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Monday 4 October 2010

Lundi 4 octobre 2010

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Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 4 October 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 4 octobre 2010

The House met at 1030.

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.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Just before we begin with the introductions, as you know, we are experiencing unseasonably cold weather. The chamber is cool today, so before anyone starts to complain to the Speaker, yes, the heat will be turned on.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Introduction of guests?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I know that 40 seniors are coming from my riding of Mississauga–Erindale. They are not here yet, but they should be here momentarily. I really want to welcome them to the Legislature, and I want to encourage all the members in the Legislature to welcome them as well. They are from the River Grove seniors' club; 40 of them are coming to the Legislature.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Please welcome, in the public galleries, grade 10 students from St. Augustine Catholic High School in Markham.

Mr. Dave Levac: I'd like to introduce, in the gallery to my right, Jane and Rick Mederak, who are the grandparents of Caelan Meggs, our page—big Caelan. I think you see him walking around; he's the big guy.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I take great pleasure introducing Mr. Waqar Gilani, a businessman and community leader, owner of Gilani Fine Clothing as well as Society Fashion, and Mr. Ahmad Shabbir of Best Buy Travel. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Today, we will be celebrating 20 years of German unity, and we're inviting all the MPPs to come out front to raise the German flag.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of page Megan Brian and the member from Essex, we'd like to welcome Sue Brian, Troy Brian and Brock Brian to the galleries today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

On behalf of page Audrey Steele and the member for Sault Ste. Marie, we would like to welcome Wendy Steele, Jim Steele and Evelyn Steele to the members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

On behalf of page Emily Rempel and the member for Kitchener–Conestoga, we'd like to welcome Kathleen

Rempel, Len Rempel and Greg Rempel to the galleries today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the public accounts committee of the Parliament of Ghana, led by the Honourable Kwaku Agyeman-Manu. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests. Welcome to Queen's Park.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today a delegation from the Office of the National Assembly of Vietnam, led by the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Nguyen Quang Thanh. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests to the Legislature. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Premier. In 2003, the self-proclaimed education Premier focused on a legacy of improving student test scores. Seven years later, his focus is on banning chocolate milk in schools. Speaker, how did Premier McGuinty get to be so out of touch?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'll remind the member that we use titles. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to give credit where credit is due, and that's to our teachers, our parents, our principals and, most importantly, our students, who have really applied themselves. I believe that there has been an awakening, and I'd like to think that we gave birth to at least a little bit of that. Globally, in terms of understanding the single most important thing that we can do, the single most important strategy that we can adopt in terms of strengthening our economy is to invest in our people by continuing to invest in our schools and our colleges and universities and apprenticeship programs and the like. I look forward to dealing with more during the course of the supplementaries.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Policy memo 150 was posted on January 15 of this year. It bans scones and danish, as well as crackers, pretzels, popcorn and chocolate milk. According to the ministry, the policy is still in effect. In the 2005 throne speech, Premier McGuinty promised that 75% of students would meet standardized test requirements. Today, students are studying 16 pages of rules and regulations to avoid being rounded up by the classroom police.

Why does Premier McGuinty think he has a more intelligent understanding of what kids should be eating than their parents?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: First of all, I think that it's very important that we remind everyone in this assembly that our students are doing better in school. Test scores have improved; graduation rates have improved as a direct result of our investment in education. Parents have also told us that they want to be sure that when their children attend school, they can access healthy food, and we very much appreciate the support and input they have provided as we've worked toward that. I'm happy to say that children have been able to access chocolate milk in our schools, and that continues to be the case—in whatever size container they would like to purchase.

1040

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Premier McGuinty is so out of touch. He thinks it's okay for six-year-olds to be talking on their BlackBerrys during sex ed classes as long as they're not drinking chocolate milk.

The education quality assurance office reports year after year that students are not meeting provincial targets, so Premier McGuinty has given up and moved on to other priorities in education. Now he wants teachers to hold bake sales on school property.

Why did Premier McGuinty change his priorities from the priorities of Ontario families?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I'm going to tell you about a priority of this government. I know that the folks in the opposition are opposed to this, and I know they are going to cancel it, but we are investing in full-day kindergarten. This is something that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): As the honourable member knows, we do not interrupt question period with points of order.

Minister?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: The opposition has said that full-day kindergarten is a frill. We believe it is an investment in our future. In fact, families across Ontario have told us that this is something they truly value, and they know that students in our schools will benefit from this investment.

So, while we are committed to doing all we can to support students, and certainly their families, we know that the opposition is not there. We are very, very confident that the investments we have made, the fact that test scores have improved, that we have more students graduating, that parents are confident, when they send their children to school, that—

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

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. At one time, Premier McGuinty focused on giving parents more time with their families through a new civic holiday in February.

Today, Premier McGuinty has a “more intelligent understanding” of family time. He's busy telling moms and dads to gather their kids down in the laundry room and do a couple of loads of laundry together on Saturdays.

Premier, how did you get so out of touch with Ontario families?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my honourable colleague and all members of the Legislature of the good news we put out on Friday. We have closed another four coal plants in the province of Ontario. That's the equivalent of taking two million cars off our roads.

I know that the members of the opposition will be very, very interested in what the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment had to say in this regard. They said that coal-fired plants in Ontario “kill nearly 250 Ontarians and make 120,000 ill each year. They emit cancer-causing chemicals such as arsenic, brain poisons such as lead and mercury, and sulphur dioxide....”

So I know that my honourable colleague will want to join us as we continue to work as hard as we can to shut down coal-fired generation in the province of Ontario, the single largest North American initiative—

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The Premier is out of touch; he's out of gas. Had he joined me in Metcalfe this weekend for the 154th annual agricultural fair, he would have heard from people who can't afford his increase in hydro bills. He would have heard from them that they think his trying to tell them to do laundry on Saturdays instead of—spending their time is wrong-headed.

When the Premier used to promise to use technology to improve learning conditions, he meant that “parents will be able to access up-to-date information on class sizes in their school, and across Ontario, through a new class size website.” Today he wants teachers and students to text each other with their BlackBerrys in the classroom.

Premier, are your new priorities part of your “more intelligent understanding” because you're bored or because you're out of touch?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is doing a lot of jumping around, but I think we should stay focused on one subject, and I want to return to the issue of electricity.

As my honourable colleague knows very well, because that party, when in government, sat on its hands, did not build significant new generation, did not add significantly to new transmission—their plan was essentially to put in place diesel-fired generators in our urban cores—we were left with the predicament that we inherited. So we're making tremendous efforts to invest in new

generation and new transmission. We're creating a modern, reliable electricity system. More than that, in the interests of parents—mothers in particular, whom we hear from by the score—we are cleaning up the quality of our air.

I would have thought that the member opposite would find it in her heart at some point in time to say, "Yes, we need to work harder as a society to clean up the quality of the air that our children are breathing." That's why we shut down four more coal—

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: There's one thing he is cleaning out, and that's people's wallets. You're taking their money; they can't afford you anymore.

In 2003, Premier McGuinty told Ontario families that he would use technology to improve health care, government services and democratic institutions. That meant eHealth, a one-stop portal through ServiceOntario and looking at voting online. All of those initiatives have failed, so the Premier has moved on to new priorities. Now he's trying to get Justin Bieber to follow him on Twitter.

The question: Does Premier McGuinty think his new priority, in trying to catch Bieber fever, is more important than his old ones, or is it just time for a change?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My honourable colleague is thrashing about frantically, and it's not something that you really want to watch very closely.

I want to remind my honourable colleague about something else we're doing today. Today, we're opening the world's largest solar farm in Sarnia, Ontario, and I'm very pleased that the MPP for Sarnia-Lambton will be attending that announcement, in full support of those new jobs and the clean air that this is going to help create for the province of Ontario.

I'm also very pleased that the MPP for Haldimand-Norfolk attended our green energy hub announcement, which had been championed so capably by the member for Brant.

I know that there is, at heart, a desire to move ahead with our electricity—

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

LOBBYISTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Ontario families should expect that every single public health care dollar goes into improving front-line care. My question is a simple one: Does the Premier agree?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Yes, I do.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: According to the lobbyist registry, at least 14 hospitals have retained lobbyists. Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital paid StrategyCorp \$35,000 for four months of lobbying. The Premier will know StrategyCorp very, very well. His former prin-

cipal secretary is the chairman, and his former director of research is a senior consultant there.

Why is it that Ontario hospitals feel that they have to turn to well-connected McGuinty government insiders to help them get things done?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. I want to start by making it as clear as I possibly can that it is not okay to use money that is intended for front-line patient care to lobby the government that makes decisions around funding. There is not a hospital CEO in this province who cannot call me directly. That's part of their job—to make sure that government is understanding what their pressures are. So I am very clear that using taxpayer dollars to lobby for more taxpayer dollars is simply not okay.

That's why we have really moved hard to increase accountability and transparency in the health care system. We have really tightened our policies on the acquisition and use of consulting services. There is greater accountability and greater transparency in—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: StrategyCorp was paid \$80,000 by Mississauga's Credit Valley Hospital for lobbying, while Brampton's William Osler Health System paid another lobbyist, the Capital Hill Group, \$77,000 last year. Meanwhile, physiotherapy and dietician services were lost at Credit Valley, and operating room and emergency services were cut at William Osler.

Why are precious health care dollars being diverted to insider lobbyists instead of being used for doctors, for nurses and for front-line care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said in the previous answer, it is not okay with me and it is not okay with our government to use taxpayers' dollars to lobby government—that just doesn't make sense. I am completely supportive of the notion that it is not all right.

1050

We have worked very hard to reduce consulting expenditures in this province. In fact, you might be interested in the record. In 2001-02, the government opposite, when the Conservatives were in power, spent \$656 million on consultants. It is now less than half of that: \$304 million is what was spent on consultants this past year. We are focused on reducing the reliance on consultants, and we are focused on using every dollar we spend on health care to get better care for the people of this province.

LOBBYISTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier, and it's about lobbyists. There are at least 11 more hospitals that have recently retained lobbyists.

Since the McGuinty government refuses to make hospitals subject to freedom-of-information requests, and we're forced to rely on voluntary disclosure, will the Premier shed some light on the matter and reveal how

much money hospitals have wasted on well-connected lobbyists this year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me just take the opportunity, through this first question, to restate, affirm and support what the Minister of Health has just said. It is unacceptable in Ontario today for hospital administration to employ lobbyists to try to influence our government. If they want to talk to us, they should pick up the phone. We are available.

I think there is a very strong consensus among all Ontarians that every single dollar that we invest in health care should, as much as possible, be delivered to front-line services; to doctors, nurses, technologies and diagnostics; to getting wait times down; and to building new hospitals. Those are the kinds of things that we believe in in government.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontario families contribute tens of billions of dollars every single year so that quality health care will be there and available when they need it. But here's what's happening when we play "follow the cash": Families give their hard-earned money to the government, the government gives it to hospitals, and hospitals give it to lobbyists who then talk to the government for them. All the while, ER wait times are getting longer, and front-line health services are vanishing.

Does this make any sense at all to our Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: This is a government that, since we were first elected in 2003, has worked very, very hard to increase transparency and to increase accountability. I think the member opposite might be interested in hearing some of the steps we have taken. Cancer Care Ontario was brought under freedom of information in 2010. Publicly funded universities were brought under FIPPA in 2006. Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation were brought back under FIPPA after they were excluded by the Conservatives in 2005. Local public utilities were brought back under FIPPA in 2004.

The Audit Statute Law Amendment Act, 2004, broadened the powers of the Auditor General so that the Auditor General could review public sector organizations such as hospitals. We've implemented the Personal Health Information Privacy Act in 2004, establishing privacy protection—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Here's how it works: Close advisors to new Premiers leave their jobs and become lobbyists. Then they sell their connections to companies, and now it seems they also sell those connections to publicly funded organizations like hospitals. It's a revolving door that needs to be shut once and for all.

Why won't the Premier put an end to this self-serving insider lobbyist culture by banning hospitals from hiring lobbyists completely?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As both the Premier and I have already said, it is unacceptable for hospitals to hire lobbyists to lobby government. The taxpayers have just

one pocket, and it makes absolutely no sense to use that money for anything other than initiatives that improve patient care.

We have made some tremendous strides forward when it comes to health care in this province. Our wait times are down dramatically. Our access to primary health care is up dramatically. We've invested more in nurses: There are more than 10,000 more nurses working today in this province than when we took office in 2003. We have wrestled with generic drug prices. We have wrestled down brand name drug prices. We have really worked hard to increase the capacity of our health care system. The people of this province know their health care system is far better today than it was in 2003.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is also for the Premier. When Premier McGuinty said he would clean up the environment, he said that he would focus on reducing traffic gridlock and diverting 60% of waste from landfills. But Toronto overtook Los Angeles for last place in commuting times, and the Environmental Commissioner reported that the McGuinty Liberals failed to meet their landfill target. Today he's hired 250 dandelion police to crack down on families who defy his weed killer ban.

Premier, did you create this extra red tape and bureaucracy because you were bored, out of gas, out of touch or all of the above?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm delighted for the question. Since our party formed government some seven years ago, we have made the environment a priority. The good people of Ontario know the contrast between the government that they had before and the government they have today, because we are led by what is widely regarded to be the greenest Premier in North America, and I want to thank him for his leadership.

When we went to the people and said that we needed to have a ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides, people gave us a mandate to do that. We've done that today, and I'm pleased to share with the House that scientists now tell us that there's been an 80% reduction of pesticides getting into our water in this province. That's because people are doing the right thing, and I am convinced that the good people of Ontario want to do the right thing. All we have to do is make sure—

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: Here's the minister everybody in Ontario's always ready to hear from.

Premier McGuinty also used to promise that Ontario families would get the care they need when they need it. In 2003, that meant hiring more doctors and nurses in the north, reducing patient wait times in overcrowded emergency rooms and adding more MRIs. Today, the number of communities without a GP in the north has grown. The Sudbury hospital strategy to reduce ER wait times is to

stuff patients in a bathroom, and a pregnant dog jumped the queue to get an ultrasound at Peterborough Regional Health Centre, where there's a demonstration today, by the way.

Does Premier McGuinty understand that because he's changed, Ontario families are looking for change?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment. I just remind the honourable member that his question and his supplementary need to relate. The question was on environment and the supplementary was on health care. I heard no connection between the two, and with that, I'm going to move to the next question.

Interjection: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member knows that we deal with the points of order following question period.

RETIREMENT HOMES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre désignée aux personnes âgées. The Toronto Star exposé on abuse and neglect in retirement homes has shocked Ontarians. Sadly, the Star's finding came as little surprise to me and to dozens of groups who have asked for regulation of the retirement home system and who have been sounding the alarm since the retirement home bill was introduced. The government knew this legislation was deeply flawed, yet in spite of the advice from many groups, which translated into over 100 amendments from the NDP, the McGuinty government voted them down and passed this reckless legislation. Now we see the devastating impact. Will the minister admit that her government made a deadly mistake that needs immediate correction?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: I appreciate the question. I have to say that when I read the Toronto Star article, I too was deeply saddened and shocked by what I read. The safety and the well-being of Ontario seniors is an extremely important priority for this government—always has been and always will be. That is why we have a new piece of legislation called the Retirement Homes Act. The Retirement Homes Act is currently in regulations: we are reviewing the regulations, we're putting them together and we're speaking with the experts. In fact, we're going to keep moving forward on this regulation. It is an important piece for Ontario seniors and we're going to keep moving forward.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The minister has to realize that even once the bill is fully implemented, it won't change anything, because what you have set up is a self-regulated industry with no transparency, no safeguards and no regulation of care.

On May 17, after your government voted down all of the NDP amendments, I told your predecessor, "What we are doing here today is terrible.... The disaster stories, the headlines, will hit us within weeks of this bill becoming law in Ontario." And this is what we're facing today.

The minister has read the headlines; I hope she saw the video. Will the minister commit to reopening this flawed legislation before more seniors suffer from terrible abuse and neglect? It needs to be changed.

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: The unfortunate fact is that for 20 years, we've been talking about this. This is the government that's finally doing something about it.

What we know—and I hear what the member is saying—is that we have in our grasp the ability to regulate the retirement homes industry. That's what we have. She wants to throw it away. We're not doing that. We're going to move forward, we're going to get this act done, and we're going to hire the right people to manage the regulatory authority.

In fact, an important part of this regulation is that the care and safety standards will be right across the board. So retirement homes will have to adhere to these care and safety standards. It's very important. They include a written policy to promote zero tolerance of abuse and neglect. It includes programs to prevent and control—

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

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is for the same member, but as Minister of Revenue. October is Small Business Month. As you well know, small business is the lifeline of this province. Small business owners in my community of Mississauga South work hard every day to make a life for themselves and to help the economy flourish. And I know that prior to her work in government, the Minister of Revenue was a small business owner.

While in my riding, I have heard some misinformation regarding the impact of the HST on businesses, particularly small business. Can the minister tell the House what impact the HST is having on small businesses in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: I thank the member from Mississauga South for the question. October is Small Business Month, so I would like to congratulate all those small businesses in our province who are doing such an incredible job.

He's right: I was a small business owner before coming into politics. One thing I remember is, I used to pay the GST all the time and I would get it back, but I would pay the PST and I would never get it back. That would change. And if I was still a small business owner, still selling sauce, I would be able to hire somebody so that they can promote my product even more.

We're doing a lot for small businesses. I'm proud of this government and our HST.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Many small business owners want to focus more on growing their business. Our government's Open Ontario plan helps businesses do just that by cutting red tape and reducing taxes. These efforts are vitally important as small businesses create jobs for

people all across this province. They tell me that such initiatives would improve their competitiveness and productivity.

For example, one of my constituents in the members' gallery owns Fine Clothing Co., a manufacturer and wholesaler of women's wear. Just today, he was telling me how his company has benefited from the reduction in business taxes and the flow-through savings of HST. In fact, this is one of his best years. He has recently expanded to 36 stores in Ontario alone under Gilani Society Fashion, which also means he has been hiring more people; they're now up to 200 on staff.

Can the minister provide more information on how the tax reforms will work for small businesses across this province?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thank you to the member. What are we doing for small businesses? We are lowering taxes. That's what we're doing for small businesses.

We have a plan called the Open Ontario plan. It's a plan that, within 10 years, will cut taxes and also create 600,000 new jobs for the province of Ontario.

Through the HST, small businesses will now be reimbursed for the provincial tax that they pay on their business inputs. In fact, that will bring their costs down. And to support small businesses, Ontario will also provide \$400 million in transitional assistance.

It's a good time to be a small business owner. Now they're getting it back; they're getting the taxes back. We're very, very proud of this.

RETIREMENT HOMES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is to the Premier. Premier McGuinty has said in the past that he would guarantee seniors would be treated with respect and dignity. Today, it means urine-stained retirement homes that leave unbathed and incapacitated residents stranded for half an hour in dirty bathrooms, lying prone on the floor and sitting in soiled adult diapers for hours. Residents supply their own toilet paper. Meals are hot dogs, macaroni and cheese and cold cuts.

If this is Premier McGuinty's more intelligent understanding of respect and dignity for seniors, could he please explain it to the rest of us?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister Responsible for Seniors.

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: I thank the member for the question and I also thank the Progressive Conservatives for supporting our legislation, because unfortunately not everybody in the House did support this legislation. I hope that their support will continue.

I was very saddened and shocked by the conditions described in the Toronto Star. I want to thank the Star for bringing the attention of all Ontarians to this important issue. The safety and well-being of Ontario's seniors is one of our top priorities, and we will make sure that we help our seniors.

The Retirement Homes Act puts in place many things. One of the things that it does put in place is a standard of

care and safety, and I will speak to it in my supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The Retirement Homes Act does very little. It just scratches the surface of what needs to be done. We need to do a lot better.

In 2008, Premier McGuinty said we must do "a better job of caring for the elderly." Now, the Minister of Health says that worrying about this keeps her up at night. Well, families who wait years and years to get their loved ones into a care facility need answers from this government, not a plea for sympathy.

We in the PC caucus have called for a comprehensive review of seniors' living conditions in these homes. My question to the Premier is, will you agree to such a review?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: What I'd like to say to the member is that what we have is a strong piece of legislation. We are moving forward; we're going to continue moving forward on this.

Part of this legislation is about care and safety standards. It's under the Retirement Homes Act: Every home will be required to comply with standards for each care service offered. The safety standards will include a written policy to promote zero tolerance of abuse and neglect. It's about programs to prevent and control infection, staff screening and training, and requirements for a safety plan. The regulatory authority will conduct inspections and investigations to enforce compliance with care and safety standards.

We have never legislated retirement homes. We're doing that now with this strong piece of legislation—

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

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Premier. Five NDP caucus members, including myself, are supporting the Put Food in the Budget campaign and will live on one bag of food-bank food for the week. We are doing this to understand the hardship faced by thousands of Ontarians who have to survive on social assistance rates as low as \$2 a day. Even government members agree that rates are inadequate.

Will the Premier join us this week and live on a food-bank diet to better understand the utter inadequacy of social assistance rates in this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to stand and speak to this issue and I was pleased to stand beside my Premier last week as we launched the campaign at Daily Bread Food Bank for their Thanksgiving food drive. I congratulate the Daily Bread Food Bank, which has worked in my home community for many, many years.

We're absolutely committed to combating poverty in Ontario. We thank all the community partners, the poverty reduction advocates and everyone who continues to

raise issues. I've had an opportunity myself to go on to the Do the Math website. What I say to the member opposite is that it highlights the need for the work that our government has been doing already through our poverty reduction strategy.

We took a bold step. We introduced the poverty reduction strategy, where we outlined a plan to reduce the number of kids living in poverty by 25% by 2013. We have a plan and the plan is working despite these tough economic times and despite the lack of support from the—

1110

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I had asked the Premier whether he'd go on the diet. Perhaps the minister can answer that, too.

Social assistance rates have fallen by about 30% since 1994. Recipients are forced to rely on food bank handouts to try to get through the month, yet the McGuinty government refuses to acknowledge that it is impossible to live a healthy life on their inadequate social assistance rates. The government provides a child benefit, but cuts the special diet allowance and claws back basic assistance so recipients are never, never better off.

Why won't this minister, this Premier and the cabinet join me and my colleagues and live on a welfare diet for just one week?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: On this side of the House, we're about taking positive action steps to help Ontarians living in poverty. On the opposite side of the House, they're a lot of talk.

We accelerated the phase-in of the OCB two full years ahead of schedule and they voted against it. We introduced full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds. We've ensured tax fairness for low-income families, removing 90,000 low-income Ontarians off the tax rolls, and they voted against it. They voted against our six increases to social assistance rates. They voted against our creation of 22,000 new affordable child care spaces. They voted against stabilizing the rent bank. They voted against raising the minimum wage. They voted against 90,000 low-income Ontarians off the tax rolls.

We're taking positive steps. We have a strong plan. We're committed to reducing child poverty in this province. We take steps every day, and we'd like to see actual support from the party opposite—

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

TORONTO WATERFRONT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. The Toronto waterfront has long been an eyesore in our province's capital. Many of the factories that once employed thousands of Torontonians on the Toronto waterfront have closed and new communities and employers didn't spring up overnight to take their place. Over the summer, though, I noticed that there was

a lot of work underway on the Toronto waterfront. For example, at the foot of Sherbourne and Lower Jarvis, construction work is sometimes an eyesore too, but I trust it's also a sign of better things to come.

Now, I know the government has committed \$500 million in funding to the waterfront revitalization initiative. My question to the minister is as follows: What has been accomplished with this money so far?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The Toronto waterfront initiative is a giant step towards making Toronto a more livable city. With our federal and municipal partners, it is the largest urban development project in North America.

The construction the member has noticed is on the East Bayfront, which is now under development. The parking lot at Lower Jarvis has become the beautiful Canada's Sugar Beach. Under construction nearby is George Brown College's health sciences centre. Also nearby, Sherbourne Common is the first park in Canada to integrate an ultraviolet stormwater treatment system into its design.

These projects on the East Bayfront are improving Torontonians' quality of life and making the city's new blue edge a great place to live, work and play.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: It's great to see the Toronto waterfront being transformed after being underutilized for such a long time. Since I am an enthusiastic bicyclist, I'm personally excited by these projects at Sugar Beach and the park at the East Bayfront.

Now, I know that many of my constituents will work on the revitalized waterfront and will enjoy visiting it—just like we are here. Surely, though, the projects you mentioned cannot account for the \$500 million the government has dedicated to this renewal project. So, Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what other work is under way that we should know about?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: In the West Don Lands, Waterfront Toronto is cleaning up a polluted brownfield and replacing it with a vibrant new community in the heart of the city. The Don River Park, plus more than 1,000 units of housing, including 240 units of affordable housing, are already under construction. This is smart growth, a better alternative to urban sprawl. Better yet, the West Don Lands are particularly exciting because they will be home to the Pan Am Games' athletes' village in 2015.

There has also been progress on the central waterfront; for example, the opening of the wave decks that have already captured the imagination of so many Torontonians and tourists. I urge all members to visit the waterfront and see the tremendous transformation that's taking place, improving the quality of life for Torontonians for decades to come.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. About five months ago, the minister attended a local council meeting in Wellington county to discuss the Green Energy Act, including the approvals process for wind farm proposals. There, according to two

published reports in two local community papers—the Wellington Advertiser and the Drayton Community News, in their May 21 editions—he stated that if municipalities refused to sign off on the wind applications, the applications would not be approved.

Now that he's the Minister of the Environment, the head of the ministry which reviews the wind farm applications, is he prepared to repeat the same statement in the House this morning?

Hon. John Wilkinson: We are in the process, of course, of eliminating dirty coal-fired generation in the province of Ontario—the first in North America. We are making investments in green renewable energy across this province and leading North America in that regard.

For a project in regard to wind development to be approved by the Ministry of the Environment, it needs to have received the approval for a renewable energy approval. That is new in the province of Ontario and was contained in the Green Energy and Green Economy Act that we passed in this House. One of the requirements is that a proponent must submit a complete application, and that includes a review and a consultation with the municipality, a schedule that is attached to that application. We will, of course, look at any approval which is complete. We will not look at—

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: Clearly, the minister was saying something different five months ago than he's saying today in this House.

The truth is, this government's Green Energy Act has stripped municipal councils of their local decision-making authority, pitted neighbour against neighbour in rural Ontario, and created legitimate questions about the long-term cost of electricity even as hydro bills are skyrocketing today. Here we have a minister of the crown, at a public meeting in his riding, stating that municipalities have a de facto veto over wind farm applications.

The minister led his constituents to believe that municipal councils can stop the wind farms from being built. Will he now admit and acknowledge that he was wrong to do so?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'll try to answer the question out of respect for my colleague; we share Wellington county.

I'll say yet again: For a wind turbine project to be approved in the province of Ontario by the Ministry of the Environment, the proponent must submit a complete application. That is the law. Under the law, one of the requirements is that the municipality has to be consulted. There also have to be public consultations. As well, in the consultations, it is important that the municipality has to complete a schedule that says that all of the issues in regard to the municipality have been addressed.

I'll say yet again: There will not be an approval of a renewable energy approval in this province of Ontario unless an application is complete. The requirements in regard to the municipalities are very clear, and those standards must be met in the province of Ontario.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. On Friday, US Steel announced that it was shutting down its Hamilton blast furnaces indefinitely. This follows the closure of the blast furnace that took place for much of 2009.

US Steel has not hesitated to take assistance from the people of this province. When will this government finally show a little backbone and stand up for the families who are taking a hit?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the question. I want to say at the outset that, first and foremost, we feel for the workers and their families who have been affected by this terrible development. I know that the Minister of Economic Development was, in fact, working with the company involved to see if there's anything at all that we might be able to do together.

We have found ways in the past, I am proud to say, to work with the city of Hamilton and the people of Hamilton. We will continue to look for opportunities in the future.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is the second US Steel shutdown in just two years. Starting and stopping a blast furnace takes years off of its lifespan—they're made to run non-stop—and all of this for a company that accepted \$150 million from the Ontario government in 2006 and made job commitments to the federal government that it admits it has not honoured.

When will the government finally say no to the bullying tactics of this arrogant multinational corporation—in fact, all multinational corporations—and stand up for Ontario workers?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to say that, again, our responsibility today is to work with those who have lost their jobs, should that prove, in fact, to be the final decision that the company makes. We have not given up entirely in that scope. Should that be the case, then we will work with them to provide them with training opportunities.

I also want to say, again, that I want to confirm our continuing commitment to the people of Hamilton generally. We've been there in the past. We partnered with ArcelorMittal Dofasco to upgrade their steel production process. We're very excited about the opportunities both in jobs and the long-term legacy projects we'll put in place through the Pan Am Games. We're talking millions and millions of dollars in new sporting infrastructure.

But beyond that, this is not a good day for those families. We understand that, we regret that and we'll continue to look for ways to work with the people of Hamilton and help them build a brighter future.

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. We all know how important

it is to maintain our health, but we often forget that bad oral health can play a big part in one's overall health through such conditions as gum disease and cavities. These problems may also exacerbate serious conditions such as diabetes and respiratory diseases. Untreated cavities can also be painful and lead to serious infections.

It is so important for our kids to learn early to maintain their oral health so that they will live healthy lives well into adulthood. Dental work is often expensive and not always the number one priority for low-income families that are struggling to make ends meet.

Could the minister please tell this House what this government is doing to help our vulnerable children get access to important dental care early in life?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member from Oak Ridges–Markham, who certainly has a deep understanding of public health issues.

Last week, I was very happy to launch a new program in this province called Healthy Smiles Ontario. It means that eligible children aged 17 and under will have access to comprehensive dental care. One hundred and thirty thousand kids throughout this province will benefit from healthy smiles. These kids will have access to regular checkups. They'll be able to get X-rays and cleanings, and they'll be able to get cavities filled before they become a serious problem for these kids.

There are a lot of parents out there who are struggling to make ends meet and to provide the best care possible for their kids. Healthy Smiles Ontario is going to help them. It means that kids will—

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

Ms. Helena Jaczek: The Healthy Smiles program focuses on children and youth. I've been getting questions from my constituents in Oak Ridges–Markham who want to know how this program fits into our province's poverty reduction strategy, which is concerned with reducing the number of children and youth living in poverty by 25% in five years. Can you please tell this House and my constituents how this program helps us achieve our goal?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm very pleased to have a chance to speak about how this Healthy Smiles program fits within a comprehensive strategy on poverty reduction.

I was pleased to stand at LAMP Community Health Centre last week and make another announcement about this program. On that day, we met a little boy named Luka, who was in for emergency dental care. With the Healthy Smiles program, Luka's mom would be able to have him come in for preventive care—cleaning, treatment—so that he would be able to have that care before it was an emergency.

This program builds upon the \$1,100 per child of the OCB, the \$63.5-million investment in child care and the 520,000 kids who now get a healthy breakfast or a healthy snack. All of these pieces are part of our compre-

hensive strategy to reduce child poverty in this province. This is another important move to help families be able to help their kids so that they can have the best possible outcomes for their kids, which is exactly what they want.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Premier. Sue Lambier of Sarnia has provided daily support for her son Michael for the past 20 years. Michael has cystic fibrosis and has no control of his arms and legs. He needs help with all his daily needs.

Sue was hospitalized last year and because she has no supports for Michael, he was hospitalized as well—for three months. Premier, this is no way for Sue and Michael to live. One hundred and eight people are currently on a wait-list for residential services in Lambton county. When can Sue Lambier expect your government to provide services for her family?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this issue. I simply want to say that helping families who are in these circumstances is something that's of critical importance to the Minister of Community and Social Services. As a mother myself, I can appreciate the challenges that exist for this family. We don't underestimate for a moment the issues that are being raised here, and I'd be happy to raise them with the Minister of Community and Social Services.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: We don't get to choose which questions we answer. That was a Comsoc ministry question. I want to redirect it back to the Premier.

Sue Lambier doesn't want to know what you haven't done. She wants to know what you will do. In Sarnia–Lambton there are 470 families waiting for supports. Backtracking on your promise to increase 2% to service agencies will mean even more in reduced services.

Sue has been turned down for both Passport funding and is waiting for residential support. Just so the Minister of Children and Youth knows, that's Comsoc too.

Minister, when are you going to start helping families like Sue Lambier's? She just wants to ensure her son is taken care of when she is no longer able to.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: As any parent knows, a child is a child is a child, no matter what their age. We are proud on this side of the House to stand side by side with families responding to challenging circumstances. I'm very proud on this side of the House that, since 2003-04, we have committed almost \$176 million in new funding to help over 2,700 adults with developmental disabilities. That's why our government initiated the Passport program and invested \$31 million to help 2,500 young adults make the transition.

Some \$99 million was invested in special services at home. We know that challenges for families across this province are very serious. That's why myself, the Minis-

ter of Community and Social Services, the Minister of Health and everyone on this side of the House works in partnership to support—

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Mrs. S is a senior from Fort Frances and she currently has a respite care bed at Raincrest Home for the Aged in Fort Frances. Two weeks ago, she received a letter from the North West Community Care Access Centre, telling her that a long-term-care bed is open to her in Terrace Bay. Terrace Bay is 550 kilometres, or seven hours, away from Fort Frances where her family and friends reside.

My question is this: Is this the McGuinty Liberals' idea of quality long-term care for Ontario seniors? Send them 550 kilometres—seven hours—away from their family and friends?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Of course not. What I will do is undertake to look into this particular case. I do recall that some time ago the member opposite brought forward a case. When we actually looked into it, we discovered that the story was slightly different. So what I will do is undertake again to look into this particular case.

1130

But of course, people who are in long-term care need to be close to the people who love them—their family members, their friends, their community. So I will undertake to look at this particular case.

As we are working to build capacity in long-term care, as we are looking to strengthen community supports so that people don't have to go into long-term care, our focus is very much on services for the frailest and the seniors in our community. We will continue with that work and, as I say, I will happily look into this particular case.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The reality of this comes down to the government saying, "This isn't happening," but people continue to get these letters. People continue to be told, "If you want a long-term-care bed, you go 300 kilometres, you go 550 kilometres."

The McGuinty government tells one story here in question period, but then when seniors are desperate they get quite another message from officialdom.

I simply want to ask the minister this—550 kilometres is the same as the distance from Toronto to Montreal. I don't think the minister would tell people in Toronto, "If you want a long-term-care bed, go to Montreal." I don't think you would. The really sad part is, the local district service board has put forward a number of proposals for supportive housing, but the North West LHIN and the North West Community Care Access Centre—

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Actually, I completely agree with the member. It is not okay that a person who's in a long-term-care home should be asked to move far away from friends and family. I will undertake to look into this particular situation.

We have a plan when it comes to long-term care and we are acting on that plan. We have opened over 8,000 new long-term-care beds. Just on the weekend, we opened a new long-term-care home in my community of London. We have plans to open almost 1,700 more beds across the province going forward. When it comes to long-term care, we have made enormous investments. We are spending now over \$1 billion more than when we were elected.

We know there's more work to do and we have a plan to get that work done. The member opposite has no plan when it comes to long-term care and, in fact, the initiatives that they are proposing would actually hurt the people who they are pretending to stand up for.

TOURISM

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Tourism and Culture. Minister, over the summer I had the opportunity to attend several festivals in Guelph. Festivals and events are great ways to attract tourists while showcasing what our community has to offer. Several weekends ago, I was able to participate in the Guelph Jazz Festival, which, along with the Hillside Festival in Guelph, has greatly appreciated the support Celebrate Ontario has provided to them. The Celebrate Ontario funding has enabled both festivals to draw in audiences from a wider market and encourage tourism to my riding.

Speaker, through you to the minister, what is this government doing to foster and promote festivals and events across this province for all Ontarians to enjoy?

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member from Guelph for her question.

Investment in our hundreds of festivals and events across the province are, needless to say, very important. Festivals and events like the Guelph Jazz Festival are a key part of the tourism industry. They are powerful economic drivers for many communities across the province. They attract visitors from near and far, filling our hotel rooms and our local restaurants and stimulating our economy. This is why I am so proud that this year, our government is investing \$20 million to support festivals across Ontario through our Celebrate Ontario plan come 2011.

Celebrate Ontario 2011 supports the promise of the Open Ontario plan to strengthen our economy—

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: This Celebrate Ontario program is vital to the existence of small, local festivals. I understand that the program helps festivals to offer new activities, reach new audiences and generate more economic activity in their communities. For example, the Guelph Jazz Festival was able to create a new Nuit Blanche event

using the Celebrate Ontario funding this year, a very important component to ensuring that visitors and residents have new reasons to travel across our great province each year.

In our community, we have a number of festivals that vary significantly in size, audience and capacity. Some have approached my constituency office regarding funding for the upcoming year. Would all festivals be eligible for Celebrate Ontario 2011, and where can my constituents get—

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

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you again for the question. This year, our government launched an enhanced Celebrate Ontario program to increase the size, the reach and the impact of festivals and events across the province. I would like to encourage those interested to visit our website, www.ontario.ca/celebrateontario, for more details. The website is very informative, providing application guidelines, contact information for regional advisers and answers to frequently asked questions, among many other things.

Since 2007, this government has invested over \$37 million—let me repeat: \$37 million—to support over 500 festivals across Ontario, and we look forward to seeing that number increase come 2011.

LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

In Ontario today, there are many Ontarians who lack the basic literacy, numeracy and essential skills to get a job. These are necessary if we are to have a thriving economy.

I ask you today, Minister: Are you prepared to continue to make permanent the \$45 million for literacy services and training which ends with your 2010-11 fiscal year, or are you going to allow these people to not receive funding and go back to funding for the 1997 levels?

Hon. John Milloy: I welcome the question from my colleague, and I suspect what may have prompted it is the presence of the Ontario Literacy Coalition here at Queen's Park. I know that members on all sides of the House want to welcome them here to Queen's Park and congratulate them for their good work.

I've been very proud of the additional \$90 million that our government has invested in literacy programming over the last two years, which has allowed 13,000 more learners to come forward. The honourable member is aware that part of that funding came from the federal government, and we continue to call on Ottawa to maintain funding as we still struggle with the outcome of the recession.

As minister, I want to very publicly pledge that we're going to continue to work with groups like the Ontario Literacy Coalition to make sure that they have the resources they need to continue their excellent work.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. John Yakabuski: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Earlier today, to a question from the member from Thornhill—the question was directed at the Premier. I'm just going to read the opening part of the first part of the question: "When Premier McGuinty said he would clean up the environment, he said that he would focus on reducing traffic gridlock"—transportation—"and diverting 60% of waste from landfills"—the environment.

The member from Thornhill was asking a question directly to the Premier, and the point of the question was to act as an indictment on the record of this Premier and his government. It was directed to the Premier. In the supplementary, in keeping completely with the tone of the question, he spoke then of questions more pertinent to the failures of the McGuinty government in the health ministry.

Speaker, at the end of the question, you ruled it out of order and told the Premier he didn't have to answer that question.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Halton will withdraw the comment he just made.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I withdraw.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Speaker, my request to you is that—I would ask you to review that decision on your part and to rule that, in fact, the question was in order and that subsequent questions of that nature should be considered to be in order as well.

1140

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Welland on the same point of order.

Mr. Peter Kormos: If I may, and I'm very mindful of standing order 38(a), as I join this commentary, but I suggest that we need your assistance. The Speaker has a very difficult job, especially during question period, when the process is rapid fire and the Speaker has to make judgment calls promptly. We respect that and we understand. As a matter of fact, we encourage the Speaker to make those judgment calls.

However, I think my concern—and I make reference to 37(c), which is of course the rule regarding supplementary questions. You'll note, because I've referred also to the federal standing orders—interestingly, their rule concerning questions is the same as ours, standing order 37, but they have no parallel to 37(c). In other words, the standing orders of the federal Parliament do not regulate supplementary questions. So the regulation of supplementary questions has developed through common law, if you will: Speakers' rulings.

I refer to Bosc and O'Brien, in particular pages 506-507:

"Members may seek to clarify the answer to a question or solicit further information through the use of supplementary questions....

"In the past, Speakers have used their discretion to insist that a supplementary question be on the same subject

and as a general rule be asked of the same minister.” That’s the same-subject rule and the same-minister rule.

But then, further—and again, this isn’t pursuant to federal standing orders, this is the common law developed in the federal Parliament: “As a supplementary question is meant to flow from or be based upon the information given to the House in the response of the minister or parliamentary secretary to the initial or preceding question”—that is, in some respects, what’s codified in 37(c), which is that the supplementary question must arise out of the minister’s reply to an oral question, which is somewhat narrower than the broader federal common law rule about the same minister and “be related to.”

Why I rise, Sir, is not to question your ruling in any way, shape or form, but I rise because you’ve heard me so many times call upon you to apply standing order 37 in its entirety in a far more rigorous manner, in a far more rigid manner. With respect, I think it would be helpful to all of us that if 37—especially 37(a), as well as 37(c), the standing order subsection that relates to supplementaries—were applied rigorously, we’d all be in a better position; we’d all be more disciplined about the questions we ask. It would ensure that the questions asked, not only by opposition members but by government backbenchers, be of a public interest and be urgent matters—because that’s the standard—that there not be debate in the course of asking a question, and that there not be lengthy preambles and no information other than what is necessary to make the question relevant or meaningful.

So, with respect, I submit to you that if we had a more rigid application across the board of 37(a) and 37(c), then all of us would be in a better position to comply with those standing orders, we’d have a more disciplined question period, and there would be fewer grey areas about which we have these little—this a minute controversy; the world will not end as a result of the Speaker’s ruling today. But we’ll avoid these types of conflicts by knowing what the rules are and knowing that they’re going to be applied rigidly, rigorously and firmly.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader on the same point of order.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I would note that the member from Welland did refer to 38(a), that “the Speaker’s rulings relating to oral questions are not debatable,” and having given a polite nod to 38(a), he went on to debate the issue, which he’s wont to do. He’s had, actually, a hankering to debate 37(a) for quite some time, so we appreciate your input on 37(a), which is completely irrelevant to the point of order made by the House leader for the official opposition. But we appreciate the input.

The official opposition House leader has raised a question about a supplementary question that was placed earlier today. I would note that the answer to the concern raised by the House leader for the official opposition is in 37(c): “In the discretion of the Speaker, a reasonable number of supplementary questions arising out of the minister’s reply to an oral question may be asked by any members.” So it would have to stem from the minister’s

reply. In this case, the member for Thornhill asked a question dealing with the environment. The response was on the environment. He then got up and asked a supplementary dealing simply with health, which has nothing to do with the initial question nor with the reply—

Interjections.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: Mr. Speaker, we gave the opposition the courtesy of listening to their submissions on this point of order, and I would respectfully request that they do the same.

Standing order 37(c) is very clear: The supplementary has to stem from the minister’s reply. In this case, the question did not in any way stem from the minister’s reply nor to the original question, and I believe your ruling in this case was appropriate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This is a serious issue, and I want to thank the honourable member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the member from Welland and the government House leader for their comments.

I think everyone in the chamber knows that the Speaker does try to be as lenient as possible when it comes to question period. The general rule—there were some comments made by the member from Welland on the general rule being applied and interpreted by many Speakers—is clear: The supplementary question should not only have a connection to the original question, but should also flow from that question that was provided.

I did listen today very carefully, as I endeavour to do every day—to listen carefully—to both the member’s original question and the response, and the supplementary as well. I heard the original question and I heard the answer, and the ultimate question—not the preamble—in my mind related to environmental policy. As I listened to the answer and then to the supplementary question, the focus changed to health policy. Yes, there may have been comments in the preamble to the question, but the question itself, in my mind, related to health policy. The challenge for the Speaker in that situation is to discern a connection between the two. To be in order, a supplementary question has to have some relevance to the main question and flow from the response.

As I said, I do attempt to give as much leeway as possible. I will comment on this aspect of standing order 37. I—and we’ve talked about this before—have read a great deal of Hansard. I have read Hansard from when the NDP was in government, I have read Hansard from when the Conservatives were in government, I have read Hansard with the current Liberal government and previous Liberal governments, and I can tell you that every Speaker has been challenged with government questions. I can read you rulings that you may think were coming from an opposition member today, and it’s actually comments that a government member sitting in this House today has made. I think all members have had frustrations with government questions, as do I. There were a couple of occasions today where they brought it back but, again, this is the challenge of dealing with some of the pre-

amble. The preamble starts to go all over the board, and then it comes back to a question.

I would just ask all members to be cognizant when they are drafting their questions that they also make sure that they are listening very clearly to the responses that come from the minister. But I also lay down the challenge, particularly to the government side, to keep in mind standing order 37, and I will endeavour to do my best.

I took exception to a comment that was made earlier. I am very cognizant of the role that the Speaker plays in doing so in an unbiased manner. I have endeavoured to do that for the past three years, and I can assure you that as long as I continue as Speaker, I will be doing so in an unbiased manner.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I too would like to seek your assistance. Earlier today, in response to a question by the member from Whitby–Oshawa, the education minister—while I'm delighted she suggested we would form government—knowingly indicated in this House something that was not true. I would ask that you ask her to withdraw that incorrect information.

In the future, I think that there's a role for you to play, if I might say so, humbly, to ensure that ministers don't erroneously or intentionally mislead this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the honourable member for her point of order. It is again another challenge for the Speaker to deal with the veracity of comments that may be made in the cut and thrust of question period, but also for the Speaker to deal with the factual correctness of comments that do get made in this House. I would just remind all members that they should endeavour that, to the best of their ability and to the best of their knowledge, they are ensuring that comments that are made in this House are factual.

If the honourable minister in question feels that a withdrawal should be made, I certainly would welcome that.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm seeking your assistance on an issue that came up today in question period. The member from Kenora–Rainy River asked me a question regarding a constituent who was being told to move from Fort Frances to a long-term-care home in Terrace Bay. The member did provide me with the letter that this constituent received, and indeed, it has nothing—it absolutely does not make that suggestion. If I may, it's a very short letter. The letter reads—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): My response to the minister is going to be the same as my response to the member from Nepean–Carleton. I trust that all members, in either formulating a question, formulating an answer, or in response or in comment made during debate in this House, are going to ensure that information is of a factual nature. I trust that all members are going to do so. For me to have detailed, minute knowledge of every issue going on in the province is not possible.

I would just remind all members that at any time that they're coming before this House, the information should be based on good, solid facts.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Beaches–East York has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Children and Youth Services. This matter will be debated tomorrow at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Wellington–Halton Hills has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of the Environment. This matter will be debated tomorrow at 6 p.m.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1153 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I am very delighted to introduce to the Legislature on this 20th anniversary of German unity a number of German presidents of associations and the consul general of the Federal Republic of Germany, Sabine Sparwasser. She's here with us today. The president of the German World Congress, Karl Ruppert, is here with us. So is Mr. Frank Danner from the Hansa club from Brampton and the president of the Historical Society of Mecklenburg Upper Canada, Mr. Chris Klein. And there are some others. Welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Welcome to Queen's Park.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to acknowledge National Mental Health Week.

I asked to be a member of the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions because I knew that people in my riding of Dufferin–Caledon were struggling to get mental health assessments, let alone treatments, and they were finding closed doors and long wait-lists.

Mental health and addiction issues are the second-leading cause of disability and premature death in Canadians. It is a serious health issue that receives little recognition or attention. That is why in our report we presented 23 recommendations based on consensus that we believe can move Ontario in the right direction. I was pleased to see that the committee's report received overwhelming support from the mental health and addiction organizations across the province the same day it was released.

I would like to thank the Ontario division of the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Ontario Federation of Community Mental Health and Addictions Programs and the Ontario Peer Development Initiative for supporting the work of our committee.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize the many individuals, volunteers and organizations in Ontario who are doing excellent work in the field of mental health.

I also want to continue working with all members of the provincial Parliament to implement the select committee's work. I encourage you to continue the dialogue about mental health and addictions in our community.

EVENTS IN MISSISSAUGA SOUTH

Mr. Charles Sousa: It was another spectacular summer on Mississauga's waterfront. Every year, south Mississauga celebrates the warm weather with a number of outstanding festivals.

The Mississauga Waterfront Festival kicked off the season in mid-June with live music and entertainment for the whole family. The festival also gives back to the community through its Sponsor a Child program. This year, the organization gave free admission to over 5,000 children from deserving families.

On Canada Day, thousands gathered to celebrate Paint the Town Red at the Port Credit Memorial Park on the shores of the Credit River. The party featured an extraordinary Lakeshore Road parade, followed by a street-sized cake-cutting and a spectacular fireworks display to top off the evening.

This year's many events were made all the more special as it also marks the 175th anniversary of the village of Port Credit. As part of the anniversary, a number of heritage and garden displays have been featured, a time capsule was prepared, theme songs were written and fabulous art competitions continue.

On July 24, our team was proud to host a community barbecue at the Port Credit Harbour Marina. Despite the rain, over 2000 people came out to enjoy delicious halal foods, cotton candy, live bands, face painting and carnival rides for the kids.

In August, the Port Credit BIA's Busker Fest was back on the village streets. Performers came from all over the world to entertain and amaze the community.

To finish off the summer with a big bang, the waterfront hosted the 12th annual Southside Shuffle Blues and Jazz Festival. This year, I'm pleased to say that the festival received a \$75,000 grant from Celebrate Ontario. These funds help attract visitors from all across Canada and the United States to Mississauga's beautiful lakeside villages.

Of course, these events don't just happen on their own. They are the result of countless hours of hard work by organizers and volunteers, and the generous support of sponsors. To all who made these tremendous events possible, thank you. We look forward to seeing you all on Mississauga's waterfront again next year.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. John O'Toole: Today, in Peterborough, the Peterborough Regional Health Centre staff and citizens are demonstrating that they've had enough of the attack on their health care system by the McGuinty government, as well as the wasteful LHINs. Hundreds of protestors are converging on the Peterborough Regional Health Centre to show their anger and frustration at the continued cuts and lack of support from their MPP, Jeff Leal.

People in Peterborough are waiting longer for care in hospitals, in long-term care and, indeed, in their homes. All the while, Peterborough residents are putting up signs all over town asking their MPP to stand up for them.

Recently, our leader, Tim Hudak, and I met with professionals from Peterborough. They warned that they are seeing the beginning of a silver tsunami in terms of care for the aging population, whether it's ALC patients in hospitals, retirement homes, long-term-care homes and the rest.

Peterborough is just one example of the failure of the McGuinty government to plan for the future, not just of our aging population but of the health care system generally.

It is crystal clear that the McGuinty Liberals are out of touch with the citizens, not just of Peterborough but indeed of the province of Ontario. We call on Premier McGuinty and his health minister to stay tuned and pay attention to the seniors. We saw in question period this morning the same issues raised by all parties in the opposition.

Stand up for the people. Stand up for the seniors in this province.

DURHAM REGION 211

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: This past Thursday I had the pleasure of attending the official launch of the 211 phone services in Durham region. This is a phone number much the same as 911 or 411, except that it is a service that recognizes some social barriers and is available to anyone needing access to social services in their community, such as language support, mobility, isolation and other needs.

The 211 service is funded by the United Way, with help from various levels of government. Recognizing the benefits of 211, the provincial government invested \$13 million over four years to expand 211 to the entire province by March 2012. By the end of September, the number of Ontario residents with access to 211 will surpass 8.5 million, or 70% of the population, according to Ontario's 211 services.

Calls are answered by live operators 24 hours a day, seven days a week, who access each caller's needs and link them to the best available services and programs. The 211 service helps individuals find services and understand access requirements for programs like employment counselling, housing assistance, services for

seniors, home support, legal assistance, child care and language classes.

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In 2002, United Way of Canada and other partners won approval from the CRTC to use 211 for community, social, government and health information in Canada. The 211 service is changing the way Ontarians access information. Instead of annoying phone menus or impersonal automated attendants, 211 callers speak directly to a certified information and referral specialist. By combining the human touch of live answer with modern phone and web technology, 211 is able to provide callers with award-winning, high-quality services.

The 211 service is another valuable tool that is available to all residents, and I fully support the 211 initiatives in Durham region and in all of Ontario.

HMCS HAIDA

Mr. Ted Arnott: This year, the Royal Canadian Navy proudly celebrates its 100th anniversary. With Remembrance Day just a month away, my family and I yesterday visited one of our national historic sites, the HMCS Haida.

The Haida, a tribal class destroyer, was commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy in 1943, operating throughout the remainder of the Second World War. Following a post-war refit, the Haida continued in service through the Korean War and the Cold War until her decommissioning in 1963. Today, the Haida is stationed at Pier 9 in Hamilton harbour.

Our October 3 visit was a fascinating journey through our nation's history, made even more enlightening thanks to Ray Pearce, who accompanied us. Ray, having served on the Haida in the late 1950s, offered his compelling first-hand account of life aboard this Canadian warship. Ray Pearce continues to serve today as president of the Fergus Legion.

My late father-in-law, Ted McCabe, served in the Royal Canadian Navy during World War II. His story, like that of Mr. Pearce, was one of youthful courage, achievement and service to country.

I want to thank Ray Pearce for taking us on the tour of the Haida, for his continued leadership at the Legion, and all other Legion members for their important work. Through their service, they remind us of those who travelled to distant lands, far from their families, on our behalf—and, indeed, of those who do so again today.

CHILD CARE CENTRES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: In September, I wrote a letter to the Minister of Education on behalf of some of the existing child care centres in my riding, child care centres very concerned about the future. They and the parents that support them support the idea of full-day daycare, but are concerned that, at present, the way Bill 242 and full-day daycare are being rolled out, we could see an end to many a non-profit daycare centre in Ontario. They're

nervous about what will happen after the transition period for the use of third party providers expires. Many of the centres fear that this will result in the demise and downfall of non-profit child- and family-centred daycare throughout Ontario.

Parents, children and daycare providers across Ontario need to know what the plan is going to be and what funds are going to be allocated to make sure that we have daycare provided throughout this province for many years to come. That answer needs to come quickly.

HISTOIRE FRANCO-ONTARIENNE

M. Phil McNeely: Le 24 septembre, j'ai eu le privilège d'assister aux célébrations soulignant la francophonie en Ontario. J'ai énormément joui de L'Esprit du lys et du trille, spectacle à grand déploiement présenté par L'écho d'un peuple. Pour souligner les 400 années de présence française en Ontario, L'Esprit du lys et du trille nous a fait revivre plusieurs moments marquants de l'histoire des francophones et des 400 ans de victoires à célébrer.

Soulignons quelques faits saillants dans cette histoire :
 –l'arrivée du premier Français en Ontario, Étienne Brûlé, qui deviendra le guide de Samuel de Champlain;

–la création de l'ACFÉO face à la venue du règlement 17, la guerre des épingles et l'émeute de Ford City, Windsor;

–que cette année, l'ACFÉO-ACFO-AFO, qui ont pour mission de promouvoir la francophonie et de valoriser les intérêts collectifs de la communauté francophone dans toute sa diversité, tout en favorisant son rayonnement partout en Ontario, fêtent leurs 100 ans; et

–les 35 ans du drapeau franco-ontarien déployé officiellement pour la première fois à l'Université de Sudbury le 25 septembre 1975.

Je suis fier de faire partie d'une communauté qui compte environ 35 % de francophones.

DEBRA DYNES FAMILY HOUSE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm pleased to mark a wonderful milestone for my community in Ottawa Centre. This past June 1 was the 15th anniversary of the Debra Dynes Family House.

The family house has been serving the Debra Dynes social housing community with truly valuable programs and supports that make a very real difference for the people of that community and our city of Ottawa as a whole. I have to compliment executive director Barbara Carroll and her dedicated team of staff; Gay Cook, chair of the board; and the volunteers who serve day in and day out to meet emergency and ongoing needs of that community.

The Debra Dynes Family House offers after-school and activity programs for youth, language and skills training for newcomers, community computer access, children's clothes and baby bundles for families, and referrals to other community and government services.

The family house's food cupboard is also one of the largest food banks in the city of Ottawa, serving a wide geographic area and feeding a minimum of 1,500 people in need per month. They even keep birthday cakes in the freezer so no child has to go without a special treat on their special day.

These are people who care deeply about our community, and I wish them all the best on this very special anniversary.

DAY OF GERMAN UNITY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I would like to say a few words on the anniversary of German unity.

Twenty-one years ago, a significant event took place in the history of mankind. That was, of course, the fall of the Berlin Wall and German unity. The Berlin Wall came crashing down not only by bulldozers, but by pickaxes of ordinary folks—yes, even by hand—as pieces of concrete were carried away by Germans on the east side of the wall who had been chafing under Soviet domination. That was 21 years ago. The political unification of the two German states followed a year later, on October 3, 1990.

To help us to celebrate this special event—I introduced to you earlier members of the German community, but for the record we would like to do it again. In the gallery is the consul general of the federal republic, Sabine Sparwasser. We have the president, Mr. Christian Klein, of the Historical Society of Mecklenburg Upper Canada; Karl Ruppert, president of the German World Congress; Mr. Frank Danner, the president of the Hansa club of Brampton; and there are even some people here from as far away as London, Ontario, to ensure that their flag gets raised and that Germany finds its place in the sun right here in Ontario, at this Legislature. That's why we are doing these celebrations.

We raise this German flag here at Queen's Park as a significant symbol of pride that the new Germany that was raised from the ashes of World War II is a leading partner for peace, solidly integrated into Europe and greatly respected by the international community.

Just a few words in German associated with Mozart's *Zauberflöte*, and it simply goes like this.

Remarks in German.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just like to add to those comments a personal thank you to you, Madam Consul General, for that wonderful piece of the Berlin Wall that sits on my desk downstairs in my office.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I beg leave to present a report, Agencies, Boards and Commissions: Ontario Power Gen-

eration Inc., from the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I usually have a script and I was sitting on it.

Mr. Hardeman presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: As Chair of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, I'm pleased to table this report on our review of the operations of Ontario Power Generation Inc. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the chair, the president and CEO and staff of Ontario Power Generation Inc. for their assistance and to express our appreciation to those who made presentations to the committee. I thank the committee members for their contributions to the review process, and thanks also goes to our committee clerk, Doug Arnott, and research officer Larry Johnston.

With that, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Hardeman has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ONTARIO AGRICULTURE WEEK

Hon. Carol Mitchell: I rise to remind Ontarians that today marks the beginning of Ontario Agriculture Week, and I speak in recognition of the hard work and the dedication of our Ontario farmers. Our government recognizes agriculture as a key economic sector, and as part of this reality, we have provided over \$1.8 billion in ongoing support for our farmers since forming government in 2003.

Ontario's agri-food sector is one of the province's leading industries, contributing more than \$33 billion to the economy every year, and these businesses employ more than 700,000 people. Our government recognizes this sector as a key contributor to the strength of this province's economy. That is why we are committed to initiatives that will make our agri-food industry stronger, including: introducing new animal health legislation; implementing programs under the Growing Forward agreement; working with our ministry colleagues to address wildlife compensation issues; and investing in agri-food research through our partnership with the University of Guelph and the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre.

The strength and diversity of Ontario's agri-food industry is there for everyone to see, whether it's in the aisles of your local grocery store, visiting a farmers' market, dining at a restaurant or taking a drive down a country road. Across Ontario, our farmers produce more than 200 commodities, many of which are processed in this province.

My commitment to Ontario rural communities runs deep. As the MPP and a fifth-generation resident of Huron–Bruce, one of the richest agricultural ridings in Ontario, I know full well the issues and challenges, as well as the successes and achievements, that our farmers have experienced.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, good things do grow in Ontario. Our agri-food industry has a global reputation for excellence. It extends from the fields and farmers' markets to new value-added products, such as soy-based spreads and gluten-free oat products—two innovative agri-food products that have been recipients of the Premier's Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence.

Establishing these awards has allowed us, over the past four years, to celebrate the hard work and the ingenuity of hundreds of Ontario farmers, entrepreneurs and processors, and this government is very pleased to be a partner in their success.

Our future success, the success of our province, lies in innovation. We value and honour the past, but there is a new world opening up in front of us. There will be new uses for the crops we grow, from feedstock to fuel our cars to nutraceuticals and more. The opportunities are there.

One in every five Ontarians lives in a small town, communities with populations of less than 25,000. If we want to keep our province strong, we need to make sure that our rural economies prosper. We will continue to support our agri-food industries to generate new economic opportunities, create jobs and support local food through our Open Ontario plan.

Our government is working hard to support local foods. We are committed to working with farmers to increase our fresh food production and to bring more Ontario foods to the table, whether that table is found in our kitchens at home or in the cafeterias of our local schools.

We have invested \$65 million to support the production and the marketing of Ontario foods through key initiatives, such as the Ontario Market Investment Fund. We know that we have a leading role to play in promoting Ontario foods, and we are achieving results through our Foodland Ontario programs. I'm pleased that many major retailers have developed buy-local promotions of their own and are featuring fresh, high-quality foods grown and produced right here in our province.

Philip Donne, president of the Campbell Company of Canada, said: "Local food is no longer a trend; it's a shift." I believe he is right. Never before have there been more exciting times for savouring Ontario homegrown and locally sourced food, but we can do more.

Today I'm encouraging everyone in this Legislature and across the province to celebrate the bounty of Ontario agriculture by having at least one dish on the table made with ingredients grown and produced right here in Ontario while you celebrate this Thanksgiving. You will be surprised how easy it is and how tasty it is.

Ontario's farmers grow high-quality food products that are among the best in the world, and if you buy

Ontario, you're supporting our farmers, you're helping to grow your community and you're also protecting the environment. When we buy Ontario products, everyone wins.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise on behalf of our leader, Tim Hudak, and the PC caucus to recognize Ontario Agriculture Week. This important week was created through a private member's bill by my former colleague Bert Johnson, the Progressive Conservative member from Perth, and it starts on the Monday before Thanksgiving. It is a time to celebrate the accomplishments and the contributions of our farmers.

We are lucky in Ontario to be able to depend on our farmers to produce safe, healthy and abundant food. I want to thank the farmers for that. I know the commitment they make—the long days, the hard work and the uncertain returns. Farmers are an essential part of our rural communities and they are the stewards of our land. They depend on the earth for their living so they know how important it is to take care of it. Whether a restaurant or a grocery store, I encourage Ontarians to ask where their food comes from and, wherever possible, to choose that Ontario food.

Ontario Agriculture Week is also a time to look at the state of our agriculture industry. This year, Ontario's farmers were lucky to have great weather. Of course, it's never perfect, but the early spring, hot summer and good rain certainly helped a lot of our farmers, and there were no disasters impacting market prices. So we need to ask ourselves why so many farmers are still in trouble. Why isn't there a more positive outlook for Ontario agriculture? Instead of predicting growth in the industry, there's a projected \$500-million farm income loss for 2010. I think it's time to ask the tough question. Why?

In the past, people have talked about governments managing from crisis to crisis. Today, they talk about managing by ignoring the crisis. Historically, agriculture has contributed to Ontario's economic strength, but the strength of the sector has been taken for granted. Over the last few years, we saw the priorities of this government shift away from rural Ontario and we have seen the priorities of the Ontario Minister of Agriculture shift away from helping our farmers. The fundamentals, such as support for farmers, have been ignored. Based on ministry estimates over the last four years, direct support for farmers has declined from 38% of the ministry's budget to, this year, 6% of the ministry's budget.

Farmers tell us there's been a shift in government from one that was there to help to one that is heavy-handed and punitive. One example of this government's failure to build the fundamentals of agriculture is the handling of the business risk management program. In 2007, grain and oilseeds producers got a business risk management program based on the cost of production. It was acknowledged by almost everyone that it was a success. In fact, it was so successful that when other commodity groups looked at designing a new program, they used that cost-of-production model.

Last year, the McGuinty government cancelled that grain-and-oilseeds-cost-of-production program. This was a program that was working and that farmers liked, and the government just cancelled it. We asked, and the farmers asked, "Why?" The minister responded that the program wouldn't work without federal support, even though it worked well for three years without it. Yet, seven months later, the government reinstated the program even though nothing had changed. Yet the minister still claims that the cost-of-production program won't work for other sectors without federal support. Why will it work for grain and oilseeds but not for beef and pork, which really need help urgently? Why won't she take action to help farmers today while we still have an agriculture industry in Ontario?

The truth is that other provinces have provincial programs to support agriculture. If we don't have equivalent programs, it puts our farmers at a disadvantage. This government doesn't seem to understand that piling more and more burdens on our farmers has an impact on the health of the industry.

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Look how this government is dealing with the increasing coyote problem in Ontario, which is causing farmers to lose more livestock. The government sees this as a problem too, because the amount of compensation they are paying is increasing. According to the ministry, claims have increased from \$755,000 to \$1.5 million over the past seven years. They're taking compensation out of legislation and putting in regulation.

We discovered that their proposal cuts compensation in a number of ways. Compensation will no longer include future values. Compensation paid will count toward AgriStability, meaning that it will reduce the amount of support that farmers receive and are eligible for.

I know how hard Ontario farmers work. I know the quality of the food they produce. If the government stops burdening them with red tape and more costs and instead works with them, I believe the future of agriculture in Ontario will be strong.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to Agriculture Week in Ontario.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I'm pleased, on behalf of New Democrats and NDP leader Andrea Horwath, to have an opportunity to speak today in celebration of Agriculture Week in Ontario. Having a significant number of farmers and a significant number of rural communities in my constituency of Kenora-Rainy River, I'm especially proud to be able to talk about some of the accomplishments and achievements of those people.

There is no doubt that Ontario has the potential to have a very productive agricultural sector. There is no doubt that farm families in Ontario work very hard, work consistently and make incredible investments in their farms and in our rural communities. I think we all want to recognize them for those efforts and accomplishments.

But I have to say that when I go to fall fairs, as I did in my constituency this year, when I talk to farmers about

their communities and about the challenges they are facing, I wish I could say it's all good news. It's not. The fact of the matter is that the beef industry in Ontario has still not recovered from some of the disasters that were visited on it starting 10 years ago. Farmers are still working very hard to get out from under a mountain of debt and are still facing uncertain economic circumstances.

I wish I could say that our pork and hog producers feel comfortable with their situation, but they don't, and I think the minister knows this. There are all sorts of farmers across this province who made good investments—sound investments—in their pork and hog operations only to discover that they're now facing very serious difficulty.

I wish I could say that we were seeing more food processing operations in Ontario. But just last week, we heard the announcement of the shutdown of some food processing operations here in southern Ontario.

I wish I could say that farmers and rural residents in my riding were very happy with getting their hydro bill every month, but they're not. In fact, they are very worried. For example, people in the dairy industry, where electricity is used to run the milking machines and to run the coolers, where access to electricity is very important for the operation of a dairy farm, are very worried about how they're going to pay the bill. Beef farmers, who have to pump water in order to ensure that their cattle are properly watered, are very worried about the hydro bill—which is the natural source of energy to run the pumps. These are really practical problems.

I wish I could say that farmers are happy on some other fronts. But in fact they're worried about the shutdown of rural schools, because they know that every time their neighbourhood school shuts down and their kids are forced to go further, this is another cost and another difficulty placed in their way. And they're very worried about the reduction of health care services at local hospitals, because what seems to be happening with the LHINs, at least in my part of the province, is that more and more health care services are being taken out of smaller communities and centralized in larger communities, which, again, makes it more and more difficult for rural and farm families to deal with some of the big challenges of life.

While I join with my colleagues in saying thank you to Ontario farmers, thank you to agricultural producers in Ontario, I have to say to the minister that your government has in fact made it more difficult for farm families in this province; that farm families increasingly wonder, "How are we going to pay the bills? How are we going to deal with the everyday issues of life? How do we pay the hydro bill? How do we pay the bill for heating fuel and all of these things?"

I sincerely hope that the government will pay more attention to these kinds of matters because it would be a travesty to lose even more farms and more agricultural production in Ontario.

PETITIONS

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Pension Benefits Act ... regulations for ‘loss of sponsor’ of defined benefit pension plans only permit windup and annuity purchase; and

“Whereas in the present economic climate the cost of annuities is at a 25-year high with no relief in sight;

“Therefore the purchase of annuities exacerbates the punitive impact of windup on Nortel pension plan members and others in similar situations, and increases the costs passed on to the taxpayers of Ontario;

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

“To amend the PBA regulations to permit the Administrator and the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to apply other options in the ‘loss of sponsor’ scenario which will provide more benefits to Nortel pension plan members and others in similar situations, such as the continuation of the pension plan under responsible financial management by a non-government institution.”

Mr. Speaker, I agree with that and I sign the petition.

HOME WARRANTY PROGRAM

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I’m reading a petition supporting extending the Ombudsman of Ontario’s jurisdiction to include the Tarion Warranty Corp.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas homeowners have purchased a newly built home in good faith and often soon find they are victims of construction defects, often including Ontario building code violations, such as faulty heating, ventilation and air conditioning ... systems, leaking roofs, cracked foundations, etc.;

“Whereas often when homeowners seek restitution and repairs from the builder and the Tarion Warranty Corp., they encounter an unwieldy bureaucratic system that often fails to compensate them for the high cost of repairing these construction defects, while the builder often escapes with impunity;

“Whereas the Tarion Warranty Corp. is supposed to be an important part of the consumer protection system in Ontario related to newly built homes;

“Whereas the government to date has ignored calls to make its Tarion agency truly accountable to consumers;

“Be it resolved that we, the undersigned, support MPP Cheri DiNovo’s private member’s bill, which calls for the Ombudsman to be given oversight of Tarion and the power to deal with unresolved complaints;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act to provide that the Ombudsman’s powers under the Ombudsman Act in respect of

any governmental organization apply to the corporation established under the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act, and to provide for necessary modifications in the application of the Ombudsman Act.”

I couldn’t agree more, and I’m going sign my name and give this to Emily R. to be delivered.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, Canada, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

“Whereas kidney disease is a huge and growing problem in Canada; and

“Whereas real progress is being made in various ways of preventing and coping with kidney disease, in particular the development of a bio-artificial kidney;

“We, the undersigned call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make research funding available for the explicit purpose of conducting bio-artificial kidney research as an extension to the research being successfully conducted at several centres in the United States.”

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

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GOVERNMENT’S RECORD

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that I have it signed this time. It’s signed by the clerks, and it’s signed by people in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and even from Huron–Bruce. It’s to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the residents of Ontario feel that this current Liberal government is directly responsible for their rising household debt by slapping them with higher taxes, such as the health tax and the HST, higher fees, higher hydro bills and higher auto insurance premiums; and

“Whereas the people have lost faith in their government;

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

“That the McGuinty government immediately resign and call an election.”

I have also signed this.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I am tabling a petition from the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario and from the Carleton University Students’ Association.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas in 1994, the Ontario government disqualified international students from the Ontario health insurance program (OHIP); and

“Whereas international students must now pay private health insurance fees through the university health insur-

ance plan (UHIP) that are more than \$800 a year, and students with two or more dependants can be required to pay over \$3,000 in mandatory hospital insurance fees; and

“Whereas in some instances, such fees have increased by more than 30% in a single year; and

“Whereas international students already pay tuition fees that are three to four times higher than fees charged to domestic students for the same education; and

“Whereas Ontario’s 35,000 international students pay provincial taxes and contribute \$900 million to the provincial economy each year but do not receive health care like all Ontario residents;

“Therefore we, the undersigned residents of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to restore OHIP coverage for international students.”

I affix my signature and send it to the table via page Nick.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition presented to me by Don Henderson of RR 4, St. Marys. It’s to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance of Stratford, Ontario, in their Vision 2013 report to the South West LHIN, is planning to reduce the operating hours of St. Marys Memorial Hospital emergency department from 24-7 to 16-7 and reduce the number of acute care beds and also move rehabilitative beds from St. Marys Memorial Hospital to Seaforth general hospital, which would force residents of St. Marys and surrounding areas to travel 51 kilometres or more to receive rehabilitative care;

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

“Save our hospital: We, the undersigned, urge our leaders not to accept the recommendations in the Vision 2013 report and not to reduce our emergency room hours of operation and not to reduce our acute care beds.”

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to present this on behalf of the residents of Perth-Wellington and Huron-Bruce riding, and thank you very much for the opportunity.

BRITISH HOME CHILDREN

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from the Rielly families of Peterborough, Kitchener and Belleville. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, between 1869 and 1939, more than 100,000 British home children arrived in Canada from group homes and orphanages in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland; and

“Whereas the story of the British home children is one of challenge, determination and perseverance; and

“Whereas due to their remarkable courage, strength and perseverance, Canada’s British home children en-

dured and went on to lead healthy and productive lives and contributed immeasurably to the development of Ontario’s economy and prosperity; and

“Whereas the government of Canada has proclaimed 2010 as the Year of the British Home Child and Canada Post will recognize it with a commemorative stamp;

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

“Enact Bill 12, a private member’s bill introduced by MPP Jim Brownell on March 23, 2010, an act to proclaim September 28 of each year as Ontario home child day.”

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it to the clerks’ table.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: I want to thank again my friend Ken Sharp of Peterborough for providing me with this petition. To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, Canada, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

“Whereas kidney disease is a huge and growing problem in Canada; and

“Whereas real progress is being made in various ways of preventing and coping with kidney disease, in particular the development of a bio-artificial kidney;

“We, the undersigned call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make research funding available for the explicit purpose of conducting bio-artificial kidney research as an extension to the research being successfully conducted at several centres in the United States.”

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

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition, the first one of which I’m sure I’m going to be receiving many more to come, and I’ll read it. It’s to do with paved shoulders, and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas pedestrians and cyclists are increasingly using secondary highways to support healthy lifestyles and expand active transportation; and

“Whereas paved shoulders on highways enhance public safety for all highway users, expand tourism opportunities and support good health; and

“Whereas paved shoulders help to reduce the maintenance cost of repairs to highway surfaces; and

“Whereas Norm Miller’s private member’s Bill 100 provides for a minimum one-metre paved shoulder for the benefit of pedestrians, cyclists and motorists;

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

“That Norm Miller’s private member’s Bill 100, which requires a minimum one-metre paved shoulder on

designated highways, receive swift passage through the legislative process.”

I support this petition.

TAXATION

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with the eco tax, and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government continues to raise taxes in Ontario despite a fragile economy; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government already down-loaded a smart meter energy tax on to Ontarians; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government has added his new secret eco tax; and

“Whereas the eco tax will be slapped on over 10,000 household items such as detergent, makeup, smoke detectors and sunblock; and

“Whereas the eco taxes are being levied and collected by a secretive, unaccountable government agency that spends tax dollars without any meaningful public oversight or transparency; and

“Whereas a Tim Hudak PC government would scrap the eco tax;

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

“That the McGuinty government cancel the eco tax that further burdens Ontario’s families and seniors.”

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Jeff Leal: I again have another petition from Ken Sharp to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned residents of Ontario, Canada, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to the following:

“Whereas kidney disease is a huge and growing problem in Canada; and

“Whereas real progress is being made in various ways of preventing and coping with kidney disease, in particular the development of a bio-artificial kidney;

“We, the undersigned call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make research funding available for the explicit purpose of conducting bio-artificial kidney research as an extension to the research being successfully conducted at several centres in the United States.”

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENHANCEMENT OF THE ONTARIO ENERGY AND PROPERTY TAX CREDIT FOR SENIORS AND ONTARIO FAMILIES ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DU CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT DE L'ONTARIO POUR LES COÛTS D'ÉNERGIE ET LES IMPÔTS FONCIERS À L'INTENTION DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES ET DES FAMILLES DE L'ONTARIO

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

Bill 109, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement the Ontario energy and property tax credit and to make consequential amendments / Projet de loi 109, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts pour mettre en oeuvre le crédit d'impôt de l'Ontario pour les coûts d'énergie et les impôts fonciers et apporter des modifications corrélatives.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I'll be sharing my time with the wonderful member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Thank you to the government House leader for that introduction.

I'm pleased to stand in the House today for second reading of Enhancement of the Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit for Seniors and Ontario Families Act, 2010.

Quite an introduction, but to add to that I'd also like to acknowledge the Rempel family who are here today from Wilmot township and New Hamburg in the riding of Kitchener–Conestoga. We have Len, Kathleen and Greg, who are the family of page Emily Rempel, who is our page captain today. Welcome today, and well done, Emily.

More to the speech—and also my mum and dad, who are watching, and my husband, Richard. I have to include them.

1350

This proposed enhanced tax credit would boost tax relief to 2.8 million Ontarians and would help support seniors and low- to middle-income families with energy costs and property taxes.

The Ontario energy and property tax credit, or the OEPTC—I'm not sure which is easier to say; I think they're both equally as difficult—is the latest tax relief in our Open Ontario plan.

Introduced last March, the Open Ontario plan lays the foundation of the government's strategy to position the province for new opportunities, new jobs and, of course, new economic growth. It's about reassessing how Ontario does business and how it can best prepare for the times ahead. It's about maximizing existing resources consisting, of course, of Ontario's people, consisting of

programs and processes to the best that they can be as the economic recovery takes hold. Also, it's about ensuring that the people who call Ontario home can enjoy a quality of life that is second to none.

Undeniably, the global economic downturn has affected more than just businesses. As part of our Open Ontario plan, the government is making investments to help Ontarians adapt and has introduced several targeted tax relief measures.

As of January 2010, the average Ontarian is receiving an income tax break of \$200 per year. There's also the new northern Ontario energy credit that will help eligible northerners manage their energy costs.

Just a couple of weeks ago, we proposed the children's activity tax credit to help families by putting some money back into the pockets of the people of Ontario and promote an active and healthy lifestyle for our children.

The next stage of our tax relief would be provided through this proposed Ontario energy and property tax credit, or OEPTC.

In the 2010 Ontario budget, our government announced that we would be converting the Ontario property tax credit into the Ontario energy and property tax credit in order to deliver more than \$1.2 billion in annual support to low- and middle-income Ontarians.

Last week, the Premier and the Minister of Finance announced that our government is proposing to enhance the support originally announced by \$525 million, for a total of \$1.3 billion in annual support. To provide additional assistance for seniors, the government is proposing to increase the income levels at which the credit begins to be reduced. This means that more seniors would benefit from the full credit and a greater number of seniors would qualify.

With this proposed enhancement, 50,000 more seniors would be eligible for the credit and another 690,000 seniors would receive a higher amount. Therefore, approximately 740,000 senior families and single seniors would be eligible for up to \$1,025 in annual support.

Seniors have worked hard to help build the province that we are enjoying today. The enhancements we are proposing to this tax credit would make things a little easier for seniors by providing some help with household maintenance costs.

Ontarians would be able to apply for the Ontario energy and property tax credit starting with their 2010 tax returns. The credit would be paid out in four quarterly payments, just like the new Ontario sales tax credit and the GST credit.

This measure supports recommendations by social policy advocates to send out frequent payment of property tax credits rather than one lump sum payment in order to improve cash flow to the recipients themselves. This way, the people of Ontario receive the funds when they need it.

I'd like to now provide a few details about how this tax credit would work. To target assistance to those who need it most, the OEPTC would be income-tested.

To provide additional assistance for seniors, as I mentioned, we're proposing to increase the income level at which the credit begins to be reduced for seniors from those that were announced in the 2009 budget. So, the income thresholds would be increased to \$25,000 from \$20,000 for single seniors and to \$30,000 from \$25,000 for senior couples and single seniors living with dependent children.

This follows improvements we made in the 2009 budget, when the non-senior income thresholds were raised to \$20,000 from \$4,000 for single people and to \$25,000 for families, including single parents. For all recipients, the OEPTC would be reduced by 2% of adjusted family net income over the applicable income thresholds, which would be indexed annually for inflation. For non-seniors, a family or a single person who owns or rents a home would be able to claim an energy amount of up to \$200. In addition, they would be able to claim a property tax amount of \$50 plus 10% of their occupancy costs, to a maximum of \$700.

This means that non-seniors would be able to receive up to \$900 of support every year. A senior family or a single senior who owns or rents a home could claim an energy amount of up to \$200. In addition, they would be able to claim a property tax amount of \$425 plus 10% of their occupancy cost, to a maximum of \$825, for a maximum amount of \$1,025 per year. Ontarians who do not pay property tax or rent but still pay for home energy—those who live on a reserve or in a long-term-care facility—would still be eligible for tax relief through the energy component of this proposed credit.

I'd like to provide a few case examples of how the OEPTC would work for senior and non-senior singles and families. Let's use the example of a senior couple with \$50,000 in net income who pay \$4,320 a year in property tax on their home. In 2009, they would have received \$208 in property tax assistance from Ontario's tax credits. Under the Ontario property tax credit, they would have received \$317 more. Under the new, enhanced Ontario energy and property tax credit, they would receive \$625, or \$100 more, because of the new enhancements, which is a total of \$417 in additional relief.

If we were to imagine a single senior with one child with a \$25,000 net income who pays \$675 a month for an apartment, in 2009 he would receive \$104 in property tax assistance from Ontario's tax credits. Under the Ontario energy and property tax credit, he would receive \$412, or an astonishing \$308 more in relief than he would have in 2009.

Since our announcements last week, we've received positive feedback from seniors and the people of Ontario across the province. The Canadian Association of Retired Persons, or CARP, is a national, non-partisan, non-profit organization committed to advocating for a new vision for aging in Canada. CARP calls the targeted relief for lower-income seniors and the inclusion of a higher threshold "welcome news" that "directs the relief where it's needed most."

I thought this would be a good time to share a quote that I have from the announcement I was privileged to make in Wellesley, in my riding, last Tuesday. John Thompson was there. John is the chair of the board of directors of the Canadian Association of Retired Persons for chapter 25. John says:

“In my opinion, the Ontario energy and property tax credit increase for seniors is a very positive, progressive and compassionate strategy to assist Ontario’s seniors who are on a fixed income. A tax break for the necessities of life, shelter and energy will provide additional personal resources for seniors to enhance their quality of life in other discretionary aspects of their personal budgets.”

1400

He goes on to say that, “The credit increase for seniors is a wise decision to assist those who have, over their adult lives, contributed so much to the prosperity of the province of Ontario.” We thank John for that quote. He hits it right on the head with that quote. Of course, as a result of our announcement last Tuesday of the OEPTC, John has decided to re-engage chapter 25 of CARP in the townships in Waterloo region. So this has been a really good-news announcement, especially locally for us on all levels.

Since 2003, our government has been firmly committed to introducing innovative new programs that create measurable improvements in the lives of the people of Ontario. Over the past seven years, these investments have raised the quality of life and are helping the Ontario economy and our families adapt to these sweeping global changes that we’re experiencing.

One of the priorities, as I’ve mentioned, has been to support programs that help Ontario seniors to live safe, active and healthy lives. I’m pleased to stand here today and highlight a few of the accomplishments that are helping our seniors.

In 2008, we announced the new Ontario senior homeowners’ property tax grant. In 2010, we doubled the maximum grant to \$500. This grant provides eligible senior homeowners with assistance with property taxes. Over the next five years, we will be providing an additional \$1 billion through this grant, which will benefit more than 600,000 seniors with low to middle incomes who live in their own homes.

In 2007, the McGuinty government launched the four-year, \$1.1-billion aging at home strategy. I have a quote to show how the OEPTC announcement that I did last Tuesday ties in with this. An 87-year-old senior shared an interesting insight with me that I will share with you. The aging at home strategy is designed to provide support to seniors and their caregivers to help seniors stay healthy and live with dignity and independence in the comfort, of course, of their own homes.

We’ve also expanded home care services to about 500,000 Ontarians each and every year. The new and enhanced Ontario energy and property tax credit would be added on to these measures to provide additional support to seniors with their home maintenance costs. As I men-

tioned earlier, the OEPTC also supports seniors living in long-term-care homes. Our government has taken several important steps to support our seniors living in these homes. Earlier this year, Ontario introduced legislative protections for seniors living in retirement homes. For the first time in Ontario’s history, seniors living in retirement homes across Ontario will be protected under the new Retirement Homes Act, which received royal assent in June. The act creates regulatory authority with the power to license homes, to conduct inspections, investigations and enforcement, including financial penalties or revoking licences, if necessary, and it further establishes mandatory care, safety standards, requirements for emergency plans, infection control prevention programs, assessment of care needs and care planning, police background checks, and training for staff. Finally, it establishes residents’ rights, including the right to know the true cost of care and accommodation and the right to live in an environment that promotes zero tolerance of abuse or neglect.

Our government has taken a number of important steps to ensure that seniors who cannot live at home enjoy access to the highest-quality long-term-care services, including making key investments in long-term-care homes and increasing front-line staff.

At this point, I want to interject. I have two quotes that have to do with the OEPTC announcement and the long-term-care connection: “The achievements that we’ve seen add more than 8,200 new beds in long-term-care homes since 2003, as well as increasing long-term-care funding by more than \$1 billion since 2003 and funding more than 6,100 front-line staff in long-term-care homes, including 2,300 nurses.”

If passed, the enhanced energy and property tax credit would put some more money back into seniors’ pockets. This supports one of the McGuinty government’s key priorities: to help our seniors retire with income, security and dignity.

I wanted to share a quote from Cyril Rideout. He goes by the name of “Cy.” He also was at the announcement in Wellesley last Tuesday. Cy is 83 years old, although I don’t believe him. He doesn’t look a day over—well, that’s a dangerous one, isn’t it? He doesn’t look 83, but he assures me he is. He works with Community Care Concepts in Wellesley and throughout the townships. At the announcement he shared with us some of his insights and how he feels the OEPTC will benefit seniors throughout the province, most specifically in Wellesley township. Cy Rideout says, and I quote:

“As a provider of services for seniors, helping to keep them in their own homes in safety and comfort, Community Care Concepts offers Meals on Wheels, volunteer-assisted transportation, home cleaning and maintenance. With our hospitals full, there is a need to keep our seniors safe and comfortable in their own homes.

“With today’s announcement”—that was the OEPTC announcement—“this new tax credit gives seniors the opportunity to cover expenses such as hydro, property tax and other expenses as a result of living at home.”

We thank Cy for that. I do have another quote from him that I'll share with you shortly.

Ontario is playing a leading role in a national effort to review the state of the current retirement income system, its future sustainability and options that could strengthen the system for our seniors.

Our government is in the midst of reforms to modernize the Pension Benefits Act. Recent reforms were the first major enhancements to our province's pension system in over 20 years. These upcoming reforms build on recommendations from an Ontario Expert Commission on Pensions and subsequent consultations with stakeholders to improve financial security of our province's pensioners.

The McGuinty government is also supporting seniors through reforms to the rules for locked-in retirement savings accounts, thereby giving seniors and other Ontarians more flexibility in accessing funds in these accounts.

In January of this year, in 2010, we increased unlocking from Ontario life income funds to 50% from 25%, and looking back, effective April 1, 2009, we provided a two-year waiver of fees for financial hardship, unlocking applications.

The enhanced energy and tax credit for seniors and families is just one more measure we have taken since 2003 to invest in our seniors, to help them with income security and provide our seniors with more opportunities to stay active, healthy and involved in their communities.

Steve Kannon, the editor of the Woolwich Observer, also wrote about the OEPTC and the announcement last Tuesday: "New Tax Credits are Aimed at Household Costs."

He writes, "Seniors stand to gain the most under the proposed new Ontario energy and property tax credit, though the measures will apply to some 2.8 million low- and middle-income residents. Ontarians who own or rent a home could receive up to \$900 in tax relief, with seniors able to claim up to \$1,025."

We thank Steve Kannon for that in the Woolwich Observer. He has summed up that portion of this particular bill quite nicely.

In 2009, we announced that we're investing more than \$1.2 million to expand our elderly persons centres program, which supports the maintenance, operation and programming of senior centres across the province. These centres serve as vital community hubs that provide health, social and recreational programs, of course, to promote wellness for seniors.

1410

We also announced, in 2009, an investment of \$900,000 annually to provide the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse with long-term stability to better assist victims of elder abuse in communities across the province. This investment supports the work of regional elder abuse consultants, over 50 local elder abuse networks and community agencies implementing the Ontario strategy to combat elder abuse.

It works together with the OEPTC, of course, because it's all working to protect seniors, keep them safe in their

homes and to help them where they need the most help; in this case, coordinating community services, raising awareness of elder abuse, and letting seniors know where they can go for help. The investment with that funding since 2003 totals over \$4.2 million.

In addition, there was funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, in partnership with the Assaulted Women's Helpline, introduced the Seniors Safety Line; again, so important in keeping seniors safe, keeping them in their homes and keeping them without risk in their communities—24 hours a day, seven days a week, in more than 150 languages.

Ontario's senior population is expected to double to 4.2 million over the next 25 years. By 2017, which, as I just realized, is my retirement date, for the first time seniors will account for a larger share of the population than children 14 and under—wow. Our government is well aware of this reality. We continue to work hard to ensure that Ontario seniors have access to quality programs and services that will allow them to live safe, happy, healthy and independent lives.

The proposed Ontario energy and property tax credit is just the latest example of investments our government is making to support Ontario seniors. These are investments we're making to support the very foundation of our Open Ontario plan, which is, of course, Ontario's people.

I had another quote from Cy Rideout from the energy and property tax credit announcement that we did in Wellesley. I thought it would be appropriate to insert it here. Cy—Cyril; he goes by Cy—says, "As a member of the Community Care Concepts board and a volunteer driver for patients and Meals on Wheels, I'm aware of the needs of many seniors who are on fixed incomes. I know that they will welcome your announcement of the tax relief for Ontario energy costs and property taxes. It may well be the difference that will allow them to remain comfortably in their own home."

I reiterate what Cy is saying himself at 83, that this OEPTC may well be the difference that will allow seniors to remain in their homes and to remain comfortable in their own homes.

Furthermore, the OEPTC is one part of a larger comprehensive tax reform plan which provides significant tax cuts and relief for Ontario families and individuals. Through our tax plan for jobs and growth, we're delivering \$11.8 billion in permanent and temporary tax relief over three years to Ontario families and singles. Our government has permanently cut Ontario personal income tax for 93% of income taxpayers, with most now saving an additional \$200 each year. We also eliminated provincial income tax for 90,000 Ontarians.

Furthermore, eligible Ontarians are receiving three transition payments over this year, totalling \$1,000 for families and \$300 for singles, as well as the Ontario sales tax credit which provides up to \$260 for eligible seniors and families each year. Of course, our northern residents who pay rent or property tax are now eligible for an

annual credit of up to \$130 for a single person and \$200 for a family.

The Ontario energy and property tax credit is one more thing that we can do to help put money back in the pockets of Ontario families and Ontario seniors. This tax credit directly supports our 2010 budget commitment to help Ontarians with home energy costs and to help Ontarians with property taxes.

I want to conclude by re-emphasizing the important fact that the proposed Ontario energy and property tax credit would provide \$1.3 billion in annual support to 2.8 million people in Ontario. That's why I ask for the support of the House in passing this act. Thank you for your support.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member talked about all the tax cuts that they're giving to seniors and to low-income people. Tax cuts are handed out by a government when things are out of whack, when things get out of proportion. So this whole bill talking about tax cuts is a testament to the failure of this government to get a quality program in place that Ontarians could live with. It's a shame that it has come to this.

The member talks about 93% of Ontarians getting a tax cut. She doesn't talk about the 100% of Ontarians who paid huge increases through income tax increases, through eco taxes, through all the various programs this government has brought in. If they took away \$100 from a taxpayer, they've given them back something like \$7 on \$100. This government has had money flowing one way, out of taxpayers' pockets into government coffers—and that has been ongoing since 2003, when the first thing this government did was break their promise that they wouldn't raise taxes. "I will not raise your taxes": That was a promise the Premier made, and the first thing he did was bring in the largest tax increase in Ontario's history.

Of course, since that time, he also has the record on providing the highest deficit in Ontario's history—over \$20 billion of deficit. He also has the record for increasing the provincial debt more than any other Premier in Ontario's history. I'd say that's a grand slam for the Premier.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the words from the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, but I have to say that even though I think it's a good idea to give a credit to seniors and I think that we should vote in favour of giving people that credit, let's recognize that although they're getting from one hand, money is being taken by the other. The deregulation of gas utilities in this province, the increase in profits allowed to electrical utilities, the HST on electricity bills, the commitment to high-priced nuclear: The wide range of decisions that have been made that drive up electricity costs and make life more unaffordable in this province cannot be corrected by this simple tax credit.

There's a reality in Ontario, and that is that our energy system has got to be renewed. We, in this province, can make decisions to renew it in a way that's cost-effective, environmentally beneficial and a way that will, in fact, generate jobs in Ontario, or, on the other hand, we can make decisions that are very expensive, have little or no positive impact on the environment and, in the end, make life far more difficult for seniors and for people right across the spectrum in this province.

It's unfortunate and it's wrong that this government has decided to go with a high-cost, low-benefit strategy. That's a mistake. This bill before us today is meant to deal with some of that political fallout. I don't think it will deal with all that political fallout. I think that people will be happy to get a cheque because they feel hard-pressed, but they also understand, and they understand well, that this government is making huge mistakes on the electricity file, and they're stuck with the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: This bill is really part of an ongoing series of programs our government has had to try to help seniors, whether they be tenants or homeowners. It's a credit that you get when you fill out your income tax—I know that many seniors are certainly very happy when they receive this credit—and then there's a grant too.

1420

What is happening now is that the grant for homeowners has been increased from \$250 a year. They can get a cheque that comes from the government of Ontario for up to \$500 now, and a lot of them got it when they filled out their income tax this year.

The only problem I found was that a lot of people who fill out the income tax for seniors are not really up to speed in terms of how to fill it out for seniors and they miss—there's one page there where all you have to do is check a box and the seniors become eligible for the grants and credits. You can get up to \$1,500 based on income. It really makes me almost cry when I see seniors come into the office and their income tax forms have not been made out correctly.

I'm sure that in all our ridings, if you check with your seniors you'll see that invariably there are a great number who have been shortchanged because they didn't get the proper instruction or the proper income tax form filled by their local hairdresser or whoever does their income tax. I think that one job we have as MPPs is to check those. There are many of them who could get this grant and credit. So this is an enhancement of that.

I know that in Toronto—the same as with Toronto–Danforth—there are a lot of seniors who are property-rich and pocket-poor. This really helps them especially, in a city like Toronto.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: The member for Kitchener–Conestoga mentioned in her remarks the pension reform that this government has been undertaking. I'm urging the government to undertake even more

pension reform to accommodate the very desperate situation that Nortel pensioners are finding themselves in.

Members of the Legislature will remember that almost a year and a half ago I brought forward to this Legislature a bill that would have allowed Nortel pensioners two choices when their pension fund was wound up. One was the present option—the only option—to buy individual annuities. I brought forward a suggestion that the pensioner would have the opportunity to put their funds or a portion of their funds into a registered retirement instrument so that they would be able to avoid the very, very low returns that the Financial Services Commission of Ontario is going to get when they buy individual annuities. That was rejected by the government members—the Liberal members of this Legislative Assembly. All the members of the opposition supported that particular endeavour.

As well, the Nortel group has been asking the government to undertake their suggestion to establish a financial services model, which has been successful in other jurisdictions.

Needless to say, we need to have this government trying harder for the Nortel pensioners. They will appreciate the small cheque they get from this, because they're going to suffer so badly from their losses from the bankruptcy of Nortel. But we need this government to go further for the Nortel pensioners.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Kitchener–Conestoga has up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I'd like to acknowledge the comments by the members from Halton, Toronto–Danforth, Eglinton–Lawrence and Carleton–Mississippi Mills.

I want to reiterate one of the comments that I read, but I did want to also stress that we are talking about 985,000 seniors in the province of Ontario who will benefit from this. About 245,000 will continue to see tax relief, another 690,000 seniors will see an increase in the tax relief they receive, and 50,000 seniors will see relief that they hadn't previously seen. So this is quite a significant and substantial energy and property tax credit that we are proposing. I wanted people to understand the numbers, specifically of seniors, and that about 2.8 million people in the province of Ontario will benefit from this as well.

I did say that I would give you a quote from the 87-year-old woman I met. I didn't go back for it, but my mum PINed me to remind me to tell you. Here it is.

When I was at the announcement, a gentleman came up to me and said, "Thank you for this. This supports my 87-year-old mother for living in her home. She couldn't be here today because she's not mobile." So I went there to see her, I went to her home and she clasped my hands and said to me, "Thank you so much for your help today because it means that I can stay in my own home. Your help today is the right thing for me. Thank you."

So I convey that to the House, and reiterate that it is the right thing to do—the Ontario energy and property

tax credit for seniors—as well as for all the people in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 109, which is An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement the Ontario energy and property tax credit and to make consequential amendments. The member for Durham may be sharing some of my time with me as well.

Let me begin by saying that this is a modest tax credit. I know the Minister of Finance, when he introduced the bill and spoke to it briefly, talked about a billion dollars. Well, the actual effect of this particular bill, Bill 109, is that it's a \$70-million project, which sounds like a lot of money, but when you start spreading it across the province, it is relatively minor. I will point that out as I have an opportunity to speak to the bill.

It was announced in the 2010 budget that they were going to convert the existing Ontario property tax credit to the Ontario energy and property tax credit starting with the 2010 taxation year. Frankly, this could have been dealt with in the spring budget bill. But the way the government's rolling it out, each week they seem to have a new individual tax credit bill, and I think that is about getting more political bang for the buck and about optics, about looking to be doing something about the rising costs that Ontario families and Ontario seniors are facing. Last week, the bill we were debating was an Ontario child tax credit worth some \$50 per family, which, for most families, is not going to be a huge amount of money. And now, this week, we're debating the Ontario energy and property tax credit.

Certainly, I have a lot of examples from my riding about how people on the ground are being affected by the rising costs to do with energy in the province of Ontario. So any tax relief that the families and seniors of Ontario can get, we're going to support. But it is relatively minor, especially when you look at all the various increases that have come about. Most recently, one of the big-ticket items, of course, is the HST, which is on people's electricity bills—that's 8%. This bill we're debating I don't think will even cover the additional cost of the HST on people's bills. We also have seen in the spring that an 8% to 10% increase in rates was approved by the Ontario Energy Board.

Across the province, the government is implementing smart meters. People have to pay for those smart meters on their electricity bill. I believe it's roughly around \$4 on each of those bills, and that's before they're turned on and we get the time-of-use factor. I've got some letters I'll get on the record to do with what's happening on the ground and the effect that that's having on people's energy bills.

Of course, we have the Green Energy Act and the contracts the government is entering into: the big Samsung contract, of course, and the many feed-in tariff contracts. I call them the "buy high, sell low" process, where the government is entering into 20-year deals to, for ex-

ample, buy solar energy at 80 cents a kilowatt hour. Of course, most of us are paying somewhere around seven, eight or nine cents a kilowatt hour for electricity. So the difference between that eight or nine cents and the 80 cents is going to be made up by all ratepayers, and we have not seen the effect of that yet. In fact, last week in estimates with the Minister of Finance, Mr. Sterling and I were asking questions about what the future liability would be for the feed-in tariff. So far, I have not had an answer to that—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I would just remind the member to refer to other members by their riding name rather than their name. Thank you.

1430

Mr. Norm Miller: I would if I could remember his riding name. He's changed the name so much on me—

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Carleton–Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Norm Miller: Carleton–Mississippi Mills. Thank you.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Just Ottawa.

Mr. Norm Miller: The member for Ottawa. I know that he is here making a point, especially as he just spoke briefly a minute ago about his concern for Nortel pensioners. He's been doing a great job on every opportunity, the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills. On that front, in fact last week in estimates committee he asked—he kind of used a lot of my time, I would say, asking many questions to do with Nortel pensioners, speaking up for them and putting forward questions that have to do with the financial sponsorship model that they're recommending. He's been doing a great job speaking up for many of his constituents who are Nortel retirees. Congratulations on that. Keep up the good work.

We aren't even seeing—the Green Energy Act hasn't really kicked in. We had studies on that, showing that one thing's for sure: When you're buying power at 80 cents a kilowatt hour and selling it much lower than that, that's going to drive everybody's costs up. We had London Economics—we commissioned a study with them—and they showed that it's going to have a profound effect on people's energy bills over the next few years. There are various studies, some that show energy bills going up 43% by 2015.

Also, on the energy front, despite being in power seven years, the government has not dealt with the nuclear power situation. That's something they've just not acted on, and here we are, seven years later. It takes a long time, if you're going to create new nuclear energy, and yet they've done nothing on that front.

We're seeing all kinds of pressures on people's electricity bills and I'm afraid it's going to get worse. We're going to support this modest tax credit proposed in Bill 109, but it is just that: very modest. In fact, one of the new taxes the government put in in the past year was a tax on energy bills to pay for in-home energy audits that are done, to cover the cost of those energy audits—which works out to about \$4 a month on people's bills. It was a

\$55-million program. As I say, the total value of this program is \$70 million.

The parliamentary assistant talked about CARP endorsing this. That's the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. I read their press release, and I'll quote a different part of it than the parliamentary assistant did. I would call it very faint praise. Let me just quote from their press release of September 28, 2010, where CARP says:

“CARP has consistently called on the Ontario government to provide relief for home energy costs for Ontarians who have been hit particularly hard by the combination of the new harmonized sales tax, time-of-use meters, rising home energy costs, and rising property taxes. Older Ontarians, especially those with low and fixed incomes, have faced escalating home energy costs and those who find it necessary to spend a considerable amount of time in their homes have been the most affected.”

They go on to say, “CARP members will be pleased that the Ontario government has responded to their call for relief from mounting home energy costs—which were made worse by the new HST and smart meter rates. This targeted relief for lower-income seniors and moving to include a higher income threshold will be welcome news and directs the relief where it is needed most.

“In submissions to government, CARP supported its call for relief with the results [of] member polling—of the over 3,700 respondents 69% did not think the one-time-only rebates and generalized tax relief were enough to offset the added burden of the HST and 86% did not believe that business would pass through their savings.” Obviously, they're glad to get some relief, but it's pretty faint praise for this initiative.

You look at some of the commentaries here. Christina Blizzard has written about this proposal. The headline: “Dam! Hydro Bills Make us Cry.”

“McGuinty says investments in power grid helped avoid blackouts, a claim that's pure hogwash.” That's interesting, isn't it?

“Premier Dalton McGuinty's promise to give a monetary break to seniors facing soaring hydro bills won't help Mark Robertson's parents.

“The Scarborough seniors worked hard, paid their bills and saved for a comfortable retirement.

“And while they can pay their way, it didn't stop Robertson's mom from crying when she opened up her most recent electricity bill—and found from now on, she'll be paying a whopping \$905 every two months.

“Electricity bills went up 8% in June. Then the HST kicked another 8% in on July 1.

“Over the next six months, most analysts expect prices to soar—as rate hikes, time-of-use smart meters and other charges kick in. Windmills and solar may be trendy and green, but they're expensive and will push up the cost of electricity to the stratosphere.

“Robertson's dad is 84, his mom is 86. His dad is in the final stages of cancer. He came home from hospital for palliative care.

“He needs an oxygen machine to keep him alive.

“And that machine is causing a spike in his electricity costs. His last bill showed a ‘budget catch-up’ adjustment of \$478.86—doubling his parents’ bill.

“‘My mom cried when she opened it,’ Robertson said in an interview.

“And they can’t even claim the electricity as a medical cost.

“With the rebate only covering people making less than \$30,000, his parents’ past thrift means they won’t qualify.

“‘The people who have actually saved up and worked hard and are veterans and have slightly more retirement income don’t qualify for it, and that’s not fair either.’

“‘An extra tax’

“‘It’s like an extra tax on people who have contributed so much to the country,’ Robertson said.

“Soaring energy costs were front and centre at Queen’s Park last week as the latest hydro bills started to thud through mailboxes.

“The Robertsons’ earlier bill of \$377.29 was made up of \$105.48 for delivery; \$22.99 for regulatory, a \$22.31 ‘debt retirement charge’—and HST of \$49.04.

“McGuinty likes to say the extra costs are going to produce more energy, better transmission and cleaner energy.

“He likes to point out we got through a hot summer with no blackouts or brownouts—hinting that wasn’t the case when the Tories were in power.

“That’s only partially true.

“While the McGuinty government announced last Friday four more coal plants would close permanently, the only coal plant mothballed before last week—Lakeview in Mississauga—was actually ordered shut by the previous Tory government.”

Isn’t that interesting? For all that this government’s been talking about shutting down coal-fired electricity generation, the only plant actually shut was ordered by the member for Kitchener. We all know the record of the government on promising—they’re very good at promising to shut down coal-fired electricity. In fact, if they kept their original promise, they would all have been shut in 2007. I believe it was originally 2004, wasn’t it? From 2004 to 2007: It keeps changing.

“And with the devastation in the manufacturing sector”—going back to the article—“we don’t need anywhere near the amount of electricity we required when the economy was booming.

“There might have been fewer smog days. The truth is, though, that most of our smog comes from coal plants in the Ohio valley. And with massive cutbacks in the auto sector and the manufacturing sector there, those coal plants simply aren’t pumping out the same amount of electricity.

“Yes, we did have a blackout when the Tories were in power in 2003. But it wasn’t caused by faulty transmission lines or a lack of generation here.

“The problem was with a poorly maintained hydro line in Ohio.

“You get the impression that the rebate announced by the government last week was hastily thrown together on the back of a napkin.

“It was in response to the roar of disapproval from voters across the province who, like the Robertsons, opened their bills—and wept.”

That was an article by Christina Blizzard. You can see that it’s her perspective that the government is reacting to all the pushback they’re getting from constituents who are opening their electricity bills and being shocked at the huge bills they’re facing.

I have certainly heard, on the smart meter front—mainly anecdotally, but it seems quite universal across the province when you talk to other MPPs. The smart meters get installed—they haven’t started the time-of-use metering in most places—but they’re installed, and then the next month, for some reason, your hydro bill goes up. That’s a story that I’ve heard from many MPPs who have been contacted by constituents. I don’t know whether there’s a fault with the actual meters or what the answer is, but I can tell you, it’s a common story I’ve heard around the province.

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In fact, I received this letter from a constituent of mine. I won’t put his name on the record, but I did want to get on the record some of what he said about smart meters, because I have received quite a few letters like this. This was from March of this year:

“This letter is the result of sudden and unexpected outrageous increases to hydro accounts since the installation of the so-called smart meters in the late fall of 2009. I was present the day of installation, having time to converse with the installer (a retired hydro worker, called back in to help move the installation forward with some expediency). We discussed the relationship between consumer and smart meter, arriving at the same conclusion: that this installation of such a new technology, touted to be the best thing since Swiss cheese, resulting in some indigestion, the only one suffering would be the consumer—the real loser!

“One of my tenants approached me on the 26th of February, 2010, furious about her latest bill. I must say, it was extremely high, given that it was a ‘read’ meter reading. Her bill had gone from \$200–\$300 monthly to a charge of \$1,400 for two months, even though usage had never changed. The tenant called Hydro One and filed a complaint. As usual, it was given a level of toilet priority—flushed. They were told, ‘It is what it is and you will have to pay the account or have your services cut off.’ We also received a final billing for \$320 for a unit that was vacant for 21 days. I can only imagine that if someone was living in this unit during this period, the billing may have exceeded \$1,000. What impact will this have on the working people in this province? Both of these units rent out at \$975 monthly. Now add to that the cost of Hydro One services at \$700 plus per month. Hydro One, the Ontario Energy Board and the Liberal Party can envision naked, half-starved people trying to get to work to get enough money to pay their utility bills. However,

they still require food and clothing as well as transportation. Maybe this province will have to import a lot of canned cat food and crackers to feed the working poor as well as the elderly living on the edge. You can be sure the Premier would not find this very appetizing!

“The owner of the Tim Hortons franchises in Huntsville was furious when he received his latest billing from Hydro One (‘three times the usual monthly billings’). Well, at least we can say that Hydro One is not prejudiced. They really do not care who owns the account. Another business owner in Huntsville has had a hydro crew working around his home for the past two weeks in an effort to determine why his consumption is so abnormally high, why the new smart meter recently installed by Hydro One has been spiking continuously since it was used to replace the old reliable analog meters of the past.”

That’s an indication from one constituent around the Huntsville area.

Still on smart meters and time-of-use metering, I was at Murray Ore’s business in Parry Sound, Orr’s Fine Meats and Deli. I drop in there on a regular basis when I’m in Parry Sound. He was very concerned. He serves lunch there, but of course, it’s a butcher shop, and he’s got all kinds of refrigerators and freezers. He can’t shut them off during the day in prime time, when the bills are the highest, and start them up at night; they run all the time. So he was very, very concerned about what was going to happen to his bill. He can’t shift the demand to the middle of the night; he has no option. He’s very concerned about the effect that was going to have on his small business.

We have heard, as the member from Halton pointed out, that the Premier is suggesting that to get the cheaper rate, we all need to start doing our laundry either in the middle of the night or on Saturdays. So Saturdays will become the laundry day across the province.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: He needs to get an ice house.

Mr. Norm Miller: We used to have ice houses.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I think they’re going to be making a comeback.

Mr. Norm Miller: The member from Mississippi Mills is suggesting that maybe we’ll have a resurgence of ice houses in the province of Ontario. We used to actually have an ice house back at the resort I formerly ran. Mind you, that was about 40 years ago. When they would go out on the lake, cut the ice and pack it in the ice house, as a kid, I got to take fish that people caught inside and put them on the ice. We may be heading back there.

This letter I have is from a constituent talking about her concerns. It’s hand-written, and she did say I could use her name, Marion DeMerchant, and her concerns:

“Dear Mr. Miller,

“I need your help, please.

“With the new meter my hydro bill is ‘said’ to double the average of the past five years.

“I called hydro—they will not even come to check the meter or the reason for the increase.

“I heat with oil and wood; have no clothes dryer nor any additional electric equipment.

“Plus I have been away two days of each week during a warmer-than-normal winter.

“I am alone on fixed retirement income and usually keep heat from the oil furnace at 15 degrees to save oil.

“I have a friend who heats a home, twice the square feet of my 1,000 square-foot, by all electric. His bill is \$313 and mine \$322.

“PS: I told hydro that I’m unable to pay the full \$322 out of my monthly pension, OAS and CPP.”

That is a concerned constituent, and that is kind of what is happening on the ground with these increased costs.

I have many concerned constituents writing to me. Here’s another concerned with time-of-use pricing:

“Dear Mr. Miller,

“Thank you for your continued support in our area, and this opportunity to express my concerns re: time of use pricing.

“Other than the fact that the time-of-use positive returns at the consumer level are not being realized in terms of reducing our overall consumption costs, I also have additional concerns which seem not to be being addressed in this matter.

“(1) irrespective of our individual (residential) consumption and proven lack of ability to reduce our own costs of use under this program, there are a multitude of commercial organizations in Ontario which, because of their business needs, cannot run at off-peak times. Unquestionably, these organizations’ electrical consumption costs will increase significantly. Being by necessity profit-driven, there is only one place they can recover those costs, and that is from the consumer by passing on those cost increases.

“(2) Because of most consumers’ lack of ability, or motivation, to move to ‘off-peak’ time of use, their cost will increase, which will be windfall revenue to the electricity producers and associated utilities. One has to question how these windfall revenues will be utilized. For example, will it be used to accelerate the paying down of the huge Ontario Hydro debt?

“Please correct me if my initial premise is incorrect here, i.e. business organizations will be on time of use rates. Otherwise, if you have the opportunity to raise these concerns it will be much appreciated.”

That is a concern, and as I mentioned, in talking to businesses like Orr’s in Parry Sound, time of use does apply. They’re very concerned about how they’re going to pay their bill.

Here’s another email—this is a cottager:

“We have investigated many ways to reduce our hydro consumption. For some people, the end result will be to sell their cottage. We will wait for a full year of actuals before deciding on any drastic measures.

“Long-term worry: infrastructure. Just not there. Second long-term worry: management. Read recently that

hydro rates are expected to increase as much as 40% over the next few years. That's poor planning and management. It is a sad thing to see this resource-rich province become a have-not because of poor management."

Unfortunately, as of two years ago, we have become a have-not province.

This constituent, a cottage owner, says in this letter to me:

"Dear Mr. Miller

"As a cottage owner in your riding, I was dismayed to discover that the cost of my hydro has increased roughly 25% this year—and that is cost increases, not consumption increases. After some discussion with Hydro One, it seems to me that a disproportionate amount of the increased cost of hydro delivery is borne by cottagers. Hydro One tells me that even though we are resident in the area for about 65% of the year, we cannot be considered 'resident' since we own a property elsewhere. As a result, delivery charges, linked to consumption charges, are twice as high for non-residents than for residents. I am not sure why this is considered fair. When two residences are charged different rates for the same service, that is discrimination, and that is what Hydro One is practising. Since this is legislated discrimination, I'm not sure there is anything you can do about that.

"My reason for emailing you is to point out the obvious flaw in Hydro One's plan from the northern perspective: the impact on northern communities when cottagers can no longer afford their cottage because of high costs due to hydro rates and taxation rates. In my experience, the majority of cottagers are long-term owners who struggle for the privilege inherent in being able to spend time up north. For many of us, this struggle is one we are losing and there will be an inevitable, unpleasant financial impact on the region as a whole.

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"The taxpayers of Ontario have been poorly served by the management of hydro resources in the province and the failure of governments to plan for their long-term availability. Now some Ontarians are forced to bear an unequal burden of the cost of this mismanagement. In the long run, all Ontarians will suffer.

"I find the current pricing practices of Hydro One discriminatory and punitive."

That's a slightly different concern, and I'm afraid Bill 109 will not assist that constituent. So that has given a bit of an idea of some of the emails that I have been receiving to do with concerns about increasing energy costs.

Let me just talk a bit about what this bill is going to do, because, as I said, the other day when the Minister of Finance was speaking, he threw out the \$1-billion figure. This is actually a \$70-million proposal. It changes the old Ontario property tax credit. With that, a non-senior was able to claim up to \$900. So they're playing a bit of a game with numbers, I would say, in that they've taken that amount of the old Ontario property tax credit and renamed this the Ontario energy and property tax credit. So now the maximum you can qualify for, if you're a

non-senior, is \$700, and they're giving you a \$200 energy tax credit. Guess what that makes: \$900. It will make a very slight difference. For some people, it's easier to get the full \$200 versus getting all of the old \$900 of the other. But \$700 and \$200 still adds up to \$900.

Interjection: It's a bit of a shell game.

Mr. Norm Miller: It's a bit of a shell game, I would call that, yes.

This program is income-tested so that if you're a single person and you make \$20,000 or less, or if you're a family and you make \$25,000 or less, and the same applies for seniors, then you can qualify for it. For non-seniors, a family or a single person who owns or rents a home would be able to claim an energy amount of up to \$200. In addition, they would be able to claim a property tax amount of \$50 plus 10% of their occupancy cost, to a maximum of \$700. As I say, that \$200 energy credit plus the \$700 property tax credit comes back to the same total that was in the old Ontario property tax credit.

The property tax amount would not be allowed to exceed occupancy cost. The maximum energy and property tax amounts that could be claimed would be \$900. The total of these amounts would be reduced by 2% of adjusted family net income over \$20,000 for a single person or over \$25,000—so as you have more income, then you get less of a credit.

Then there's also the seniors' part of it. It's the same threshold for seniors. It is \$20,000 for singles and \$25,000—sorry, the income thresholds for seniors would increase from \$20,000 to \$25,000 for single seniors, so that's the increase, and from \$25,000 to \$30,000 for senior couples. That's to get the full amount of the credit.

For seniors, this is the way it would work: Additional benefits would be provided to seniors. A senior family or a single senior who owns or rents a home would be able to claim an energy amount of up to \$200. In addition, they would be able to claim a property tax amount of \$425 plus 10% of their occupancy cost, to a maximum of \$825. The occupancy cost is equal to the property tax paid and/or 20% of qualifying rent paid during the year. The property tax amount would not be allowed to exceed occupancy cost. The maximum energy and property tax amounts that could be claimed would be \$1,025. The total of these amounts would be reduced by 2%, again, for net income over \$25,000 for a single senior or over \$30,000 for a senior couple.

This also does apply to people who live on a reserve and pay home energy costs, and they have to have some proof of their energy bill.

So that's kind of what this bill is about. It is a relatively modest effort, particularly when you look at all the various ways in which—I have talked a lot about energy having gone up because of all the various costs and pressures, including the green energy tax they put on recently. It's worth about \$50 million; this whole plan is \$70 million.

The HST is huge, of course, and it applies not just to energy bills but affects how much disposable income

people have, because it also applies to gasoline for your car, heating oil and a long list of other things that the old provincial sales tax did not apply to. People are facing so many increased costs, and this is going to be a relatively minor benefit for them when you look at the long list of things.

When the current government came into power, one of the first things they did in their first budget was scrap a seniors' property tax credit that had been put in place by Ernie Eves. If they feel so strongly about it, I'm not sure why, in their first budget, they scrapped that seniors' property tax credit that Ernie Eves had brought into effect. They also scrapped the plan to have tax-reduced zones in the north, which were about to be implemented. In their first budget, they did away with that plan to have tax incentive zones, I guess they were called, in the north. I happened to be at, I think, a FONOM conference in northeastern Ontario when Ernie Eves announced that, and I can say it had a very positive response and that northern communities were looking forward to the benefit of increased economic activity they were expecting from that.

Also in that first budget they cancelled planned tax reductions that would benefit business and create jobs. The corporate tax rate was supposed to go from 14% to 11%. They put it back up to 14%, a 27% effective increase from where it was planned to go down to. They also increased the small business tax. Of course, despite the Premier, in a very well publicized public signing with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that he wouldn't raise taxes—despite making that commitment—he brought in a huge new tax, one of the biggest tax hikes we've ever seen, in the health tax, which people are still paying to this day. Over \$15 billion has been taxed through that new tax.

Of course, most recently, on the same day the new HST was coming into effect, we had the new eco tax. I was surprised at the sort of public reaction I got from constituents in Parry Sound–Muskoka to this eco tax. I think people reacted because they viewed this particular tax as being sneaky. There hadn't really been any publicity about it. The government had been doing a sales job going around the province trying to sell the HST, which was coming into effect on July 1, but we really hadn't heard much, if anything, about the eco tax. Then, all of a sudden, people went to—

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: Did the member from Peterborough say, “We dropped it”? I think he said, “We dropped it.”

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: The member from Peterborough just said, “We dropped the eco tax.”

Interjection: They withheld it in three days.

Mr. Norm Miller: That's what I'm talking about: the reaction of the public to this new tax. I think people just viewed it as being sneaky. The government didn't communicate what the tax was about or how it was supposed to benefit the environment. People went to Canadian Tire

and bought something—it might have been a toothbrush; it might have been whatever—and they were looking at the receipt and wondering, “What's this other tax on here?” There was mass confusion. Different retailers were dealing with it in different ways. There was a huge public backlash that I certainly heard about at a local level from people who just said, “We've had enough. Nobody told us anything about this, and damn, here's another new tax.” There was a backlash from that.

So, as the member from Peterborough pointed out, they dropped it. Well, they sort of dropped it. They dropped it for 90 days—

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: They dropped it for 90 days. It'll be interesting to see the way the government handles that one, but I suspect it will come back and it's going to be totally hidden so we just don't know it's there anymore. We will definitely be watching to see in what form this eco tax comes back. But I think when people can't see any benefit to it that it's going to benefit the environment somehow, then they just see it as being a tax grab.

1500

I've had private members' bills in the past to do with deposit return, where there's some incentive to actually benefit the environment. I had a private member's bill to do with the LCBO deposit return that I happen to think makes sense. In fact, the government actually implemented it the next year. There's some actual incentive, and the consumer gets the money back. They may pay a deposit, but they actually get it back, and there's a benefit to the environment in that that incentive to get their money back causes them to bring bottles back. There are, as has been proven through the Beer Store system of deposit return, very successful return rates—in the high 90%, I think, in the Beer Store.

I've been supportive of deposit return systems where there's actually a benefit, but with the eco tax you couldn't see any connection to a benefit to the environment; you just saw an extra tax.

Part of the reason that this government has been looking at new taxes is because of the state of the finances of the province of Ontario. I just sat through the estimates committee with the Minister of Finance last week, and one of the pieces of information that should be a little startling to Ontario residents in the public accounts is that the government had a deficit of—I think the final number was \$19.3 billion. Actually, it was hard to keep track because it changed so many times last year. They started out last year's budget in March 2009 saying it was going to be—I believe the first number was a \$14-billion deficit in the budget. Then, in June, they revised it up to \$18 billion. Then, in early September, they changed it to \$24.5 billion—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Twenty-four point seven.

Mr. Norm Miller: —\$24.7 billion. Thank you, member from Halton, for correcting me on that. Then, as we got closer to the end of the fiscal year, getting close to March 31, 2010, the number went to \$21 billion, roughly. Feel free to correct me, member from Halton, if I get the

number wrong. Then, in the end, they were all happy that the deficit was \$19.3 billion. Hurray, hurray. This was supposed to have been some wonderful thing.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: A record Ontario deficit.

Mr. Norm Miller: And that's a record deficit.

That's one side of it, but the interesting part of it is also, though, that when you look at the public accounts, the actual debt added to the province of Ontario last year was \$35.2 billion in extra debt when you add that \$19 billion and then you add on other debt that they borrowed for capital spending and who knows what else? That's a big number: \$35.2 billion in new debt for the province of Ontario added just last year, with about 50% of it borrowed outside of the country.

I specifically asked the Minister of Finance, "Where is this money borrowed from?" Roughly 50% is from outside the country, and that's Europe and China. It's borrowed around the world and it's got to be repaid. Frankly, I find it a little scary that this government has added that much debt in just one year—\$35.2 billion in just one year in the province of Ontario. That's a mortgage on our kids' future. The pages sitting here: I'm afraid to say that you're going to be paying off that debt as you get into your working careers and pay future taxes to pay off the \$35.2 billion in debt just added this year.

Why are we in that situation? We're in this situation because this is a tax-and-spend government. When they came into power, the budget was about \$68 billion. They've greatly increased spending so that this year it's \$127 billion in spending. That's a huge increase. But the interesting thing to notice is, the revenue for this year is that \$107 billion is projected. That's a record revenue. So we don't have a revenue problem; we have a problem that the government has spent irresponsibly and not tried to control spending at all.

Despite a recession happening, which they've mentioned a lot and blamed for all kinds of things, in October 2008, we haven't seen any restraint from this government. In fact, since 2008, despite having this worldwide economic calamity, they continue to sign contracts with a big part of the workforce of the government of Ontario. About half the budget is wages, and they continue to sign contracts for 2% or 3% over four years.

Only in this year's budget have they said they're going to freeze the non-union wages and start to deal with the unionized part of the workforce and freeze their wages only when the current contracts expire. They signed these three- and four-year contracts that don't expire until after the next election, I think, with the thought that if there are political problems or strikes or whatever pushback from the public sector, that would happen after the next election and not be a problem for them.

We're in the situation we're in because this government has been irresponsible with its spending—a spending problem, not a revenue problem. It's affecting all taxpayers as they're seeing increased costs on the pocket-book and as they're being forced to pay higher and higher fees in new taxes, new fees and new increased

charges on their energy bill. That's the situation we're currently in.

I'm not seeing the member from Durham. I think I will conclude shortly and just say that this modest tax support for the people of Ontario is something we will support, although, as I say, when you look at the total costs that people are facing on their property and energy bills, \$70 million is relatively minor. It is something that we will be supporting, but it won't make that much difference for the people of Ontario.

As I was saying previously, I think the strategy of the government has been to roll these bills out kind of one at a time. They could have had this bill—it was announced in last year's budget—in the spring budget bill. They could have had the child activity tax credit in the spring budget bill. But the order paper is relatively thin, so instead, we're seeing these thin bills roll out one at a time with great fanfare and the government talking about billions of dollars when, really, it's a relatively minor benefit for the people of Ontario.

Apparently the member for Durham is busy with constituency meetings, so he's going to be speaking later. I know he usually likes to speak to any bill and get the voice of his constituents on the record, but other members will be speaking further on to this bill. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I'm pleased to take a couple of minutes to respond to the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka, the critic for the PC caucus.

This is an important measure. The parliamentary assistant spent some time outlining the legislation in the leadoff for second reading. I think she did an excellent job of that.

Obviously, we're concerned, particularly about seniors, those with lower incomes, those on fixed incomes, those who may have an element of vulnerability in their income stream. We want to make sure there are provisions in place as we change and structure policy to protect them. We want to make sure there are opportunities for them to offset some of their costs, such as their energy costs, in such a fashion that, as we change, as the systems change, as we restructure the electrical systems into a new economic structure, those who find themselves in a situation where they are likely on fixed incomes or low or modest incomes, we provide some element of protection for them.

That's why, in part, the Ontario energy and property tax credit for seniors is in place: We have adjusted. The critic spoke to some changes in property tax credit systems and energy credit systems over the past number of years, and we have adjusted as we've gone along. We looked at the property tax credit and found that there were adjustments needed on those in the early going. Similarly, we feel it's the appropriate time now to be looking at these adjustments on this side, particularly on the energy side.

1510

This Ontario energy and property tax credit is going to deliver almost \$1.3 billion in annual support. That's a lot of money: \$1.3 billion to go to Ontario families, primarily seniors, to support them in their endeavour to be able to offset some of the costs they might otherwise endure. This is an increase of some \$525 million compared to the property tax credits that were in place in 2009 and, if passed, some 740,000 Ontario seniors would see an increase in the tax relief it provided for. These are large numbers—billions of dollars, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of seniors and families having an opportunity to see some relief as we all struggle with some of the costs of ensuring we have an adequate, effective electrical system where the lights will stay on.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'd like to congratulate my colleague the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka on his excellent critique of this legislation, which, for those of you who are watching, is the Enhancement of the Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit for Seniors and Ontario Families Act, 2010.

As my colleague mentioned, of course we're going to support it because anything that's going to bring tax relief, insofar especially as it concerns seniors, you've got to be in favour of. But really, the fact of the matter is that this government wouldn't even have brought this legislation in at all if it hadn't been for the huge pushback from the public with respect to their skyrocketing energy prices. That stems from the complete lack of an energy plan, notwithstanding their protestations.

We've got a government here that's completely ignoring the energy needs of this province in the years to come. We've got increases that are going up and up, probably another 25% by this time next year, and they're doing very little about it, completely ignoring the problem and burying their heads in the sand.

So we've got a situation where we've got this legislation before us. It's really a band-aid solution for the lack of attention to the energy sector. As far as the seniors are concerned and the statements that have been made by previous members in this debate about how much this government has done for seniors, well, I would beg to differ when you look at what's happening in our retirement homes right now, where you have people who are left in shocking conditions, when you have people who are without the supports that they need. They're not able to manage in the community. A lot of them are having to go into retirement homes because we don't have enough long-term-care placements available for them, nor do we have enough placements for them in the community. We've got a situation where the aging at home strategy is a complete failure. When you look at community care access centres across this province, they are completely without enough funds to be able to provide the necessary housekeeping, nursing and other services that our seniors require.

So as far as everything this government has done for seniors, I say forget about it. They've done nothing. They continue to hide their heads in the sand.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'd like to thank the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka as well for speaking to this issue and pointing out that at the core of what we're dealing with is a failure, a complete mess when it comes to electricity policy, and an attempt on the part of the government to try and paper that over.

This is a government that has decided to continue with privatization of our electricity system, a government that has made decisions about the technology we use that will make life more expensive for people. This is a government that now is beginning to realize that what it has done to the public, what it has done to Ontario's economy, what it will do to Ontario's economy is putting its political future in jeopardy.

Why is this bill before us? Why are we debating this initiative to provide property and energy tax credits to people of this province? We're doing that because this government even last year when it did its polling—and I'm speculating, because I've never been able to see the polling, but one can only conclude that they looked at what was going on with the public, did the numbers, realized they were in trouble and decided they had to bring forward a program, a bill that would give them political cover.

As you're well aware and as other members are well aware when they talk to their constituents, people are hard-pressed. So I don't think there's anyone in this Legislature who will say, "No, we shouldn't give people this credit." But many of us will say the reason that this is even before us and is necessary is because this government, the McGuinty government, has made a monumental mess of its electricity and energy policies, and the people of this province have been forced to pay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: We're talking today about the enhancements to the Ontario energy and property tax credit for seniors and families. And you know what? I am really pleased that we now have both opposition parties on board, that they understand. I've listened to and understood the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, and I know that he's fully in support of this measure. Listening to his rhetoric, we're a little bit unsure, but I think that was the message. I just heard the same endorsement from across the floor, and I think I understand why: because this is something that the seniors of this province need.

I talked about the folks in Elliot Lake. The people in Elliot Lake, the people on Manitoulin or maybe the people in Bruce Mines—and I happened to have been at the 130th anniversary of the Central Algoma Exhibition just the other day—would be telling me, and they do tell me, that they appreciate the assistance they are receiving through the northern energy tax credit, which is on top of what we're suggesting today for the Ontario energy and

property tax credit, which will help all seniors in northern Ontario of modest or low income and will help families across the province.

I understand that people have difficulty with property tax and energy costs. In the world we live in, those costs are fixed. You can't do much about them. You can't change. With energy, you can do some things, but with your property tax you are kind of at the mercy of the realities of municipalities these days.

What I would suggest to people—and for those out there watching, you would know that this is good for the people of Ontario. It's good for modest- and low-income people, especially seniors, so I'm pleased to see the opposition parties supporting the government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to respond and thank the members for adding comments.

The member from Pickering–Scarborough East was throwing out that \$1.3-billion figure again, and I point out that this bill is dealing with \$70 million. To bring in a little bit of a comparison, the green energy tax that is added to people's bills is roughly about a \$50-million program. I just wanted to give some sort of scope as to the costs and benefits.

The member from Whitby–Oshawa pointed out that this bill is a reaction, in her opinion, to pushback from the public because of the lack of an energy plan put forward by the current government in the past seven years, and this was more of a band-aid solution to that pushback.

The member from Toronto–Danforth also said that the energy sector is a complete mess and pointed out that the current government's political future is in jeopardy. He suggested that this bill is about political cover, and the polling had something to do with it.

I would ask the member from Algoma–Manitoulin to go check with his government officials, but it's my understanding that the cap that's outlined in this bill for seniors includes any other program they might get, including a northern energy cap—having just been briefed on it last week—which is included in this, so you can't get both beyond the cap that's outlined in this bill. So I would just ask him to go and check the facts on that one and report back to the House, if he would like to do so. But it's my understanding that this cap for seniors—I believe it's a \$1,025 cap, if I'm reading in the right spot here—includes anything you might get from the northern energy program as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Today I'll be discussing Bill 109, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement the Ontario energy and property tax credit and to make consequential amendments. Those who have been in the chamber for the last round of questions and comments and those who've been watching on television will know that the heart of what I have to say is that this govern-

ment has made huge mistakes on the energy file; that the McGuinty government has misunderstood, whether it was maliciously or not, what had to be done to make sure that we have affordable, reliable energy in this province, and set out on a number of policy courses that have driven up the cost of living and put people in a very difficult situation. Thus today, we are going through a variety of standard phrases: putting on a band-aid, papering over—take your pick. This government has a political problem and it's trying to address it in part with this bill.

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Why do seniors need this credit? Because this government is hitting them hard, hitting them continuously, and not just on the tax side: It's hitting them on the cost of utilities to keep themselves warm in the winter and at a cool and healthy temperature in the summer. This government has set aside its understanding of what people in this province need and has decided on a course of action that means that you, Speaker, and I and members all around this chamber hear from families about their skyrocketing hydro bills. They see the hydro bills raised by hundreds of dollars despite, in many cases, their best efforts to reduce their energy use. Dalton McGuinty's policies—and I will go into detail in this speech—are driving those increases. Every bad decision by this government means another nickel or dime or dollar on somebody's hydro bill and, I would argue as well, on their natural gas bill. Those nickels and dimes are turning into big bucks, and that's why this afternoon we are in this chamber debating this bill, because people are feeling it.

Over the past couple of weeks we've heard about a billion and a half dollars on the not-so-smart meters, sweetheart private power deals and a decision to let utilities raise their profit margins. All of those things hurt the people of this province, hurt the economy of this province. When you add in Dalton McGuinty's 8% HST, you have a bad mix.

People understand that in this society taxes are how we contribute to the common good of the society itself, but they don't think it makes sense to make it more difficult for people to pay for the very necessities of life. As you well know, people in your riding in high-rise apartment buildings in the middle of the summer facing west find their units extraordinarily hot and they have to air condition those units. Increasingly, those tenants, those seniors, those citizens will be spending an awful lot of money to keep the temperature at a level that allows them to be healthy. Increasingly, not just in Toronto but across Ontario, people will be spending more to keep warm in the winter, a necessity of life in this climate. This government has misunderstood where it needs to apply its charges, and charging more to people for the necessities of life is a profound, fundamental error in policy and in treatment of the population.

Everyone in Ontario needs a break on their hydro bill. This plan is an extremely modest response that leaves most families still struggling to pay their hydro bills. There's very little new here. This proposal, this approach was first brought forward in the March 2010 budget.

There were no funds allocated. This is the first time we actually get to debate this, but it is not the first time it's been put on the table and announced and—what can I say?—not just announced, but announced with fanfare. The second coming has arrived; the people have been saved: That's the attitude of this government when it makes these kinds of announcements.

Seniors need every penny that they can get to pay their hydro bills. Much more could have been done and that's why the NDP is demanding that the 8% HST be taken off hydro bills. Removing the HST from hydro bills puts \$500 million back into the pockets of nearly six million Ontario families and senior households. Our proposal, the repeal of the HST on hydro bills, would save the average family with two or more children about \$135 a year. That's a positive step. That's a step that this government could put in place that would be understood very quickly by the people of Ontario and would benefit them in a substantial manner.

The Liberal policy is one that's in disarray. Over the past three weeks, the NDP, led by Andrea Horwath, has voiced its concerns again and again. Bad policy decisions have been made by this government, and Ontarians are paying the price. This government's energy policy is seriously broken, and with the time that I have today, I want to address a number of these concerns.

Before we talk about things like smart meters, nuclear power plants and all of the technology, all of the hard investments that are made to provide us with electricity, with energy, I want to talk about this government's decision to make American utility companies richer, this government's decision to make all utility companies far more profitable than they were in the past. I want to talk about this government's decision to not only make it more difficult for people to pay their electricity bills but more difficult to pay their natural gas and their heating bills as well, because this government's approach to energy—not just electricity but to energy overall—is to make sure that energy companies are far more profitable than they've been in the past. That has consequences—consequences that this bill, as I've said before, is trying to paper over, is trying to band-aid over, this afternoon.

Last year, the Ontario Energy Board held a hearing to decide if there needed to be any change in what's called the return-on-equity rate. For those who don't follow Ontario Energy Board events closely, and that must be 99% of the population, they were trying to decide whether or not energy companies could make a bigger profit. In Ontario, we've regulated energy. We know that it's central to people's well-being. We know that it's critical to the performance of the economy. We know that because of the way energy is distributed—through pipelines, through wires—it's a monopoly. So there has to be a way for the public to protect its interest when it deals with these energy companies. We've regulated the price; we've regulated the profit that companies can make.

The Ontario Energy Board has determined the amount of profit that these companies can make as a way of saying that if they want to go and borrow money from a

bank or from people who want to buy bonds, they can tell them, "Yes, we're making a very high rate of profit. We're very solvent. You can loan us money. You can buy our bonds." Independent Canadian voices said that no change was needed in the rate of profit, the return on equity, for utility companies. But American experts were brought in by the big utilities who said that profits should be higher and that Ontarians should pay more.

The last time I looked there was still a border, there were still separate sets of laws, and there were separate governments between us and the United States. But the Ontario Energy Board was deeply swayed by these American experts who said that Canadians should pay more so that Canadian utilities or utilities operating in Canada could return higher rates of profit to their owners.

They won; they were successful. The Ontario Energy Board changed the rules so that utility companies can now collect \$240 million and more per year in profits. That's a lot of money. That is a lot of money that goes on for a long time, money that is not something that's subject to the vagaries of budget-making, not something that will be dropping any time soon. If this government has a deficit problem long into the future, this credit may be at risk, but I can tell you right now the pressure of those who own these utilities to continue to crank out profits will be relentless. These profits, this \$240 million a year, is a sum of money that seniors and families will be paying for many years—decades to come. So you have to ask, why on earth should families that are already struggling over money have to pay a higher rate of profit? It doesn't smell right. It doesn't look right. It isn't right for Ontario. It is the wrong decision. It's a direction that this government could have overruled and didn't—has not, has said it won't.

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World-renowned finance experts from U of T and York business schools argued that the current formula for profits was just fine, maybe even a bit generous. The utilities hired American experts who argued that the profits were too low, that Ontarians should pay more. Now I have to say to you, I heard no rumblings of utilities wanting to leave Ontario and go somewhere else and not operate here. It isn't as though they weren't being given the money to actually maintain their power plants, their lines and their transmission system. No, it was their profit that was at issue, not the money to actually make sure the system was working well.

In the end, the energy board that the McGuinty government put in place decided that the American utility experts were right and these poor utilities needed a higher rate of profit. And we are carrying the burden for that and our budget is going to carry the burden for that, trying to ameliorate, trying to soften the blow that seniors and families are going to feel from those higher costs.

We don't understand why \$240 million more is coming out of the pockets of hard-working Ontarians just to make sure that utilities are more profitable, and it isn't just the NDP that finds this puzzling, finds this a wrong step, a misdirection for the province. It's no wonder that

polling shows that most Ontarians think Ontario is headed in the wrong direction. It's decisions like this that say to people, "My interest, our interests, are no longer being looked after."

But it isn't just folks in every day lives who feel that way. Groups as diverse as the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters association, the Consumers Council of Canada and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre have all written to the minister in the past week or so voicing their objection to the decision. I'd like to read from these letters because I think people need to know what others are saying. The Consumers Council of Canada, September 24, 2010, in a letter to Brad Duguid, said:

"Dear Minister:

"The Consumers Council of Canada ... is very concerned about the decision of the Ontario Energy Board to allow utilities to increase their return on equity to 10%"—their profit. "The issue has now been raised in the Legislature.

"The consumer council believes the threshold question is whether publicly owned utilities should be allowed to earn a" return on equity. "Public utilities are just that—public. They have little or no risk. The money thus earned is a hidden and regressive tax. Their shareholders are their customers, city or provincial taxpayers who are already paying increased rates to cover the costs of a variety of initiatives.... Fairness to consumers should be the guiding principle. The OEB sets rates based on a complex formula designed to ensure that utilities cover their costs (which include a return to their shareholder—the city or province). Now it seems those costs have just gone up, and electricity consumers will pay yet again.

"Consumers don't object to paying reasonable costs to ensure the lights are on and the environment is not unduly damaged. We rightly expect the OEB to be looking out for our interests as the regulator of public utilities where decisions should result from a fair process, one that allows a searching examination, in this case, for increased" return on equity. "The Ontario Energy Board allowed for the increase in the absence of a balanced process and based its recommendations on the fact that private US firms are somehow comparable.

"The Consumers Council of Canada urges you to review the recent decision of the Ontario Energy Board in the light of the fundamentally flawed process through which this decision was made. Any decision affecting rates requires a proper hearing, which, in turn, allows cross-examination. That was not done in that case. Ontario consumers deserve better."

I think they put it well. Why has the rate of profit been increased for these companies that are not in a situation of great risk; where, in fact, things are very stable? They are providing a utility service; they are not subjected to a wave of competition the way you would be in some other industrial sectors. Yet the return on equity, their profit, has been doubled, from about 5% to 10%.

It is not good public policy. It is not good for the people of this province. It is why a property tax credit is

called for, but it is also what is driving people's need for that kind of tax credit.

Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, September 28, 2010, to the Honourable Brad Duguid:

"Dear Minister:

"Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters ... writes to support the calls for a review of the Ontario Energy Board's December 2009 report on the cost of capital for Ontario's regulated utilities made by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre ... and the Consumers' Council of Canada ... in their recent letters to you.

"Any equity return being achieved by Ontario manufacturers in the current environment of ever-increasing energy and utility costs is rapidly eroding. In these circumstances, it is of considerable concern to CME that the equity returns allowed to Ontario utilities should be materially increasing.

"Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters agrees with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre and Consumers Council of Canada that the board's recent cost of capital report is the result of a fundamentally flawed process. Moreover, the question of whether publicly owned utilities that do not raise equity in the capital markets should be permitted to recover costs of equity that they do not incur is an issue that needs to be scrutinized in a proceeding that allows issues of fact and opinion to be fully tested under cross-examination.

"It is unclear to Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters why publicly owned utilities should profit from assets acquired with funds provided by taxpayers when the board itself has ruled in prior cases that utility investments funded by taxes should earn no return.

"Moreover, the Ontario government has recognized that the source of funds invested in utility assets is an important matter to consider when establishing utility prices. A backgrounder issued by the Ontario government on February 23, 2005, when it established prices to be paid by consumers for electricity produced by the regulated assets of Ontario Power Generation Inc. ... stated as follows:

"The prices on OPG's regulated assets are based on projected costs of operation plus a 5% return on equity.... While the standard ROE for North American utilities is 10%, a 5% ROE will generate revenue to service the OPG debt held by the Ontario Electricity Financial Corp. while putting significant discipline on OPG to contain costs and improve overall operating efficiencies."

"For all of these reasons, CME urges the minister to take action to redress and mitigate the harm that the board's cost of capital report is causing to manufacturers and other consumers.

"CME would be pleased to meet with you or your representatives to discuss this matter."

Signed "Ian Howcroft, vice president, Ontario division."

Then, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, September 27, 2010, to Mr. Brad Duguid regarding "Ontario Energy Board decision EB-2009-0084, cost of capital for Ontario's regulated utilities:

“The recent media coverage of increases to the financial return of public and private utilities in Ontario has highlighted a significant and flawed decision of the Ontario Energy Board that is unnecessarily adding to the financial hardship of increased energy rates by Ontario consumers. The Public Interest Advocacy Centre ... represents the Vulnerable Energy Consumers Coalition in the Ontario Energy Board. PIAC also provides legal representation and research on behalf of ordinary and vulnerable consumers of other important utility services. We participated in the proceedings that gave rise to the decision in issue and would respectfully request your assistance in this matter.

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“In 2009, the OEB commenced a proceeding to review its formula-based return on equity ... for public and private regulated gas and electric utilities. In the course of the proceeding, the board held a consultative conference that was supposedly to examine whether the original formula was still working well.

“Strict limits were put on costs incurred by ratepayers’ representatives to produce evidence for the conference that was to answer a series of questions put by the board. Conversely, the utility stakeholders introduced extensive cost-of-capital evidence in the proceeding that went well beyond the questions supposedly in issue and was directed to the issue of what the actual change should be.

“Notwithstanding the fact that there was no evidence of any difficulty that Ontario utilities were experiencing in accessing capital markets for financing, the board elected to make a significant change in the formula in favour of the regulated utilities. In its decision, the board noted that because the expert retained by the ratepayer representatives had not done the extensive empirical analysis the utilities’ experts had done, it could not rely on his recommendation. The expert had not done this work because he had been limited in the scope of the board’s own directive.

“The board decision thus surprisingly decided to both determine that the formula needed to be changed and to actually make the change in the formula without a full hearing, and without the ability of ratepayers to have full, independent, expert evidence before the board and to conduct cross-examination. Even more surprisingly, in the teeth of a recession, the board found that fairness to these utilities meant enriching them by some 150 basis points in” return on equity “largely on the basis of comparisons to US utilities historically rejected by previous boards. The end result means an eventual increase of an estimated \$285 million in rates annually that will go ... to private and public shareholders.

“We do not believe that the board’s report of the board of EB-2009-0084 on cost of capital for Ontario’s regulated utilities should govern the future setting of” return on equity “by the board. The conduct of the hearing giving rise to the report did not meet the requisite standards of fairness, and led to a one-sided result. We believe this is an issue that the minister must act to redress. We believe that pursuant to section 35 of the act, the

minister should ask the board to examine this issue of the appropriate” return on equity for Ontario Energy Board “regulated utilities, following a fair and full hearing of evidence.

“We would be pleased to meet with you or your representatives to discuss this matter....

“Yours truly,

“Michael Janigan

“Executive director.”

The simple reality is that this government has decided that in a choice between the public and the utilities, it sides with the utilities. That has consequences in the hundreds of millions of dollars per year for the people of this province. That has consequences for the well-being of seniors who need to keep warm in the winter, need to have their refrigerators running, need to have air conditioning in the summer and, at the same time, need to pay either their mortgage or their rent. Those seniors are hard-pressed. Those families are hard-pressed. This bill simply is giving with one hand while the other hand has been very extensively clawing back. That is the reality of what we are dealing with today in this Legislature when we look at the larger picture that this bill sits within.

I’ve been speaking primarily about electricity, but don’t forget that people in this province use natural gas to heat their homes, to do their cooking and to dry their clothes, and that natural gas and its costs are hitting people hard as well. And further decisions by this government’s energy board have been driving up the cost of people’s home heating, driving up the cost of people’s living.

A few years ago, the Ontario Energy Board allowed utility companies that were able to store natural gas to pass their costs on to the public. I will quote from an article, again, by Michael Janigan from the Public Interest Advocacy Centre. He wrote:

“Over the last two decades, governments and regulators, in Canada and in most of the developed world, have moved to replace state regulation of important public utilities, like telecommunications, energy and airline transportation, with competition whenever there has been an opportunity to do so....

“The proponents of this change (usually the utilities themselves) have persuaded many governments to favour, by statute, market forces over regulation as the preferred choice for providing consumer protection.” As you well know, there is a lot of tender mercy in market forces when it comes to consumer protection. In fact, the quality of that mercy is rarely strained. “But what happens when such a choice does not benefit consumers but actually costs them” much more—“a billion dollars more over 10 years?

“This is the choice that the Ontario Energy Board has recently made in deciding that the natural gas storage market is competitive.

“For most customers, a squabble over gas storage seems somewhat remote. In fact, gas storage is needed to serve all customers and is an important component of a

customer bill. Gas is stored in the summer and withdrawn for the increased heating needs of winter days.”

The pipelines that come to Ontario from Alberta can't carry all the gas we need in the depths of winter. So the simple reality is that it comes to Ontario, goes to south-western Ontario; there are large caverns, and it's pumped into those caverns; and then, in late December, in the depths of January, that gas is pumped out to make sure that we're warm.

“Both of Ontario's local gas distribution utilities, Enbridge Gas Distribution and Union Gas, have developed storage facilities located in Lambton county near Sarnia. Both companies did so by getting approval of the Ontario Energy Board to make their ratepayers responsible for the cost of development and the operation of the storage.” So you, Speaker, and everyone in this room who, for the last few decades in Ontario, has been paying their gas bill, paid the cost of setting up that storage, making sure it was well maintained, making sure it was available there for us on the cold days when we needed that gas to keep us warm.

“While Enbridge uses all its storage for its franchise customers, Union has an excess amount over what is needed to serve its franchise customers. This storage is in high demand. Union sells this storage to marketers like BP Canada Energy or other distribution utilities, including Enbridge. The price that is paid for this excess storage by these customers is some five to six times the rate that is based on actual utility costs currently paid by Union's franchise customers. Because Union ratepayers have paid for, or are financially responsible for, this storage, they have in the past been credited with most of the revenue from these outside sales of excess storage,” but not any more, not under the McGuinty government. Under the McGuinty government, money that would have flowed back to customers to help keep down their heating bills so that they could keep warm in mid-winter no longer goes to them.

“Notwithstanding the huge difference between storage prices at cost and on the open market, the Ontario Energy Board decided that sufficient competition existed from storage sellers in the secondary market outside Ontario to deregulate storage services offered by Union and Enbridge. The board conceded that there would likely never be a competitive market for storage available to Union's residential customers.” After all, so few of us have giant salt caverns located in our backyard. They're just not everywhere, as you well know, Speaker.

1550

My guess is that there are none in your riding. My riding is surprisingly deficient. There are only a few places where they exist; they are owned by a few hands, and thus that ownership gives access to very large quantities of money, because as you well know, in mid-February, in mid-January, we are very much driven to be warm.

So these customers who depend on that storage will pay a cost-based rate. However, the money from the outside sales of storage, developed and paid for by Union

Gas's Canadian customers, after a brief transition period—I imagine it sitting in a bank account—will all go to Union's Texas-based American owners, Spectra Energy, formerly Duke Energy. I'm sure people have heard of Duke Energy; I'm sure people have heard of Spectra. At current storage rates this will amount to a loss of over \$100 million per year to Union customers, who will have to make up for this loss in their rates, \$100 million that used to stay in Ontario's economy now extracted out of Ontario and shipped to Texas. It's almost a replication of what happened over most of the 20th century, when money flowed into the United States to pay for hydrocarbons, fossil fuels and fossil fuel services. Once again Texas is able to take money out of Ontario for energy costs.

Enbridge customers will be paying an additional annual \$40 million of this amount for the storage that came from Union. That's a lot of money. If you're in the Enbridge service area, part of your bill pays for storage that you've already paid for out of your rates and is now just going to make sure that Spectra Energy is far more profitable than it otherwise would have been.

“While the customer financial impact is jaw-dropping,” writes Mr. Janigan, “the kicker is that this billion-dollar giveaway involves existing natural gas storage and will not help at all to build more storage that might drive the price down.” Why would Spectra Energy or Union Gas take the money that it had extracted from Ontario to build more storage? No, they're just going to make more money on the assets they already own that were paid for by you and me and the other people of Ontario through their natural gas bills.

This government, the McGuinty government, has been moving forward with making sure that utilities can make more profits and making sure that deregulation allows more money to flow out of this province, out of our wallets, out of our household budgets and to Texas. No offence to Texas; it's not a bad place, but I would rather our money stayed here.

“It's possible that the Ontario Energy Board,” writes Mr. Janigan, “felt hamstrung by the statutory requirement to prefer competition to regulation. However, this reverse Robin Hood result cannot be what the government intended for Ontario consumers. This is particularly the case when these consumers are facing rising energy costs for real system needs in the form of conservation and new supply. There's also no precedent in North America and other Commonwealth regulatory jurisdictions for a decision to deregulate where there are only the prospects of increased costs for consumers.”

That's why we're regulated in the first place: because there wasn't an alternative. We don't have two sets of gas lines running through our cities. We don't have 20 different storage caverns located around Ontario. There are only a few. There is one set of gas lines. Consumers are limited in their choice and thus regulation is needed, and when regulation is turned on its head so that protection is for the gas company and not for the public, then we pay, and we pay in a substantial way.

“Petitions filed by industrial and residential consumer groups to review the OEB decisions”—at the time of this writing, 2008—“are currently in the hands of the McGuinty” government. “The Ontario government must decide if it is in the public interest, or even in accordance with competition principles, to charge Union customers an additional \$100 million per year with no offsetting benefits.” It doesn’t sound like a good deal to me. Someone else may well think differently, someone who’s a Premier. Maybe Premier McGuinty thinks it’s a good idea that we pay an extra \$100 million to pay for something we’ve already paid for. Whatever the current trends in utility regulation, it seems reasonable that customers should always get what they have already paid for.

Well, I know you, Speaker, will be shocked—and it’s a good thing that you’re sitting down—to know that, in the end, the McGuinty government didn’t overturn those decisions. It decided that \$100 million more a year going to Spectra Energy was a good thing. Although we raised questions in the House, although Public Interest Advocacy Centre and others said, “What are you doing? Give your head a shake,” there was no change. That decision went forward to the detriment of the people in this province, to their cost in their pocketbook.

When we talk about making a mess of the energy file, when we talk about the McGuinty government misunderstanding what people need to have done, when we look at the difficulty people have with affordability and when we look at this bill today, we shouldn’t be surprised, because decisions that were made over the years to enrich those companies at our expense are coming home to roost.

I just want to note, before I go on to my next item, that the estimated amount of Union Gas revenue from the sale of excess storage came to \$125 million to \$150 million a year. The Union customers would have gotten a credit for a chunk of that in the past on their gas bills worth about \$94 million to \$113 million per year, or about \$72 to \$115 per customer per year. The effects of the decision will be fully phased in by 2011.

We’ve been talking a lot about electricity, and I’m about to return to electricity. But one should not forget that we need natural gas as well, and those who receive these property tax credits—as I assume this bill will be passed and put in place—are going to be hit by their other utility bills as well.

Let’s go to electricity. There’s a reality about our electricity system that the real investments started over a century ago, and we have built a system over the past 100, 110 or 120 years that has provided Ontarians with electricity throughout the province. The system is aging. Technology is changing. We went from a system that, at the beginning of the 20th century, was primarily coal based, one that was dependent on coal from Pennsylvania, one that was shut down by the big coal strike—I think in 1904 or 1905. It was called the great coal famine. We went from that to a system that was primarily and overwhelmingly dominated by hydroelectricity that was publicly owned. That system provided Ontario with the muscle to industrialize. That system provided us with

energy, with electricity, at a cost that allowed manufacturers to set up here and compete with American manufacturers and build the kind of life that we like to live here in Ontario. The system has aged, and technology has changed. We are at a point in the history of this province where we have choices to make about the kind of technology and kind of ownership we engage in to make sure that we have power for another century.

This government could have taken a path, in looking at the renewal of our electricity system, that would have had conservation and efficiency at the core, the most environmentally beneficial and the lowest-cost, most job-generating option before us. They could have put that at the core of their policies, but they didn’t. They could have decided that it’s time to move on technologically, because if we replicate the system that we had in the 20th century, we are stuck with a wide variety of costs for building distribution lines and transformer systems that would be very differently shaped, configured and sized if we had a very different electricity system. We could have had a decision not to further privatize power, Bruce Power being a case in point and gas-fired power plants being a case in point. We could have continued with the decisions we made in the 20th century that actually made Ontario prosperous and made it a place that was attractive for investment. But they in fact decided to take a very different course of action. They decided to roll the dice once again on nuclear, to make big investments in gas-fired power plants and to have some green window dressing with a small part of our energy to come from renewable power, and there are consequences to the decisions they made.

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I want to start first with the whole question of energy conservation, because energy conservation is the only option we have that is as cheap as the coal-fired power we need to get rid of. Energy conservation is the cheapest option we can implement in Ontario—one that we need to implement.

The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario was charged with providing a report to this Legislature on a regular basis about the progress of conservation in Ontario. His first report came to us in May of this year, and it’s not a bad report. In his executive summary, he talks about the major issues that need to be addressed. He says that the first thing Ontario needs is a comprehensive energy conservation strategy. He says, “Several other provinces and Ontario municipalities have energy conservation strategies but Ontario does not.”

My goodness, one would have thought, by the way the McGuinty government speaks, that it had a strategy, but the Environmental Commissioner, looking at the documents, has said that in fact there is not a strategy. Now, I agree with him, having myself tried to find a strategy that this government has and not having found it. But it’s nice to have the Environmental Commissioner confirm that one does not exist.

He writes, “The strategy should provide a definition of conservation to guide the measurement of progress; it

should set objectives and targets as appropriate; and, the strategy should co-ordinate government-wide initiatives. Development of the strategy should incorporate public comment by posting it on the province's Environmental Registry."

What we have had are ad hoc approaches to energy efficiency and conservation, we've had announcements, we've had recycling of announcements, we've had commemoration of and hailing of announcements, but we haven't had a strategy: a comprehensive approach to reducing the cost of energy for you and me and people across this province; a comprehensive approach to making sure we have the energy we need to power our lives, to power our economy. That's missing. That's confirmed by the Environmental Commissioner.

Now, the Environmental Commissioner has commented on some of the conservation performance, even within that ad hoc framework. I think his commentary is very interesting. He actually requested from the Ontario Power Authority their documentation and their reports, and I'll read what he has to say: "Pursuant to its new reporting mandate, using our authority to request information, the ECO sought information on the status of the directives"—instructions from the Minister of Energy to engage in conservation and efficiency. He said to the OPA, "Tell us what you've been directed to do and how it has worked out."

"According to OPA-supplied information," the Environmental Commissioner "believes that achievement of the directives"—the instructions of the minister—"and, by extension, government policy has been mixed and in some cases underwhelming." He goes on to say, "With one exception, the directives that specified programs with attached savings have achieved only part of the specified amounts. In some cases, no verified savings at all are reported." So the thing that is the most cost-effective, the best for our environment and our economy, and the approach that should be at the centre of Ontario's electricity strategy, the Environmental Commissioner, to be generous, finds wanting.

He talks about a few directives put out by the Minister of Energy: October 2005, the low-income directive. What, in fact, we have is that three megawatts of the 100 megawatts of savings for low-income and social housing has been achieved, "although the ministry has equivocated between assigning responsibility for this sector to the OPA and undertaking the initiative itself." So the target was 100 megawatts and they achieved three. I have to remark that that doesn't sound like a roaring success to me. It sounds like they missed. It sounds like they missed in an area where people are already vulnerable, already have low incomes, are already hard-pressed by energy bills. Of a 100-megawatt target, they only made three megawatts.

March 2006: the residential and electrically heated homes directive. Zero megawatts of the 150 megawatts from conservation in the residential sector in electrically heated homes has been achieved—zero megawatts; nothing; nada. They were given a directive, they were

given instructions to reduce energy consumption in that context and they did nothing—zero.

March 2006: commercial buildings and municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals directive. Zero megawatts of the 150 megawatts from conservation in commercial buildings and the municipalities, universities, schools, hospitals has been achieved.

So, three out of 100 in one program, zero out of 100 in another, zero out of 150 in another. You can see that there is a pattern here of failure to actually achieve what needs to be achieved.

I'll read further what the Environmental Commissioner had to say: "The minister has not enforced compliance where the OPA has not completed or made progress on transition directives within a regional time frame." In other words, instructions are sent out, I assume, on paper; the paper lands on a desk, and there it is housed; there it happily nestles down, waiting for another layer of paper to be laid over it and yet another until the layers grow thick and solid, perhaps insulating the desk from the heat of the sun—I don't know. But in terms of actually reducing energy use from the instructions the minister has issued: No, not an impact. And frankly, the minister's office doesn't follow up. Maybe it's not a priority for the minister.

The Environmental Commissioner goes on to write, "There appears to be no specific mechanism for the minister to enforce directives." How about that? When he gives a directive to the Ontario Power Authority to reduce energy consumption, he doesn't actually have a mechanism for following through to see that anything happens. That's not an instruction; that's a wish. That's a, "Gee, wouldn't it be nice if we had less energy use in our colleges and universities," with no follow-up, no enforcement, no real action. That has been the fate of what should be at the core of the province's electricity program; not at the periphery, but at the core, and at the core there's simply emptiness.

There was another interesting piece in this report. Everyone should read this report. The Environmental Commissioner is very dry in the way he writes these things. He writes that the ECLA, which was passed by this government in 2006, "had many of the same enabling provisions as the GEGEA, including: the ability to require public agencies to develop conservation plans...; the ability to override restrictions on the use of conservation technologies; ... the power to require home energy information upon property sale.... Yet in the three years between the passage of the ECLA and its replacement by the GEGEA, the only action taken by the government was one minor regulation that overrode the barriers to the use of clotheslines. While laudable in principle and ambitious in scope, the ECLA"—very ironically named—"had minimal influence on energy conservation in Ontario." There's a very jolly picture in this report of laundry on a clothesline.

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When you go for three years with an act whose only impact on energy conservation is to make it legal for

people to use clotheslines in areas where previously it wasn't allowed, you have to say that the government is no longer following this issue; that it is not paying any attention to it; that in fact it has decided that its least-cost, most beneficial option is not one that's a priority for it; and that in fact it sees it as a nuisance, as a pain, as a distraction from what must be, really, their more serious concerns, which my guess is, making sure that there are enough gas-fired power plants and nuclear plants in this province.

I just want to note two other things the Environmental Commissioner said. I don't have a lot more time, but I want to say this: If you don't make the right decision when you decide how to deal with the electricity system, it's very pricey, and it has been very pricey. You are well aware of that. Everyone in this chamber is well aware of that.

When the Environmental Commissioner reported on why it is exactly that local distribution companies, local utilities, building operators aren't saving a lot more energy, he sat down with them and said, "What are the things that are standing in the way? Why is it that you can't make life more affordable for people?" What did they have to say? Local distribution companies said, "There's a lack of regulatory clarity and continuous long-term commitment to energy conservation in government policy."

Well, I say that, and it's seen as simply partisan. The Environmental Commissioner has identified it as a significant barrier to local public utilities delivering the goods. Unless people on the government benches have a credible reply, I think that stands as a statement about, really, where their money is and where their mouth is, on this issue.

When he talked to building operators about why it is we're not seeing a lot more energy conservation there, he said that capability in the buildings sector is a barrier. Ontario is not creating the capacity to design, construct and operate green buildings.

We do get one-offs. Every so often when a building is being built that meets a relatively high standard, there's a lot of noise made about it, but frankly, it should be so common that it just passes unnoticed, that it's part of everyday life, but it isn't. In Ontario, the capability to design, build and operate green buildings is profoundly lacking. That's in the government that goes about building a culture of conservation, but doesn't actually put in place the infrastructure to deliver the goods on the ground and in the buildings that we live and work in.

One thing that was very interesting in what he found was that financial barriers exist to motivating conservation in the broader public sector; the money saved as a result of energy efficiency improvement does not stay in the sector.

So if you're managing a university and you're able to cut your energy use by 10% or 20%, that money is taken out of your budget. You put in the capital, but you don't get to keep the savings. So you have a disincentive to actually reduce energy consumption. Bad policy—expen-

sive policy for all of us. We pay taxes to operate our public buildings. If they aren't energy-efficient, we pay more than we should be paying because energy is being wasted. Because what we have in place is a system that discourages public sector managers from actually making buildings energy-efficient, we are paying more.

It comes out, as well, when we build new buildings. We try to build them as cheaply as possible. We don't build them on the basis of what their long-term operating costs are or how we can make sure they don't use too much gas and electricity in the future. No, we build them so they are as cheap as we can—and we get stuck with the long-term operating costs. Not wise at all.

We have a problem with a government that doesn't understand how to put together an electricity strategy and ensure that we have affordable electricity in the long run, but we also have a problem with a government that doesn't understand that public power has been the difference between industrialization and non-industrialization in this province.

Bruce nuclear—the leasing of a publicly owned power facility to a private company—is a case in point. As you are well aware, and this came up recently, last summer, 2009, the contract was rewritten between Bruce nuclear and the government of Ontario. That rewrite led to roughly \$50 million a year more going to Bruce Power to pay for power.

I've always heard that the reason that private companies should have higher rates of profit is because they take a risk. There's an electricity market and they're in there and being entrepreneurial and gutsy, and apparently also making sure that their profits are guaranteed—not just guaranteed, but boosted. When you look at sources like the Association of Major Power Consumers in Ontario website, who went into some detail about how Bruce Power did very well out of that deal and how we, as power consumers, are going to pay more, then you have to ask yourself: Why is it that a private company gets treated like a public utility? Why is it that they get guaranteed profits? Why is it that in a society where demand for electricity in the last years has dropped sharply, their profits are guaranteed by us? If you're going to guarantee profits, why don't you just own the thing? This government's decision to proceed with privatization, and acting in a way, when it comes to these companies, that makes sure that we always take the hit and they don't, has not served us well.

All of these things aggregate together and I'm sure there will be other opportunities to speak at greater length about this bill. There are other points that I would touch on if I had another hour, but I'm not actually requesting one. I'll get to that.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yes, I know. I appreciate the assistance from my colleague.

I'll say this: This government has made decisions around technology and around ownership that have driven up the cost of electricity and gas, have driven down our standard of living. Today we are dealing with a

bill that will address a very small part of those losses, a bill that nonetheless, I would say, all parties will probably pass because the people of Ontario need at least a bit of relief back from the decisions, the mistakes—the extraordinarily expensive mistakes—made by the McGuinty government. This is going to be very expensive for them a year from now. It's very expensive for the people of Ontario today. They won't forget.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bob Delaney: The Conservatives and the NDP speak as if we lived at the far end of a time tunnel back into the 1950s or the 1960s. I liked Ike and I liked JFK, too. I definitely thought that Pearson was an upgrade over Diefenbaker, but that was then and this is now.

They compare energy today with what energy cost half a century ago. I ask: Where are energy costs going everywhere in the world today? Straight up. How do our energy prices compare with energy prices in the industrial heartland of North America, the Great Lakes states and the Midwest? We're the cheapest.

We ask, then: Is this the same PC Party that wants to bemoan paying 65 cents or 80 cents per kilowatt hour for feed-in-tariff electricity when, on its watch, it paid more than a dollar per kilowatt hour for peak power, which it then added to the stranded debt that all of us are paying? Enough. We're here to do the right thing. We're here to do it in the right way. To help Ontarians of modest means, the province has a new energy and property tax credit. If you're a senior on a fixed income, there's an additional senior homeowners' property tax credit; and for every qualifying individual, there's an annual \$260-per-year sales tax credit.

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Let me quote to you from the current edition of the Economist magazine, October 2010, with regard to wind power: Texas in the US "already leads the nation in wind power capacity, and in 2009 some 6% of its electricity was pulled from the air."

The cost of energy is rising on the 21st-century side of this time tunnel. Those of us who do not comprise the Flat Earth Society side with Ontario families, not with the two parties opposite.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member talks about this electrical situation that the Ontario government has gotten itself into, which is, indeed, dire straits. The former member mentioned that we have low-cost electricity in Ontario. I'm not sure that could be documented with any degree of authenticity.

I heard from a very good source that last month the state of Massachusetts purchased a 20-year supply of electricity from the province of Quebec for six cents a kilowatt—20 years, six cents a kilowatt: I think that's probably a pretty good price.

I think we have to ask ourselves in this province, what is our purpose in this province? What is the purpose of our electricity? Why do we want to have electricity? We

want to supply electricity, certainly, to homes and businesses, and we want to do that at the lowest cost that we can possibly do it so that our businesses can be competitive in the North American marketplace. It seems to me that six cents from the province of Quebec compared to 81 cents for solar energy or 30 cents for wind power—I'm not sure the two equate, and I'm not sure that the purpose of the government is to experiment in these new forms of electricity generating.

It would be wonderful to have experimentation on solar energy. I'm not sure that 10 megawatts, which I think the government is working on—I think that might be a little large in the experimental area. I think it's costing the province of Ontario too much and I think it's costing the people who use energy in this province too much, and it's driving businesses out of Ontario. I think that the government should reassess what the purpose of generating electricity in this province is and what the end use of that energy should or could be.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's a pleasure to enter into this debate and make a few remarks on the comments made by our colleague from Toronto–Danforth.

Certainly, I'm proud to be a member of a government that has decided to tackle the energy crisis that we were left with in 2003. You will recall the great blackout that summer in August: no power across a large swath of Ontario, and a government that had not planned appropriately. So we have, in fact, put in place our Green Energy Act.

Rebuilding a system, as we are doing now, is obviously a costly enterprise. People understand that. There is an impact on individuals. With this particular bill, Bill 109, with our energy tax credit for seniors, we are helping those on fixed incomes and most in need.

I'd like to tell the member from Toronto–Danforth that I attended, with the member from Vaughan, a meeting with a seniors' community centre in the riding of Vaughan just last Friday. The room was absolutely packed. These were seniors on a limited income who obviously wanted to stay in their own homes as long as possible. We were commended for what we've done on the property tax credit—the fact that it was, in fact, doubled in 2010. Many of the people there were the beneficiaries. They understood that what we were doing with this particular bill, Bill 109, was targeted to specifically help them. They appreciated that.

I'm absolutely convinced that this is a bill that needs support from every member in this House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I listened very intently to the comments that were made by the member from Toronto–Danforth, and I thought he made a number of very good points, one being the necessity to consider conservation as a serious part of our energy platform as we go forward and this government's failure to make any real difference in terms of conservation measures.

But of course, that doesn't say it all. We need to have an energy policy that makes sense in this province, and I think that's why we're in the situation we are in, where we need to give credits to seniors and people living on fixed incomes: because this government has failed so disastrously to create a balanced energy policy. Of course, we should be investing in renewable energy—that only makes sense—but we need to have it balanced.

We need to recognize the fact that industries need large sources of power, and so we can't neglect other types of energy sources—nuclear, in my mind, being part of that mix. That's why we've gotten to the situation where we are. We're paying large amounts of money for renewable energy, and as a result, we're seeing more and more businesses in particular struggling with energy costs. We're seeing businesses, even in my riding, that only operate at night; they can't operate during the day anymore. They're operating on such slim margins right now that it's possible that they may not even be doing business in the province of Ontario in the next few years.

What we haven't even considered in all of this, too, is the number of businesses that have been turned away from looking at Ontario as an attractive place in order to do business because of our lack of a comprehensive energy policy. I don't know that we're ever going to be able to quantify that. We can certainly take a look at the businesses that are going to be leaving Ontario. We've seen business after business close up in the last year or so, but we're going to see that happen in the future. We can only ask ourselves, why aren't businesses looking at Ontario in the future? One of the major reasons is going to be because of the high cost of power, and we need to do something to reverse that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Toronto–Danforth has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the members from Mississauga–Streetsville, Halton, Oak Ridges–Markham and Whitby–Oshawa for commenting on my remarks.

No one sees 1955 as the peak of energy technology. The world has moved on, and it has moved on in substantial ways. That's why, when I talk about the change in technology, I recognize that it's time for us to move on from nuclear. It's no longer cost-effective, if it ever was. It's no longer where the world is going in terms of developing new technology.

As we tackle the energy crisis, as we tackle the costs of an aging system, we have to make the right decisions, because, as you well know, \$1 billion doesn't fall into your lap every day. We've spent \$1 billion, \$1.5 billion or, in one rough calculation, more like \$2.5 billion on smart meters. But smart meters are extraordinarily limited in what they can do. The reality is that most people's ability to respond to the smart meters is limited by the amount of money they have in their pockets—which, to tell you the truth, is increasingly diminished—and limited by the kind of lives that you have to live when you're raising kids, when you're on the move, when you've got a job.

When we spent \$1 billion or \$1.5 billion in scarce capital on a measure that had very little positive impact on people's lives, as opposed to spending \$1.5 billion to actually cut their energy bill by making their homes more efficient, we wasted that money. That is a burden that is laid on the backs of ratepayers and citizens across Ontario.

This is a longer debate, and it will go on for days, but what the government has opened up is a very broad range of questions that we all have to address.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased this afternoon to have a little bit of time to provide my comments on this particular piece of legislation, Bill 109, the Enhancement of the Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit for Seniors and Ontario Families Act, 2010.

I've been sitting here for most of the afternoon, and when I arrived today—as most people will know, this is a proposed credit. Clearly, on our side of the House, we're very hopeful that both opposition parties are going to find the capacity to support this when we get to third reading vote. From what I'm hearing, it sounds like that in fact might be the case, so we look forward to having their support on this particular piece of legislation.

1630

I think for those who have followed the goings-on in the Legislature perhaps closer than others, they will know that this particular piece of legislation had its genesis some time ago. I'm going to give a bit of background on where we were and how this got started.

Some will remember that it was actually in 2009 that we allocated about \$750 million to the property tax credit. That credit was for low- and middle-income Ontarians, and exactly how much you would have received was based on a formula involving your income and how much you had paid in property taxes or rent—I think it's important to remind people who are following the debate that not only does this credit apply to those who own a home, but it also applies, should it pass, to those who pay rent. As well—a further piece of that—it's important to note that people who live in a long-term-care home will be eligible for the energy component of this particular credit. So there are a couple of extra pieces that I think people need to be aware of.

Under the credit in 2009, singles who earned under \$20,000 and couples or parents who earned under \$25,000 would have been eligible for the full credit. That's the 2009 position. What we have now is a new announcement today—this is the new credit that we're now discussing—and that tax credit will be enhanced from about \$750 million to about \$1.3 billion. These changes will primarily impact seniors. We're raising the income threshold for seniors. Single seniors who earn \$25,000 or under will receive the full credit, and senior couples who earn \$30,000 or under will receive the full credit. So we're increasing the threshold for those two groups by \$5,000 per category. This is going to extend the credit to

740,000 seniors in the province of Ontario, so we're building on our support to them.

The amount you receive on the credit is going to be phased out gradually. Like most credits, this is income-tested. This isn't unusual. It's a progressive way to implement a tax system, and we're doing that with this credit as well. So two cents on every dollar you make over the threshold is when you will begin to see the phase-out: approximately \$20 per \$1,000 or so.

In total, the Ontario property and energy tax credits will benefit 2.8 million low- and middle-income Ontarians. The enhanced credit will work like the current credit. The first payment will be a lump sum, but after that, beginning in July 2011, the payments will be staggered so that people have access to the money when they need it. In the same way that the Ontario sales tax credit and HST rebates were staggered, people will be receiving cheques throughout the year.

I'll now talk a little bit about non-seniors. We're going to see where a family or single person who owns or rents a home would be able to claim an energy amount of up to \$200. In addition, they'd be able to claim a property tax amount of \$50 plus 10% of their occupancy cost, to a maximum of \$700. The property tax amount would not be allowed to exceed the occupancy cost. The maximum energy and property tax amounts that could be claimed would be \$900—this is for the non-senior category. The total of these amounts would be reduced by 2% of the adjusted family net income, as I mentioned earlier.

Additional benefits to seniors: A senior family or a single senior who owns or rents a home would be able to claim an energy amount of up to \$200. In addition, they would be able to claim a property tax amount of \$425 plus 10% of their occupancy costs, to a maximum of \$825. The property tax amount would not be allowed to exceed the occupancy cost. The maximum energy and property tax amounts that could be claimed would be \$1,025. So this is very significant. The total of these amounts would be reduced by 2%, again, as I just said in the previous categories. So this is indeed significant, and that's why we feel it is important to bring this legislation here, and we're very excited that it sounds like we're going to receive the support of the opposition parties on this credit.

I would say that in my seven years here—and I'm sure that for members who have been even longer than that, and there are many who have—very few issues tend to grab the attention of the public in Ontario like issues around electricity costs. I understand that, and that's fine. That's why I think, when we on this side of the House have the opportunity, that we get our feet as often as possible and speak directly to this issue.

Just last week—this one is, I guess it's fair to say, easy messaging for the opposition parties and something they can have a lot of fun with. We acknowledge that over here. It's easy to talk about tax increases. But unfortunately, what it seems is happening when this issue is debated is that the other half of the story is not being told.

Just last week I had the opportunity to be back in my riding of Thunder Bay—Atikokan. The Premier was there for almost a full day; we had a great day. The NOMA conference was on—the Northern Ontario Municipal Association. At the same time, the leader of the third party was in Thunder Bay. She took the time to hold a press conference—as is what they do, and that's fine—and she talked about the impact of HST on hydro bills. Of course, that's all she talked about.

This is the other half of the story that I made reference to earlier in my remarks. They don't talk about the significant package of tax reforms that were introduced at the same time as the HST, thereby leaving out the full story. This property tax credit that we're talking about here today, as I've mentioned in my opening remarks—and it was important to get it on the record. We're talking about, for seniors and non-seniors, the energy component being up to \$200, just in this credit alone. When the member from the official opposition from Parry Sound—Muskoka spoke, he made reference to the fact that the northern energy credit, which is additional to what we're talking about today, was not available to people who would be receiving this particular credit.

We took the time to check. In fact, it's information that is wrong. In fact, the northern energy credit can be stacked on top of this credit so that seniors and homeowners and renters in northern Ontario not only will be able to get up to \$200 on this credit that we're discussing here today, but they as a single will be eligible for a further \$130 credit and they as a couple will be eligible for an additional \$200 credit. It is indeed very significant.

People are calling this “modest,” but that's when they only talk about the one credit, and they're linking it all the time back to the impact of the HST on hydro bills and the cost of living. They're talking about it as being modest in isolation. But that's why I referenced the northern energy credit, and that's why I referenced earlier the significant package of tax reforms that were introduced at the same time as the HST. They want to talk about the hydro bill and the ability of families and homeowners and renters in the province of Ontario to manage this cost.

One of the other significant tax reforms we brought in when the HST was introduced was a 1% reduction in the personal income tax rate of everybody in the province of Ontario, up to almost \$37,000—\$36,000 and change; so I'll round it up to \$37,000. That 1% reduction for those people in the personal income tax rate means \$370 to them. If you're a couple and each of you is earning \$37,000, that 1% reduction in the personal income tax rate means \$740 to you. If you earn \$25,000, you get \$250; if you earn \$30,000, you get \$300; if you earn up to the maximum of \$37,000, it's \$370. Why is that important? Because when they talk about the HST and the impact on the hydro bill, they don't talk about the other tax reforms that we've brought in.

Let's think about the \$370—if you're a couple, \$740 back in your pocket if you're both earning \$37,000. To use up \$100 of what we just gave you back—and I'm

speaking directly to the people in the province of Ontario. It's important that if they're going to remember anything about this debate, they might remember this piece. To use up \$100 of tax relief that our government has given you through various measures, you have to spend \$1,250 on something that was previously exempt from the PST. So if, by example, we use for the case of round numbers your hydro bill, which is the focus of the opposition parties, and if for the sake of round numbers we say that your hydro bill last year was \$1,000—some people are paying more; we get that—but just for the sake of round numbers to give the example: If you paid \$1,000 on your hydro bill last year, the 8% PST, as a result of the harmonization of the sales tax, will add \$80 on your hydro bill. That's if you spent \$1,000 to accumulate an \$80 expense. I just explained that if you earn \$37,000, you're going to have \$370 more, and if you have a partner who's earning \$37,000, they're going to get \$370 more. That's \$740; you had to spend \$1,250 just to use up \$100 of it.

Today I'm talking about two other credits here. The one we're talking about here today, called the Ontario energy and property tax credit, will give seniors and non-seniors an additional up to \$200 more of energy tax relief. As well, people in northern Ontario, if they're single, will receive up to \$130 more, and up to \$200 if they're a couple.

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I think it's important that, after everything has been discussed on the tax piece, on the effect on hydro bills, we try to remember, with hopefully some clarity, that little example that I have laid out there for people when it comes to the language and the rhetoric that's often used by the opposition parties to make this look, in my mind, much more onerous than perhaps it really is.

Now, much of the focus on this particular credit has been on the energy part of it, and I think it's important that we remind people about the record of the other parties when they had an opportunity to manage the energy file. When the NDP were in power, two things of note, I would suggest, occurred.

Interjection: Only two?

Mr. Bill Mauro: There were many more things, but two things of note.

Energy prices in the province of Ontario under the NDP went up by about 40%, give or take. One of the things that I remember very clearly, that perhaps is even more egregious, is that under the Peterson government in the late 1980s, they had negotiated a deal to bring in 1,000 megawatts of very affordable, very clean and very renewable energy from the province of Manitoba—1,000. The deal was signed, and in the early 1990s under the NDP government, for their own reasons, which I'm sure we might hear a little bit about today, they cancelled that deal, which would have brought 1,000 megawatts in through northwestern Ontario and which would have been a huge, huge construction project for northwestern Ontario. They cancelled that project. That energy would have been online, had it gone forward in the early 1990s,

somewhere around the year 2000, and the province of Ontario would have had the benefit of that power for around 10 years now. But they made a decision to cancel that project. We all have a history when it comes to managing power in the province of Ontario.

I listened to the member from Toronto–Danforth, who has a long history with these issues. With respect, I'm having a hard time understanding exactly where he is on it. He speaks very clearly and very often in opposition to nuclear. He spoke, perhaps not as directly, but indirectly, in opposition to the decisions that we've made on green energy. He has spoken very clearly against gas-powered energy, and he has spoken, obviously, very clearly against the use of coal. Well, we've got to make a choice.

The member from the official opposition, in his response to the member from Toronto–Danforth, talked about Quebec selling power for six cents a kilowatt hour—I think he said it was to Massachusetts—and compared the energy rates in Quebec to the energy rates in Ontario. Well, we all know that Quebec has always been cheaper. We wish we were that low. It would be wonderful. But we also all know that, in Quebec, they're blessed to have the vast majority of their energy needs met by hydraulic power, and most of that hydraulic power has been in place for a long time. They're blessed that way, just like we could say about British Columbia as well. They've been very fortunate.

I will also talk a little bit about the position of the official opposition when it comes to this as well. Previous speakers have spoken on this, and we listen to them respectfully when they get up and make their comments on our position on the energy file. But, again, many of us will remember as well, when we came into this position in 2003, what had occurred before we got here. That was that the Conservative government of the day was breaking up the old Ontario Hydro into four or five different private corporations and that the market would rule, that everything was going to be great. The free hand of the economy was going to make everything good. We'd have lots of power. It would be cheap. It would be affordable. More supply would come online—as is, I would say, their ideological predisposition, and that's fine. They took that approach. It's not an approach I would favour.

I think that if you go back to the Margaret Thatcher days, if they had paid a little bit of attention to what went on in England when that approach was tried, perhaps they would have seen that it was disastrous. It did not work well. But anyway, they went forward with it. Well, what happened there? That experiment, I guess we would call it, didn't work quite so well.

In very short order, I think it was November 2002 when the market was open, the Conservative government of the day reversed their position in terms of allowing the free market to reign when it came to energy in the province of Ontario. They reversed their position and brought in a rate cap, because when they allowed it to go to the free market, as was predictable to almost everyone except them, prices spiked. There were concerns about demand. There was no investment being made in infrastructure. I

can tell you, as somebody who lives in northwestern Ontario, when they tried to sell off Hydro One, the transmission infrastructure in Ontario—and the Conservatives were trying to do that—that concerned me greatly, because I'm not sure what private sector company would be able to find an appropriate rate of return on their investment, when you think about the infrastructure required in northwestern Ontario to supply electricity. I'm not sure how well that would have been maintained. But in any event, they changed their position. They flipped on it and they brought in a rate cap.

They've been talking to us about the price of electricity that we are now charging here in the province of Ontario. They capped it, as I recall, somewhere around four-point-something cents; I think perhaps 4.3 cents, give or take. They capped it. Well, the result of the cap was what? Stranded debt. The Conservatives made a decision, when they saw the folly of their way on the free market when it came to electricity, to cap the price so that the ratepayer, on their bill that arrived at their door on a monthly or a bimonthly basis, would not see a dramatic increase in price. But what was happening, of course, was that the true cost of electricity was not being paid for off of the rate base, but that the cost of electricity was now transferred to the stranded debt. And so a bulk of what exists there—I'm not sure what that number is; it's in the tens of billions. I hear different numbers from time to time, so it's hard to know exactly what the number is. It's significant, and we do know that that decision added a significant volume of money to the debt.

The Conservatives made a decision that they didn't want the ratepayer to pay the price, the true cost of electricity. That was their approach; we have had our approach.

I think, as you heard the member from Mississauga say earlier, every government takes a different approach to this. The prices that we are charging today in Ontario are being compared to prices that we were being charged 10 and 20 years ago. I'm not sure how anybody expects that to remain the case.

What we do know over here, on our side of the government, is that this is very important. We understand the value of affordable electricity, especially, I would say, to large industries in Ontario. It's why, for about four or five years now, we have been bringing in very affordable pricing programs to support large industry in Ontario. It's why in this budget of 2010 we further enhanced those programs significantly: a \$450-million energy support program for large industry in Ontario; a three-year program at \$150 million a year. There is more good news on that front. I think that we've announced that we haven't done a good enough job of communicating to the public in terms of support for large industry—I think up to 230 or 250 of the largest energy users in the province of Ontario—that we will do a better job of ensuring that people are aware of in very short order.

I can see my time is almost up. I think it's important. I would hope and repeat that people will remember the entire package of tax reforms that we have brought in over

the last year and a half or so, remembering again the one example that I put on the table: personal income tax reduction. It's 1% on the first \$37,000, or \$370. If there's a couple in the same home, that's \$740 in your pocket. If your energy bill was \$1,000, the HST adds 8% to it: That's \$80 over the course of a year, if it's a \$1,000 bill over a year. We just talked about \$740. You have to spend \$1,250 to use up \$100 of tax relief.

The sky isn't falling. We recognize the importance of this issue to the ratepayers in the province of Ontario, to residential users and to industry in the province of Ontario. It's why we've taken the significant steps that we have on the tax reform side as we go forward on this front.

I look forward to the remarks from the members in the opposition and look forward to addressing them with my two-minuter.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Well, the sky is falling. As the member wrapped up his remarks, he said, "The sky isn't falling." I'd like to tell him that the sky is falling because of the policies of the McGuinty government, where you're going out and purchasing solar power for 80 cents a kilowatt hour when we're paying six cents a kilowatt hour for in it our homes. Add the figures up. It doesn't make sense.

As well, I'd like to point out to the member opposite that the stranded debt was not created by the last government. The stranded debt was created by the Peterson government from 1985 to 1990. I remember; I was sitting in opposition at the time. I couldn't believe the amount of money—something like a \$15-billion overrun on the Darlington nuclear plant. Their incompetence led to a huge, huge debt on Ontario Hydro at the time.

1650

As well, at that time, they had another hare-brained scheme, and that was the introduction of non-utility generators, where they signed, like they're signing today, 20-year contracts for power produced by natural gas generators at 12 and 13 cents a kilowatt hour when power was selling for four or five cents a kilowatt hour. Unfortunately, these long-term, 20-year contracts for buying power at 80 cents—40 cents, in some cases—per kilowatt hour are mortgaging the future of our children.

This government has made a bed for itself with regard to the misplacement of any logic towards our electricity supply. It's not only going to hurt seniors in their homes, residents in their homes, but it's also going to hurt the future of our economy and jobs for our children.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Howard Hampton: I listened with interest to my colleague from Thunder Bay–Atikokan. He goes on, over and over and over again, about tax credits. But there's a big problem. You see, people can't afford to pay their hydro bill now, today. They're not talking about a year from now or a year and a half from now; they're talking about today. People can't afford to pay their hydro bill

today. Where I come from in northern Ontario, they've already turned their heat on, and they can't pay their heating bill.

What is the response of this government? It is so typical of the McGuinty government to promise people that something will happen in the future; that next year, people will get a tax credit, or that next May, people will get a tax credit. But people can't pay their hydro bill now. They can't pay their heating bill now.

We've had many nights where we've already had frost. If you can't pay your heating bill, and the temperature is down below zero—I don't know about members of the Liberal government, but you've got serious problems, and telling people, "We promise this will be taken care of next May" or "This will be taken care of in the election a year from now," doesn't help pay the hydro bill or the heating bill today.

Let me tell you what happens when you can't pay your hydro bill: You get a bigger hydro bill. Then you are told to pay a security deposit, which in some cases is in the thousands of dollars. And people don't have the money now.

That's the problem with this: another promise to do something in the future when people don't have the money now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio: We don't have to go up north to start the furnace already, according to the member from Rainy River.

Interjection.

Mr. Mario Sergio: Yes. We've already started it down here too.

I have to compliment the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan for a very eloquent and detailed—details of the bill here.

I have to say that in my area I have a very large population of seniors: seniors as individuals and seniors as families. I can't imagine either a family or one of those seniors saying that almost \$100 a month in property and energy tax relief is not going to help them. Of course it is. I'll tell you, it is. It's a big help.

If we are saying, "It's not enough," well, maybe it's not enough, but given the tough time that we have ahead of us, and with the prices of everything going up, we have to face ourselves, and they understand the fact that, yes, things are going up. If they have to make a reasonable living, things are going up. If we have to have availability of power so we can turn the heat on, then, yes, indeed, we have to pay for that as well. At least we have the luxury, you may call it, or convenience that we can just turn on the switch and say that at least we are comfortable. So not to appreciate that \$100 a month at most for our seniors, that it's nothing—I think we have to recognize that even in the circumstances, it's a big help. I think because the government recognizes the need out there, it is doing this. I hope that as we move along, we may continue to assist and improve the situation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments? The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the members from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, Kenora–Rainy River and York West for their comments.

In regard to the comments from the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, my reference to the stranded debt did not say that the Conservatives started the stranded debt. What it was meant to do, I think I pretty clearly stated, was exhibit the policy position that they took. They tried to hide the true cost of power from the ratepayer by transferring it to the stranded debt. They had gone to a free market. It didn't work. They capped the rates at 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour. "What the hell are we going to do with this? We're going to transfer it to the stranded debt." That's what that point was. And that's what they did. The record is clear.

The member from Kenora–Rainy River talks about next May, next month. No. In my 20 minutes, I had an opportunity to put on the record a couple of the examples of reductions that are in place now. I focused very clearly on the personal income tax reduction that took effect on January 1, 2010, fully nine months ago. We're three quarters of the way through the year. People who are eligible for that in a home, if there are two people, at \$37,000 a year, might have 600 bucks of that in their pocket already. So it's not about next May. It's there now. It's already there, as well as the transition cheques, the first of which went out in July, some people receiving significant amounts—well, everybody receiving a good chunk of money on that one. So already there has been significant relief.

I want to thank the member from York West as well, who pointed out very clearly that the maximum under this particular credit that we're discussing today is \$200, but even if you get a reduced amount, even if you only get half of it because your income is higher and even if you're only eligible for \$100 of that credit, you're going to have to spend on energy \$1,250 before you use up that \$100 of the credit.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm very pleased and honoured to have this opportunity this afternoon to speak in the Legislature on behalf of my constituents in Wellington–Halton Hills, to speak to Bill 109, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement the Ontario energy and property tax credit and to make consequential amendments. This bill was introduced in the Ontario Legislature by the Minister of Finance on September 28, 2010, and, of course, we are now engaged in second reading debate.

I will say from the outset that it is my intention to support this bill when it comes to a vote at second reading, but I would also add that it would be my expectation that the government will want to send this bill to committee, most likely to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, for further discussion, perhaps public hearings, so as to ensure that we get this right and that

there aren't any drafting errors or there aren't improvements that might be forthcoming and might be possible.

Let's look at what this bill does. In looking at the explanatory note, it says:

"The Taxation Act, 2007 is amended to implement the Ontario energy and property tax credit announced in the 2010 Ontario budget. The Ontario energy and property tax credit will apply for the 2010 and subsequent taxation years and will have two components: a property tax amount and an energy amount. For 2010, the tax credit is claimed in income tax returns filed by qualified individuals for the year. Starting in 2011"—of course, that's an election year—"the Ontario energy and property tax credit is calculated using income information from income tax returns filed for the previous year, but is payable directly to eligible individuals in four quarterly instalments during the second half of the year and the first half of the following year."

Of course, the cheques will ostensibly arrive in people's mailboxes just before the election. Isn't that cute?

Again, the position of our caucus has been very eloquently stated by our party's finance critic, the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, who did a good job this afternoon. But of course, it is our view that this act expands on the current property tax credit and adds a new energy tax credit for low- to middle-income Ontarians.

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In the first year of implementation, the Ontario energy and property tax credit would be provided after people file their 2010 tax returns in 2011. Beginning in 2011, the credit would be paid quarterly, like the Ontario sales tax credit. The program is intended to be administered through the Canada Revenue Agency, but I suspect there will be included in the cheques a little message from the Premier of Ontario, Premier McGuinty, informing people that it is through his government's policy that the cheque has arrived in their mailbox.

Interjection: I don't think he'd be above such things.

Mr. Ted Arnott: No, I don't think so either.

This is important to point out and important to note for people who are listening: The increases in hydro are estimated to drive up household hydro bills by 43% by 2015, adding another \$732 per year to an average household hydro bill. Of course, we've seen a number of policies by this government which have had the effect of driving up the hydro bills in the province of Ontario. People are very concerned about this in my riding, and I'm sure the government members are hearing the same expressions of concern from their constituents as well. I can't believe that they're not hearing about it. People are very, very concerned.

As the member for Rainy River indicated earlier during the course of this debate, many people are unable to pay their hydro bills. Certainly, I'm hearing that in my riding, too. In fact, I first started hearing serious concerns of economic anxiety related to the cost of living and related to the cost of many government programs and so forth when I started to open the responses I had received

to a survey that I included in my most recent newsletter, which came out in the springtime. A substantial number of respondents—the vast majority, in fact, who expressed their concerns—were expressing severe anxiety about the costs of living, in particular the HST, but also the cost of electricity and a number of other essentials that are in their household budgets.

We see that this policy and this tax credit is an admission of an unaffordable, failed energy policy. We support this bill because we believe that Ontario families and seniors need any tax relief that they can get, however minor.

I want to compliment the member for Carleton—Mississippi Mills, who in an intervention this afternoon, in a two-minute response to one of the speeches that had already been presented, pointed out the fact that the current government's energy policy, whereby they're paying some electricity generators up to 80 cents a kilowatt hour, yet are charging the consumer less than six cents a kilowatt hour or thereabouts, is an economically unsustainable energy model that is going to be forcing future generations, in many cases our children or our grandchildren, to pay for these failed energy experiments of the McGuinty Liberal government. He also pointed out—and I thought it was important that he pointed it out—the fact that the Darlington nuclear station, which was built over the late 1980s and came online in the early 1990s, had extraordinary cost overruns, largely due to political interference from the Liberal government of the day, the David Peterson government. That's a fact as well that contributed significantly to the stranded debt problem that Ontario Hydro has had ever since. So those are important points.

This is now, I think, the fourth week that the Ontario Legislature has sat since we resumed sitting for this fall sitting of the Legislature, and I would argue that the McGuinty Liberal government is in neutral. Where there should be action, there is instead complacency. Where there should be prudent planning for the future, there is instead fantasy. Where there should be forthrightness in terms of the challenges we face, there is instead obfuscation. We see huge problems in terms of the government's policy and the challenges that the provincial government is facing in the months and years ahead, huge problems in terms of jobs, huge problems in terms of the economy and the management of the economy by government, high taxes, high cost of living, rising hydro costs and rising insurance costs, and a huge deficit in the range of \$20 billion, without a credible plan to get us back into the black.

Of course, the provincial budget—the government is compelled, actually, by the legislation that we put on the books. If they run a deficit, they have to articulate a plan to balance the budget over time and eliminate the deficit. If you look at page 48 of the budget papers document, you see that they claim and purport to have a plan to eliminate the deficit by 2018. But if you look at the assumptions, they're very interesting, because it demonstrates that they would have to hold program expense

increases to below 2% per year after 2013. This Liberal government has not ever done that. They haven't even come close to that. In fact, their spending increases on average, even in good years, were 7%, 8% a year, well in excess of inflation. This government is not predisposed towards holding spending to below 2% per year. They will not. They don't have the stomach for it. They don't have the backbone for it. They're not going to do it. So that demonstrates that this so-called plan to balance the budget, eliminating the deficit by 2018, is a fantasy and it shouldn't be taken seriously by the people of Ontario by any means.

Because this is a budget bill—as we know, we have considerable latitude on debates on budget matters. This is a budget bill that arose originally from the 2010 budget, so I think it's important to talk about some of the other external budgetary issues that we're facing in the province of Ontario. Certainly, the government members who have spoken to this bill have spoken at great length about some unrelated issues with respect to this particular bill but related to the general budgetary policies. So I would ask for your indulgence in this respect.

I think it's important that we point out during the course of this debate, and we will continue to point these issues out over the next 12 months, I have no doubt, that the McGuinty government, of course, when it comes to taxes, promised not once but twice that they would not raise Ontario's taxes. After they were elected in 2003, they immediately brought in the health premium—so-called; as the Minister of Finance of the day called it. Really, it was a brand new provincial income tax. It was absolutely brand new, but they tried to call it a premium. It was the largest single tax increase in history. And, of course, in 2010 the HST kicked in on Canada Day, which is the largest single sales tax increase in Ontario's history.

We all recall Premier McGuinty, during the election campaign in 2003, in the main ad that the Liberal Party put on the air, where he sat before the camera very quietly, in what appeared to be a sincere voice, saying, "I won't raise your taxes." Of course, he's broken that promise twice in a huge way, which has contributed to the loss of confidence in the government. As we know, approximately three quarters of Ontarians today believe that there needs to be a change of government in the next provincial election.

Another important issue that needs to be brought forward during the course of this debate is the CAS funding, allowing CAS officials to drive gas-guzzling SUVs and take out \$2,000 gym memberships.

Of course, we have the eHealth scandal that we all recall, where \$1 billion was expended on endeavouring to set up an electronic health record for Ontario patients. The Auditor General of the province of Ontario eventually weighed in on that and demonstrated how hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money was wasted with very little to show for it in the end.

We have the Green Energy Act, which continues to be a subject of debate in this Legislature. The Premier re-

versed his decision regarding mandatory energy audits after public and stakeholder outcry. There continues to be a huge issue in many ridings across the province, many of the ridings held by Liberal members of provincial Parliament, where there are wind farm proposals that are pitting neighbour against neighbour and causing a very serious outcry in rural Ontario, where we see that many communities are struggling with the issue. Hundreds or thousands of people are attending public meetings to express concern.

When I listen to my constituents about the proposal, two broad themes emerge: number one, people feel that their local decision-making authority has been stripped away by the Green Energy Act; secondly, they also believe that there may be serious health impacts. I realize that the chief medical officer of health a few months ago did a rather quick survey of the existing medical literature on wind farms and in fact brought forward conclusions that I'm sure pleased the government. It is also true that the government is currently funding a significant health study over a three-year period and spending hundreds of thousands of the taxpayers' money on this, so obviously the government is prepared to concede that there might be a health concern, there might be a health issue that needs to be studied.

1710

That being the case, would it not be prudent that the government would await the results of that health study that it has commissioned before it goes whole hog into expanding the wind farms the way that they appear to be wanting to do? I think that most people would conclude that it would be prudent to wait until that health study is completed. Certainly, that was the subject of a private member's resolution that I tabled in this House. It was actually Bill Murdoch, the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, who first brought forward this issue. And I know that a while ago we had an opposition day motion on this subject and, of course, the government voted it down.

We also see that under this government, senior executives of the OLG were charging expensive meals, alcohol and gym memberships while failing to protect lottery ticket buyers from being defrauded by retailers. Recently, there was another example, a very high-profile example, in the newspapers about that issue. Obviously, there are still huge problems at OLG in terms of how insiders have been able to defraud the system, and I would encourage the government to take greater steps toward solving that particular problem. We also know that during the midst of the Canadian auto crisis, the OLG had the gall to advertise a contest giving away German-made vehicles.

We look at the WSIB, another important responsibility of government—managing the WSIB, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. Of course, businesses large and small pay premiums to be administered by the WSIB, which, in turn, is charged with the responsibility of compensating injured workers. Both the chair and the CEO of the WSIB charged expensive trips, meals and a GPS system to taxpayers.

Then we see the deficit. I made reference to it earlier, but of course the deficit this year is around \$20 billion—still amongst the highest deficits ever in the history of the province—under this government, and still no plan to get us out of it that's true, accurate and has credibility. With that deficit financing, that means that Liberals are spending \$2.8 million an hour more than they're taking in—\$2.8 million an hour, every hour, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 12 months of the year, 365 days of the year. All of this mountain of debt is being added to the burden that our children, our grandchildren and subsequent generations are going to have to pay.

Looking at the tax collector severance issue—and this is something that I had a chance to point out in the Legislature back in March. We discovered and learned that the staff that were going to be transferred from the provincial Ministry of Revenue to the Canada Revenue Agency to work for the federal government with the introduction of the HST—that their employment would be transferred. They weren't going to miss a day of work. In many cases, they probably weren't even going to be moving offices, because I suspect, in some cases, the office leases were assumed by the Canada Revenue Agency. Some of them would have had to get new business cards, perhaps, but they weren't missing a day of work. In spite of that, many of them received substantial severance; the government, I'm told, paid out \$25 million in severance to provincial tax collectors who did not miss a single day of work. It's hard to explain that one.

The Ombudsman: Of course, we've seen unprofessional and crudely executed smear campaigns to oust the current Ombudsman, André Marin. In spite of the efforts to try to embarrass Mr. Marin, the government finally had a change of heart and decided to reappoint him.

We have here the G20 issue: During the summer, we had the G20, and if it wasn't bad enough that the Premier quietly created a new regulation, the Toronto police chief then incorrectly communicated the regulation. Neither the Premier nor his minister clarified the regulation to the public. We're not done with this issue either, and I'm sure that there's going to be more discussion and debate on it until we get the truth and the real answers behind what happened with respect to that particular issue.

Then we have the Super Corp. issue. As we know, the government was so desperate for money that the Minister of Finance mused about selling off the OLG, the LCBO and possibly parts of Ontario Power Generation, merging them all together into one big company and then trying to sell shares in that.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: They were going to sell Niagara Falls.

Mr. Ted Arnott: It's possible that they were going to sell Niagara Falls; we don't know.

To make matters worse, they paid expensive consultants to look into it only to retreat once the initiative became public.

Then we have—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I know it's late in the day, but I would ask that members give their attention to the speaker from Wellington-Halton Hills on both sides of the House. Thank you.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm sure they're enjoying it as much as I am, and I appreciate their indulgence in listening to what I have to say.

Of course, we have the eco tax, which I assume is about to hit the papers again—because remember when that little surprise hit the taxpayers of Ontario on Canada Day, the government decided to retreat. I listened to the Minister of the Environment of the day do his press conference, when he had to explain and answer questions on it. I felt sorry for him, in fact, but shortly thereafter he was removed from that position and moved into another portfolio. But it is the stated intention of the government to come out with a replacement to the eco tax, and I think the time is coming up very soon as to when that—it would appear the government is committed to doing an eco tax, but it just wants to bury it somehow.

We see the issue of the hidden hydro tax increases. The Green Energy Act allows a \$53-million increase in hydro charges that will mean a minimum 25% increase in hydro bills, and that is even before the HST is added.

Then we look at the microFIT program. The government told ground-mounted solar power producers that they would be paid 80 cents a kilowatt hour, then slashed it to 58 cents, betraying rural Ontario. I remember that issue, obviously, from the summertime and the outcry that we had in the land. They said that it was the responsible thing to do, and then there was one more flip-flop a few weeks later when they bumped it slightly higher to 64 cents. What a complete mess the government had on its hands, and it was one that it created.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Certainly the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound has a petition that he has launched calling for an election. I suspect that that petition will generate enthusiasm and support all across the province, including the ridings that the Liberals hold currently, because certainly I've been hearing since May from my constituents. The most persistent question I hear from people wherever I go in my riding is, "When is the next provincial election so we can get a new government?"

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Howard Hampton: In terms of energy policy and, more specifically, electricity policy and electricity pricing policy, there are many things which my colleague in the Progressive Conservatives stands for that New Democrats would fundamentally disagree with, but I do think we agree on one thing that he highlighted in his speech, and that is that there have been a number of decisions made over the last seven years by the McGuinty Liberals on the hydroelectricity front which have resulted in people having to pay hydro bills that are totally unreasonable.

People are paying for the bloated, multi million dollar salaries of some of the electricity executives. People are

paying now for an electricity system that doesn't have one bureaucracy, not two, not three, not four, not five, not six, but seven, and they're also paying for the large, private, profit-driven entities that are now part of the system. People are paying for something that I think we can all acknowledge now are not-so-smart meters, which are costing well in excess of \$1 billion to put in place, but the net result is, people's electricity bills are skyrocketing.

I want to commend my colleague from the Conservative Party on this narrow front for identifying a number of those areas where people are having to pay for policies that were clearly mistaken and for decisions that clearly are not supportable, and people shouldn't be forced to pay for those kind of things.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to offer a response to the member from Wellington-Halton Hills. I was able to be here for about half of his 20 minutes.

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I guess it really doesn't come as much of a surprise to me that, generally speaking, I suppose, the Conservatives are not in favour of green energy. I will say that I was surprised by the comments of the member who did the one-hour leadoff from the third party, from the NDP, in terms of his comments around green energy. I would have expected that the NDP would be more supportive of green energy than apparently is the case, but it's not a surprise, necessarily, that the official opposition does not support it.

Again, if that's the position you're going to take, that's fine. If you want to have a debate around the fact that perhaps the price point for wind or solar is too high or too low or just right, I think that's a discussion that anybody is willing to have. But I think that to take a position that does not support the efforts that are undertaken to establish a green industry in the province of Ontario—I'll characterize as unfortunate.

I would also suggest that it's important that people know that the total amount of megawatts that are going to be generated from green energy in Ontario, whatever that price point is, it's not the price point that you pay on your bill. That's going to be 10% or 20% of the total energy generated in Ontario. That will be fed into the pooled price and the price will reflect an increase as a result of those higher prices, of course. Some people seem to be playing a bit loose with the language in terms of trying to convey to the public that the price point on green energy is the price point on your bill, and of course that's not the case.

On the credit that we're supposed to be discussing, I didn't hear much discussion on that from the member. The little bit that I did hear was the continued attempt to minimize the impact of this \$200; if you're halfway through in terms of eligibility, \$100 for energy support just on this one credit. You have to spend \$1,250 just to use up that \$100 and of course, that's not all we're offering to people in terms of tax relief.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: It's clear that everyone in this Legislature is in favour of green energy, but the problem that the government has got itself in is that they've done it at any cost; not at a prudent cost, not at a cost where we can afford to go into the next decade and provide jobs and the economy for our kids and our grand-kids.

The United States of America has 500 years of coal in the Pennsylvania-Ohio belt; 500 years of coal to produce power. We can't control what they do in that area, but if they can produce coal power at three cents a kilowatt hour, then our economy is going to have to compete with that in some way. So there is pressure upon the government to make prudent investments in any kind of green energy enterprise that they get in, and they're just experimenting. They're paying 80 cents a kilowatt hour. They're paying 43 cents a kilowatt hour. They're paying 13 cents a kilowatt hour, not only today but for the next 20 years.

What I'm saying is, we are all for green energy, but we are for prudent, logical, rational green energy, and if we have to buy power from Quebec at six cents a kilowatt hour, that makes a heck of a lot more sense than paying 80 cents a kilowatt hour for solar power in our climate, which is just ludicrous.

They try to portray us as not being friendly to the environment or concerned about emissions, all that kind of thing. We are, but we think we can do it smarter and we think we can do it better. We know that it can be done better, and that's why we have to change this government next year.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: I very much appreciate the opportunity.

There's this constant bantering back and forth about green energy and what's taken place, what hasn't taken place. One of the concerns that bothers me is that one of the first things that the government did when it first came into power is they cancelled one of the committees: the joint committee between the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Natural Resources. It was a joint committee that was established—and actually I know quite a bit about it. It took several attempts before it actually came to fruition. What that was designed to do was—there are about 2,800 dams in the province of Ontario that are completely underutilized or not utilized in any way, shape or form. The first thing that happened was, the committee chair came to me, after losing government, and said that they'd shut down the committee. Here was an excellent opportunity to utilize energy that's out there and available now, but it was never taken advantage of.

In regard to Bill 109, we constantly hear bantering back and forth about the tax credit. The reality is, there were going to be some significant impacts on individuals, predominantly seniors, in the province of Ontario. If you take a look at seniors—who are at home during the day,

when we fully expect that the smart meters will take effect and these individuals will be utilizing energy at peak-cost times.

Quite frankly, it's good to move forward. We see unanimous consent; I'm hearing it pretty much from everybody. Let's get on with it, pass the bill and move on. Get it to committee if it needs to go to committee, and then we can move forward with some other issues and really deal with the issue.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Wellington–Halton Hills has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I certainly want to thank my colleagues who have responded to the remarks I put forward. As I say, this is essentially a budget debate, because it's a budget bill. I would use my two minutes to continue to call upon the government to respond to important issues in Wellington–Halton Hills.

We need a new Groves Memorial Community Hospital in the future, and we need the government's approval to move to the next stage of planning.

We need renovation to the Georgetown hospital. We need a small capital grant to allow for the new emergency department renovation as well as to make room for the new CT scanner.

We need the Highway 6/Morrison bypass to be built around the community of Morrison and Puslinch township, south of Guelph.

We need assistance to improve our ambulance service in the eastern part of Wellington county, in the Erin community, and we need help from the provincial government to encourage the city of Guelph to come to the table and work with us toward those solutions.

We need new long-term-care beds, and we need more effective management of the long-term-care system by the province of Ontario, in particular by the Minister of Health.

In the town of Halton Hills, whose council is very concerned about the Places to Grow policy of the government, we need assistance in terms of intervenor funding for the potential OMB hearings that will result from the Places to Grow decisions that the government compelled the town council to take.

We need new infrastructure money for communities like Centre Wellington, a community that has about 100 bridges, many of which are in a state of repair that will require assistance to ensure that they are safe.

In the town of Halton Hills, we have a need for new arenas in Georgetown. The council has provided great leadership, but the provincial government needs to come to the table.

We need assistance with respect to tourism, and we need greater leadership from the Ministry of Tourism to help bring people to our communities across the province of Ontario and in particular to the areas I am privileged to represent.

So we need greater action from this government, and we'll continue to call for it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton: On behalf of New Democrats, I'm pleased to have a few minutes to debate this legislation.

More specifically, I'm pleased to have a few minutes to talk about the context in which it occurs, and the context is this: It doesn't matter where you go in Ontario, people are shocked at the explosion in their hydro bills. People who had a hydro bill a year and a half ago of, say, \$100 a month are now opening the envelope and finding that it's \$200 a month; in other words, another \$1,200 a year. Many people do not have that additional \$1,200 a year. That's a bit of the context. People are shocked. They don't have the money to pay. They're very worried; they're very concerned.

As is the habit of the McGuinty government, members of the government stand up and try to make this tax credit sound as if it's the greatest thing since sliced bread. What we're dealing with here, frankly, is a measly \$70-million credit when you read the fine print. That's it. This is not going to come anywhere near to addressing the explosion that people have experienced in terms of their hydro bills. It's not going to come anywhere near it.

In addition, I think people have started to pay attention to this issue, and one of the things they recognize is that the explosion in the hydro bill has just begun; that decisions made by this government four and five years ago, three years ago, two years ago and in the last year are going to drive the hydro bill up even more; that the explosion they've seen in their hydro bill is nothing compared to what is about to happen over the next 12 to 18 months.

That is the context: a government trying to say they are doing something to help people when in fact this is not going to amount to very much at all and people are going to see even more serious increases in their hydro bills.

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I want people to understand specifically why they're going to see those increases in the hydro bill. One of the reasons, of course, is the HST adding another 8% on to the hydro bill. Making hydro electricity taxable with the HST is causing very serious pain for people. All you have to do is go to the Statistics Canada formula and it shows that you're talking about another \$240 a year for the average household just by adding the HST to the hydro bill. In fact, in northern Ontario, where I come from, it's going to be much more than that, and hopefully I'll have time to explain how that's going to happen. But the HST is one of the major sore spots here—\$240 a bill when you calculate it.

For the life of me, I don't understand why the government doesn't say, "Look, putting the HST on the hydro bill is not a good idea. We'll take it off." That's what New Democrats believe. Things that people need, essentials—electricity to ensure that the food in your refrigerator is safe to eat, electricity to ensure that your kids have a light to do their homework with, electricity so that you

can run your basic appliances in your home—should not be subject to this very regressive tax. However, no matter how many times we make that case, this is a government that insists on taxing an essential service with a very regressive tax.

There are some other decisions that have been made which have driven up the hydro bill and are going to drive up the hydro bill even more. The first one that comes to mind is the not-so-smart meter. After the government introduced the legislation to bring in the not-so-smart meter, as somebody who was on the committee and asked a lot of questions about this, I was struck by what I would call the superficial answers. It was as if someone had taken first-year economics and thought, because they had taken first-year economics, they knew everything there is to know about economics. It became very obvious, as the committee sat and we asked questions, that there was a big hole in the argument for not-so-smart meters. Essentially, what it is is this: People are not nocturnal animals. We're not like raccoons. We don't conduct major parts of our social and economic life after the sun goes down. We conduct most of our social and economic life during the day. That means that we send our kids to school during the day, we go to our doctors' appointments during the day, we come here to this facility during the day. We do all of these things during the day, which means, naturally, that there's a significant use of energy during the day.

I would argue that you're actually very limited in what you can drive into the midnight hours. I don't think it's going to be possible to say, "Well, we'll send our kids to school at 1 a.m. and save electricity—shift the peak electricity use to midnight by doing that." I don't think you're going to get physicians who are going to say, "Come and see me at 2 in the morning; we'll shift the electricity use to that time when it's less expensive."

Just for families—and I take my own family as an example—many of the things that use a lot of electricity we already do after 9 o'clock at night. A typical day works like this: The kids get home from school and you try to give something to eat. If you have a soccer game or a baseball game or a hockey game, you do that. After that, you do the homework. Then you try to get kids off to bed. And it's only after 9 o'clock at night in our house that you get around to doing the dishes or doing the laundry. Trying to portray that these not-so-smart meters are going to revolutionize when electricity gets used and when it doesn't get used just doesn't bear up when you do the analysis.

But this government is charging people on their hydro bills now. The cost is already over \$1.5 billion that people are paying on their hydro bill, and the cost is going to go up. In my part of the province, they have not implemented time-of-use metering yet. But let me tell you, in a part of the province where, in the wintertime, the sun goes down by 4 in the afternoon, when people see the shock of that of time-of-use bill because they had to turn their lights on at 4 o'clock in the evening and keep

them on at 5, at 6, at 7 and at 8—when people get that time-of-use bill, there's going to be serious shock.

You have to ask yourself, who would have implemented these not-so-smart meters so that, in major parts of the province, people who have to turn the lights on at 4 in the afternoon would get charged peak electricity prices? That's what's going to happen, and that's why the hydro bills are going to escalate. As the cost of putting in the not-so-smart meters continues, that \$1.5 billion is going to become \$2 billion, and people are going to pay for that on their hydro bill.

It doesn't end there. Earlier this year—and this is really quite atrocious, because at the same time that this government says, "We're going to give you \$70 million back on your hydro bill," what they're really doing is stacking another \$240 million in costs on. Let me tell you, that is really outrageous because it has been done, if not through the back door, then through the side door. What I'm talking about is the kangaroo-court process that was used at the Ontario Energy Board to slide through a \$240-million increase in people's hydro bills. You have such diverse groups as the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, the Consumers Council of Canada and the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters writing to the Minister of Energy and the Premier and saying, "This is outrageous"—\$240 million, again, added to the hydro bill. And what for? It's added to the hydro bill so that the big utilities that are already floating in money, thank you very much, can stuff another \$240 million in their pockets at the expense of hard-working consumers.

Government can try to cover this all they want, but when the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, an organization that represents low-income people in this province, writes and says to the government that the decision of the energy board is simply not supportable, the decision of the energy board is flawed and the end result means an eventual increase of an estimated \$285 million in rates—\$240 million on the hydro bill and another \$45 million on the natural gas and heating bill—when you've got organizations like that, or you've got the Consumers Council of Canada—"The Consumers Council of Canada is very concerned about the decision of the Ontario Energy Board ... to allow utilities to increase their return on equity to 10%" from 8%. From 8% to 10%, that is a very big increase when you stack it on the hydro bill. As I say, it amounts to \$240 million.

"The Consumers Council of Canada urges you to review the recent decision of the" Ontario Energy Board "in the light of the fundamentally flawed process through which this decision was made."

Then the Canadian Manufacturers' Association says, "Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters writes to support the calls for a review of the Ontario Energy Board's December 2009 report on the cost of capital for Ontario's regulated utilities...."

"Any equity return being achieved by Ontario manufacturers in the current environment of ever-increasing energy and utility costs is rapidly eroding. In these circumstances, it is of considerable concern to the" Can-

adian Manufacturers and Exporters “that the equity returns allowed to Ontario utilities should be materially increasing.”

These organizations representing consumers, representing low-income families and representing businesses are saying, “Don’t tell us that you’re going to give a \$70-million rebate on the hydro bill. Tell us about the \$240 million you’re adding to the hydro bill through this back-door kangaroo-court process.”

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But it doesn’t end there, because the fact of the matter is that both at the Bruce nuclear plant and the Darlington nuclear plant, the cost overruns associated with the refurbishment of those nuclear plants are going to add several billion dollars to the hydro bill. Now, yes, this government is going to use every manoeuvre it can to keep those increases off the hydro bill until after the election, but the fact of the matter is, the explosion that people have seen in their hydro bills already over the last year to 18 months is nothing compared to the explosion in the hydro bills that they’re going to see over the next year to 18 months, and this \$70-million credit is not going to come anywhere near addressing that—nowhere near addressing that.

I just want to give some examples of what I’m talking about here. In terms of the Darlington rebuild, Ontario Power Generation is planning to spend \$1.1 billion on the definition phase and the so-called campus master plan between 2011 and 2014. According to OPG’s preliminary economic analysis, the Darlington rebuild will have a capital cost of between \$8.5 billion to \$14 billion. That’s going to be added to the hydro bill.

Now, many people could take issue with their figures. Many people have and many people have suggested that the figures are going to be even larger than that, but I’m not going to do that here. I think it suffices to say that what this government has planned in terms of adding even more charges—considerable charges—to the hydro bill completely overwhelms the \$70-million tax credit.

Just some sobering thoughts: On average, the actual costs of Ontario nuclear projects have been historically two and a half times greater than their original cost estimates. So put that in the context of what I just mentioned. The government says \$8.5 billion to \$14 billion. Let’s take the lower figure, \$8.5 billion: \$17 billion added to the hydro bill. I won’t even mention the cost overruns at Bruce nuclear, but those cost overruns—Bruce nuclear is a private company, but because of the kind of sweetheart deal this government has signed with them, Bruce nuclear is going to add several billion dollars to the hydro bill.

Members of the government have said, “Well, this is unavoidable.” You don’t have to put the HST on the hydro bill. You don’t have to take an essential service like electricity and subject it to a very regressive tax, which is what the HST is.

We didn’t have to go down this road of the not-so-smart meters. We didn’t have to go down this road. We don’t have to continue going down this road because the not-so-smart meters have not been fully implemented.

There are several additional costs that are going to be added if this government continues to go down this road, and they are going to add significantly to the hydro bill.

Similarly, the government doesn’t have to have seven public bureaucracies running the hydro system, and I think this is what really infuriates people. At one time we had in the province Ontario Hydro. Ontario Hydro didn’t always do things right. They certainly made some mistakes. New Democrats have been very aggressive on the record over the last 30 years pointing some of that out, going right back to the 1970s. But Ontario Hydro did do some things right. Ontario Hydro is much like what we have today in Quebec. Hydro-Québec is a publicly owned utility that operates on a not-for-profit basis trying to provide affordable, responsible electricity to people in Quebec, much as we see Manitoba Hydro—publicly owned, operating on a not-for-profit basis trying to provide electricity to people on an affordable, responsible basis.

What do we have in Ontario now? Well, under the McGuinty Liberals we have Hydro One, which is one corporate entity, complete with the executives and their million-dollar salaries. We have Ontario Power Generation, another entity complete with its million-dollar salaries. We have the Ontario Energy Board, another bureaucracy, a huge bureaucracy. We have the Ontario Electricity Financial Corp., another bureaucracy complete with its CEOs who make huge salaries. We have the Ontario electricity standards authority, another bureaucracy—this is number 5 now—complete with their huge bureaucracy and the executive salaries. Then there’s the Independent Electricity System Operator, again with their huge salaries and their huge bureaucracy. Then finally we have the Ontario Power Authority, which is out there signing contracts for billions of dollars that will bind Ontario consumers for 20 and 25 years. We now have seven electricity bureaucracies in Ontario, and people are paying for that on their hydro bill.

The government wants to pat itself on the back and say, “Oh, aren’t we doing a wonderful job here? We’re going to offer up \$70 million in electricity credits.” That is embarrassing in the context of the indefensible decisions that have been made, of some of the sweetheart contracts that have been handed out to profit-driven private electricity providers. It’s embarrassing in the context of executive salaries that have exploded through these seven bureaucracies. It is embarrassing in terms of the fiasco with the not-so-smart meters. And it’s embarrassing in the context of this government putting a very regressive tax, the HST, on the hydro bill, on a service which is essential for low-, modest- and moderate-income Ontarians in terms of trying to conduct their everyday lives, in terms of trying to get their kids to school, get the homework done and all those things.

I say to this government: You can spend a lot of time trying to pat yourself on the back for this \$70-million tax credit; I don’t think it’s going to do anything to stem the anger and the frustration that people feel and are going to continue to feel with the explosion of their hydro bill, all

of which is evidence of the wrong-headed decisions that have been made over and over again by this government on the electricity file.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

Hon. Sophia Aggelonitis: The member shared with us some examples. I, too, would like to share an example of what this credit would mean to a single senior. A single senior with \$25,000 in net income who pays \$755 a month for her apartment: In 2009, she would have received \$704 in property tax assistance from Ontario's tax credits. Under the Ontario property tax credit that was proposed, she would have received \$7 more. Under the new enhanced Ontario energy and property tax credit, she would receive \$811—or \$100 more—because of the new enhancements, for a total of \$107 in additional relief.

It may not sound like a lot, but that, with the other parts of the comprehensive tax package—so the proposed energy and property tax credit for seniors would see a senior receive up to \$1,025. A senior couple will receive, in transition payments, about \$1,000 every year; personal income tax cuts, \$200 per year; sales tax credit, \$260 a year; seniors in the north, \$200 for a family; seniors' property tax credit—the homeowners' tax credit—it went from \$250 to \$500.

What we see here is just one part of a whole package, and the package is about making sure that we help seniors in any way that we can. In fact, this property tax credit, if passed, will help over 740,000 Ontario seniors. They will see a tax relief. It's about helping our seniors, and we're committed to helping our seniors as much as we can.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments?

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Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The people of Ontario should understand that they're not going to get a cheque in the mail. These are tax credits that are going to come off your income tax, so this is money that you've paid out. You're not going to get it back, you're not going to get money in your hand. That's something that I think people in Ontario will understand, and I think it's indicative of this government: It's not something they tell people. It's the way they do business.

The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound wants you to resign and call an election. He's got a petition to that effect. I understand that people are driving 20 miles to come in to his office to sign this petition. People feel very strongly about it. I think a lot of MPPs, particularly Conservative MPPs, are going to have those petitions in their offices, and it will be interesting to see how many people come in to sign those and from what distance they come in.

The member from Rainy River—

Mr. Howard Hampton: Kenora–Rainy River.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Yes, way out west there, up north—spoke well about the effect of the electricity program up there or the plans of this government have had. As the member from Mississippi Mills just spoke to

earlier, it's all about doing the practical thing. Using the electrical grid in Ontario for some experimental purposes regarding solar energy or wind energy, paying 80 cents a kilowatt hour or paying 47 cents or 36 cents a kilowatt hour for wind or solar and putting all of that experimentation on the backs of businesses and residents in Ontario is just something that is so far out that the people of Ontario are going to reject this. They're upset about it, and they're going to be very, very upset about it come next October.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments.

Mr. David Oraziatti: I'm pleased to comment on Bill 109 with respect to the Ontario energy and property tax credit.

First of all, a couple of things that I think are important to get on the record that the member conveniently left out: The credit will deliver almost \$1.3 billion in annual support. It's an increase of \$525 million in support for over 740,000 seniors in Ontario. This is important tax relief for energy pressures that seniors are facing in the province of Ontario. This is in addition to a number of other credits. First of all, the Ontario property tax credit was increased this year from \$250 to \$500. As well, the northern Ontario energy credit was introduced, which would see individuals receive \$130 and couples receive \$200.

I think these are tremendously important credits. I'm surprised that the member is speaking in opposition to these, but the member has very little credibility on energy issues. Under the member's government, hydro rates went up 40%, all the conservation initiatives were cancelled that would have saved us 5,200 megawatts in energy generation and they paid \$150 million to cancel the deal with Manitoba.

When the Conservatives brought in the price cap on electricity, they voted against it. When we lifted it, they voted against that too. I'm not sure what the member's plan is for energy conservation in the province of Ontario, but they certainly don't have much credibility. They oppose the nuclear, say they're opposed to coal and don't fully support the green energy initiatives. These initiatives are very important. We've added 8,000 new megawatts of energy in Ontario. We are shutting down coal-fired generation, protecting the health of Ontarians. These credits are an important way to offset energy costs in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Questions and comments.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: It's a pleasure to actually join in the debate yet again this afternoon, to respond to the member from Kenora–Rainy River—I wanted to get his riding on the record there—and to be part of this discussion about the proposed Ontario energy and property tax credit once again. I iterated earlier this afternoon and now have the opportunity to reiterate the importance of these targeted tax relief measures.

It's incredibly important when we're talking about 2.8 million people in the province of Ontario who will bene-

fit from these tax credits. Looking specifically at seniors, which this proposed Bill 109 does, in fact, we're talking about 245,000 seniors in the province of Ontario who will continue to see a tax credit. As we heard just a few minutes ago, 690,000 will receive an increase in their tax credit and 50,000 seniors will see a brand new tax credit that they haven't seen in the past. These are exactly the times that we need to do this in the province of Ontario.

I want to show support again from CARP, from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. John Thompson says, "In my opinion, the Ontario energy and property tax credit increase for seniors is a very positive, progressive and compassionate strategy to assist Ontario seniors, many who are on fixed incomes." John Thompson goes on to say, "A tax break for the necessities of life—shelter and energy—will provide additional personal resources for seniors to enhance the quality of life in other discretionary aspects."

This credit increase for seniors is a wise decision to assist those who have contributed so much to the prosperity of our province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): The member from Kenora–Rainy River has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I rest my case. As I listened to government members' responses, what they all dutifully stayed away from is the fact that while \$70 million may be handed out with the left hand, the right hand is taking \$240 million out with the flawed decision by the Ontario Energy Board. The right hand is going to take at

least at least another \$500 million out with the not-so-smart meters. The HST is going to take another \$500 million out.

I think any reasonable person in the province—they wouldn't even need a calculator—could figure out that the McGuinty Liberals putting \$70 million back through this tax credit but taking \$240 million out through the flawed decision at the Ontario Energy Board, another \$500 million out through the not-so-smart meters, and another \$500 million out through the HST is going to leave people in a much worse-off position. That's the point that New Democrats are here to make. Yes, there's going to be a tax credit, but it's going to be a very minor tax credit, and when you put it next to the huge increases that are coming on the hydro bill and are being implemented now on the hydro bill, the \$70 million is not going to go very far.

If this government really wanted to do something, it would take the HST off the hydro bill. If it then wanted to do something more, it would stop the flawed not-so-smart-meter scheme in its tracks. And if it wanted to do something more, it would get rid of huge executive salaries that we now see at the seven hydro bureaucracies.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. It being four minutes to the hour, I declare that this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

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Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Hon. / L'hon. Sophia (LIB)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Revenue / Ministre du Revenu Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Arthurs, Wayne (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / Procureur général Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion and Sport / Ministre de la Promotion de la santé et du Sport
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Brown, Michael A. (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Caplan, David (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Carroll, M. Aileen (LIB)	Barrie	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism and Culture / Ministre du Tourisme et de la Culture
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (LIB)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (LIB)	Essex	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (LIB)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (LIB)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Dunlop, Garfield (PC) Elliott, Christine (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB) Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (LIB)	Oakville Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Gélinas, France (NDP) Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Nickel Belt Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines et des Forêts
Hampton, Howard (NDP) Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Kenora–Rainy River Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiles et de l'Immigration
Hoy, Pat (LIB) Hudak, Tim (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Jaczek, Helena (LIB) Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham Brampton–Springdale	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Johnson, Rick (LIB) Jones, Sylvia (PC) Klees, Frank (PC) Kormos, Peter (NDP) Kular, Kuldip (LIB) Kwinter, Monte (LIB) Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB) Leal, Jeff (LIB) Levac, Dave (LIB) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock Dufferin–Caledon Newmarket–Aurora Welland Bramalea–Gore–Malton York Centre / York-Centre Glengarry–Prescott–Russell Peterborough Brant Nepean–Carleton Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Marchese, Rosario (NDP) Martiniuk, Gerry (PC) Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina Cambridge London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB) McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
McNeely, Phil (LIB) Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC) Miller, Paul (NDP)	Parry Sound–Muskoka Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of 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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Moridi, Reza (LIB) Munro, Julia (PC)	Richmond Hill York–Simcoe	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murdoch, Bill (PC) Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R (LIB)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Naqvi, Yasir (LIB) O'Toole, John (PC) Oraziotti, David (LIB) Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC) Pendergast, Leeanna (LIB) Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (LIB) Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre Durham Sault Ste. Marie Oshawa Kitchener–Conestoga Elgin–Middlesex–London Scarborough–Agincourt	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Prue, Michael (NDP) Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (LIB)	Beaches–East York Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB) Ramal, Khalil (LIB) Ramsay, David (LIB) Rinaldi, Lou (LIB) Ruprecht, Tony (LIB) Sandals, Liz (LIB) Savoline, Joyce (PC) Sergio, Mario (LIB) Shurman, Peter (PC) Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord London–Fanshawe Timiskaming–Cochrane Northumberland–Quinte West Davenport Guelph Burlington York West / York-Ouest Thornhill Nipissing	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Sorbara, Greg (LIB) Sousa, Charles (LIB) Sterling, Norman W. (PC) Tabuns, Peter (NDP) Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Vaughan Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud Carleton–Mississippi Mills Toronto–Danforth Mississauga–Erindale	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB) Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB) Wilson, Jim (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex Perth–Wellington Simcoe–Grey	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC) Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB) Yakabuski, John (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Zimmer, David (LIB)	Willowdale	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS 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
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole
Maria Van Bommel
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

**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, Toby Barrett
Bob Delaney, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Pat Hoy, Norm Miller
Leeanna Pendergast, Charles Sousa
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: David Oraziotti
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Helena Jaczek
Steve Clark, Helena Jaczek
Kuldip Kular, Dave Levac
Amrit Mangat, Rosario Marchese
Bill Mauro, David Oraziotti
Joyce Savoline
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**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: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Reza Moridi
Bas Balkissoon, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Ted Chudleigh, Mike Colle
Christine Elliott, Peter Kormos
Reza Moridi, Lou Rinaldi
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Yasir Naqvi
Bas Balkissoon, Joe Dickson
Sylvia Jones, Amrit Mangat
Norm Miller, Yasir Naqvi
Michael Prue, Mario Sergio
Maria Van Bommel
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
Wayne Arthurs, M. Aileen Carroll
France Gélinas, Jerry J. Ouellette
David Ramsay, Liz Sandals
Peter Shurman, Norman W. Sterling
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**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
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vic Dhillon
Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo
Rick Johnson, Sylvia Jones
Jean-Marc Lalonde, Ted McMeekin
Shafiq Qaadri, Khalil Ramal
Elizabeth Witmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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