Les nouvelles mesures protégeront mieux les étudiants qui suivent des cours d'enseignement à distance et des programmes en classe.

I have noted that our Private Career Colleges Act has strong enforcement measures that allow us to protect students. Today, we are proposing amendments to further strengthen our enforcement of this act. If passed, these amendments would raise the maximum financial penalties for provincial offences from \$25,000 to \$50,000 for individuals and from \$100,000 to \$250,000 for corporations. These penalties would be in keeping with other consumer protection legislation, such as the Consumer Protection Act, 2002. This would help us to improve student protection and the quality of PCCs and programs.

In addition to this, we are also proposing amendments to the OCAD act to help our premier design institute remain competitive with other Canadian art and design universities. If passed, these amendments would change the name of OCAD, the Ontario College of Art and Design, to OCAD University, the Ontario College of Art and Design University. Changes to the act would also establish a university senate and amend the powers of the board of governors.

I'd like to give credit for this OCAD item to my colleague Mr. Kwinter, the member from York Centre, who is a very strong proponent of OCAD and has certainly worked with us. I'd also like to pay tribute to members of OCAD who are here today in the gallery. We have Sara Diamond, the OCAD president; Sarah McKinnon, OCAD vice-president, academic; Robert Montgomery, the OCAD board of governors' chair; Amanda Almedia, the OCAD student representative on the board of governors; and Carole Beaulieu, the OCAD director of government relations. We want to thank them for their advocacy on these changes.

In closing, our Open Ontario plan recognizes the importance of post-secondary education to helping our government create more opportunities for jobs and growth to compete in the global market. A higher education will help Ontarians reach their full potential and help us open Ontario to global markets and future prosperity. After all, today's students are the builders, dreamers and innovators who will lead Ontario into the future. They will help us build a stronger Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'll say to the minister and to the government that I will reserve most of my comments until I've had a chance to review this bill. What I can say is what the minister has said, that it was back in 2006, under the former minister, your predecessor, that your government first said that it would undertake to review these acts, and that would be in particular the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000, and the Private Career Colleges Act. I'm just saying, what took you so long? That's four years ago that you first announced you were going to do a review of the acts. In the meantime—and I don't want to confuse private career colleges with degree programs offered under ministerial consent at universities, but in the meantime we had some of the strongest language we've ever seen from an Ontario Ombudsman. I can understand

from your perspective why you're not renewing his contract. He called it an urgent matter. He urged your ministry, Minister, to get tougher on unscrupulous private career colleges. His report of course was called *Too Cool for School* and he said that what was going on in many of the private career colleges was an unmitigated disaster. He urged your government to refund students that had been ripped off, and you guys refused to do that.

So I thought, especially with what happened at Bestech Academy, where the lady was running one of her colleges out of a restaurant in one of her locations and was not cracked down upon until many, many, many students complained to the opposition and to the government—I would hope that this act today, the new bill, does actually crack down and that you actually will use the authority that you have under current legislation. You're increasing the fines, as far as I can tell today, to crack down on unscrupulous private career colleges. I've not heard a lot of complaints about the degree programs offered under the other legislation, and that would be Algonquin College, Central Michigan University, Conestoga College, some of the degrees offered at Georgian College, Humber College, Lawrence Technological University. All of these have very good reputations that I am aware of, Minister. So I will be interested to learn more during debate and during the technical briefing on the bill on why the need to crack down.

The only link I can tell is, as you mentioned, on the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's website; he's already beat you to the announcement. He's announced that you're going to make these changes, mainly for international students, as part of your Open Ontario plan. He doesn't say anything about how much it's going to cost the students or whether you are going to re-regulate international fees. I have a feeling that because the government's decided to use international students as a money-maker for the sector, you will be avoiding that aspect of what they really want to know. They trust already that Ontario has an excellent reputation in post-secondary education and that there are degree-granting institutions like OCAD which are or will be top-quality.

I do want to say to the representatives of OCAD that are here, as I've done as critic before on behalf of the PC caucus, as far as I can tell we shouldn't have any problems with the amendments to that part of the act and it's too bad you're put in this controversial act which talks about cracking down on bad people in the sector. Yours is good news, to change your name and amend the powers of the board of governors. I've served on the board of governors of U of T for many years and commend all those volunteers, as the minister has, who are working with the Ontario College of Art and Design, which will be called, if passed—of course I'm in opposition and have been in opposition for a few years, so everything gets passed that these guys propose. So I'm going to call you the Ontario College of Art and Design University and congratulate you ahead of time. And if there's anyone in my caucus that disagrees with that, I've been here 20 years so I will deal with that.

But the rest is going to be controversial. The questions of course will be, why didn't you do it sooner and why did so many students get ripped off in the private career colleges? You have not given a report back to Parliament as is part of the recommendations of the Ombudsman, to report back to the public on what you did to stop those unscrupulous operators. I was kind of expecting today that you'd spend a little more time—you had 20 minutes; you only took a minute and a half—to explain to us what you did since the last time you got on your feet and talked about the bad people in the sector. Are you cracking down on the bad people? If so, report back and tell us why exactly, when a number of the institutions that will be affected by this legislation have impeccable reputations, you're cracking down on them.

1530

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you. I'll have an opportunity to speak to the bill directly once we debate it and once I review it. But I want to say, before I get into some of the criticism—because that's what I do, Minister; sorry to disappoint you—that I'm a strong supporter of OCAD. I don't mind that you inserted that into this bill, even though they don't seem to gel together in the way they should. But it's not a problem for me. They're in my riding. Strong support there—the name change is a good idea, including other powers they're getting. So we're happy you're here. Don't worry about it. I suspect the Conservative Party will support it as well. That shouldn't be an issue. But if you want to come for the other part, come back again.

With respect to what the minister is announcing today—I'm a bit surprised about some of the language, Minister, I have to tell you. I want to repeat for you because it puzzled me a little bit. You say: "We are a leader in quality assurance for our post-secondary education system." That worried me, because your reputation in this regard is not stellar. I'm going to refer to something that André Marin pointed out in his report that proves that you're not quite the leader you want to be. You also say that Ontario is moving to protect Ontario's reputation. You've got a lot to protect; I agree with you. When I read some of these quotes, there's much that we need to do with respect to our loss of reputation around the issue of unscrupulous private universities that spring up, and there are many. We've got over 420 private universities. Many of them are not so scrupulous, and much work needs to be done, no doubt about it. I'm hoping your bill will finally do that. We were hoping, naturally, that you would simply enforce the Private Career Colleges Act that you passed in 2005 and that came into effect in 2006. But if you need another bill because that bill was not quite good enough, God bless, let's look at it. But it would have been my hope that you would have enforced or applied the letter of the law that we have in this province at the moment.

You also say, the "Private Career Colleges Act has strong enforcement measures that allow us to protect students. Today, we are proposing amendments to further

strengthen our enforcement of this act.” We’ll see what they are. Yet you admit that the previous bill, in 2005, had the tools—that you had the tools to be able to use it effectively but you and/or your ministry folks weren’t using it very effectively. That is puzzling.

Just to read, for the record, what Mr. Marin said in relation to his review of a number of these problems: “The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities is responsible for overseeing over 400 private career colleges and protecting student consumers against unscrupulous and incompetent training providers. In 2006, the Private Career Colleges Act, 2005, came into force, providing the ministry with even broader and more enhanced powers of enforcement, and students with greater protections including access to refunds and alternate training when colleges unexpectedly close their doors.” It tells you the kinds of power you have already. “Despite the fact that it is illegal to operate a private career college that is not registered with the ministry, a considerable number of unregistered training facilities exist in Ontario, presenting a risk to unwary consumers. The ministry is fully cognizant of this reality. However, it does not vigorously pursue information about or enforcement against rogue operators.” You’re aware of it and you do very little to pursue them.

They talk about Bestech, which they reviewed in this particular report: “The ministry learned that Bestech Academy was also falsely marketing itself as a registered vocational college. Instead of trying to shut down Bestech Academy to protect student consumers, as a result of confusion and miscommunication, the ministry instead proceeded to support the school through the Ontario skills development program.”

There are so many problems, as you can see. I highlighted three or four other spots that I wanted to review with you to tell you that we have serious problems, and your reputation has been affected for many, many years. You did have time. You knew problems existed, and your ministry simply did not pursue them. You do not have a very good record.

Mercifully—thankfully, perhaps—now you can do something anew by presenting a new bill, even though you had the tools to do it. Let’s look at it and see what else comes up in the next little while.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO PHARMACISTS

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

“Whereas Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus support public health care and protecting access to front-line care;

“Whereas Ontario families have already given Dalton McGuinty \$15 billion in health taxes, which was wasted on the \$1-billion eHealth scandal. Now the McGuinty

Liberals are cutting front-line public health care and putting independent pharmacies at risk;

“Dalton McGuinty’s cuts will:

“—reduce pharmacy hours during evenings and weekends;

“—increase wait times and lineups for patients;

“—increase the out-of-pocket fees people pay for their medication and its delivery; and

“—reduce critical patient health care services for seniors and people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and breathing problems;

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

“That the McGuinty government stop its cuts to pharmacies.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

ONTARIO PHARMACISTS

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

“Whereas the Ontario PC caucus supports public health care and protecting access to front-line care;

“Ontario families have already paid Dalton McGuinty \$15 billion in health taxes, which has been wasted on the \$1-billion eHealth scandal. Now the McGuinty Liberals are cutting front-line public health care in our communities and putting independent rural pharmacies in Bruce and Grey at risk;

“Dalton McGuinty’s cuts will:

“—reduce local pharmacy hours during evenings and weekends;

“—increase wait times and lineups for patients;

“—increase out-of-pocket fees people pay for their medication and its delivery; and

“—reduce critical health care services for seniors and people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and breathing problems;

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

“That the McGuinty government stop its cuts to rural pharmacies.”

I have signed this and will give it to Kyle.

ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: I have a petition addressed here 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.”

Of course, I will append my signature and send it to you by way of page Tara.

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition regarding taxes. It reads, “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised Ontarians he would not raise their taxes and then broke that promise after getting elected; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty also said it would be ‘silly’ to raise taxes in a time of economic challenge; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty’s new plan to blend the provincial sales tax with the GST into one harmonized tax, the 13% Dalton sales tax..., scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2010, represents one of the largest tax hikes in Ontario history, at a time when Ontarians are still feeling the effects of the recession; and

“Whereas the 13% DST will increase the cost of a long list of items not previously subject to the provincial sales tax, including electricity, cable, gas, transit fares, haircuts, newspapers and magazines, your morning cup of coffee—all things Ontarians depend on every day—making it even more difficult for families and seniors to make ends meet; and

“Whereas the 13% DST will also raise the cost of carpentry and plumbing services, heating and air conditioning repairs, landscaping and snowplowing, renovations and other professional services, meaning that home prices, condo fees and rents will all go up, and businesses will have a harder time paying the bills;

“Therefore 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.”

HIGHWAY 17/174

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I’ve got a petition here that comes from concerned citizens on the road safety of Highway 17/174.

“Whereas Highway 17/174 needs to be expanded to four lanes from Trim Road to Prescott-Russell Regional Road 8 in order to enhance road safety; and

“Whereas Highway 17/174 has been known in the past for its hazardous condition and accident rate; and

“Whereas this highway represents the main artery for the working population of Clarence-Rockland, Alfred and Plantagenet and Hawkesbury to access the national capital; and

1540

“Whereas the united counties of Prescott-Russell have demonstrated their interest in conducting the environmental assessment for the widening of Highway 17/174 by passing a council resolution; and

“Whereas the city of Ottawa passed a council resolution asking that either the province or the united counties of Prescott and Russell take the lead in the environmental assessments; and

“Whereas both the federal and provincial governments have each committed \$40 million towards the widening of Highway 17/174;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide the necessary funding to the united counties of Prescott and Russell to undertake the environmental assessments required for the widening of Highway 17/174 from two to four lanes between Trim Road and Prescott-Russell Regional Road 8.”

I am supporting this petition by adding my signature.

ONTARIO PHARMACISTS

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition signed by residents of my riding from the township of Rideau Lakes and the township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands. It was collected at the Delta Community Pharmacy. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus support public health care and protecting access to front-line care;

“Whereas Ontario families have already given Dalton McGuinty \$15 billion in health taxes, which was wasted on the \$1-billion eHealth scandal. Now the McGuinty Liberals are cutting front-line public health care and putting independent pharmacies at risk;

“Dalton McGuinty’s cuts will:

“—reduce pharmacy hours during evenings and weekends,

“—increase wait times and lineups for patients,

“—increase the out-of-pocket fees people pay for their medication and its delivery,

“—reduce critical patient health care services for seniors and people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and breathing problems;

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

“That the McGuinty government stop its cuts to pharmacies.”

I certainly agree with the petition, will affix my signature, and give it to page Tudor.

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I have another, different petition to do with the DST, and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“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:

electricity; home heating oil and gas at the pump; hair-cuts; 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 affix my signature.

ELMVALE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with the petition and will sign it.

ONTARIO PHARMACISTS

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition today from good citizens from the riding of Peterborough.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario has dedicated new funding of \$100 million in addition to the \$50 million already available for professional services;

"Whereas the government is increasing the dispensing fees in the public system to help properly compensate local pharmacists for their valuable contribution to community health care;

"Whereas the opposition who are against these reforms are only interested in helping the big pharmacy chain companies increase their bottom line;

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

"To continue to increase the money that is invested in Ontario's public drug system and to ensure that a higher quality of care is delivered, particularly for families and seniors."

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

ONTARIO PHARMACISTS

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition from my riding. It's from downtown Prescott, from the Seaway Valley IDA pharmacy. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas ... the Ontario PC caucus support public health care...;

"Whereas Ontario families have already given Dalton McGuinty \$15 billion in health taxes, which was wasted on the \$1-billion eHealth scandal. Now the McGuinty Liberals are cutting front-line public health care and putting independent pharmacies at risk;

"Dalton McGuinty's cuts will:

"—reduce pharmacy hours during evenings and weekends,

"—increase wait times and lineups for patients,

"—increase the out-of-pocket fees people pay for their medication and its delivery,

"—reduce critical patient health care services for seniors and people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and breathing problems;

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

"That the McGuinty government stop its cuts to pharmacies."

I agree with it, I will affix my signature and I'll give it to page Zachery to present to the table.

ONTARIO PHARMACISTS

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas some pharmacies have withheld their services or made them less accessible for Ontarians in an unfair attempt to protest much-needed drug reforms; and

"Whereas Ontario opposition politicians are supporting these harmful tactics by refusing to support the reforms that will make prescription drugs more affordable for Ontarians;

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

"That all members of the Legislature withdraw their support for those engaged in protest tactics that are harmful and misleading to patients requiring prescription medications; and

"That all members of the Legislature support the drug reforms that will lower prescription drug costs for Ontarians and fairly compensate pharmacists for the services they provide."

I agree with this and I'm going to send it with Max to the table.

1550

TAXATION

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

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

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

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

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to abandon the sales tax increase announced in the 2009 budget.”

As I am in complete agreement, I have affixed my signature and send it with page Tudor.

ONTARIO PHARMACISTS

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly from Pharma Plus in Brockville, my hometown.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus support public health care and protecting access to front-line care;

“Whereas Ontario families have already given Dalton McGuinty \$15 billion in health taxes, which was wasted on the \$1-billion eHealth scandal. Now the McGuinty Liberals are cutting front-line public health care and putting independent pharmacies at risk;

“Dalton McGuinty’s cuts will:

“—reduce pharmacy hours during evenings and weekends,

“—increase wait times and lineups for patients,

“—increase the out-of-pocket fees people pay for their medication and its delivery,

“—reduce critical patient health care services for seniors and people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and breathing problems;

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

“That the McGuinty government stop its cuts to pharmacies.”

I certainly agree with it. I will sign it and send it with Mitchell down to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

Ms. Smith, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act /
Projet de loi 236, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de
retraite.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time today with the member from Pickering-Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to thank the House leader for sharing with me, as did the chair of cabinet a couple of weeks ago, the vast majority of the time available, which is always appreciated.

I'm very pleased that we are at this point in this process with respect to Bill 236, the Pension Benefits Amendment Act, 2010. I'm pleased that we're here in the third part of the process. We've obviously had extensive debate during the past weeks and months on the bill itself: the stakeholder consultation; inputs from all sides of the House in regard to the bill; the second reading vote; and the subsequent hearings that were held. We're pleased, obviously, to be at this point on this particular matter that is of such interest broadly—the issue of pensions—to Ontarians, and I would even say to Canadians, but in the context of our work, obviously Ontarians.

The subject of reforming the retirement income system has been very much in the public realm of late, as both pension plans and retirees have been affected by the global economic recession. The currency of this particular discussion broadly continues. The federal government has been undertaking its own consulting process on a national scope. The Minister of Finance just last week was in London, Ontario, with the federal Minister of Finance on a stakeholder round table that the federal minister was holding as part of their process in regard to pension reform and, broadly, pension renewal in this country.

Families now have increased concerns, obviously, about their futures after members retire from the active workforce. Retirees themselves, those who have already finished in the workforce, have added concerns about how they will continue to live within the lifestyles they've established and how pension reform can assist in doing that and what the economy does in that regard as well.

Why, you might ask, is pension reform needed in Ontario? It's not often something that is, in detail, at the tip of the tongue of Ontarians, but why do we need it?

Over the next 20 years, the portion of the population aged 65 or over will nearly double to about 23% by 2030. That will be up almost 14% in 2009 and will continue to increase over the first half of this century. By the end of the first half of this century, over a quarter of the population will be 65 or older. So this is a matter that Ontarians, those who are retired and those who are in the workforce and even those who might not be yet, might take a modest interest in. Thus, the level of incomes for the older and largely retired population will have an increasing impact on the economic and social well-being of our population in general.

During second reading debate, we had the opportunity to speak of the important role that retirees play in the economy. It's their capacity to have disposable income that allows them to put money back into the economy, which drives, in effect, the jobs that those who are in the workforce can sustain. So their contribution is not just a matter of having pensions and their income at retirement for their own very modest means, but ideally to have a level of income that allows them to be substantive contributors to the economy on a going-forward basis.

We have an obligation to create the strongest environment possible for the financial security of Ontarians in their retirement, because they've earned that through their very substantive efforts. I think everyone in this place will agree that we have that obligation. Seniors and retirees have worked hard so that we have the type of lifestyle many of us now have. Part of our role is to ensure a level of security for them in their retirement. It has been their hard work and dedication that has driven the economy of our province and made it such an attractive place for people to live, work and invest, and we want to see that continue as we move forward.

Ontario's workforce has built our quality of life here in this province, and they've earned the right to continue to enjoy that lifestyle in their retirement.

The government has recognized that, and despite the vital importance of pension plans to the health of Ontario's economy, it has been more than 20 years since there's been significant pension reform in the province. Twenty years is a long time. For many, it's certainly half of their working life since we have had a serious look at pension reform here in Ontario, and I might suggest nationally as well.

In that regard, since March of last year our government has taken a number of significant steps to address employment pension system issues. For example, we have introduced a temporary solvency funding relief program that helps to protect jobs and the families of those who work at those jobs.

We are working to simplify pension division when a marriage ends. Probably those of us in this room know others who have been in situations where a marriage has dissolved and families are impacted and the difficulties that occur with trying to sort out pension division at that point in time when either both spouses were working or one or the other spouse is working, what the benefits are and what the rights are. We've worked to simplify that process.

We've initiated the first-ever actuarial study to determine and examine the financial health of the pension benefits guarantee fund. There's been lots of discussion in this place over the past year or so about that particular fund. We need to be looking at it to see about its sustainability.

We've also established an advisory council on pensions and retirement income because we need the best possible advice not just from experts but from stakeholders very, very broadly.

We've initiated technical discussions with the Canadian Institute of Actuaries about funding rules for defined benefit pension plans. We need to know that whether it's defined benefit plans or defined contribution plans, whether it deals with the pension benefits guarantee fund, that we have the best information possible—and we haven't had that. Clearly, without reform over 20 years we as a province have not stayed current on the information necessary to make good decisions.

To further our plan for reforming the pension system in Ontario and building on the recommendations of the Expert Commission on Pensions, the government introduced Bill 236, the Pension Benefits Amendment Act, in 2010. The reform package addresses many significant issues while striking a balance between the concerns of stakeholders and delivers on our commitment which we made during the 2009 budget, which was to review the pension systems in this province.

For the benefit of the members here in the Legislature, I want to briefly describe the reforms that are proposed in our bill and certainly thank the members on the committee from all sides who took the time, obviously, to hear the witnesses and provide their input as we moved through the clause-by-clause and considered additional recommendations to the bill at that point in time.

The proposed amendments would provide for the restructuring of pension plans affected by corporate reorganizations. Surely we have seen, and will continue to see, many of those under the current economic climate that we have. Corporate reorganizations are not new, but I think they have accelerated in the past few years, and one would see little expectation that that would slow in the foreseeable future.

We want to protect the benefits and security for plan members and pensioners. Some of this can be achieved through some of the following measures.

We have to put in place requirements for asset transfers between plans if there is a restructuring, particularly as it relates to defined benefits. These need to be clarified and simple. Although an individual's specific benefits may be altered as a result of a restructuring and transfer, the actual value of a member's accrued benefit would be protected. So we're looking at windows of opportunity for transfer of benefit plans but not such that it would affect the contributions and the commuted value that employees have established that they're depending on for their pensions as things move forward.

On a reorganization, if the transaction involves the transfer of a portion of the membership from one

employer's plan to another—not the entire employee membership but only a portion of it—employers would be permitted to agree to give individual members the option of transferring or not transferring the value of their pension plan to the successor plan. So individual members of the pension plan would have a greater degree of individual flexibility as it might meet their own particular needs, because not every employee is going to be faced with exactly the same set of conditions.

A prescribed portion of any surplus related to the assets being transferred from the previous employer plan would be transferred to the successor plan, and the government will consult with stakeholders prior to setting the size of that prescribed portion. So there are some constraints that will have to be put in place to make sure that this works effectively.

1600

Asset transfers between plans would continue to require the consent of the superintendent of financial services, the fiscal superintendent, to protect the value of the members' and other beneficiaries' benefits. That's the oversight part. There is a need to have government oversight, in this case at arm's length, through FSCO, through the superintendent, to continue to have the superintendent's consent with respect to some of these transfers occurring. It just makes sense to have that third party at arm's length, with some oversight involved in the process.

Until July 2015, pension plans affected by past restructurings could enter into agreements that would allow current individual plan members to consolidate their pension benefits into a single plan through an asset transfer based on value. There are some provisions for windup activities, to be able to have members take care of the transfer issues that are needed.

As well, there's a need to clarify benefits for plan members that might be affected by layoffs, and to eliminate the partial windups that occur. A pension plan windup occurs when the plan is terminated and all the assets become distributed. A partial windup, though, may occur when a significant element of the workforce is eliminated—not the entire workforce—or a particular function or workplace is discontinued.

If passed, under this particular legislation, new partial windups would not be allowed following a transition period to end in June 2012. A partial windup with an effective date prior to that date would be permitted for a further period, so we're not going to change the rules arbitrarily midstream for various organizations or retirees. But after that, no partial windups could be declared. At that point, no distribution of surplus would be required except on a full windup of the plan.

Among the issues that we needed to address during this process were the grow-in benefits that enable qualifying employees to receive enhanced early retirement benefits from those plans that offer them. This would be extended to all eligible members whose employment is terminated by the employer other than for cause, and would continue to be provided on full windup of the

pension plan. These provide windows of opportunity for employees who might leave an individual employer, who have built some partial pension benefit opportunity, to be able to continue to have that value in place on their retirement, save and except where someone was dismissed with cause.

To balance these entitlements with those of other stakeholders—and there are other stakeholders involved—multi-employer pension plans and jointly sponsored pension plans could elect not to provide grow-in benefits, according to a prescribed process, and that process is well laid out.

Under our proposed changes, all accrued pension benefits would be vested immediately, so they're held. A transition period would allow plan administrators to adjust to this change, and the amount for small pension benefits would be increased.

There are a number of provisions, obviously, within the act that are intended to protect the interests of employees, to provide a better window for them to protect their families, in some instances, such as with the issues around marital breakup. These are important to employees in the province and certainly important to their future and to the future of their families.

There are a number of measures that are going to be put in place. Retired members, as an example—those receiving pension payments—would be defined separately from former members. We heard this clearly from the stakeholders, those who are retired and want to be addressed in the plans as retired members so that they can participate actively. That was one of the constraints: There was no real window, a good window, for them to be active participants in pension advisory committees. That's being put in place as part of this legislation, because retirees who are now out of the workplace want to feel they have the same benefits of participation that active employees would have.

There are new rules that would make pension advisory committees easier to establish, allowing members and retired members to monitor plans on an advisory basis. Co-operation from plan administrators would be required as specified, though.

Plans would be required to give all members, including retired members, information about the funded status of plans at various prescribed times. That was one of the issues we heard from the stakeholders: the window of access that they were looking for, a means of opportunity to know what the status of the plan was, to know what the fiscal status was. Frankly, as much as we might think that's a simple thing to do, and it should have been happening, it wasn't necessarily. Retired members in particular have great difficulty in acquiring that kind of information.

There are any number of issues that I could spend some considerable time on, but our time today is going to be somewhat constrained. As a result, I'm going to make sure that I don't take more than the time allocated, because I know members opposite wanted to speak to this bill.

I think the important parts are—much of what I said deals with some of the technical elements of the bill, and it is a technical bill in many ways. But there are stakeholders who have spent a considerable amount of time, and we were very pleased to hear them and the inputs they had during the consultations and certainly during the committee hearings. And I would suggest particularly from retired members, who probably had the best insights in many cases about the impact that pensions have and about their sustainability and what it means to their lives—I want to thank them for their contribution during the process.

I very much look forward to the balance of the third reading debate. I understand from the minister, as I think everyone is aware here, that later in this year we anticipate additional legislation, a second piece of legislation coming forward in regard to pensions in which we can continue to have this discussion in the interest of Ontarians. At the same time, we continue to engage ourselves, and will engage ourselves, with our peers through the finance ministers across this country, provincially and nationally, as we seek to find the best solution for those moving out of the workforce into retirement to provide them with the lifestyle which they have earned during their time in the workforce.

Speaker, thank you very much, and I'm hoping that when the debate is finished, we'll have the support of all members of the Legislature for this pension reform bill.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: I just ask the parliamentary assistant—first of all, I appreciate the section of the bill that deals with asset transfers between pension plans, because it is exactly the type of enabling legislation that I asked for during one of my private member's ballots, a resolution on paramedic pensions.

It started out with just Simcoe county paramedics who had a problem when we divested paramedic services from either hospital-based services or Ministry of Health-based services, and they went into municipal-based services or into the OMERS pension. Unlike the OPP, who have in the police act the ability to transfer their pensions very smoothly, that wasn't the case in the mid-1990s. Since the Simcoe paramedics mentioned it to me, hundreds, if not—we're told that almost 30,000 people are affected by this section of the act in terms of divestment. Many of them don't know that. That's one question.

People who went through a change of employer but not a change of job, through no fault of their own, like paramedics or like MPAC employees who were Ontario revenue bureaucrats and then later became MPAC property assessors, were also deemed to have changed employers, but their pensions and their pension rights weren't fully transferred. They're wondering how their former colleagues or current colleagues will all know about these changes and the ability to have their current plan negotiate with their old plan so that they get the maximum benefit.

I noticed in committee that you did change the date so that people have up to July 1, 2015, to make sure that OMERS sits down with OPTrust and that the hospitals of Ontario, which I think is called the healthcare of Ontario pension plan, sits down with OMERS and many other examples. I don't want you to drag this on. We want it done immediately, and how will people know—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to say that this is a very complex issue, as we all know. Pension reform hasn't been really done since the early 1980s, and it requires a lot of input from various groups and also input from members of this House.

Being a complicated issue—you have MEPPs, which are multiple-employer plans; you have SEPPs, which are single-employer plans; you have contributory plans; you have defined pension plans; numerous other smaller plans; and insurance plans. To get all these people onboard is a very complex issue. Bill 236 is starting the process—I repeat: starting it. It falls very short of the actual fine-tuned bill that we would like to see.

We had a lot of input from the NDP and the opposition party. Actually, we personally put in 15 amendments that fell on deaf ears, as usual, which happens in committee. They never accept any amendments. Any constructive criticism goes by the wayside. If it doesn't get dealt with there, it somehow, mysteriously, appears about six months later in a government suggestion. It's very frustrating, speaking from the position of the opposition, to actually get good input, and we had some very, very big organizations come forward with their suggestions from different perspectives. There were pensioners who weren't union; there were pensioners who were union; there were other groups—salary groups, non-salary groups and lots of other groups that came forward which had great ideas—good, constructive criticism that we brought forward in our amendments, which, once again, were ignored.

This bill is an administrative change, which is good, and it deals with a couple of issues that we like, but it falls drastically short of where we'd like to be.

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

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to thank the member for Pickering–Scarborough East because he's got a foot in both Durham region and the city of Toronto—quite unusual.

But he, along with, I think, all the members of the committee and also the members of the ministry staff who have taken time—as all members have said, this is an extremely detailed piece of legislation that deals with many issues that are beyond the comprehension of most of us here, but we do understand that there is a need to undertake this administrative reform. I think one of the members mentioned that really, nothing has been done of any substance in this area since the early 1980s, probably. I know that even the Premier has been trying to

get the federal government involved in undertaking some substantive measures in pension reform.

It's something that will be of benefit. It's one of many steps that I'm sure will have to be taken. For too long, this has been on the back burner for most governments because, I think, it reflects where people are at: They never start to think of their pension until they get to a certain age or stage in life, and it's hard to get them to pay attention to it.

But some of the changes here are quite important. I know they've consulted with a lot of stakeholders and they've been setting up these pension advisory committees that are easier to establish now. Also, giving more information to members about their fund status is very important, and also being more transparent about related fees etc.

There are some good initiatives here in this piece of legislation. It's the type of thing that governments have to undertake, even though we never really get clamouring for pension reform until something collapses, as has happened in too many cases that are well known. It's timely legislation. I hope it's the first step of many steps and I hope it's supported.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: This is an interesting bill. I want to thank the member from Pickering–Scarborough East for his comments, many of which I echo. I don't think you're going to find a lot of opposition over here, collectively or individually, but I think that what I could say is, it's yet another bill that is more about what's not there than what is there. It begins to tinker with the pension situation in the province of Ontario. It nibbles at it, but it doesn't go where we have to go. I acknowledge that the member himself has signified that this is a piece of the puzzle and that there's more legislation to come.

I want to underscore a couple of points that he has made, not the least of which is the fact that there is a growing cohort of people called the baby boomers who are becoming seniors, of which that member and myself are a part. So we're looking not too far down the gun barrel before it comes to us. If you take a look at the statistics, the government knows, the opposition knows and, most of all, the people who live in the province of Ontario know that the vast majority are not going to have the money to continue to live in the style to which they've become accustomed when they get to pensionable age—and for many of us, that time is coming very quickly because of the growth of that cohort itself.

What we've got is a partial piece of legislation, and I would say that time here is of the essence, because if indeed we don't tackle this now, we're almost too late already. I take a look at people who have been responsible. I would number myself amongst those who have put the maximum amount into RSPs over the years because they don't have defined benefit plans—most of us don't have defined benefit plans; we're not members of the public sector, the “new elite,” as I like to call them, and we still don't have enough to be able to look ahead

five or 10 years at most and say, “Those RSPs are going to produce what we need,” or that the rules for those RSPs are going to be applied in such a way as to benefit us in the way that they have to. I don't want to see a new generation of—

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Let me just very briefly thank the members, and maybe I'll mention them as I go through. If I don't, I'll catch them at the end.

The member from Simcoe–Grey: You're quite correct; this is enabling legislation that will address that very issue that you raised here. I had the opportunity to deal with that issue myself when I first arrived here with government services, at that time Management Board, and that was with GO Transit employees. But that had to be a one-off decision that was very, very difficult to achieve. So this will achieve that.

Certainly, the expectation will be between the superintendent, between FSCO, between the plans themselves—OMERS is a large organization. They will be in a good position to be able to communicate with their pension holders as to the options that are available to them or current employees. One would expect those organizations to be detailed enough to manage most of that, and I'm sure that you will be in touch with the paramedics who contacted you. If they're not aware now, I'm sure they will be very shortly, once we finish with this particular bill.

To the member from Hamilton East, I appreciate the debate here and in committee. There are occasions when the government doesn't necessarily agree with opposition motions; they might not fall in line with the government agenda at that point in the legislation. I know that has occurred on occasion, that we don't fully agree with some of the amendments brought forward by the opposition. But we continue to listen intently and always look for good amendments that we can actually implement.

To the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, thank you for your comments. I know you continue to have a strong interest in this matter, broadly, as do your constituents.

To the member from Thornhill, I think we're getting to that level sooner than anticipated—not sooner than we think—but, yes, there is more to do. I think we're all in agreement on that. After 20 years, we have to start somewhere. This is a good piece of legislation to start that. What's particularly important is that the dialogue has started and has become more focused.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to lead off third reading debate on Bill 236. I should say at the outset that the PC Party, the official opposition, will be supporting this bill.

It is a technical bill that is dealing with relatively minor changes to the rules to do with defined benefit pension plans. The sorts of things that it does are: It clarifies the benefits of plan members affected by layoffs

and it eliminates partial windups; it facilitates the restructuring of pension plans affected by corporate reorganizations—and that was something the parliamentary assistant was just talking about—while protecting benefit security for plan members and pensioners; it increases transparency and access to information for plan members and pensioners; it enhances regulatory oversight; it improves plan administration; and it reduces compliance costs.

Where we are right now in the process is, we've had second reading debate and the bill did go to committee. There were a number of amendments put forward at committee, about 50, most of which were the government's—some which were the NDP's and some which our party put forward. The government amendments were mainly of a technical nature, changing some dates and some terminology.

Certainly, the official opposition was there listening to those people who came before the committee, and we put forward some amendments that we thought made sense. I've spoken with pension members, both at the committee and in looking at this bill, and one of the issues they brought up was the issue of being able to know the status of their pension. They've worked their whole life and they're counting on this pension, and it seems to me, and I think it seems to those pension members, that they should be able to be involved with a pension advisory committee, and to have a pension advisory committee, but also be able to get information on the solvency of their particular pension, because they're going to be depending on that pension for their retirement years.

So the PC Party put forward amendments to recognize the input that we received. Unfortunately, the government voted down all of our amendments, but I would like to mention a couple of them. Because, as I say, a lot of the retired pension members would like to form a pension advisory committee so they can be more involved and know what the status of their committee is, we put forward an amendment that would require every pension plan—I'll read it: "Every pension plan is required to establish an advisory committee, and it shall include retired members of the pension plan." That's simply based on the fact that they're the people who have the most at stake in the pension plan.

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Also, we heard that the sponsors are not necessarily that keen about setting up a pension advisory committee. Sometimes privacy concerns are cited as a reason why they can't distribute names to assist in the formation of a pension advisory committee. I heard from groups like the Canadian Federation of Pensioners, who told me just how difficult it is to create a PAC. They said that even some of the sponsors think of it as being a nuisance. So that's why we put forward an amendment to require the establishment of an advisory committee, and that would then require the sponsor to be of assistance. As I say, that one, unfortunately, was voted down.

We also put forward an amendment to do with basically getting information out to pensioners. Our idea

was that a simple way to do it would be to make that information available in an electronic format, so we put forward an amendment that would make it possible: "The administrator of a pension plan shall ensure that information about an individual's benefits or entitlements under the pension plan is available to the individual over the Internet, and the administrator shall ensure that appropriate security measures are implemented to prevent unauthorized access to this information by others."

The sort of information would be that critical information to do with the solvency of the plan: "The administrator of a pension plan shall ensure that any report filed with the superintendent concerning the most recent solvency valuation of the pension plan is available to its members and retired members over the Internet."

This seemed to me to be a simple way to allow those members to know the status of something that's so important to them: their pension. Unfortunately, as I say, that one as well was voted down by the government members.

We also put forward an amendment to do with grow-in provisions—and I think that I had something here that I wanted to read into the record. What did I do with that? I may not be able to read that into the record because it's not handy to me. But there were certainly some real concerns from the sponsors of the cost of grow-in benefits.

I'll just read what a grow-in benefit is, because for those of us who aren't experts in pensions, it's not easy to understand. What is a grow-in benefit? Grow-in benefits are retirement enhancements provided to terminated members, on plan windup, whose age plus years of total service equal at least 55. Such persons are entitled to early retirement benefits provided under the plan that they would have grown into had both the plan and their employment continued until their early retirement date.

This is generally considered to be costly to plan sponsors. It's only found in Ontario and Nova Scotia, and Nova Scotia is planning to do away with grow-in benefits. And here's what I was looking for. There were groups like the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association that came before the committee to point out—and I'll read from their submission:

"The grow-in provisions of Bill 236 as they currently stand will have a further negative impact on OMERS' financial situation. An estimated amount of up to \$1 billion will be on top of the existing \$6-billion-plus deficit that OMERS needs to deal with over the next four years. This cost must not be legislated upon the OMERS plan especially at a time when the OMERS plan can least afford additional and unnecessary costs."

They showed why a MEPP or a JSPP—a multi-employer pension plan or a jointly managed pension plan—require a different regulatory regime:

"Plans like OMERS (public sector MEPPs/JSPPs) require a different regulatory regime than single employer pension plans ... because of their joint governance structure." And I think this is key: "OMERS' two

corporate boards, each with half of the board members representing the employers and half representing the employees, are the best joint decision-makers to determine the benefit composition and subsequent contribution rates of the OMERS plan. This governance structure must not be overridden with provincial legislation.”

They go on to say, “The 2008 report of the Expert Commission on Pensions in Ontario specifically proposed that multi-employer plans and jointly sponsored plans”—that’s the JSPPs—“like OMERS, be exempted from the grow-in requirement. The rationale for this recommendation is that when parties jointly sponsor and govern a plan, share risks and bargain collectively on early retirement benefits, there is no need for additional legislative protection.”

So, based on that specific recommendation, the recommendation of the Arthurs report, we put forward an amendment that the grow-in provision does not apply with respect to jointly sponsored pension plans or a multi-employer plan. Unfortunately, that was voted down, although there is still a possibility with the bill that it can happen, even without this provision.

So those are a sample of some of the amendments that the official opposition put forward.

There are other concerns that I could ask the parliamentary assistant to listen to and see whether they are fully addressed in the current form of the bill, because I’m not positive whether they are or not. The member from Simcoe–Grey has brought up issues to do with the paramedics in his riding.

I received a letter from MPAC employees and I’m going to read it. As the member from Simcoe–Grey pointed out, they used to be government of Ontario employees. Now they’re MPAC employees. So they’ve got this joint pension and they still have some questions. I’ll read this letter from Ron Franklin of Mississauga, Ontario, to do with MPAC employees. I think most of their considerations are addressed in this bill, but they do have some finer points. Here’s the letter:

“It’s our understanding the proposed legislative changes are a follow-up on the November 2008 report and recommendations of the Ontario Expert Commission on Pensions, such as contained in section 5.3 titled ‘The Effect of Restructuring on Active Members and Retirees.’ In this regard, we take it the government’s reform package is intended to include and address such significant long-standing issues as past investments and the ensuing split pension problems of Ontarians.

“Their submission to the expert panel detailed how many people have been directly and prejudicially impacted by their past divestment from the OPS, as well as by the pension decisions not of their own making or choice, and advised some possible options at resolution.

“The solution that is fundamentally fair, reasonable and what many MPAC employees are seeking is a merging/consolidation of their separate split pensions under one of the OPS plans, either OPSEU Trust (‘OPTrust’) or the public service pension plan/Ontario Pension Board (‘OPB’). As indicated by those employees

this would take into account salary increases under the successor employer MPAC, and ensure that such employees and prospective pensioners would not lose their existing entitlement to the post-retirement health and dental benefits for those covered through their previous employment with the Ontario government.

“With respect to the concept of merging the split pensions, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services had written the Chair of MPAC’s board of directors in June of last year advising in part: ‘If divested MPAC employees withdraw or transfer their OPS pension assets and thereby terminate OPS pension entitlement status, they will forfeit access to future post-retirement insurance coverage.’ Under the circumstances it is our understanding that a viable solution would be the consolidation and transferring of the split pension assets to one of the OPS plans, ‘OPTrust’ or ‘OPB.’

“The chair of MPAC’s board of directors wrote on January 15, 2009, referencing the expert commission’s call upon the government to promptly address the pension arrangements for groups of public service employees affected by past divestments and transfers. MPAC’s letter stresses an immediate urgency to the matters and advises some employees have chosen to defer their retirements”—and I know the member from Simcoe–Grey had mentioned that. There are some of the ambulance drivers, as well, who are deferring retirement until this is resolved—“while awaiting a response from the Ontario government to provide a remedy to the situation.

“We would greatly appreciate it if you would advise how the government plans to resolve this important and long-standing split pension issue for pensioners and prospective pensioners working at MPAC, and how the relief will be implemented.

“Ontarians to be given a couple of options depending on their circumstances, such as the freedom of choice on an individualized basis of consolidating/transferring their split pension assets to either the previous original plan or to the successor plan. At the same time, this would give them the option of leaving the split pensions as they are if they do not wish to consolidate their pensions under one plan or the other. In fact, many at MPAC have been seeking legislative amendments which would, in essence, include/enable the OPTrust plan and the OMERS plan to enter into voluntary individualized transfer agreements to consolidate all their pension assets/service back under the one OPS plan ‘OPTrust.’”

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That letter is signed by a number of MPAC employees, the affected group from Richmond Hill and Mississauga.

Perhaps the parliamentary assistant can respond to that concern—I’m sure he followed all that in the letter—to confirm that their concerns are addressed to their satisfaction.

This bill, as I mentioned, is technical. It’s dealing with defined benefit pension plans. There’s so much more out there that’s not covered in it. It really doesn’t address the bigger issues of retirement income challenges, and that’s

really the majority of people out there. That's 60% to 70% of the people who either don't have a defined benefit plan or don't have a defined contribution plan or don't have any retirement savings at all.

Certainly, the trend in the private sector—and there's a hugely different world out there between the private sector and the public sector. We're getting kind of the gold standard for the public sector and something very different in the private sector. In the private sector, the trend is toward defined contribution plans; that is, plans where the employee and usually the employer will contribute to the retirement plan each month but the value is not backstopped. It's whatever you invest in that plan. It's very much like what MPPs at Queen's Park have. You might pick a mutual fund that the plan is invested in, and then you have a particular value that goes up over time, but when you retire, that value is what your retirement is. That's what the private sector is moving toward. I met with a large Ontario unionized company this week at Queen's Park. I won't name the company, but in the past they had a defined benefit plan, and now for all new hires they're moving to defined contribution plans.

That's what's happening in the private sector predominantly, where you have a plan at all. There are a lot of people who have no plan whatsoever, people who are just putting off or not thinking about saving money for retirement.

The most you can contribute, if you are earning money and putting it into an RSP, for example, is 18% a year, compared to the value of most of the public sector defined benefit plans, which is about 35% of your income per year—so it's more than double. In the public sector, in most cases, the defined benefit plan is backstopped by the government. So if you're a teacher or you're a police officer, you are going to receive that money unless the government really gets us into financial dire straits like some countries such as Greece currently are. We aren't quite there yet in Ontario. We're moving that way with a \$21.3-billion deficit, but we're not quite there yet.

This bill is not dealing with those bigger issues of retirement income, and those really are the bigger issues. How do you get more people to plan and more people to save and think about their retirement?

I met with the Association of Canadian Pension Management. I thought they had a lot of very positive ideas, and I'd like to get some of them on the record. They made a presentation to me and briefed me, as the finance critic, on some of the bigger issues. What did they say? They said they thought they needed to:

- rebalance the debate to focus on retirement income;
- encourage the formation of more workplace plans and savings options for Canadians, which is critical to the retirement income debate;
- enhance, protect and sustain the security of pension plans and retirement income options.

What is the current dilemma? Insufficient savings and a lack of workplace plans are the main impediments to

adequate retirement income. If you're self-employed, unless you're just specifically putting it into an RSP, you wouldn't likely have a plan. Some individuals and families are not saving enough. They're intimidated by the amount they think they need to retire comfortably. They find pensions confusing and complex, and fewer employers are offering pension plans as the current rules and policies make this more difficult.

There's not enough of a pan-Canadian approach. I think that's important: that there's fragmentation and different rules across the country. We're dealing with one fairly technical bill here to do with defined benefit plans. Well, the rules are different across the country, and I mentioned how Ontario is unique in that it has grow-in options. It's about the only province now that does it; I think Nova Scotia had grow-in options. Also, Ontario's the only province that has the pension benefits guarantee fund, and maybe I'll come back to that a little bit later. You might be working in Ontario right now, but next month you might be transferred to BC. So the more it's a Canada-wide approach to pensions, the better. The more transferable they are, the better.

It should be noted, though—I mean, we have one of the best retirement systems in the world at a basic level, and those are national programs: old age security; the guaranteed income supplement, GIS; the mandated Canada pension plan benefits; and voluntary workplace and individual savings. That's sort of a solid base, and it works well. But workplace plans and retirement saving options are the best way to meet the needs of the vast majority of Canadians. So those people at the very low level of income have those plans that I just mentioned that provide a sort of base level of income in retirement. It's when you get into the vast middle class that we have the problem where people aren't saving enough for retirement.

What is the path ahead? We need to focus on how to support and encourage Canadians to plan and save more for their own retirement. We need to encourage employers to keep offering or start offering pension plans that meet the needs of employees in the 21st century. And governments working together would best facilitate these actions. I think the federal government is engaged in this debate, as are many provincial governments. The national approach, I believe, is the best approach.

The Association of Canadian Pension Management says, "Don't tinker with government programs such as CPP, which do the job of providing a basic level of income for all Canadians," and they think it doesn't need to be expanded. "The reality for many people is that an adequate retirement can be achieved for less than the oft-stated retirement income goal of 70% of pre-retirement income." That's been the target that's been set in the past, and what they're saying is that that's too high, that most people don't need 70% of their working income to be comfortable in their retirement. But it's the current pension rules rather than the lack of employer willingness that are discouraging new workplace plans and frustrating existing employer and employee plans. It's

those rules that are stopping the employers from being able to set up plans that would then benefit their employees.

They're recommending a balanced approach. They say, "Let's be realistic about what Canadians really need to save for retirement"—so lower than that 70%. Employers need to be kept in the game, and consumer protection must be an important part of any reforms. Those pan-Canadian solutions recognize that Canadians' ability to obtain adequate retirement income should not rely on where they live or whether their job is in the public or private sector.

But the big challenge is expanding coverage so that more people have retirement income or are planning for a retirement income. That means more defined contribution plans, new options, more economies of scale and participation by the self-employed—because there are a lot of small businesses, as you would know, Madame Speaker, that don't have a plan. Expanding coverage should be a voluntary decision by employers, employees and the self-employed, utilizing auto-enrolment with opt-out mechanisms, such as used in the United States and coming in the United Kingdom. That's where you're automatically signed up, and then you have to make a decision to opt out of it. I think that makes a lot of sense, because the last thing many of us want to do is—we have other things we'd rather spend our own money on today versus putting aside for our retirement a few years in the future. We may want to buy that new motorcycle or put the addition on the house. Let's face it, there's always something we can find to spend the money on that we may want or that will come before making the decision to put that money away for years in the future for our retirement.

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"Expanding coverage would benefit from efforts by government and pension providers to help demystify decisions for people, while reducing the perceived 'sticker shock' resulting from the historical focus on the 70% replacement figure"—so they're saying to lower that figure.

The means to expanded coverage: "The ACPM believes that several large plans operating multi-jurisdictionally would provide the flexibility and choice of savings options that employers and individuals need, while encouraging diversification of capital, economies of scale and competition benefits." I agree with that point.

"Another government mandated payroll tax is not what the economy needs, especially when, for many, there are better ways to prepare for retirement." So that would be, I guess, perhaps an additional CPP plan.

ACPM is agnostic on publicly run versus privately run plans as long as it is not only a public plan, so it's not just an expansion of the CPP. They're not in favour of CPP involvement in supplemental plans, if there is risk of creating one large mega-fund. Private sector creativity and expertise is the best way to develop choices and educate Canadians.

The focus should be on expanded coverage, and there are many different changes required to make that happen; many outside of the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Ontario. Consequential changes to the Income Tax Act and federal and provincial pension standards legislation are required to enhance the ability to provide defined contribution options; encourage new models that combine elements of defined benefit and defined contribution, like target benefits; encourage more multi-employer plans; promote participation through auto-enrol with an opt-out provision; enable individuals to join plans without employer sponsors, so that could be the self-employed person; and provide the opportunity for large plan administrators to service smaller plans, because generally these plans, economies of scale, make a huge difference.

They also suggest promoting mandatory access:

"Automatic enrolment with opt-out can encourage increased participation while ensuring the flexibility and choice needed to reflect different savings potential and approaches over a lifetime.

"Models exist in other jurisdictions either requiring employers to offer plans unless they opt out, in which case employees can still join a plan, or by automatically requiring employees be in a plan unless they opt out." These are things that we should be looking at going into the future.

"Proposals for a default publicly mandated plan should be deferred to allow private sector to provide access and options for Canadians." So they obviously feel that a CPP-only option or public option is not the optimal choice.

I've talked a bit about the specific provisions of this bill, and more broadly the bigger issues that need to be addressed. Some of the things not addressed in this bill: It does not deal with the circumstances—the future, bigger choices I outlined; it does not deal with the majority of people who have no pension; the government has not created more opportunities for savings so that more Ontarians could put money away for retirement; and the government has not removed mutual fund management fees from the long list of services that will be subject to the HST.

I think this is a point that needs expanding upon, and that is that one of the things that's being taxed with the new HST—for the majority of people out there who are saving by having a registered retirement savings plan, the HST will apply to the management fees on that mutual fund. This will have a tremendous negative effect on the amount that you're able to save in that RRSP. Canada is unique in the world of value-added taxes—and there are quite a few countries that do have value-added taxes—in terms of applying that tax, the HST, to the management fees of mutual funds. So it further puts those people who aren't in a defined benefit plan, the 60% to 70% of the people, at a further disadvantage in terms of trying to save enough money.

This bill also doesn't deal with the Nortel workers out there who are faced with the possibility of seeing greatly

diminished retirement savings. The government has, in another bill and in the budget, put money into the pension benefits guarantee fund. Ontario is unique in the country in having a pension benefits guarantee fund. It will provide up to \$1,000 a month if the defined benefit plan fails. The way it's supposed to work is that it's supposed to be funded by the companies and the employees that would benefit from it. It's in a negative cash flow situation, as so many things this government is dealing with are, so the government has recently moved \$500 million into the pension benefits guarantee fund. I think that's specifically to do with Nortel workers. If I was a cynic, I'd say it was because there was recently a by-election in the Ottawa area, which is where many of the retired Nortel workers live. But this bill doesn't address the bigger issue of what's going to happen to all those Nortel workers. That provision just means that they would receive up to \$1,000 a month, which, for many of the Nortel workers, would be a big drop from what they were expecting to receive.

There's quite a bit that's not covered by the bill. We are generally supportive of it and think it's an improvement for these defined benefit plans that it affects, so we will be supporting it. This is the easy part of the pension changes. The government has said they're going to introduce another bill. I don't expect we'll see that until probably the last week before the Legislature rises, so it would likely not be getting debated with the bigger, more challenging issues until the fall.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill this afternoon.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd also like to convey my concerns that the member of the opposition stated, in his frustration that some of their amendments—in fact, all of their amendments—were not addressed and accepted in any way, shape or form. I also feel the frustration that all the amendments we brought before the committee were also shot down and not dealt with, and some of them were very important to making this bill stronger. Constructive criticism from very large organizations in the province has been totally ignored by the government on this situation.

The government says that in the fall they're going to come forward with more legislation. I'm not quite sure. I certainly hope it's going to be a lot more than what was done here because, speaking about the PBGF fund, which is the most important thing that is facing Ontario and Ontarians, it hasn't even been mentioned or dealt with in this situation. That's the part of the bill that would have given an immediate sense of security and relief to the hundreds of thousands of people who have pension plans that are struggling and could possibly go under. Obviously, the money situation was not dealt with in this bill whatsoever. It's housekeeping and some reforms in reference to vesting and other such things, which are good. Any kind of movement on pension reform is good, but it doesn't deal with the problem that's facing

hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Ontarians. As mentioned by the former speaker, the Nortel workers are a perfect example, and I'll get into more detail about that.

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes to respond to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka and his comments. Let me first say that I'm pleased to hear that the Tory caucus is generally supportive of the bill. I understood that to say that they would be voting in favour. I can appreciate that any time when the opposition is generally supportive, that's a big step from the standpoint of government legislation.

1650

He made a number of comments on a variety of areas. I'd welcome a copy of the correspondence, if it wasn't sent to the ministry officials from the MPAC folks. I certainly would undertake, if it's not there now, to ensure that it's before them for a more wholesome review of that. The issue around health benefits is one that, in my discussions initially with MPAC—as I'm sure he had as well—they were concerned about, as well as the transfer of assets. This is a nuance, for me, that sort of came up late in the discussion, but I'm anxious to see the copy of it. I hadn't seen that particular correspondence and would be happy to forward that if it's not with the officials already.

He spent some time speaking to the issue of retirement income adequacy, if I can call it that. That's part of this broader discussion. Whether it's the OAS or the GIS, CPP, workplace plans or individual savings, clearly they need discussion, as he's articulated. It's going on across the country and we should be a strong part of it. It's the reason the Premier stood up and has called for a national summit with federal leadership. We need to have this discussion with Ontarians, with Canadians about what the right model is and how it might look. We look forward to that discussion, as I'm sure he does as well, over the coming months, as the case might be.

Certainly, the budget did identify some \$500 million into the pension benefits guarantee fund, which is obviously an underfunded model. This certainly will help to provide some relief in that regard for those who find, if they find, that they have to draw on it—

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: I'm glad to add my voice to that of my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka. We've had many talks one on one, he and I, about the state of pensions in the province of Ontario, and one of the lines that keeps getting repeated, not just between he and I but, I think, amongst people who are at least over 50 and certainly those over 60, is, "Isn't it great how people can work longer these days?" Well, on the one hand, from a medical perspective it's great that people can work longer, but thank goodness we can because we have to. I think that's the basis for the broad discussion about pensions, not the specific discussions, necessarily, that we're having today.

I thank the member for responding to many of the points that the government has made in terms of the technical responses. I can imagine that, for those people who are watching at home, you've got not a heck of a lot to do because this is boring stuff. It's necessary stuff, but it's boring in terms of the technicalities of it when the nub of this thing does go back to that original question.

Let me put this question: If the government is as interested as it says it is in reforming pensions, is bringing forth more legislation on the issue of pensions—I'd like to recall very briefly, because I haven't got much time, the fact that I spoke recently to IFIC, the people who sell mutual funds in the province. They want to know, because essentially mutual funds are nothing more than private pensions that people are buying for themselves, why there is an onerous addition to the issue of buying mutual funds called the harmonized sales tax. I know that we're not debating that any more and that it's coming into being on July 1, but isn't that an additional negative towards people who can ill afford it and, ultimately, are going to have to be bailed out by we, the people of Ontario?

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

Mr. Jeff Leal: I listened very carefully to the—I thought—very informative comments from the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. He's certainly very involved in his file. I think that, by and large, there's interest on all sides of House in pension reform. I think today there's no sort of issue that has seized the nation as much, particularly as a result of the meltdown of the financial structures south of the border. Many people who had invested in RRSPs and in mutual funds witnessed the value of those funds declining significantly. When you have the opportunity to talk about the fact that 65% of the people who live in the province of Ontario do not have a defined benefit pension plan and the work that's being done by the federal finance minister, Minister Flaherty, his round table across Canada to solicit opinions about the future of pension plans in this country, it's something that we all should take a real interest in. Certainly, we've got to start, in elementary school, to get the principles in place to encourage savings so that when we get into our late fifties and our sixties, we in fact have prepared adequately for those days when we won't be in the workforce.

This is the first bill of two that will be presented to this House as a result of recommendations that were put forward through the Arthurs report, which was a very comprehensive review of pensions in the province of Ontario. Indeed, as I indicated, this is an issue where we see that all parties in this House have come together in the best interests of Ontarians to make sure they have adequate pension funds down the road.

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

The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to the members from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Thornhill, Pickering–

Scarborough East and Peterborough, who made comments on my speech.

I know that the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek was involved as a member of the NDP. Certainly they did, as he pointed out, put forward many different amendments at committee level that were all voted down, but they did work hard on that, and he spoke passionately about many of them. I know he has a large constituency, particularly of unionized workers, who have some real concerns. I'd say that some of those private companies are the ones that are most at risk as well.

The member from Thornhill pointed out that the HST will apply to management fees on mutual funds, and that is an additional negative. It does make a chasm between those people on their own trying to save money and those people who happen to be lucky enough in the public sector to have a defined benefit plan. It makes the divide even larger.

The member from Peterborough talked about what's going on across the country. As I said in my remarks, I do think that many of the solutions to the bigger questions to do with pensions are pan-Canada solutions, and the best solution is one that applies to the whole country.

He also did mention that young people should be learning about financial literacy, and I would completely agree with that. In fact, I've had some people in the financial business in my riding from the Parry Sound area writing to me, suggesting that there should be more in the curriculum to do with financial literacy so people know how to plan for their retirement, but also just some fairly basic aspects of financial management. So I would completely agree with that.

I thank the Legislature for the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Before I get into the details of the bill, I want to use this opportunity to talk about what the NDP will be looking for in terms of pension reform before the end of June.

First, with only 35% of Ontarians covered by an occupational pension plan, there's a clear need for expanded pension coverage for the other 65% of Ontarians. Ideally, the way this would be done would be to increase the benefit levels of the Canada pension plan. This would draw on existing economies of scale, risk-sharing and the administration efficiencies of the plan. The Ontario NDP joins with the federal NDP and the Canadian Labour Congress in the campaign for an expanded national universal pension plan in the form of an enhanced CPP.

We also support those parties who are calling for an increase in the guaranteed income supplement and for reform of Canada's bankruptcy laws so that pension plan members are ranked above other creditors in bankruptcy proceedings.

That said, the issue of expanding pension coverage is an urgent one. We in the Ontario NDP do not believe that the Harper government is going to move to expand coverage under the Canada pension plan. Therefore, we

believe that there is an important role to be played at the provincial level in greatly expanding workplace pension coverage. That is why, with the finance ministers' pension meeting coming up in June, it is essential to know where the McGuinty government stands on this very important subject.

We know where we stand. It's called the Ontario retirement plan, but we have no idea where the McGuinty government stands on pension coverage for the 65% of Ontarians without a workplace pension plan. What we need is an Ontario focus, a made-in-Ontario solution, not reliance on federal action that we all know is not even on the books. The NDP believes that Ontario should move ahead with other provinces and develop an employment-based pension plan for all working Ontarians who presently lack occupational coverage.

1700

Before I get into the specifics of how such a plan would work, I'd like to talk a bit about the benefits of such a plan. First, and most obviously, the Ontario retirement plan would deal with the roughly 65% of Ontarians who presently have no workplace pension plan coverage.

Second, in the Ontario retirement plan, the band of income that the contribution rate would be assessed against would be different from that of the current Canada pension plan. A broader band of income would allow for a higher benefit for plan members earning over \$47,200 in 2010 dollars. This responds to exactly the kind of replacement rate issues that pension expert Bob Baldwin identified in his report to the Minister of Finance that was tabled in Whitehorse in December.

Thirdly, an Ontario retirement plan would be used to further consolidation of a fragmented workplace pension system. For example, Ontario has over 6,500 workplace plans, many of them very small. Many might elect to integrate into a larger Ontario plan which has at its base two thirds of the workforce. Bigger is better in some cases.

Fourth, an Ontario plan would allow for the transfer of RRSPs, which could be used to purchase past service credits for the basic benefit. This would allow older workers who would not ordinarily be able to earn the full benefit to receive more than they would have otherwise.

Here's how it works. An Ontario retirement plan would be a publicly run targeted benefit plan, much like the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan and the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Pension Plan. In order to maximize participation, every employee not enrolled in a workplace pension plan would be automatically enrolled in the Ontario retirement plan. But the plan is not mandatory. If you have a better way to plan for your retirement, you don't have to take part in the Ontario retirement plan. If, as your life changes, you decide that the Ontario retirement plan is something you can use, you can opt in. Employees and employers would be expected to contribute equally to the plan. Contribution rates for employees would be phased in over a five-year period depending

upon economic circumstances and somewhat longer phasing might be considered for employers. Unlike a defined contribution plan for a group RRSP, the assets of the plan would be invested for the plan as a whole and not on an individual basis. That results in far more security for the plan members. The maximum benefit for the plan would be between \$600 and \$700 per month in 2010 dollars. And because many current members of the workforce would not have sufficient years in the plan to receive the maximum benefit, plan members would be able to increase their normal benefit through a retroactive purchase of past service credits.

In the new world of work, people are increasingly mobile. Many will work a number of jobs in their lifetime. We can choose to let them sink or swim, or we can step up with sensible solutions like the NDP Ontario retirement plan that makes their lives better. And I might add that this plan has received great support throughout the province from many groups: intellectuals, unions, businesses. We've had lots of positive responses to this plan.

Let me cover some other key issues. That was the coverage issue, but Harry Arthurs also came up with a number of good suggestions regarding strengthening the existing pension system.

First, the NDP supports Arthurs' recommendation for establishing an Ontario pension agency. We believe that pooling, administering, investing and disbursing stranded pensions would be an important role for this agency. In our opinion, an Ontario pension agency would pretty much solve the problem that Nortel pensioners face now. Nortel, AbitibiBowater, and CanWest Global Communications all could benefit from an Ontario pension agency. We were hoping to see an Ontario pension agency in this first package right here in Bill 236, but it's nowhere to be seen. Will it be in the second package? I wait with bated breath. I'm not even sure that the government knows that. Will there even be a second package this session? They say yes. Who knows?

Second, at only a \$1,000 level of monthly pension benefits eligible for protection by the pension benefits guarantee fund, it's completely inadequate. Why I say that is, if you take the Nortel situation, for instance, some of those workers had 40 years' service. They had pensions ranging between \$1,600 and \$3,800 a month—\$4,000 a month. So when their plan wrapped up—it failed—the equity wasn't there. It wound down. Their fear is, it's coming to a closure quickly. The Ontario government did step up to the plate with a little money for the pension benefits guarantee fund—very little.

If I worked my whole life and I was entitled to \$3,800 at the end of my life in deferred wages—my money; in other words, I took benefit advantages over wages that I would have gotten. That's what these people did, and now you're telling people in their 60s, "Oh, by the way, your \$3,800 isn't there. You won't be getting it. But we're a good government; we're going to give you up to \$1,000"? So what do you say to hundreds of pensioners who come to us and say, "Where's my other \$2,800?"

“Well, I’m sorry. It’s not there. You’re out of luck.” “But I worked my whole life for this. This was my planned retirement. Now I might have to work till I’m 75, if I live that long.”

It’s a pretty scary situation. This has not been dealt with by this bill; it hasn’t even been touched—about increasing it. Even Harry Arthurs, who was hired by the Liberals, recommended that this pension plan be boosted to \$2,500 a month—their own expert. Not a word about raising it in this first bill. Nothing. Pretty scary stuff.

We believe that, over time, the monthly guarantee covered by the PGBF should be increased to a maximum of \$2,500. We don’t expect the government to be magicians. We don’t expect them to increase it to \$2,500 immediately. It’s going to be over a period of time. We’re well aware of that. We can’t expect that much input of resources that quickly. We’re realists, but we also know it’s deferred wages that these people are owed, and the government has to step up to the plate to make sure that, eventually, they get the money they’re owed. I don’t see any of that in here. That hasn’t happened since 1980, by the way; that pension benefits guarantee fund hasn’t been changed since 1980.

While the NDP agrees that the basis on which the levy will be paid by plan sponsors is a complex matter and that a phase-in period is necessary, we are extremely disappointed that this key Arthurs recommendation is nowhere to be seen in the first package, and I’m not quite sure it’s going to show up in the second package. Again, we would have liked to have seen movement on this issue in this package, and we expect to see the issue addressed in the next package, whenever that may occur.

Don’t get me wrong; there are a couple of good things in this bill. The NDP supports the Arthurs recommendation that all active plan members should be immediately vested for all accrued pension benefits. We’ve supported this all along. That was done. It was done, at no cost to the government. As you know, as things now stand, if an employee moves on before two years are up, he or she loses their employee contribution to their pension plan.

It’s a small move. I’m not quite sure how much of an investment the government made in this—probably nothing. It will probably be part of the plan. But something should have changed years ago, and we’re glad that this part of the present package is in there, but we also have real concerns with the package and we are disappointed that the government ignored our amendments in these areas. These are the very areas that unions have worked on for years—valuable input, valuable material that could have been used by the government; totally ignored. All our amendments were totally ignored. Sad.

We’re very concerned with the changes in the surplus distribution on windup. This change in the act is a significant loss of entitlement for plan members. Currently, section 79 requires both that there be an agreement for surplus distribution and that employer entitlement to surplus must be established. We acknowledge that there has been difficulty in the applications of this section of the act, but we still believe that this wording makes things much, much worse.

1710

There would have been a greater basis for this change if the government had followed the Arthurs recommendation on vesting, grow-in rights, and if the PGBF recommendation for an increase to \$2,500 a month were implemented. Only the vesting and grow-in recommendations were implemented in this bill. The PGBF recommendation so far has been ignored. This is not Harry Arthurs’s so-called “delicate balance.”

Putting it bluntly, the NDP believes that the surplus should only go to employers on windup if the employer has a clear entitlement to the surplus. As our amendment was voted down, we will continue to oppose the provision as things now stand.

We also have problems regarding the asset transfer provisions. Transfers between plans need to be as simple and transparent as possible. The basic principle of preservation of benefits and commuted value is necessary to ensure fairness and impartiality, and individual choice needs to be preserved.

There are a number of problems with the way asset transfers are addressed in this act currently. Most significantly, current provisions require the predecessor and successor plans to provide the same benefits, and individuals are not given any choice with respect to the transfers—unacceptable. As a matter of principle, the legislation should have incorporated individual choice, as reciprocal agreements do now, so that plan members can make a decision, based on full information, to stay in the original plan or move to the successor plan. The proposed changes to the act remove the requirement that benefits be identical. However, individual members still have no choice with respect to transfers.

In addition, in the public sector, the interest of the original employer in an asset transfer for past service is questionable at best. In the public sector, large independently administrated plans generally deal with voluntary transfers under a major Ontario pension plan’s reciprocal agreement that requires no employer expenditure of time or resources. We believe that this reciprocal agreement provides a better model for transfers in the public sector than the proposed agreements between the original and successor employers.

We moved a very constructive amendment on precisely this issue and we were very, very disappointed that this amendment was voted down.

In summary, we are in the midst of a historic debate in this province and indeed in this country. The debate is over the future of retirement savings in this province and this country. We in the NDP have made it quite clear where we stand. We are on the side of the public defined pension benefits plans. The problem is that no one knows where the members across the floor stand.

When I want to talk about defined pension plans, I want to use HOOPP as an example, a hospital worker plan. A lot of people today are moving toward contributory plans, which I think are going to be a disaster in the end. But the defined pension plan by HOOPP, even through the recession, managed to have a 96% funded

rate. They were self-administered: They have their own actuaries. They have their own accountants. They run a solid plan. We also know how huge the teachers' plan is and all the investments they've made. I think they even own the Toronto Maple Leafs. It's huge. They invested in gold. They have invested all over the world. Their plan is so big that I'm a little worried, because I've heard in this House the too-big-to-fail thing again, and I'm not quite sure. A lot of these so-called too-big-to-fail companies and pension plans are certainly in trouble today, and we witness it every day. Every month, there's a new administrative pension problem, and pensions are going under and workers are being—how would I put it? They're being shafted by the employers, by protection, by insurance companies, by the government. They're losing their job entitlement wages. They're losing deferred wages which they earned their whole life. They're saying, "I'm sorry; there's no protection for you. You're out of luck."

I really find this amazing, because the other day, the Minister of Consumer Services said that some things don't fall under her mandate. I think pensions should fall under her mandate, because that affects the consumers. The consumers will have no money to spend if their pension plans are in trouble. The consumers will be in rough shape, and I can see that if this government doesn't move more quickly—and not only this government; right across Canada—we're going to have a social nightmare in 20 years. Because of the baby boomers and all of the pension plans that are folding and going under, we are moving in the direction of a welfare state. We are moving in that direction if we don't do something about pensions—

Interjection: Nobody to pay.

Mr. Paul Miller: —with nobody to pay the bills, because there are not enough people working; there are not enough babies being born; there are not enough people entering the workforce to sustain the demands of our age group and the ones just behind us.

When you think about it, 65% of Ontarians don't have any workplace pension plan, so some of them had their RRSPs, relying on the market. We've seen what the market did. I think a lot of people, and I imagine even people in this House, lost up to 40% at one point: pretty scary stuff when you don't have a defined pension plan, when that was your pension plan and now it has been hit by market conditions.

That's why we need an Ontario plan. That's why we need another backup, because I'm not overly assured that Mr. Harper is going to fully fund, as the NDP and other parties have asked, to double the CPP. I can't see it. I can see maybe a small increase over a period of years, but not to the point where it's going to help a guy with 40 years at Nortel who went from \$2,800 down to \$1,000. It's not going to help that gentleman. It's not going to give him peace of mind. That gentleman will not be relaxing in Florida. He might be working: driving a car at a pharmacy, delivering drugs, because he cannot afford to retire. He cannot not work. I see more and more of this

going on in our province every day. There are people coming into my office saying, "Mr. Miller, what am I going to do?", and the only answer I can see is that we've got to start to do something to create a plan in Ontario where they can buy credits to give them something additional.

It may not seem like a lot, but \$500 to \$700 could be the difference between an elderly person being forced out of their home because they can't afford to pay either their utilities, their municipal taxes or what other bills they have—because, trust me, as we all know, if you don't have a good income, don't have good investments and you're not in the top 25% of earners in this province, you can't live on old age security, Canada pension and the supplement. I don't know anyone in this room who could live on \$1,500 a month and maintain their lifestyle. No possible way. That would not only be eaten up by their hydro bills, all their other utilities and their food, but they may see their house go up.

Ask yourself this question: Why has North America now got reverse mortgages? Hmm. Because elderly people are broke and they have to dip into their house, which they might have wanted to leave to their kids. They can't now; they're spending it, and all these finance people are moving up to take part of their house. You can actually borrow up to, I think, 40% of your house. They even advertise that: "We'll lend you up to 40% of your house." Depending on your lifestyle, whether you require it for medications that aren't registered or covered, whether you're helping your kids because they don't have a job or your grandkids because they need money for college, whatever you're doing, most likely the money you borrow in a reverse mortgage is going to go towards helping the rest of your family, not giving you the lifestyle that they show on TV where you're headed to the Bahamas. Not happening. Not realistic.

That's what's going on in Canada. I am absolutely offended that this province and this country are not stepping up for people who have earned defined—they've earned their wages. Instead of taking an increase, they took pension credits. It was part of their negotiated package: "When I'm 65, I'll get so much a month. I can add it to my old age pension, I can add to it my Canada pension, and I can live pretty well. I can pass a little on to my kids when I go." It's not happening, as witnessed by the Nortels.

1720

What do you tell a 70-year-old man who's in your office in tears? He and his wife are forced to sell their house. They're forced to live in smaller accommodations. That wasn't in the plan. The plan was that I worked for 40 years, I saved my money, and my wife works. We retire; we travel a bit before we die, maybe. We might buy that car we always wanted. You always see the insurance companies advertising on TV: Freedom 55, this and that, and people driving around on motorcycles and cars and all that. It's not realistic.

When pension plans fail, there are no avenues—none—for people to take. The doors close on their

fingers. They have nowhere to go. They have no one to appeal to. They can't even go to their government for help, and that tells me that there's something drastically wrong in this province. It tells me that the people in this chamber have got to do something to help their fellow Ontarians, and I'm talking hundreds of thousands. That's not even dealing with the people who are below the poverty level: 20% of the people in my riding are living below the poverty level. They don't even think about pension reform. They don't even think about pensions. They're just trying to put food on the table every day. Those people need an avenue, so when they get to be 65, they're not in an even worse situation than they are now. They need this government to step up to the plate and do something too.

The days of a small minority of people living high off the hog has got to end. We all deserve; we all took part in building this province. The people of this province deserve some dignity in retirement. They deserve decent nutrition in their retirement. They should be able to have a roof over their head and at least pay their utilities. We all deserve that, and I don't think anyone in this room would argue that. But the way things are going, it's going to be a horror story in the next 20 years unless we move now to reform pension plans, to stop these huge payouts to corporate people when I've got people starving—a single mother coming into my office with nowhere to go with two kids, kicked out of their apartment because they can't afford their apartment. Then I see the government spending \$2 million, \$3 million a day on consultants. How do you explain to those people that these people in Toronto are doing that? They say to me, "Do they care about me?" I say, "You'd have to ask them," because they really don't know. They think that these people are living on a different planet.

These things are going on and they're going to continue to go on until we do something. I firmly believe that in the fall, when they come forward with their second package of pension reform, there should definitely be something in there for the PBGF fund to protect defined pension plans. But, more importantly, there should be something for the 65% of Ontarians who don't have anything: zilch, zero, no pension plan. They say, "Oh, well, they can buy RRSPs." Trust me, if you're making below \$30,000 a year, you're not buying RRSPs; what you're buying—if you can afford it—is pills, because you haven't got the proper nutrition, so that you don't have to become a statistic in the hospital situation.

I really firmly believe that we have got to move ahead more quickly. Within the next two or three years, I would expect to see some major changes in pension reform from the province and from the feds, for that matter. I'm not going to let them off, either. They can do something in Ottawa, too. The CPP, the old age security—come on. The old age security has been the same for the last 20 years, with no increases: \$500 a month. A person can't live on \$500 a month. They can't even pay their rent. I don't know; I don't know how people survive. I frankly do not know how they do it. They must be magicians

with their finances. And the government wonders why there are illegal cigarettes and the government wonders why there's a black market. Because people can't afford the things that are happening in our province. They want to be good citizens. They want to pay regular prices, but they can't because they don't have jobs, they don't have money and they don't have pension plans.

It's a rippling effect: no money, no economy. Yes, the upper middle class, the middle class and the well-to-do will survive, but what about the other 50% of Ontarians who are below that level? What do they do?

We were extremely frustrated in the committee. The parliamentary assistant mentioned that they looked at some of our comments and our amendments, and unfortunately 99.9 weren't accepted, and the one that was accepted was one they decided to withdraw because it was going to make them look bad. They gave us a half for that. That was very generous, considering I've sat on committees now for almost three years and I don't think we've had one—I repeat, one—amendment, from the NDP anyway, and I can't speak for the Conservatives, but I don't believe they have accepted one—good, constructive, well-thought-out, well-researched amendments that this government ignored totally, continues to ignore, and I've not got my hopes up that they're going to do anything but ignore, because if it isn't their idea, they don't use it. Pardon me—they might, eight months later. They'll take a good idea, twist it a little bit, and say it was theirs. I don't care, as long as it gets done, but it doesn't, because they end up twisting their own ideas into it until it's not the original idea.

Madame Speaker, you look like you want to stand up any second. You're wavering in your seat. I have a whole hour, if I want to go. Relax.

All I'm going to say is that people would love to go ahead, heads in the sand, and move ahead with what they think is a great big reform package for pensions—not. They did two things. They did a little administrative—no money. No money for the people in this bill. Don't kid yourselves out there in Ontario land. You're not going to get any additional money in the PBGF at this point, and I'm quite surprised if you'll get it later. Since everyone is so anxious not to discuss this, I think I'll wind this up at this point and, once again, I'll be happy to hear no responses.

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Thank you, Speaker. It does look like you're enjoying yourself this afternoon in a comfortable position.

I'm sure the member opposite, when he has the opportunity, will in part correct the record, because we know what his intention was. Let me say that I appreciated the speech by the member opposite. We did accept an amendment, albeit it was a good amendment. We shared a similar idea in that regard. We were happy to withdraw our amendment in favour of the member opposite's during that process.

I do want to comment more on just one thing. Mr. Miller from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek mentioned—

June, I think, was his reference point for this session with respect to a second piece of legislation, and I believe the critic from the official opposition, the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, may have mentioned not seeing legislation until June. The minister's reference was this year; it wasn't this session, so if you don't see legislation before the House rises or if you don't see legislation by June 1, it could be because the minister had indicated legislation this year, not this particular session.

I appreciate the many comments from the member opposite. I was very interested, obviously, in his early comments. I appreciate, as he's had the opportunity, as have the members opposite, to expand upon and articulate more fully their view of an Ontario retirement plan. He was very specific today, much more so today with additional time, and began to lay out the parameters of that idea. Those are the kinds of things that we're all going to have to look at. CPP, workplace plans and retirement savings by individuals are all part of the things in this process that we're going to have to continue to explore.

1730

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to make a few comments because both the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka brought up in their comments how the Liberal government did not adopt any of the amendments that were advanced on this bill. Especially, I want to go back to the amendments that were offered up by the Conservative Party—to create a pension advisory committee, and another amendment that would allow for information and knowledge to be disseminated in a much more easy and appropriate fashion—because I know I have constituents who call me who are members of pensions. Really, pensions are a labyrinth; they're so complex and so convoluted. I hear all the time—I'm sure every other member does—that we need some mechanism whereby people can be knowledgeable about their pensions so that they don't find surprises when they hit age 65 or whatever.

Maybe one member of this Liberal government can stand up next time it's their turn and explain to me, explain to the people in this House, explain to the public why they would not accept these non-partisan amendments that would allow people to gain more knowledge and insight into their pension plans. Pensions transcend political parties, and it appears to me that the Liberal Party viewed this in a totally partisan way, that any amendments that were offered up by the opposition were just not acceptable, not good enough, and that they would rather have people in ignorance—

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

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to make a couple of comments. I'm pleased to respond to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. I was here for the beginning of his speech, and I do want to thank him for a couple of the comments that he made that I think those of

us on this side of the House will appreciate. That was, near the beginning of his speech, he made reference to two things that I think, as a Liberal government, we have been supportive of, and those are the bankruptcy legislation and a national plan when it comes to pension reform in Canada, not just in Ontario.

The bankruptcy piece, of course, is federal. It's an issue that comes up often, certainly in my riding. I have a lot of pensioners who find themselves in difficulty as well at this time, and I talk to them and explain to them how we need some help from the federal government on that issue to try to help them. But also on the national plan, many of these companies, as the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek knows, operate in more than one province, in more than one jurisdiction, and if we are truly going to be able to help them we need to try to find some national solution.

I think, at the end of the day, it is probably the best hoped-for solution. Whether or not that's what actually arrives, I take the member's comments to heart. I know that it might be a bit much for us to expect that the current federal government will go as far as any of us would like them to, but nevertheless, it is appropriate that we hope and would see a really national solution come at that level.

I would add, though, that I do remember quite clearly—and it may have been even before the member came in 2007, but this issue has been sort of beginning to percolate up to the surface for quite some time now. I do remember very clearly the Premier, in this Legislature some time ago—two, three years ago, perhaps, as far back as that—very publicly articulating at that time, before it became as acute as it is today, that we needed some help from the federal government on this issue. I must say that at that time it was sort of pooh-poohed as us dismissing our responsibilities in this regard, and now here today we see others very much supporting what he was trying to accomplish two or three years ago.

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

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It is my pleasure to add my comments to the members' comments on Bill 236 in this third reading debate.

Anybody you talk to in the street—and we went through the Nortel piece and the threat of General Motors, if they weren't going to survive, the stress that it would leave in our communities. We talked about it never happening to Nortel. It would never happen to General Motors. It happened, or, in the case of General Motors, it happened to a certain extent.

This government and other governments in the past tend not to be proactive sometimes when things are working well, but as the economy turned, of course, it impacted industry—it impacted those industries that supported pensions, and we do have an issue. There's no question about it. Nobody would deny it.

I think what we did as a government—we made it very, very clear. It is a very complex issue and we want to try to get it as right as we can. Is it ever going to be right right? I'm not sure what "right right" is.

We're doing this in two phases. This is the first phase. No, it doesn't fix all the problems, but it's a start. At the same time, I think that now we have an understanding, thanks to the federal government coming to the table and saying, "Yes, this is an issue we have to look at nationally because we certainly don't want to fracture things." I know people who worked in one province and retired in another province. So we want something collectively.

This is a start. I'm confident that it's going to be a little bit of a long process, but I think we're going to get it right at the end of the day.

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

The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Paul Miller: I appreciate the comments of my colleagues in the House. The parliamentary assistant was looking for an acknowledgment that they kind of moved on half of an amendment, and I'd be more than happy to agree with him that they did withdraw something they had on the table and ours was much better, and they did accept that. I'll give him that. That was one out of about—in two and a half years, I guess one out of about 200—that's not bad.

But other than that, I'd also like to address the member from the north—I forgot his riding. I'm trying to look here. It's Thunder Bay—Atikokan. He had some good points. Yes, it's true; it is also a national situation, but what he didn't mention was the NDP plan for Ontario, which has received great, great accolades throughout the province. People would like us to move in that direction, but it seems to have fallen off the rails a bit with the government's plans. They are shifting some of the blame on the feds, but they have to step up and take their responsibility because they administer and govern about 90% of the pension plans in Ontario that they have jurisdiction over. So they can be a big player in this and certainly could move in a direction that would be beneficial to the people of the province.

I would hope that the mention of the member saying that they're moving a little bit at a time—I agree; a little bit at a time. We would have liked to have seen a lot more, but hopefully—I'll correct myself. I guess it's in the fall session that they said they're going to bring something better, and I'm hoping it's going to be much, much better.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: I just noticed that after my last comments when I asked a member of the Liberal Party to explain why the amendments were not accepted, amendments about allowing people to have more information, more participation in their pensions, two members of the Liberal Party stood up and gave comments, but neither one of them gave any answers to that question. So, silence once again is the order of the day.

I'd also like to say that I come from a little bit of a different background. As an electrician, as a tradesman—

we always had the view that a good job was a complete job. A good job was a job that you didn't have to come back to ever again. It was finished. That's what we strived for. That's what was expected.

1740

Now I'm here and I see this Liberal government, and it doesn't matter. Every bill that they advance is never a complete bill. Their bills are always half measures, halfway there and always half brought back. We saw that with Bill 231, the elections act. There are gaping holes in that one on third party election financing that we debated yesterday, I believe. We see it once again with Bill 236, the pension bill: a lot of tinkering, a lot of housekeeping—important things, but very important for a very small group of people. But then the large group of people who are looking for this government to fix and address some of the significant problems in pensions—well, that's going to come some other time. It's too much for this Liberal government to take on in one bill.

Of course, we heard earlier that definitely, this next pension bill will come in this session. Now we hear that it's going to be this year. I don't know when we'll ever see that, but I think it's important that we look at the trend that has been established by the Liberal Party, and that is a trend of half measures and half work: nothing ever complete, nothing ever finalized, just a continuation of more debate without getting the job done.

Let me explain a little bit here, because I have a number of constituents who were employees of Nortel. I'm sure I'm not the only one; I'm sure there are many members in this House who have Nortel pensioners. They spent a lot of time looking at addressing the problem that happened with their pensions. What has the Liberal government done to fix this gaping hole in the pensions that happens when a firm is insolvent and when their pension funds have not been funded properly? Well, we do nothing; nothing has been done—nothing. The only thing that was done by this Liberal government was the thing that they always find the easiest thing to do whenever a problem appears in front of them.

There was a problem with the Nortel pension. Instead of bringing in legislation to address that, instead of bringing in oversight a long time ago to ensure that the fund was properly funded—those all would have taken a little bit of effort. Instead, what do we see? The government took the easy route and they stroked another \$500-million cheque into the pension guarantee fund. That's what this Liberal government always, apparently, seems to find the solution is: "Let's take more money out of taxpayers' pockets and let's spend it." That is the way they see to fix a problem: Spend money.

It's interesting, because here we are talking about pensions. In pensions, we know this is for retirement savings. This is for savings so that we have something for a rainy day, so that individuals can have a quality of life, a standard of life past the time of their gainful employment. They understand they're savings. The Liberal government understands spending. People understand savings; Liberal governments understand spending. As these people are trying to save money to have a quality of

life after employment, what do we see happen? Not only the \$500 million in the budget that is being spent instead of providing oversight, we also see things like a new HST tax—a new HST tax that is going to apply on management fees on registered retirement funds and on mutual funds. So here, once again, the Liberal government talks about people saving money, and here they are taking more money away from people so that they will have less. More taxes; more spending; new taxes; taxes on new products and services. They have a spending problem, and that problem trickles right down into everybody's pockets, and we see this. As people's savings are getting scarcer and scarcer, this government keeps digging deeper and deeper into those people's pockets.

They could have fixed the amendments to provide and to allow for people to be more knowledgeable about their pensions. They refused, absolutely refused. These were sensible, reasonable, practical amendments and they refused. I can't understand how members of the government can allow themselves to be whipped into such a condition that they will not accept amendments that benefit their constituents, that provide value to their constituents. They chose not to.

So we see a lot of tinkering with this bill, but very little substance. We see more half-measures and more incompleteness. I'll tell you, anybody who contracted a firm that operated in this fashion would have them in court and would be suing them for an incomplete contract. We expect people to complete their jobs.

I've not heard any rationale as to why we have not addressed this problem with Nortel and others. We know that it's been going on for some time. This didn't just happen yesterday or the day before; it happened long before even this bill was introduced. We knew of the problems at Nortel. But why have we brought out a bill of tinkering and let the bill of substance languish somewhere in Liberal la-la land? Where is it? What's happening? What's preventing you from bringing out a bill that will actually protect pensioners? Again, \$500 million more in this budget to mitigate the failure of this Liberal government to ensure that funding is in those pension funds.

Maybe I'll give you an example on these amendments that we advanced. I have a constituent in my riding whose name is Roger Closs. He has been in contact with me for a period of time. His pension is with OPSEU. He had previously divorced before he retired—the survivor's benefit is where I'm going at with this one. He didn't find out until after he retired that the survivor's portion of his pension must go to his ex-wife, even though both he and his ex-wife had agreed that they would not have a claim on each other's properties. It was, I guess I'll say, a fair settlement of separation and they both agreed that there would be no claim against each other. He finds out afterwards that his survivor's pension must go to his ex-wife, not a new partner or anybody else. He can't change this. I wasn't aware of that part of the pension.

That's what I'm talking about: this labyrinth of details in pensions. Why, when the opportunity arose for this

government to allow people to be better informed, to be more knowledgeable, so that they don't find out years later some minutia, some detail that was never explained or exposed in their pensions, didn't we give them that opportunity to be knowledgeable?

1750

It would certainly help not just me, it wouldn't just help Roger Closs; it would help all of us if our constituents, if the residents of this province had a better understanding of all the contractual details that are within a pension plan. I'm sure we can all agree on that. It would benefit all of us. I know it would certainly alleviate and lessen the strain that people find when they get into these stressful situations of finding out that what they thought was is, not; something different is happening.

Again, going back to this tinkering—we're dealing with, essentially, defined benefit plans, but what of all the 65% to 70% of the people of this province who have no defined contribution or defined benefit plan? What have we done for them? What have we done for those people in this pension reform? The two things that we know that this Liberal government has done is they've added to their tax burden with the HST and they've added to their tax burden with the \$500-million top-up to the pension guarantee fund. We've added more costs onto those people, but what have we done to assist or help them with their pensions, with their retirement days, so that they can have a quality of life and a standard of living beyond their gainfully employed days? What has the Liberal government done for them? It's called a goose egg. That's what 70% of this province got from the Liberal government: zilch, zero, except for these added expenses—added expenses, but no benefits, not even the acceptance or allowance that they can be fully engaged and participate and understand their pensions. They disallowed those sensible amendments.

Hopefully, the PA, the parliamentary assistant, or someone, anybody on the Liberal side—anybody: I ask you to stand up and tell me, tell Roger Closs, tell the people of this province why party politics were so important that you would not allow them to gain insight and knowledge into their pensions, that you wouldn't allow those amendments. I want to see somebody on the other side of this House have the courage and have the conviction to stand up and tell the people of this province why you wouldn't accept it. That is the challenge that I have put out for the members of this Liberal government. Stand up. There are some people watching this; there will be some people watching it. Do yourself a favour and really come good for the people of this province. Show them what you're made of and show them that there is value in having elected people stand up for their interests. That's really what we want to see.

I want you to—actually, go back. Remember what I started off with here?

A good tradesman completes the job. He doesn't work in half measures or half something else, I could say, but that might be unparliamentary.

Interjection: We know what you mean, though.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'm sure the members opposite understand what I mean with that, and I'm sure there are many people out in the public who understand.

But let's have a complete job for once from this Liberal government, a complete job and not have that qualified support, because there are some good things in here. As the member from Simcoe–Grey explained, there are some good elements in here that are going to be a benefit and a help to a very small portion of the residents of this province. So we have to support that because it's the right thing to do. It will address an inadvertent wrongdoing that happened previously with people like the paramedics and people who have transferred employers but really haven't changed jobs. So we will be supporting on that.

But I really do want to see some day this Liberal government reverse the trend they are on and do a good, complete job, so that our support will not be qualified. Our amendments will be accepted and the support will be not qualified.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to address the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. Once again, the member's creative integral content really is amazing. He goes after his friends across the floor with zest and asks a lot of whys, and he doesn't get too many answers, I see.

This is a common theme that I'm seeing that's been created here today, the frustration of the opposition and the third party with the amendments that are constantly shot down in committees. Like I said—I'll reiterate—when I first got here, the two weeks in Parliament, the Premier stood up and said, “Welcome, members. We're all here to work for the betterment of Ontario, work for the people of Ontario.” I was quite impressed with his speech but, as time progressed, it was partisan politics, not listening to other amendments, not even dealing with them. Sometimes I've even been in committee where they don't even read them, don't even know what I'm talking about, and others just don't pay attention. So it's very frustrating for the third party and the opposition to constantly go up against a big wall with no window.

I share the member's frustration. I would just once like to see some constructive acceptance of some of the good amendments that the third party and the opposition bring forward to be addressed and utilized rather than put on the back burner and maybe parts of them used later, but that's always down the road. Instead of dealing with the problem now, it's always down the road: “We may use some of your ideas that we've borrowed”—I like to use the word “borrowed”—“from you.” They borrow them from us and they all of a sudden show up.

I guess that's the way this game's played here. I really don't like the game—

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: To the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington—I'll refer to it as 613. That'll be helpful in that regard.

I really appreciate his comments and those from the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. They are of a like mind. They're both upset that the government doesn't accept all of their amendments. I would suggest that at some point someone who has a longer history in this place than that member or even myself, someone with a long history might some day get up and explain to them how the process works in the context of amendments when governments of all stripes bring motions before committee, and how the government has to be convinced that not only is it just a good amendment, but it really has to be so substantive it's going to really actually improve the outcome of the legislation. I've not seen that yet, and certainly not from the members opposite in their speeches.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. It being close to 6 of the clock—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): You want to finish? Okay. Questions and comments?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

1800

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was hoping you weren't going to cut us off, because there's only a few minutes left.

I understand this is Bill 236, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act. We've heard from all these members that you didn't amend anything, that you wouldn't accept the amendments from the opposition. Now, what's going on over there, again? Do we have to put up with this? The Liberals, again, don't want to take amendments.

This is unfortunate, and I see our good friends from the NDP are even upset with this. You guys, I don't know what you're doing up there. Can't you remember back to when we had the bedwetters' accord, when the NDP and the Liberals were together and used to get everything together? That was back in 1989, I think, you were together. They had a big accord here; it was called the bedwetters' accord, I believe.

Interjection: It was 1987.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: It was 1987. That's when it was; that's right. You would have thought that they would have at least accepted an amendment from the NDP. But not again.

I've been sitting here listening to this conversation, and it bothers people that you won't accept amendments from us. You wonder why nobody gets along with you. They won't accept any amendments. You'd think somebody would. It's just a bit unbelievable.

The only believable thing we can do in this House is hope that the Montreal Canadiens win tomorrow night. I just want to hold this up. We've got a good Montreal sweater here; Jean-Marc Lalonde brought it in. We can all hope that a good team like the Montreal Canadiens will win and go on to win the Stanley Cup, because they deserve it—

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Leafs aren't going to do it.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: The Leafs are maybe going to go on—they'll probably go on to another city somewhere or something like that. Anyway, we all hope that Montreal wins the Stanley Cup.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Essex.

Mr. Bruce Crozier: Since we're going to do these two-minuters, let me give you a quick lesson. You've asked about amendments. I came here in 1993 under an NDP government. I sat on committee, and in opposition we gave what we thought were some very good amendments. They didn't get accepted. Then along came the Mike Harris government. What happened there was that a bill would have second reading, go to committee, and there would be no public hearings and no opposition amendments. I can remember one bill—one bill—that got amended. So that's the story.

Now you're here complaining that there are no amendments? Well, sometimes, I guess we have to believe the same as the NDP and the Tories did: I guess they just weren't good amendments.

Fergie Jenkins told me one time that he was told, "It ain't going to be an easy run," and I guess sometimes it isn't.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to thank the members from Grey-Bruce, Pickering, Essex and Hamilton East for their comments.

Let's keep in mind here that this is a Legislative Assembly, and we are to deal with facts, not just the revisionist history, as we've heard from some members.

We understand that the Liberal Party is not predisposed to accepting amendments. We know that. But when a good, solid, reasonable amendment comes forward that will be beneficial to society, they do have an obligation to advance that.

They do have an obligation to themselves and to their constituents. They have a higher allegiance to our residents and our citizens than they should have to their party. That is really key here: allegiance to the people and to do good for them, not just what's good for the Liberal Party.

That's what we see over on this side: Our allegiance is first and foremost to our constituents, that we represent their concerns, that we will bring forward their concerns, and that we won't do it in half measures or that other half thing that we so often see from the Liberal Party.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being after 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1805.

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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

Chair / Président: Garfield Dunlop
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Robert Bailey
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
Jim Brownell, Kim Craiton
Bob Delaney, Garfield Dunlop
Amrit Mangat, Phil McNeely
John O'Toole
Clerks / Greffiers: William Short (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laura Albanese
Laura Albanese, Wayne Arthurs
Toby Barrett, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Pat Hoy, Norm Miller
Glen R Murray, Charles Sousa
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: David Oraziotti
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Helena Jaczek
Bob Chiarelli, Steve Clark
Helena Jaczek, Kuldip Kular
Dave Levac, Rosario Marchese
Bill Mauro, David Oraziotti
Joyce Savoline
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Laura Albanese, Michael A. Brown
Donna H. Cansfield, M. Aileen Carroll
Howard Hampton, Ernie Hardeman
Lisa MacLeod, Leeanna Pendergast
Jim Wilson
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Leeanna Pendergast
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Ted Chudleigh
Mike Colle, Christine Elliott
Peter Kormos, Reza Moridi
Leeanna Pendergast, Lou Rinaldi
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Yasir Naqvi
Bas Balkissoon, Bob Delaney
Joe Dickson, Sylvia Jones
Amrit Mangat, Norm Miller
Yasir Naqvi, Michael Prue
Mario Sergio
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Peter Shurman
M. Aileen Carroll, France Gélinas
Jerry J. Ouellette, David Ramsay
Liz Sandals, Peter Shurman
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
David Caplan, Kim Craiton
Jeff Leal, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Lou Rinaldi
Tony Ruprecht
Clerks / Greffiers: Trevor Day (pro tem.), Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Jean-Marc Lalonde, Ted McMeekin
Shafiq Qadri, Khalil Ramal
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions / Comité
spécial de la santé mentale et des dépendances**

Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Bas Balkissoon, Christine Elliott
Kevin Daniel Flynn, France Gélinas
Helena Jaczek, Sylvia Jones
Jeff Leal, Liz Sandals
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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